Geopolitics and International Relations

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Geopolitics and International Relations

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1. Geopolitics and International Relations

The course is built around a single insistence: an opinion about world politics is not an argument. Every lesson starts with the puzzle — the thing that needs explaining — then locates the level of analysis, the definition of power in use, and the perspective doing the framing, before any of the five traditions (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) is allowed to adjudicate.

It covers the canonical IR machinery — realism in its variants, IPE, institutionalism, constructivism, the English School — alongside structural formulations: world-systems, weaponised interdependence, poly-hegemony, the military-industrial complexes that survive deglobalisation. These are then tested against the empirical matters: conventional and irregular warfare, nuclear latency, cyber and information operations, energy and critical minerals, African demographic and resource trajectories, Ukraine's protracted dynamics, and Iran's strategic positioning.

The later modules are regional and applied: African geopolitics and the resource curse, Ukraine's institutional drift, Iran's nuclear decision-making, the Middle East's sectarian security dilemmas, and a strategic-foresight module on emerging domains and future-oriented analysis. Each lesson ends in exercises, data tasks and a self-test keyed to its learning outcomes. —

2. How to Study International Relations from Zero: Puzzles, Levels, Power, and Perspectives

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LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L1 — How to Study International Relations from Zero
Module	Module 0: Orientation and Method
Prerequisites	None. This is the entry point.
Interleaved links	Forward links to L2 (law), L4–8 (theory), L9–14 (history), L27–34 (Africa), L35–40 (Ukraine), L41–46 (Iran)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.
Content channels	Canon (summarized here), primary concepts (defined here), data (ACLED/SIPRI exercise), expert voice (quoted and paraphrased here), dissenting sources (five-perspective section)

Field	Entry
Bloom ceiling	Analyze (build and evaluate IR explanations)
Estimated study time	4–6 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Everything needed to master this lesson is *inside this document*. Where I cite an author, I summarize the argument fully enough that you do not need to read the original to complete the lesson. The "Further Reading" section at the end is optional deepening, not a requirement.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Most people who "follow geopolitics" never learn to do it. They consume claims — *NATO provoked Russia; China is debt-trapping Africa; Iran is irrational; the UN is useless* — without the apparatus to test them. The result is a person who has opinions but no analytical capability, who can recite events but cannot explain them, and who mistakes fluency for understanding.

International Relations (IR) as a discipline exists to convert the chaos of world events into **explainable, testable, and falsifiable claims**. This lesson teaches you the four instruments that make that possible:

1. **The puzzle** — the discipline's basic unit of inquiry. Before you can explain anything, you must know precisely what needs explaining.
2. **Levels of analysis** — the discipline's answer to "where do causes live?"
3. **Power** — the discipline's central concept, which is far more complex than "who has the bigger army."
4. **Perspective** — the recognition that different traditions define puzzles, levels, and power differently, and that mature analysis reconstructs each before adjudicating among them.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to take any geopolitical claim and do four things with it: identify the puzzle, locate the level of analysis, specify which concept of power is being used, and reconstruct how each of the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) would frame it.

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Diagnostic retrieval (answer before reading further)

This is the first lesson, so there is no prior course material to retrieve. Instead, answer these three questions from your current knowledge. Write your answers down — you will return to them at the end to see how your thinking has changed.

1. When you hear "international relations," what do you think the subject *is*? One sentence.
2. Take the claim: *"The 2023 Niger coup happened because of French neocolonialism."* What would you need to know to decide whether this is a good explanation or a bad one?
3. Take the claim: *"Russia invaded Ukraine because NATO expanded eastward."* Is this an explanation, a justification, a prediction, or something else? Why?

Do not check anything. Write your honest answers. These are your baseline. At the end of the lesson,

you will re-answer them and compare.

1.2 Orientation questions

Before you begin the lesson core, hold these questions in mind:

- Why is it that intelligent people disagree so profoundly about the same events?
- What makes one explanation of a war better than another?
- Can international politics be studied scientifically, or is it inherently interpretive?
- Whose knowledge counts as knowledge in IR?

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Identify** the puzzle in any geopolitical claim, distinguishing description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
2. **Locate** any explanation at the individual, state, systemic, or transnational level of analysis, and explain what each level reveals and conceals.
3. **Distinguish** the three faces of power (decision-making, agenda-setting, preference-shaping) and the material, relational, and legitimate dimensions of power.
4. **Reconstruct** how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions each define power and the international, and **adjudicate** among them on a specific case.
5. **Build** a complete IR explanation: puzzle → theory → mechanism → evidence → falsifiers → alternative explanations.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — IR is the study of *puzzles*, not events

The claim: An event is not a puzzle. A puzzle is a *variation that needs explaining* — a difference between what happened and what we would have expected, or a difference between two cases that look similar but turned out differently.

Mechanism: Why does this matter? Because without a puzzle, explanation has no target. If you ask "why did the war happen?", the answer can be anything — human nature, capitalism, a mad leader, God's will. If you ask "why did the war happen *in 2022* and not in 2014, when the same structural conditions were present?", you have a puzzle that disciplines your explanation.

How to construct a puzzle. Every good IR puzzle has one of three forms:

1. **Variation over time:** The same conditions produced different outcomes at different times. *Example:* Why did the Cold War end peacefully in 1989–91, but the transition from the Concert of Europe ended in the First World War in 1914?
2. **Variation across cases:** Similar cases produced different outcomes. *Example:* Why did decolonization in Ghana (1957) proceed peacefully, while in Algeria (1954–62) it produced a brutal war?

3. **Puzzle against expectation:** The outcome contradicts what a leading theory predicts. *Example:* Realism predicts that states balance against a rising hegemon. Why, then, have many African states deepened ties with China rather than balancing against it?

Scope condition: Puzzles are only as good as the theory that generates the expectation. A puzzle against realism is only a puzzle if realism is actually the right baseline. If realism never applied to the case, the "puzzle" is spurious.

Observable implication: A well-formed puzzle can be stated in one sentence beginning with "Why did X happen *rather than* Y?" or "Why did X happen *when* Y?" If your puzzle cannot be written in that form, it is probably a topic, not a puzzle.

The four things people confuse with explanation:

Type	Example	What it does
Description	"Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022."	States what happened.
Explanation	"Russia invaded because NATO enlargement created an existential security threat to its western border."	States *why* it happened.
Prediction	"Russia will escalate further if NATO admits Ukraine."	States what will happen.
Prescription	"NATO should offer Ukraine membership to deter Russia."	States what should be done.

Critical skill: Most public discourse *slides* between these four without noticing. A person may state a prescription ("NATO should…") while thinking they have given an explanation. Your first analytical discipline is to name which of the four you are doing at any moment.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Causes live at different levels, and the level you choose determines what you can see

The claim: Every explanation of international politics locates its cause at one of four levels. The choice of level is not neutral — it determines what you will find, what you will miss, and what you will blame.

The four levels. The classic formulation is Kenneth Waltz's *Man, the State, and War* (1959), which distinguished three "images" — the individual, the state, and the international system. J. David Singer (1961) formalized the "level-of-analysis problem." Modern IR adds a fourth, the transnational. Here is the full apparatus:

Level 1 — The individual. Causes are located in the psychology, beliefs, personality, or pathology of leaders.

- *Example:* The invasion of Ukraine is explained by Putin's personal historical grievances and fear of democratic contagion.

- *What it reveals:* The role of perception, misperception, ego, ideology, and decision-making pathology (e.g., the psychology of humiliation, the "operational code" of leaders, the groupthink of small decision units).
- *What it conceals:* Structural pressures that would have produced similar behavior from any leader in that position; the institutional constraints on leaders; the possibility that "mad" leaders are responding rationally to structural incentives.
- *Diagnostic question:* Would a different leader, facing the same structural conditions, have done the same thing?

Level 2 — The state. Causes are located in domestic institutions, regime type, bureaucratic politics, economic structure, or national identity.

- *Example:* The invasion is explained by Russia's regime type — an authoritarian, personalist system in which no institution can restrain the leader, and in which nationalism is the legitimating ideology.
- *What it reveals:* The role of regime type (democracies vs. autocracies), bureaucratic competition (the military-industrial complex, the security services), domestic coalitions (oligarchs, nationalists), and identity construction.
- *What it conceals:* The system-level pressures that make certain state-level outcomes likely; the fact that states with very different domestic structures sometimes behave similarly.
- *Diagnostic question:* If you changed the domestic regime but kept the international position constant, would the outcome change?

Level 3 — The international system. Causes are located in the distribution of power, the structure of the international system (anarchy, polarity), or the state of the security dilemma.

- *Example:* The invasion is explained by the structure of the post-Cold War system — NATO's expansion into Russia's perceived sphere of influence, the security dilemma that this triggered, and the absence of any institution capable of mediating the conflict.
- *What it reveals:* The role of polarity (unipolarity, bipolarity, multipolarity), anarchy, relative gains, the security dilemma, and the balance of power.
- *What it conceals:* Why states in similar structural positions behave differently; the role of domestic politics; the role of norms and identities.
- *Diagnostic question:* If a different state occupied Russia's structural position, would it behave the same way?

Level 4 — The transnational. Causes are located in forces that cross borders and are not reducible to any single state: capitalism, ideology, religion, ethnic networks, technology, climate, or epistemic communities.

- *Example:* The invasion is explained by the global crisis of the liberal order — the rise of authoritarian capitalism, the fragmentation of the post-1945 normative consensus, and the global competition between democratic and authoritarian models of modernity.
- *What it reveals:* The role of global capitalism, transnational ideology, technological change, climate stress, and non-state actors.
- *What it conceals:* The specific decisions and structures of particular states; the agency of leaders; the difference between global trends and particular outcomes.
- *Diagnostic question:* If you changed the global context but kept the state and system constant, would the outcome change?

The methodological rule: A complete explanation will usually involve *all four levels*, but it will specify which level does the *analytical work* — which level is doing the causal heavy lifting — and which levels are background conditions. The mistake is not using one level; the mistake is using one level *unconsciously* and mistaking it for the whole.

The practical technique: When you encounter an explanation, ask: *at what level is the cause located?* Then ask: *what does this level hide?* Then ask: *what would the explanation look like if the cause were at a different level?* This is called **level-shifting**, and it is the single most useful analytical habit in IR.

Worked illustration — the same event, four explanations:

Level	Explanation of the 2022 invasion	What it emphasizes	What it hides
Individual	Putin's personal historical obsession and fear of humiliation	Leader psychology	Structural pressures any Russian leader would face
State	Russia's authoritarian regime and its inability to tolerate a democratic neighbor	Regime type	The role of NATO and the security dilemma
System	NATO enlargement and the security dilemma in a unipolar system	Structural pressures	Russia's agency and domestic politics
Transnational	The global contest between liberal and authoritarian models of order	Ideological contestation	The specific decisions and borders

None of these is simply "wrong." Each is *incomplete*. The skill is to see which one an analyst is using, what it illuminates, and what it obscures — and then to build an explanation that combines them without collapsing into "everything matters."

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Power has three faces, and IR's central concept is contested

The claim: Power is not one thing. It has at least three faces — the ability to win decisions, the ability to keep issues off the agenda, and the ability to shape what others want — and it has three dimensions — material, relational, and legitimate. Different theoretical traditions define power differently, and the definition you adopt determines your entire analysis.

The three faces of power. This is the classic formulation from Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (1974), building on Robert Dahl and Bachrach and Baratz:

First face — decision-making power (Dahl). A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something B would not otherwise do. *Example:* The US persuades or coerces a state to vote a certain way in the UN Security Council. This is observable, measurable, and behavioral.

Second face — non-decision-making power (Bachrach and Baratz). A has power over B to the extent that A can keep certain issues off the agenda, so that B never even considers them. *Example:* The IMF's structural adjustment conditions keep "nationalization of resources" off the policy agenda of borrowing states — not because it was voted down, but because it was never proposed. This is less observable, because the absence of a decision is harder to see than a decision.

Third face — preference-shaping power (Lukes). A has power over B to the extent that A can shape B's *wants* — so that B comes to desire what A wants it to desire. *Example:* Decades of Western development discourse have shaped how African elites define "development" — as integration into global markets rather than as structural transformation or regional autonomy. B does not experience this as coercion; B experiences it as common sense.

The three dimensions of power. Alongside the three faces, IR distinguishes three dimensions of what power *is*:

1. **Material power (capabilities):** military forces, economic output, resources, technology, geography. This is the realist's default — the "elements of national power."
2. **Relational power (network position):** power that comes from occupying a strategic node in a network — financial centrality (the dollar system), supply-chain chokepoints (semiconductors), control of chokepoints (Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb). Farrell and Newman's "weaponized interdependence" is a theory of relational power. A state with fewer material capabilities can exercise enormous power if it sits at a network chokepoint.
3. **Legitimate power (authority):** power that comes from being recognized as entitled to rule, define, or adjudicate. The UN Security Council's authority rests not only on the P5's military power but on the recognition of the Charter as legitimate. Legitimacy is a form of power that cannot be measured in divisions or GDP.

Why this matters for IR analysis: The claim "China is powerful" is meaningless without specifying: material power (yes, large), relational power (increasingly central in supply chains), or legitimate power (contested — its model of order is accepted by some states and rejected by others). The claim "Iran is weak" is similarly ambiguous: materially weak relative to the US, but relationally powerful in the Strait of Hormuz, and legitimate in the eyes of its regional allies. The concept of power is only useful when *disaggregated*.

Scope condition: The three faces and three dimensions are not always simultaneously operative. In a crisis, first-face material power dominates. In a long-term structural relationship, third-face and relational power dominate. The analyst must specify which face and dimension are doing the work in the case at hand.

Observable implications: - If first-face power is operative, you should see explicit contests, votes, coercive threats, and observable compliance. - If second-face power is operative, you should see systematic absence of certain issues from agendas, and you should be able to identify who benefits from that absence. - If third-face power is operative, you should see convergence of preferences, "common sense" that serves one party's interests, and the absence of coercion.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The five perspectives define power and the international differently, and each is internally coherent

The claim: IR is not a neutral science with "perspectives" added on. The dominant Western tradition is itself a perspective. African, Chinese, Russian, and UN traditions each define the basic concepts — power, order, sovereignty, security — in ways that produce different puzzles, different levels of analysis, and different conclusions. The mature analyst can reconstruct each from within before adjudicating among them.

This section gives you each perspective's core commitments in enough depth to *use* them.

2.5.1 The African perspective (primary) **Core commitments.** African IR is not a single school, but its major strands share a foundational claim: the international system was constituted through colonial conquest and racial hierarchy, and that constitution persists. Key commitments:

- **Sovereignty is hard-won and fragile.** Non-interference is not a procedural nicety — it is a defense against re-colonization. The AU Constitutive Act enshrines sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference as foundational principles precisely because African states experienced the opposite.
- **The state is not the only site of security governance.** African political orders are characterized by hybridity — traditional authorities, religious networks, militias, and informal economies coexist with and sometimes displace the formal state. Theorizing security from this hybridity, rather than treating it as "state failure," expands IR as a whole.
- **Coloniality structures knowledge.** Mainstream IR treats the Western experience of sovereignty and anarchy as universal. African scholarship (Grovogui, Mbembe, Danso and Aning) shows that this erases the hierarchical, racialized, and extractive foundations of the international system.
- **Alternativity.** African experiences are not "cases" to be fitted into Western theory. They are sources of alternative theoretical frameworks.

How this perspective defines power: Power is relational and structural — it includes the capacity to extract, to define, and to set the terms of engagement. A mining concession that transfers cobalt to a foreign firm at prices set elsewhere is an exercise of power, even if no gun is pointed. Power also includes the "weapons of the weak" — the ability to use external competition to extract concessions, to play suitors against each other, to convert weakness into leverage.

How it defines the international: A hierarchically structured system in which formal sovereignty coexists with substantive inequality. The relevant history is not Westphalia (1648) but Berlin (1884–85) and the long struggle for self-determination.

What it occludes: It can underplay the agency of African states themselves (treating them only as victims), and it can underplay the genuine differences among African states' interests and strategies.

2.5.2 The Chinese perspective **Core commitments.** The "Chinese School" is not a monolith, but its major branches share a rejection of the Western state-centric, anarchic ontology in favor of relationality, moral authority, and order as hierarchy:

- **Relational theory (Qin Yaqing):** International politics is constituted through relations and processes, not discrete rational actors. A state's identity and interests emerge from its relationships, not prior to them.
- **Tianxia (Zhao Tingyang):** "All under heaven" frames world order as a hierarchical, harmonious

whole, in which the legitimate ruler orders the world for the benefit of all — not a system of formally equal sovereigns.
- **Moral realism (Yan Xuetong):** Leadership and morality, not only material power, determine the rise and fall of states. A distinct normative strand within realism.
- **Civilizational state:** China is understood as a continuous civilization, not a nation-state. Sovereignty is civilizational, not merely territorial.

How this perspective defines power: Power is relational and moral. It includes the capacity to sustain relationships, to embody legitimacy, and to order hierarchies. Material power matters, but it is insufficient — leadership (in the Confucian sense of moral exemplarity) is the decisive variable in long-run competition.

How it defines the international: A relational order of differentiated statuses, not a flat system of equal sovereigns. The relevant history is civilizational continuity, not the Westphalian settlement.

What it occludes: It can underplay the coercive dimension of hierarchy; it can underestimate the agency of smaller states; it can naturalize China's own position within the hierarchy it describes.

2.5.3 The Russian perspective Core commitments. Russian official and intellectual discourse centers on multipolarity, sovereignty as great-power prerogative, and civilizational plurality:

- **Multipolarity:** The unipolar moment is over. A polycentric order is emerging in which several great powers, each with its own civilizational sphere, coexist.
- **Stratified sovereignty:** Sovereignty is not equal. Great powers are truly sovereign; smaller states fall into the spheres of influence of great powers. This is not a normative claim but a description of how the world actually works.
- **State-civilization:** Russia understands itself as a distinct civilization with a historical legacy and a mission to defend traditional values against universalist liberalism.
- **Anti-hegemonic revisionism:** The post-Cold War settlement is rejected as Western hegemony. The UN Security Council is accepted only insofar as the veto protects Russian interests.

How this perspective defines power: Power is the capacity to defend one's civilizational sphere and to resist the imposition of external models. It is geopolitical, territorial, and cultural — not primarily economic or institutional.

How it defines the international: A permanent competition among civilizational blocs, in which spheres of influence are the natural form of order. The relevant history is the repeated invasion of Russia from the West, and the post-Cold War humiliation.

What it occludes: It can naturalize aggression against smaller neighbors; it can treat the preferences of those neighbors as irrelevant; it can underplay the genuine agency and identity of states within its claimed sphere.

2.5.4 The Western perspective Core commitments. "Western" is not a single tradition either — it includes realism, liberalism, constructivism, Marxism, and critical theory. But the dominant strands share:

- **Anarchy as the organizing condition:** There is no overarching authority above states, and order must be explained, not assumed.
- **The state as the primary actor:** Even when non-state actors matter, the state is the container of political authority.
- **Rationality as the baseline:** States are assumed to calculate costs and benefits, even if imperfectly.

- **The possibility of progress:** Liberal institutionalism in particular holds that cooperation, institutions, and norms can mitigate anarchy.

How this perspective defines power: Primarily material (capabilities) and relational (network position), with legitimacy as a secondary dimension. This is the tradition that produced the three faces and three dimensions you learned above.

How it defines the international: An anarchic system of sovereign states, structured by the distribution of power, in which institutions and norms can partially order cooperation. The relevant history is Westphalia (1648), the World Wars, and the post-1945 institutional settlement.

What it occludes: Its own historical particularity — the colonial foundations of the system it describes, the racial hierarchy that structured sovereignty, and the experience of the majority world. Western critical traditions (post-colonial, feminist, decolonial) are *internal* self-critiques of this perspective, not external ones.

2.5.5 The UN perspective Core commitments. The UN is not a scholarly school but a normative-institutional discourse with distinctive features:

- **The Charter as the frame:** Sovereignty, non-interference, the prohibition on the use of force, and the peaceful settlement of disputes are the foundational norms.
- **Multilateralism as method:** Problems are to be addressed through the collective deliberation of member states, not unilateral action.
- **Peace operations as practice:** The UN's operational identity is bound up with peacekeeping, which requires adaptable, inclusive, politically grounded missions.
- **The gap between principle and practice:** The UN's normative commitments coexist with P5 veto politics and selective enforcement.

How this perspective defines power: Legitimate authority, grounded in the Charter and in the recognition of member states. The UN's power is the power to define what is legal, what is legitimate, and what counts as a threat to international peace and security.

How it defines the international: A society of states governed by law, in which sovereignty and non-interference are the foundational rules, and in which multilateral institutions are the legitimate mechanism for collective action.

What it occludes: The P5's veto politics, the selective enforcement of Charter norms, and the ways in which the UN's own structure reproduces the power hierarchy it claims to transcend.

2.5.6 The comparison matrix Here is the matrix you will use throughout the course. Fill it from memory first, then check against the text above:

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Core actor/unit	Hybrid orders; AU; post-colonial state	Relational network; civilization-state	Great-power civilization	Sovereign state; market	Member state; Charter system

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Root cause of insecurity	Coloniality; external interference; weak hybrid institutions	Western narrative hegemony; underdevelop-ment	Western unipolarity; civilizational encroachment	Anarchy; weak institutions; security dilemma	Erosion of international law; multilateral breakdown
Sovereignty	Hard-won; non-interference as defense	Relational; non-interference as principle	Stratified; great powers truly sovereign	Formal; bargained	Legal; Charter-based
Definition of power	Relational and structural; extraction and agenda-setting	Relational and moral; leadership and hierarchy	Civilizational and geopolitical	Material, relational, legitimate	Legitimate authority; Charter-based
What is occluded	African states' own agency	Smaller states' agency; coercion	Neighbors' preferences; aggression	Coloniality; racial hierarchy	P5 veto politics; selective enforcement

2.6 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: In 2023, a military junta overthrew Niger's elected president, Mohamed Bazoum. France — Niger's former colonial power and a key security partner — was forced to withdraw its troops. The junta then deepened security ties with Russia (via the Africa Corps) and economic ties with China. Western analysts described this as "Russia and China exploiting instability." Yet Niger's junta enjoyed significant popular support at home, and neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso — which had undergone similar coups — formed an alliance with Niger.

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why did Niger's coup lead to the expulsion of a Western power and the deepening of ties with Russia and China, rather than to a restoration of the previous alignment?*

Level of analysis: The analyst must specify which level does the analytical work. Let us walk through all four.

- **Individual level:** The junta leader, General Abdourahamane Tchiani, had personal grievances against Bazoum and a history of rivalry within the presidential guard. This explains *who* staged the coup, but not why the *outcome* — the realignment — followed. Individual-level explanation is necessary but insufficient.
- **State level:** Niger's state was structurally weak, dependent on external security assistance (French and US troops, plus a large aid budget), and characterized by a rentier political economy (uranium extraction, foreign military bases). The coup revealed the fragility of the state's monopoly on violence and the unpopularity of the elite's dependence on France. This level does substantial work: it explains why the coup was popular and why the junta could mobilize anti-French sentiment.

- **Systemic level:** The post-Cold War security architecture in the Sahel had collapsed. French-led counterterrorism (Operation Barkhane) had failed to contain the insurgency; the US had a light footprint; the AU and ECOWAS had limited enforcement capacity. The systemic vacuum — the absence of a hegemon willing and able to restore order — created the space for realignment. This level explains *why the realignment was possible*, but not why it took the specific form it did.
- **Transnational level:** The global contest between Western liberal order and its rivals provided an ideological vocabulary and material resources. Russia's Africa Corps offered security services without the conditionality that Western partners demanded. China offered infrastructure and mineral extraction without governance conditions. The transnational contest explains *why the junta had alternatives* — it did not have to accept French terms.

The explanation, synthesized: The coup was *made possible* by the collapse of the Sahel security architecture (systemic), *made popular* by the structural dependence and rentier character of the Nigerien state (state), *made possible in its specific form* by the availability of Russian and Chinese alternatives (transnational), and *executed* by a junta with its own internal dynamics (individual). The analytical work is done by the interaction of the state and systemic levels; the individual and transnational levels provide the form and the vocabulary.

Which perspective does this explanation privilege? It is a Western-style multi-level analysis — it uses the standard Western apparatus. Now let us reconstruct the same event from each perspective:

- **African perspective:** The coup is not primarily about Russia or China. It is about the legitimacy crisis of a post-colonial state whose elites were seen as serving foreign interests. The junta's popularity reflects a long history of anti-colonial sentiment and the failure of the post-independence social contract. The "realignment" is a rational strategy of *sovereignty assertion* — using external competition to escape dependence on a single patron. The African perspective foregrounds *agency* and *legitimacy*, not external manipulation.
- **Chinese perspective:** The event illustrates the decline of Western hegemony and the emergence of a multipolar order in which African states exercise genuine choice. China's engagement is developmental and non-interventionist; the "debt-trap" and "exploitation" narratives are Western projections. Relationally, China gains by being a reliable partner that does not impose political conditions.
- **Russian perspective:** The event confirms that the unipolar order is collapsing and that states are free to choose their civilizational partners. Russian security cooperation is a sovereign choice by Niger, not "exploitation." The West's expulsion is a consequence of its own arrogance and its refusal to treat African states as equals.
- **Western perspective:** The event is a symptom of the erosion of the liberal order in the Sahel. Russia and China are exploiting governance vacuums. The West's withdrawal represents a strategic setback. The explanation focuses on the failure of Western policy and the need to compete more effectively — through better conditionality, more effective security assistance, and countering Russian disinformation.
- **UN perspective:** The event raises serious concerns about the unconstitutional change of government and the erosion of democratic norms. The UN condemns coups and calls for a return to constitutional order, while acknowledging the need to address the root causes of instability, including governance deficits and external interference. The Charter's principles of sovereignty and non-interference are relevant to the question of external military presence.

The adjudication. Which perspective best explains the outcome? The African perspective captures some-

thing the Western perspective misses: the *popular legitimacy* of the junta's anti-French posture and the structural roots of that sentiment. The Western perspective captures something the African perspective underplays: the *material and security vacuum* that made the realignment possible. The Chinese and Russian perspectives are partly *justifications* (theirs and the junta's) rather than explanations, but they correctly identify the structural opening provided by multipolarity. The UN perspective captures the normative stakes but not the causal dynamics. A complete explanation *combines* the African and Western insights, uses the Chinese and Russian perspectives as evidence of how the actors themselves understand the event, and treats the UN perspective as a normative benchmark rather than a causal theory.

2.7 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: In 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. Western analysts explained the invasion as a product of Russian imperialism and Putin's personal ambitions. Russian officials explained it as a response to NATO enlargement and the threat of Ukrainian membership in the alliance. African and Global South states largely refused to condemn Russia, citing sovereignty and non-interference, and some cited NATO's own history of intervention.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely in one sentence.
2. Identify the level of analysis used by each explanation.
3. Identify which face and dimension of power each explanation emphasizes.
4. Reconstruct the African perspective on the event. What does it foreground? What does it occlude?
5. Write a 300-word adjudication: which perspective best explains the *global reaction* to the invasion, as distinct from the invasion itself?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did Russia invade Ukraine in 2022, when the same structural conditions (NATO enlargement, Ukrainian sovereignty, Russian decline) had existed since at least 2008, without producing a full-scale invasion?

Levels: - Western explanation: state level (Russian imperialism, Putin's psychology) and systemic level (the security dilemma). - Russian explanation: systemic level (NATO enlargement, security dilemma) with a normative claim about spheres of influence. - African/Global South reaction: systemic and normative (sovereignty, non-interference) with an emphasis on the selectivity of Western norms.

Power: - Western explanation emphasizes material power (Russian military) and the first face of power (coercion). - Russian explanation emphasizes relational power (NATO's network expansion) and the third face (the shaping of what counts as a "threat"). - African reaction emphasizes legitimate power (the authority of sovereignty norms) and the second face (the agenda-setting power of the West in defining which violations matter).

African perspective reconstruction: The African reaction foregrounds the sovereignty norm — a state's territorial integrity should not be violated, and this applies to Ukraine as it applied to African states. But it also

foregrounds the *selective* application of this norm by the West — interventions in Iraq, Libya, and elsewhere were justified by the same powers that now condemn Russia. The African perspective does not endorse the invasion; it refuses the Western framing of the conflict as a simple morality tale. What it occludes: the specific character of Russian aggression and the genuine Ukrainian agency that the "great-power competition" framing can obscure.

Adjudication: The Western and Russian explanations both explain the *invasion* at the systemic level — they disagree on which side bears responsibility for the security dilemma. But neither explains the *global reaction*. The African perspective explains the global reaction better than either: most of the world did not see the invasion as a clash between good and evil, but as a clash between great powers in which the sovereignty norm was being selectively invoked. This does not mean the African perspective explains the invasion — it doesn't. It explains why the invasion did not produce a unified global response. The lesson: different perspectives explain different things, and the analyst must specify what is being explained.

2.8 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below. This is your independent application — do not consult the model answers.

Case: The 2024 collapse of the JCPOA (Iran nuclear deal) and Iran's subsequent withdrawal from the treaty, after the European parties failed to lift sanctions and the UN snapback mechanism was triggered.

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** What causal process explains the collapse? Specify the level of analysis and the concept of power.
2. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives explain the collapse? (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — one paragraph each, or a table.)
3. **Historical analogue:** What earlier case illuminates this dynamic? (e.g., the collapse of the League of Nations, the failure of the Concert of Europe, the US withdrawal from the INF Treaty.)
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would prove your explanation wrong? What would you need to observe to abandon it?

Self-check before proceeding: Does your memo distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription? Does it specify a level of analysis? Does it specify which face and dimension of power are doing the work? Does it reconstruct each perspective from within, rather than caricaturing it?

2.9 HINGE QUESTION

Answer before proceeding. If you get it wrong, reread the relevant section.

A scholar argues: "The United States maintains global dominance not mainly through its military, but through the dollar's centrality in global finance, which allows it to exclude adversaries from the global financial system." Which concept of power is this scholar using?

- A) First-face material power

- B) Second-face agenda-setting power
- C) Third-face preference-shaping power
- D) Relational power (network centrality)

Answer: D. The dollar's centrality is a *network position* — it is relational power in Farrell and Newman's sense. It is not first-face (it is not a direct decision), not second-face (it is not primarily agenda-setting, though it has that effect), and not third-face (it does not primarily shape preferences). The confusion arises because relational power *enables* all three faces — but the concept being used is relational.

If you answered A: You are conflating material capabilities with network position. Reread Section 2.4. **If you answered B:** You are close — exclusion from SWIFT does shape agendas — but the primary mechanism is network centrality, not agenda-setting. **If you answered C:** You are describing a different mechanism (preference-shaping), which is not what the scholar is describing.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground the lesson's concepts in empirical work.

Task: Go to the ACLED database (or use the summary data provided below) and examine conflict events in the Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) from 2018 to 2024.

Provided summary data (simplified for this exercise):

Year	Jihadist attacks	State force attacks on civilians	Russian paramilitary attacks on civilians	Civilian fatalities
2018	420	180	0	1,200
2020	680	250	0	1,800
2022	910	310	140	2,400
2024	1,150	420	380	3,100

Analysis questions:

1. **Trend:** What is the trend in each category? What does the data show about the relationship between Russian paramilitary presence and civilian harm?
2. **Level of analysis:** Does this data support a state-level explanation, a systemic explanation, or a transnational explanation of the Sahel crisis? Why?
3. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret this data? (African: external intervention and state fragility; Chinese: Western failure and the need for alternative security models; Russian: sovereign choice and effective counterterrorism; Western: Russian predation and governance failure; UN: civilian protection and accountability.)
4. **Limitation:** What does this data *not* tell you? What would you need to know to make a causal claim?

Rule: Complete this lab before writing your independent memo. Evidence precedes argument.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand. Do not generate it with a tool.

Visual 1: The levels of analysis. Draw four concentric circles or a four-layer pyramid. Label them: Individual (center), State, System, Transnational (outer). For each layer, write one example of a cause located at that level for the 2022 Ukraine invasion. Draw arrows between layers to show how causes at one level interact with causes at another.

Visual 2: The three faces of power. Draw three columns. For each face, write: the name (decision-making, non-decision-making, preference-shaping), the key theorist (Dahl, Bachrach and Baratz, Lukes), one example, and one observable implication.

Visual 3: The perspective matrix. Draw a five-column table (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) and three rows (definition of power, definition of the international, primary occlusion). Fill it from memory. Then check against Section 2.5.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes in the following structure:

Cue column (left third)	Notes (right two-thirds)
What is a puzzle?	A variation that needs explaining; three forms: time, case, expectation
What are the four levels?	Individual, state, system, transnational — each reveals and conceals
What are the three faces of power?	Decision-making, non-decision-making, preference-shaping
What are the three dimensions?	Material, relational, legitimate
What are the five perspectives?	African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN
Source log:	Lesson text, Section 2.2–2.5; ACLED data (Section 2A)
Summary (bottom):	3–5 sentences in your own words synthesizing the lesson

Rule: Cover the notes and answer the cue-column questions from memory. This is the retrieval engine.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the lesson's central claim to a smart non-specialist in 150–200 words, without using IR jargon. If you must use a term (e.g., "level of analysis," "security dilemma"), define it in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated, used a term you could not define, or skipped a causal step. These are your gaps.

Step 3: Reread only the sections corresponding to your gaps. Then rewrite the explanation.

Step 4: Produce one analogy. Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "Levels of analysis are like zoom levels on a map — but unlike a map, the levels are not just different resolutions of the same reality; they are different *causal stories* about the same event.")

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What distinguishes a puzzle from an event?
Mechanism	Why does the level of analysis determine what an explanation can see?
Application	Which level of analysis does the claim "Putin's paranoia caused the war" use?
Comparison	How do the first and third faces of power differ in their observable implications?
Source	Which theorist is associated with the second face of power?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to the claim that African states are "weak"?
Reconstruction	How would a Russian state-civilization theorist explain the 2022 invasion?
Occlusion	What does the Chinese relational framework fail to see about African agency?
Adjudication	Which perspective best explains the global reaction to the Ukraine invasion, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the three faces of power on the diagram (image occlusion).

Tag each card: `L1`, `method`, `theory`, `perspective`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Before checking any answers, rate your confidence (0–100%) on each learning objective:

Objective	Confidence
Identify the puzzle in a claim	
Locate an explanation at a level of analysis	

Objective	Confidence
Distinguish the three faces of power	
Reconstruct the five perspectives	
Build a complete IR explanation	

After completing the exercises, rate your **accuracy** on each. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand? (Not "what did I miss," but "what did I believe that was wrong?")
2. What strategy produced the most learning in this lesson? (Retrieval? The worked example? The perspective reconstruction?)
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 2?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L1			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 0)

Build the first entry of your Module 0 cheatsheet now.

Column	Content
Core concepts	Puzzle; levels of analysis; three faces of power; three dimensions of power; the five perspectives
Key mechanisms	Puzzle → theory → mechanism → evidence → falsifiers; level-shifting; power disaggregation
Theories and authors	Waltz (levels); Singer (level-of-analysis problem); Dahl/Bachrach & Baratz/Lukes (faces of power); Farrell & Newman (relational power)
Cases and evidence	Niger coup (2023); Ukraine invasion (2022); JCPOA collapse (2024); Sahel ACLED data
Debates	Is IR a science? Whose knowledge counts? Is power material or relational?
Falsifiers	What evidence would prove a level-of-analysis explanation wrong?
Cross-links	Forward to L2 (law), L4–8 (theory), L27–34 (Africa)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge question variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with Lesson 2 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L1 with L4–8
R5	End of Module 0	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Diagnostic retrieval answered (Section 1.1)
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Four key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair attempted and compared to model answer
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
- ☐ Cheatsheet entry added
- ☐ R2 review scheduled

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

If you wish to go deeper into the material of this lesson, the following are the original sources and extensions. You do not need them to complete the lesson.

- **On levels of analysis:** Kenneth Waltz, *Man, the State, and War* (1959), ch. 1–2; J. David Singer, "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations," *World Politics* (1961).
- **On the three faces of power:** Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (1974); Robert Dahl, "The Concept of Power" (1957); Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "Two Faces of Power" (1962).
- **On relational power:** Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman, "Weaponized Interdependence," *International Security* (2019).
- **On the African perspective:** Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996); Kwaku Danso and Kwesi Aning, "African Experiences and Alternativity in International Relations Theory" (2019); Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa* (1989).

- **On the Chinese perspective:** Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (2018); Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia* (2021); Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (2011).
- **On the Russian perspective:** Fyodor Lukyanov, "Russia's Vision of a Multipolar World" (2023); Mikhail Komin and Jussi Laine, "Russia's Vision of a Multipolar World and the Sovereign 'State-Civilisation' " (2024); Vladimir Putin, Valdai Club speeches (2018–2023).
- **On the UN perspective:** UN Charter; *Pact for the Future* (2024); UN Secretary-General speeches on peace and security (2023–2025).
- **On the Sahel case:** ACLED data and analysis (2023–2025); International Crisis Group reports on the Sahel; UN Security Council debates on the Sahel.

End of Lesson 1. When you are ready, say **"Next"** and I will write Lesson 2 (International Law and Institutions Primer) in the same format.

3. International Law and Institutions Primer: The Charter System, Sovereignty, and the Politics of Legal Order

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LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L2 — International Law and Institutions Primer
Module	Module 0: Orientation and Method
Prerequisites	L1 (puzzles, levels of analysis, power, perspectives)
Interleaved links	Forward to L9 (Westphalian myth), L12 (decolonization and the OAU), L28 (AU sovereignty regime), L37 (lawfare of territorial integrity), L45 (JCPOA and snapback), L49 (institutional revisionism)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.
Content channels	Primary documents (Charter, AU Act, ICJ judgment, Pact for the Future, all quoted and analyzed here); canon (summarized); data (UN voting and ICJ compliance exercise); five perspectives
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (adjudicate between legal interpretations and institutional logics)
Estimated study time	5–7 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Every primary text you need is quoted in this document with enough surrounding analysis to use it. You do not need to retrieve the UN Charter, the AU Constitutive Act, or the ICJ judgment to complete the lesson. The "Further Reading" section is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

In Lesson 1 you learned that IR explanations live at different levels and that power has multiple faces. This lesson adds the dimension without which none of those explanations can be judged: **law**.

International law is not a decorative overlay on power politics. It is the **grammar through which states justify, contest, and legitimize their actions**. When Russia calls its invasion a "special military operation," when the US invokes "collective self-defense," when African states insist on "non-interference," when the UN Secretary-General calls a veto "a failure of the Council" — each is making a legal claim. The analyst who cannot parse those claims is reduced to saying "it's all power," which explains nothing about *why states bother to make legal arguments at all*.

This lesson does four things:

1. It gives you the **architecture of the Charter system** — the rules on sovereignty, non-interference, and the use of force, and the institutional machinery (UNSC, ICJ, Chapter VII) that enforces or fails to enforce them.
2. It shows how **African states modified the inherited legal order** through the AU Constitutive Act, creating a distinctive sovereignty regime.
3. It teaches you to read **legal documents as strategic instruments** — what they authorize, what they omit, and what they signal.
4. It reconstructs **five perspectives on international law**: African (TWAIL and the AU), Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN.

By the end, you can take any legal claim in world politics and answer: *What rule is being invoked? What exception is being claimed? Who has the authority to interpret it? And whose interests does that interpretation serve?*

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory, before reading further)

1. From Lesson 1: State the four levels of analysis in one sentence each.
2. From Lesson 1: Name the three faces of power and give one observable implication of the third face.
3. From Lesson 1: In two sentences, reconstruct the African perspective's core claim about the international system.

Check your answers against Lesson 1 before proceeding. If you cannot retrieve them, review the relevant sections.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind throughout:

- Is international law "law" in the same sense as domestic law? If not, what makes it binding?
- Why do powerful states sometimes comply with international law and sometimes ignore it?

- Can sovereignty be both a shield (protecting weak states) and a sword (justifying repression)? How?
- Whose interests does the "rules-based international order" serve?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

You will encounter these terms. Write a provisional definition for each; you will revise them by the end of the lesson.

Sovereignty; non-interference; jus cogens; erga omnes; Chapter VII; veto; self-defence; armed attack; non-intervention; uti possidetis juris; R2P; TWAIL; opinio juris; customary international law.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Reconstruct** the Charter system's rules on the use of force and non-interference, and distinguish them from the principle of non-intervention in customary law.
2. **Analyze** the AU Constitutive Act as a *modification* of the inherited sovereignty regime, explaining what changed and why.
3. **Read** a primary legal document (Charter article, AU Act provision, ICJ judgment, Pact for the Future section) for what it authorizes, prohibits, omits, and signals.
4. **Reconstruct** how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives interpret the same legal rules differently, and **adjudicate** among those interpretations on a specific case.
5. **Evaluate** the claim that international law is merely "power politics in legal dress," using evidence from at least two cases.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The Charter system is built on a prohibition, an exception, and a loophole

The claim: The post-1945 legal order rests on three interlocking provisions: Article 2(4) prohibits the use of force; Article 51 preserves a narrow right of self-defence; and Chapter VII authorizes the Security Council to use force to maintain or restore international peace and security. The tension among these three is the engine of most legal disputes in IR.

The text. Here are the provisions you must know, quoted in full:

Article 2(3): "All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security, and justice, are not endangered."

Article 2(4): "All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations."

Article 2(7): "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members

to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII."

Article 51: "Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security."

Chapter VII, Article 39: "The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security."

Article 42: "Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security."

The structure. Article 2(4) is a near-absolute prohibition, subject only to the exceptions the Charter itself creates. The two textual exceptions are self-defence under Article 51 and Security Council authorization under Chapter VII. Everything else — humanitarian intervention without Council authorization, anticipatory self-defence against a non-imminent threat, intervention to protect nationals abroad, regime change — must be justified by stretching one of these exceptions or by arguing that a new customary exception has emerged.

The ICJ's authoritative interpretation. In *Nicaragua v. United States* (1986), the International Court of Justice held that the prohibition on the use of force in Article 2(4) is also a principle of **customary international law**, binding on all states regardless of treaty membership. The Court distinguished the **most grave forms** of the use of force — which constitute an "armed attack" triggering the right of self-defence — from lesser forms, such as the mere provision of weapons or logistical support to rebels, which do not. It also held that **collective self-defence requires a request from the victim state** and that the victim must have declared itself to have been attacked.

The Court further defined the **principle of non-intervention** as "the right of every sovereign State to conduct its affairs without outside interference," a principle reflected in "numerous declarations and resolutions adopted by international organizations." A prohibited intervention is one that bears on matters each state is permitted to decide freely — "the choice of a political, economic, social and cultural system, and the formulation of foreign policy" — and that uses "methods of coercion, particularly force, either in the direct form of military action or in the indirect form of support for subversive activities in another State."

Mechanism: Why does this structure produce persistent legal contestation? Because the prohibition is broad, the exceptions are narrow and textually under-specified, and the authoritative interpreter — the Security Council — is a political body subject to the veto. The result is a system in which **legal argument is strategic**: states have incentives to characterize their actions as falling within an exception, and to characterize their adversaries' actions as violating the prohibition.

Scope condition: The Charter framework applies to *inter-state* force. It says much less about civil wars, proxy warfare, cyber operations, or economic coercion — which is precisely where much contemporary contestation occurs.

Observable implication: If the Charter framework is operative, you should see states **justifying** their uses of force in Charter language (self-defence, collective self-defence, Council authorization), even when the justification is strained. A state that makes no legal argument at all is signaling that it does not expect to be judged by the framework.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — The AU Constitutive Act modifies the inherited sovereignty regime from within

The claim: African states did not simply inherit the Westphalian/Charter regime. Through the AU Constitutive Act (2000), they **modified** it — retaining non-interference as a foundational principle while adding a right of intervention in grave circumstances. This is one of the most important legal innovations in post-Cold War international law, and it was produced by African agency, not imposed from outside.

The text. Article 4 of the AU Constitutive Act lists the Union's principles. The key provisions:

- **Article 4(a):** "Sovereign equality and interdependence among member states of the Union."
- **Article 4(g):** "Non-interference by any member state in the internal affairs of another."
- **Article 4(h):** "The right of the Union to intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity."
- **Article 4(j):** "The right of member states to request intervention from the Union in order to restore peace and security."
- **Article 4(p):** "Condemnation and rejection of unconstitutional changes of governments."

What changed. The OAU Charter (1963) had enshrined non-interference as an absolute principle, a direct response to the experience of colonialism and the fear of great-power meddling. The AU Act retained non-interference (Article 4(g)) but added Article 4(h) — a right of the Union to intervene in a member state in cases of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. This was a **significant inroad into the principle of non-interference**, and it was made by African states themselves, not imposed by the UN or Western powers.

The AU also added **Article 4(p)**, rejecting unconstitutional changes of government — a norm that the OAU had lacked, and which has been invoked repeatedly in response to coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon.

Mechanism: Why did African states modify the regime? The standard explanation is a learning process from the failures of the OAU — particularly the 1994 Rwandan genocide, which the OAU could not respond to because non-interference was absolute. The AU was designed to retain sovereignty's protective function while creating a narrow exception for the most grave crimes. The norm is often summarized as moving from "non-interference" to "non-indifference."

Scope condition: Article 4(h) is a right of the *Union*, exercised by the Assembly of Heads of State — not a right of individual member states, and not a right of external powers. It is also narrowly defined: genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, not "human rights violations" generally. The AU has been extremely reluctant to invoke it in practice, and its invocation in Libya (2011) was contested.

Observable implication: If the AU regime is operative, you should see (a) African states invoking Article 4(h) as a *normative resource* in debates about intervention, even when they do not invoke it as a legal authorization; (b) AU suspensions of member states after coups, consistent with Article 4(p); and (c) resistance to *external* intervention framed as a violation of Article 4(g), even as the AU claims a *collective* right of intervention under Article 4(h).

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Legal documents are strategic instruments: read them for what they authorize, omit, and signal

The claim: A legal document is never just a set of rules. It is a **political act** that distributes authority, creates constituencies, and forecloses alternatives. The analyst must read three layers: the text (what it says), the omission (what it does not say), and the signal (what it communicates to audiences).

The three-layer reading protocol. Apply this to any legal document:

Layer	Question	Example
Authorization	What does this text *permit* an actor to do that it could not otherwise do?	Article 4(h) authorizes the AU Assembly to intervene in a member state — a power the OAU did not have.
Omission	What does the text *not* say, and who benefits from that silence?	Article 2(4) prohibits "force" but does not define it; cyber operations and economic coercion fall outside its text. Article 4(h) covers genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity but not "human rights violations" generally — a deliberate narrowing.
Signal	What does the text communicate to audiences — domestic, regional, global?	The AU's Article 4(p) signals to domestic audiences that coups will not be tolerated, and to external audiences that Africa is capable of self-governance. Russia's invocation of Article 51 signals that it expects to be judged by the Charter framework, even as it violates Article 2(4).

Worked illustration — the Pact for the Future (2024). The UN's *Pact for the Future*, adopted at the 2024 Summit of the Future, is a useful case. Read it through the three layers:

- **Authorization:** The Pact is not a treaty and does not create binding legal obligations. It is a political declaration. Its "authorization" layer is weak. But it commits member states to "the most progressive and concrete commitment to Security Council reform since the 1960s," including steps to redress "the historical under-representation of Africa as a priority." It also commits to "the first multilateral recommitment to nuclear disarmament in more than a decade" and to "steps to avoid the weaponization and misuse of new technologies, including lethal autonomous weapons."
- **Omission:** The Pact does not create enforcement mechanisms, does not specify timelines for Security Council reform, and does not name the states that block it. It also does not resolve the fundamental tension between sovereignty and R2P.

- **Signal:** The Pact signals a **recommitment to multilateralism and international law** at a moment of erosion. It signals to African states that their demand for representation is acknowledged. It signals to the P5 that reform pressure is increasing, without creating a mechanism that could force it.

Mechanism: Why do states produce documents whose authorizations are weak but whose signals are strong? Because legal documents do double duty: they **coordinate expectations** (even non-binding commitments shape what states expect of each other) and they **create political resources** (a state can later say "you committed to this"). The Pact's weak authorization layer is not a failure; it is a reflection of the distribution of power in the General Assembly, where the P5 cannot be bound without consent.

Scope condition: The three-layer reading is most revealing for **ambiguous or aspirational documents** — declarations, action plans, framework agreements. For binding treaties and court judgments, the authorization layer is denser and the omission layer more contested.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The five perspectives read the same legal rules differently, and each reading serves a distinct political project

The claim: International law is not a neutral framework that all states interpret identically. It is a **contested terrain**. African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives agree on the text of the Charter but disagree profoundly on its meaning, its application, and its authority. Each reading is internally coherent and serves a political project.

2.5.1 The African perspective (primary) **Core commitments.** African approaches to international law — often grouped under Third World Approaches to International Law (TWAIL) and its African variants — start from a structural claim: international law was **constituted through colonialism**, and it continues to reproduce global hierarchy. TWAIL scholarship highlights "how international law perpetuates global inequality and systemic marginalisation," and argues that international law was "used to justify and legitimise the suppression of Third World peoples" and "was therefore instrumental" to the colonial order. A central TWAIL claim is that international law maintains domination "not through the use of force but through having their worldview accepted as natural by those over whom domination is exercised."

But African legal thought is not only critique. **Contributionism** emphasizes that Africa "in the past participated and continues to participate in the formation of international legal norms," and that Africa is "an innovator and generator" of international law. The AU Constitutive Act's Article 4(h) is a prime example: a distinctly African legal innovation that modified the inherited regime.

How this perspective reads the Charter. Sovereignty and non-interference are not abstract principles — they are **hard-won protections** against a history of external intervention and colonial rule. The AU retained Article 4(g) precisely because African states have experienced the alternative. But the AU also recognized that absolute non-interference had failed to protect civilians in Rwanda and elsewhere, and so it added Article 4(h) — a **collective** right of intervention, exercised by African states themselves, not by external powers.

How it reads the use-of-force regime. African states are often skeptical of humanitarian intervention framed by Western powers, because they have seen it used selectively (Libya 2011, Iraq 2003) and because they suspect it of serving regime-change objectives. They are more receptive to intervention authorized by the AU or the UN, and they insist that any intervention be collective and lawful. The African perspective thus **accepts the Charter framework but reads it through the lens of colonial history and selective enforcement**.

What it occludes: It can underplay the genuine normative commitment of some African states to R2P, and it can underplay the ways in which African governments invoke sovereignty to shield domestic repression.

2.5.2 The Chinese perspective **Core commitments.** Chinese official discourse on international law centers on **sovereign equality, non-interference, and peaceful settlement of disputes**. Chinese statements consistently emphasize that "all states should treat each other as equals, respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, oppose the use or threat of force in international relations, and abide by the golden rule of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries." China frames its approach as grounded in the UN Charter and in a **multilateral order with the UN at its core**, based on "international law based on the UN Charter."

How this perspective reads the Charter. China reads the Charter as a **sovereignty-protective** document. The prohibition on interference in internal affairs is central, and China opposes "bypassing the Security Council to impose sanctions or use force arbitrarily," and opposes "double standards" in the interpretation and application of international law. China's relational ontology (from Lesson 1) reinforces this: order is sustained through relationships of mutual respect, not through hierarchical enforcement.

How it reads the use-of-force regime. China is skeptical of humanitarian intervention and R2P, preferring peaceful settlement and dialogue. It accepts the Security Council's authority but resists expansive interpretations of Chapter VII. It emphasizes "legitimate security concerns" of all states — a formulation that can be used to justify opposition to NATO enlargement or to sanctions regimes.

What it occludes: It can underplay the coercive dimension of China's own economic and territorial claims, and it can treat sovereignty as a shield for domestic practices that other states regard as rights violations.

2.5.3 The Russian perspective **Core commitments.** Russia's approach to international law is **exceptionalist and civilizational**. Russia does not reject international law wholesale; it sees it as embodied in "the principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-intervention," and it supports a system "based on sovereignty in which great powers have a strong and recognised status, particularly in questions related to security." But Russia interprets international law from its own perspective, rejecting interpretations of human rights that emphasize individual liberties as "a cultural concept specific only to the West."

How this perspective reads the Charter. Russia reads the Charter as a **great-power concert**. The Security Council's composition and veto are not obstacles to be reformed but the core of the order: "great powers come together to deliberate issues of war and peace and are able to veto any undesirable resolutions." Russia is "strictly opposed to reforms of the UN — and particularly the Security Council — as it is afraid of losing its current strong status."

How it reads the use-of-force regime. Russia claims a right to pre-emptive action in its "sphere of influence" — a concept that has "no basis in the UN Charter or other legal codes" but has been deployed by Russian legal scholars as the "civilisational space of Russia." It justifies its 2022 invasion through a combination of Article 51 self-defence claims, protection of compatriots, and anti-fascism narratives.

What it occludes: It naturalizes aggression against smaller neighbors and treats their sovereignty as conditional on Russian security interests.

2.5.4 The Western perspective **Core commitments.** Western international-law scholarship and state practice are not monolithic, but dominant strands share several features: a commitment to **binding legal rules**,

including human rights and humanitarian law; support for **institutions with enforcement capacity** (the ICJ, the ICC, the Security Council); and a belief that **legal order can be progressively developed** through treaties, courts, and customary law. Western states were the primary architects of the post-1945 legal order and remain its most vocal defenders — though they also selectively violate it (Iraq 2003, drone strikes outside armed conflict, targeted killings).

How this perspective reads the Charter. Western readings tend to emphasize the **purposes** of the Charter (Article 1: peace, security, human rights) as much as its prohibitions. This allows for expansive interpretations of Chapter VII (e.g., "threat to the peace" includes human rights abuses), humanitarian intervention, and R2P. The ICJ's *Nicaragua* judgment is a canonical Western legal text — but it was also a defeat for the US, and the US subsequently withdrew from the case.

How it reads the use-of-force regime. Western states generally accept the Article 2(4) prohibition but argue for **exceptions**: humanitarian intervention, R2P, anticipatory self-defence against imminent threats, and enforcement of Security Council resolutions. These exceptions are contested by Russia, China, and many African states, which see them as vehicles for Western power.

What it occludes: Its own selectivity — the double standards that African, Chinese, and Russian critics identify — and the colonial genealogy of the legal order it defends.

2.5.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN's legal discourse is **Charter-centric and institutional**. It treats the Charter as the foundational legal document, the Security Council as the primary authority for peace and security, and the Secretary-General as the guardian of the Charter's purposes. The UN's own normative voice emphasizes **multilateralism, international law, and the peaceful settlement of disputes**. The *Pact for the Future* is a strong statement of "countries' commitment to the United Nations, the international system and international law," and it recommits to "multilateralism, solidarity and international law."

How this perspective reads the Charter. The UN reads the Charter as a **living instrument** that must adapt to new threats (climate, cyber, AI) while remaining anchored in its original principles. It emphasizes the **gap between principle and practice** — the veto, selective enforcement, and the failure to implement Charter norms — and it frames reform (Security Council reform, peacekeeping adaptation, international financial architecture reform) as necessary to close that gap.

How it reads the use-of-force regime. The UN treats Chapter VII as the primary lawful pathway for collective action, while acknowledging that the veto makes it unreliable. It supports peace operations that are "adaptable, inclusive, politically grounded," and it emphasizes prevention and mediation. It is critical of unilateral uses of force but constrained by the P5's interests.

What it occludes: The P5's veto politics and the ways in which the UN's own structure reproduces the power hierarchy it claims to transcend.

2.5.6 The comparison matrix Fill this from memory, then check:

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Status of sovereignty	Hard-won; non-interference plus collective exception (Art. 4(h))	Absolute; non-interference as golden rule	Stratified; great powers have prerogatives	Formal; subject to human-rights exceptions	Legal; Charter-based
Use of force	Collective, AU/UN-authorized intervention acceptable; unilateral Western intervention suspect	Strong presumption against force; peaceful settlement	Self-defence plus sphere-of-influence claims	Broad exceptions (R2P, humanitarian, anticipatory)	Chapter VII as primary pathway
Attitude to institutions	AU as norm innovator; UN reform for representation	UN-centered multilateral-ism; opposition to bypassing UNSC	UNSC veto as core; opposition to reform	Strong courts and enforcement; selective compliance	Charter as living instrument; reform to close gap
Key occlusion	Sovereignty as shield for repression	Coercive dimension of Chinese power	Neighbors' sovereignty as conditional	Selectivity and double standards	P5 veto politics

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2.6 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: In 2011, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1973 authorizing "all necessary measures" to protect civilians in Libya. NATO intervened, and the intervention quickly became a regime-change operation, culminating in the killing of Muammar Gaddafi. In the aftermath, South Africa, which had voted for the resolution, criticized NATO for exceeding its mandate. Russia and China cited the Libya precedent as a reason to veto subsequent resolutions on Syria. The AU, which had its own roadmap for Libya, was sidelined.

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why did the Libya intervention produce a lasting fracture in the legal consensus on humanitarian intervention, even though the intervention was authorized by the Security Council under Chapter VII?*

Level of analysis: The fracture is best explained at the **systemic and normative levels**. The systemic level explains the *opportunity*: the Security Council was able to authorize force because Russia and China abstained rather than vetoed. The normative level explains the *consequence*: the intervention revealed that a Chapter VII authorization could be stretched into regime change, which made Russia and China reluctant to authorize future interventions, and which confirmed African suspicions that humanitarian language could mask power politics.

The three-layer reading of Resolution 1973:

- **Authorization:** The resolution authorized member states to take "all necessary measures" to protect civilians, short of a foreign occupation force.
- **Omission:** It did not authorize regime change, did not specify limits on the use of force, and did not define "civilian protection" precisely enough to constrain the intervening powers.
- **Signal:** It signaled that the Security Council was willing to authorize force for humanitarian purposes — but the *implementation* of the resolution signaled to Russia, China, and African states that such authorizations could be exploited.

Perspective reconstruction:

- **African perspective:** The AU had its own mediation roadmap for Libya, which was bypassed by NATO. South Africa's vote for Resolution 1973 was followed by criticism that NATO had exceeded the mandate. The African reading emphasizes the **selective use of humanitarian law** and the sidelining of African institutions. It reinforces the AU's preference for collective, AU-authorized intervention over ad hoc Western-led operations.
- **Chinese perspective:** The Libya intervention confirmed China's skepticism of expansive interpretations of Chapter VII. China had abstained (not vetoed) on Resolution 1973; it subsequently cited Libya as a cautionary tale and vetoed resolutions on Syria. The Chinese reading emphasizes **non-interference and opposition to regime change**.
- **Russian perspective:** Russia similarly cites Libya as proof that humanitarian language is a pretext for regime change. The Russian reading emphasizes **great-power prerogatives and the dangers of authorizing force without controlling its implementation**.
- **Western perspective:** Western states defend the intervention as a necessary response to an imminent massacre, while acknowledging that the mandate was stretched. The Western reading emphasizes **the responsibility to protect** and the difficulty of limiting intervention once authorized.
- **UN perspective:** The UN was caught between its authorization and its inability to control implementation. The UN's own discourse emphasizes **civilian protection** and the need for **political solutions**, and it treats Libya as a lesson in the importance of aligning mandates with implementation.

Adjudication. Which perspective best explains the *fracture*? The African, Chinese, and Russian perspectives converge on the same diagnosis: the intervention demonstrated that Chapter VII authorizations could be used for purposes beyond their text. The Western perspective explains the *motivation* for the intervention but not its *consequences*. The UN perspective captures the institutional dilemma but not the power dynamics. A complete explanation combines the **systemic level** (the post-2008 distribution of power and the willingness of Russia and China to abstain) with the **normative level** (the contestation over the meaning of "civilian protection"). The African perspective adds a crucial dimension: the **sidelining of regional institutions** as a source of legitimacy.

2.7 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: In 2023, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) threatened military inter-

vention to reverse the coup in Niger. The AU did not endorse the intervention. The junta in Niger invoked sovereignty and non-interference, and neighboring Mali and Burkina Faso — also under military rule — pledged to defend Niger. The UN Secretary-General called for a peaceful resolution and emphasized constitutional order, but did not authorize force.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely in one sentence.
2. Apply the three-layer reading to the ECOWAS threat of intervention. What did it authorize? What did it omit? What did it signal?
3. Apply the three-layer reading to the AU's non-endorsement. What did it authorize, omit, and signal?
4. Reconstruct the African perspective on this episode. How does the AU's Article 4(g) and 4(h) framework shape the reading?
5. Write a 300-word adjudication: which perspective best explains why the intervention did not occur?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did ECOWAS threaten intervention in Niger but ultimately not intervene, despite the coup's violation of ECOWAS and AU norms against unconstitutional changes of government?

ECOWAS threat — three layers: - **Authorization:** ECOWAS claimed authority under its own protocols to reverse an unconstitutional change of government. - **Omission:** It did not specify a legal basis in the UN Charter, did not seek Chapter VII authorization, and did not clarify whether it would act without AU endorsement. - **Signal:** It signaled to the junta that it was serious, to domestic audiences that it would defend constitutional order, and to external powers that West Africa could act collectively.

AU non-endorsement — three layers: - **Authorization:** The AU's silence withheld the legitimacy that ECOWAS needed to frame intervention as a regional, lawful act. - **Omission:** The AU did not invoke Article 4(h) (which covers genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, not coups) and did not invoke Article 4(p) (which condemns unconstitutional changes but does not authorize force). - **Signal:** The AU signaled that it would not authorize military intervention to reverse a coup, and that it preferred diplomatic engagement — a signal consistent with the AU's reluctance to invoke Article 4(h) in practice.

African perspective: The AU framework distinguishes between **condemning** unconstitutional changes (Article 4(p)) and **authorizing intervention** (Article 4(h)). A coup does not meet the Article 4(h) threshold of genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity. The AU's non-endorsement is therefore consistent with its own legal framework — even as it frustrated ECOWAS. The African perspective also emphasizes **solidarity among states facing similar legitimacy crises** (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) and **suspicion of external intervention**.

Adjudication: The African perspective best explains the non-intervention — not because the AU was weak, but because its legal framework **does not authorize force to reverse coups**, only to stop grave crimes. The Western perspective, which tends to frame the non-intervention as a failure of African institutions, misses this legal distinction. The UN perspective captures the normative preference for peaceful resolution but does not explain the specific legal constraint. The ECOWAS threat was a signaling exercise, not a legal commitment to intervene; the AU's silence removed the legitimacy that would have been necessary.

2.8 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The 2024 *Pact for the Future* and the demand for UN Security Council reform, including the call to redress "the historical under-representation of Africa."

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** What does the Pact's reform commitment actually authorize, and what does it omit? Why did member states produce a commitment that is politically significant but legally non-binding?
2. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the Pact's reform commitment? (One paragraph or table entry each.)
3. **Historical analogue:** What earlier reform effort illuminates this dynamic? (e.g., the 1965 expansion of the Security Council, the 2005 World Summit, the G4/African Union competing reform proposals.)
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show that the Pact's reform commitment has become legally or politically operative? What would show it has failed?

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish what the Pact *authorizes* from what it *signals*? Does it reconstruct each perspective from within? Does it specify what evidence would change your judgment?

2.9 HINGE QUESTION

A state argues that its military intervention in a neighboring country is lawful because it was invited by the neighboring government to help suppress a rebellion. Which legal issue does this raise?

- A) Whether the intervention violates Article 2(4)
- B) Whether the intervention is a prohibited intervention in domestic affairs under the *Nicaragua* standard
- C) Whether the intervention requires Security Council authorization under Chapter VII
- D) Whether the intervention is an act of aggression under the Rome Statute

Answer: A. The core legal question is whether an intervention *at the invitation of a government* falls within the Article 2(4) prohibition. The ICJ in *Nicaragua* addressed this implicitly: the prohibition is on force "against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state." If the government consents, the intervention is not "against" the state — but the validity of consent is contested when the government's authority is itself contested (e.g., a civil war). B is a related but distinct principle (non-intervention in domestic affairs, which concerns coercion rather than force). C is incorrect because if consent is valid, Chapter VII authorization is not required. D concerns individual criminal responsibility, not the legality of the use of force.

If you answered B: You are conflating the use-of-force regime (Article 2(4), Chapter VII) with the non-intervention principle (*Nicaragua*). Both are relevant, but the *primary* legal issue raised by consent is whether the force is "against" the state under Article 2(4). **If you answered C:** You are assuming that all force requires Chapter VII authorization; the Charter does not say this — it creates exceptions (self-defence, consent) that do not require Council authorization. **If you answered D:** You are analyzing a different legal regime (international criminal law) rather than the *jus ad bellum*.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground the lesson's legal concepts in empirical patterns.

Task: Using the summary data below (simplified from UN voting records and ICJ compliance data), analyze patterns of legal contestation.

Table 1: UN General Assembly votes on resolutions condemning specific uses of force (illustrative)

Resolution	Year	In favor	Against	Abstain	African "yes" share
Condemning Russia's annexation of Crimea	2014	100	11	58	30%
Condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine	2022	141	5	35	55%
Condemning Israel's Gaza operations	2023	120	14	45	85%
Condemning Myanmar coup	2021	119	1	36	70%

Table 2: ICJ contentious cases involving use of force

Case	Year	Applicant	Respondent	Outcome
Nicaragua v. US	1986	Nicaragua	US	US found in breach; US withdrew from case
Bosnia v. Serbia	2007	Bosnia	Serbia	Genocide not proven; failure to prevent
Ukraine v. Russia (terrorism financing)	2024	Ukraine	Russia	Russia found in breach on some claims

Analysis questions:

1. **Pattern:** What does the variation in African "yes" shares across resolutions tell you about the relationship between African states and the use-of-force regime? Is there a single "African position"?

2. **Level of analysis:** Does the ICJ compliance record support a systemic explanation (power determines compliance) or a normative explanation (law shapes behavior)? What evidence would distinguish them?
3. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the ICJ record? (African: selective enforcement; Chinese: courts as Western instruments; Russian: courts as political; Western: courts as progressive; UN: courts as part of the Charter system.)
4. **Limitation:** What does the voting data *not* tell you? (Hint: votes may reflect strategic alignment, not legal belief; abstentions may signal ambiguity; the resolutions' text may vary in legal precision.)

Rule: Complete the data lab before the independent memo. Evidence precedes argument.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The use-of-force architecture. Draw three columns: **Prohibition** (Article 2(4)), **Exceptions** (Article 51 self-defence; Chapter VII authorization; consent), and **Contested grey zones** (humanitarian intervention without authorization; anticipatory self-defence; cyber operations; economic coercion). Draw arrows from the prohibition to each exception, labeling what the exception requires.

Visual 2: The AU modification. Draw two circles, one labeled "OAU 1963" and one labeled "AU 2000." Inside each, list the principles: OAU (sovereign equality, non-interference, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement); AU (sovereign equality, non-interference, Article 4(h) intervention right, Article 4(p) anti-coup norm). Draw an arrow from OAU to AU labeled "Rwanda learning / non-indifference."

Visual 3: The five perspectives on the Charter. Draw a five-column table with rows for: "Use of force," "Sovereignty," "Institutions," "Key occlusion." Fill from memory.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
What does Article 2(4) prohibit?	Threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence
What are the Charter's exceptions to 2(4)?	Self-defence (Art. 51); Chapter VII authorization (Art. 39/42); consent
What did *Nicaragua* establish?	2(4) is customary law; "armed attack" threshold; collective self-defence requires request
What did the AU change?	Article 4(h): collective right of intervention in genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity; Article 4(p): anti-coup norm
What are the three layers of a legal document?	Authorization, omission, signal

Cue column	Notes
How do the five perspectives read the Charter?	African: colonial history + AU innovation; Chinese: sovereignty + non-interference; Russian: great-power concert; Western: binding rules + exceptions; UN: living instrument + reform
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.5; UN Charter excerpts (quoted); AU Act Art. 4 (quoted); *Nicaragua* judgment (quoted); Pact for the Future (quoted)
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the Charter's use-of-force regime to a smart non-specialist in 150–200 words, without using jargon. If you must use "sovereignty" or "Chapter VII," define them in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for the relationship between Article 2(4) and its exceptions. Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "The Charter is like a building with a strict no-smoking rule and two designated smoking areas — but the building manager decides who gets to use the areas, and the manager is a committee that often disagrees." Where it breaks down: the "manager" (Security Council) is also a smoker.)

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What is the difference between *non-interference* (Article 2(7)) and *non-intervention* (customary law, *Nicaragua*)?
Mechanism	Why does the Charter's prohibition on force require states to justify their actions in legal language, even when they violate it?
Application	A state invokes Article 51 to justify a strike on a non-state group in a neighboring country. What legal issues does this raise?
Comparison	How does AU Article 4(h) differ from the UN's R2P?
Source	What did the ICJ hold in *Nicaragua* about collective self-defence?

Type	Example
Debate	What is the strongest objection to the claim that international law is "just power politics"?
Reconstruction	How would a TWAIL scholar explain the AU's Article 4(h)?
Occlusion	What does the Russian reading of the Charter systematically fail to see?
Adjudication	Which perspective best explains the Libya intervention's aftermath, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the three layers of legal-document reading on a diagram.

Tag each card: `L2`, `law`, `perspective`, `institutions`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Reconstruct the Charter's use-of-force rules	
Analyze the AU's modification	
Apply the three-layer reading	
Reconstruct the five legal perspectives	
Evaluate the "law is power politics" claim	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between Article 2(4) and customary law?
2. Which perspective was easiest to reconstruct? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default framing?
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 3?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L2			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 0)

Add this row to your Module 0 cheatsheet:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Article 2(4); Article 2(7); Article 51; Chapter VII; customary international law; non-intervention; AU Art. 4(h); AU Art. 4(p); three-layer reading
Key mechanisms	Prohibition → exception → contested grey zone; authorization → omission → signal; OAU non-interference → AU non-indifference
Theories and authors	ICJ *Nicaragua* (1986); TWAIL (Mutua, Grovogui); AU Constitutive Act; Pact for the Future
Cases and evidence	Libya 2011; Niger 2023; Crimea 2014; Ukraine 2022; ICJ cases
Debates	Is international law binding? Whose interests does it serve? Is R2P a norm or a tool?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that legal rules constrain state behavior independent of power?
Cross-links	L9 (Westphalia); L12 (OAU); L28 (AU regime); L37 (lawfare); L45 (JCPOA snapback)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1 and L2 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L2 with L4–8 (theory) and L27–34 (Africa)
R5	End of Module 0	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood

- ☐ Four key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (Libya 2011) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (Niger 2023) attempted and compared
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
- ☐ Cheatsheet entry added
- ☐ R2 review scheduled

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **Primary documents:** UN Charter (full text); AU Constitutive Act (full text); ICJ, *Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua* (1986), Merits judgment; UN, *Pact for the Future* (2024).
- **On the Charter and use of force:** Thomas Franck, *Recourse to Force* (2002); Christine Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force* (4th ed., 2018).
- **On TWAIL and African international law:** Makau Mutua, "What Is TWAIL?" (2000); Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996); Obiora Okafor, *Re-Defining Legitimate Statehood* (2000).
- **On the AU regime:** Ben Kioko, "The right of intervention under the African Union's Constitutive Act" (2003); AU Peace and Security Council communiqués.
- **On Russian and Chinese legal approaches:** Lauri Mälksoo, *Russian Approaches to International Law* (2015); Congyan Cai, *The Rise of China and International Law* (2019).
- **On the UN and reform:** UN *Our Common Agenda* (2021); Security Council reform proposals (G4, African Union Ezulwini Consensus).

End of Lesson 2. Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 3 (Historical Method and Causal Inference).

4. Historical Method and Causal Inference: How We Know What We Think We Know About International Politics

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LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L3 — Historical Method and Causal Inference
Module	Module 0: Orientation and Method
Prerequisites	L1 (puzzles, levels of analysis, power, perspectives); L2 (international law and institutions)
Interleaved links	Forward to L4–8 (theory), L9–14 (history), L27 (colonial state formation), L35 (post-Soviet ontology), L60–61 (capstones)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.
Content channels	Canon (summarized); primary documents (quoted); data lab (Correlates of War and ACLED exercises); five perspectives on historical method
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (judge between competing causal claims and methodological approaches)
Estimated study time	5–7 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Every methodological concept, example, and debate you need is explained in this document. You do not need to consult outside readings. The "Further Reading" section is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Lessons 1 and 2 gave you the conceptual instruments — puzzles, levels, power, perspectives, law. But those instruments are only as good as the **evidence** you feed them. The single most common failure in IR analysis is not bad theory; it is **bad method** — selecting cases that confirm your argument, confusing correlation with causation, reading history backwards from the present, or treating a single case as proof of a general law.

This lesson teaches you how to **know** what you think you know. It covers four interlocking skills:

1. **Historical method:** How to read sources critically, how to avoid presentism and teleology, and how to use archives and historiography without being captured by them.
2. **Causal inference:** How to distinguish causation from correlation, how to use process tracing and comparative method, and how to construct and evaluate counterfactuals.
3. **Selection bias:** Why the cases you choose to study determine what you can conclude, and how the most common error in IR — selecting on the dependent variable — produces false confidence.
4. **Perspective on method:** How African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions approach historical evidence differently, and why those differences matter for adjudication.

By the end, you will be able to take any causal claim in IR — "NATO caused the war," "colonialism caused state fragility," "sanctions caused the JCPOA collapse" — and subject it to disciplined evaluation: what is the evidence, what is the mechanism, what would falsify it, and what would we expect to see if it were false?

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory)

1. From L1: Name the four levels of analysis and give one cause located at each level for a single event.
2. From L1: Distinguish the first, second, and third faces of power with one observable implication of each.
3. From L2: What did the ICJ hold in *Nicaragua* about the relationship between Article 2(4) and customary international law?
4. From L2: What is the three-layer reading of a legal document, and apply it in one sentence to Article 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act.

Check against the previous lessons before proceeding.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind:

- What makes a historical explanation *causal* rather than merely *descriptive*?
- Can we ever know what would have happened if history had gone differently?
- Why do historians and social scientists often disagree about the same events?
- Whose archives survive, and whose do not? What does that mean for what we can know?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

Provisional definitions; revise by the end:

Process tracing; counterfactual; selection on the dependent variable; endogeneity; presentism; teleology; historiography; primary source; secondary source; source criticism; comparative method; most-similar systems design; most-different systems design; congruence method; archival grain.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Distinguish** causal from correlational claims, and identify the mechanism that links cause to effect.
2. **Apply** process tracing, comparative method, and counterfactual analysis to a single case and explain what each method contributes.
3. **Identify** selection bias, endogeneity, and presentism in existing IR explanations, and explain how each distorts inference.
4. **Read** a primary source and a secondary source critically, using external and internal source criticism, and identify what the archive silences.
5. **Reconstruct** how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions approach historical method differently, and **adjudicate** among them on a specific case.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Chronology is not explanation: causal claims require mechanisms and counterfactuals

The claim: A causal claim is not a story about what happened. It is a claim that **if the cause had been absent or different, the effect would have been absent or different** — and that we can specify the **mechanism** that links cause to effect.

The problem. Consider this claim: "The Treaty of Versailles caused the Second World War." It is a chronological sequence — Versailles (1919), then the Second World War (1939). But a sequence is not a cause. To make it a causal claim, you must specify:

- **The mechanism:** How did Versailles produce the war? Through German resentment and revisionism? Through the punitive reparations that crippled the Weimar economy? Through the territorial settlements that left German minorities outside the Reich? Through the disarmament clauses that made German rearmament a symbol of sovereignty?
- **The counterfactual:** Would the war have happened without Versailles? If the answer is "probably yes, because the structural conditions of multipolarity and the rise of Nazi ideology would have produced a war anyway," then Versailles is a contributing condition, not a sufficient cause.
- **The scope condition:** Under what conditions does a punitive peace produce a revanchist war? The answer must specify what distinguishes Versailles from other punitive settlements that did not produce wars (e.g., the settlement of 1815 after Napoleon, which produced a century of relative peace).

The mechanism requirement. A causal claim without a mechanism is a black box. "Sanctions caused the collapse of the JCPOA" tells you that two things happened; it does not tell you **how** one produced the other. The mechanism might be:

- **Economic pressure:** Sanctions crippled the Iranian economy, making the regime unwilling to comply with nuclear restrictions.
- **Political signaling:** Sanctions signaled that the West would not deliver the economic benefits promised under the deal, undermining the domestic coalition that supported it.
- **Reciprocal escalation:** Sanctions triggered Iranian counter-escalation (nuclear enrichment, support for proxies), which triggered further sanctions, in a spiral that neither side could control.

Each mechanism implies a different counterfactual and a different observable implication. The economic-pressure mechanism implies that *removing sanctions* would have stabilized the deal. The signaling mechanism implies that *credible commitments* would have stabilized it. The reciprocal-escalation mechanism implies that *de-escalation on both sides* would have been necessary.

The counterfactual requirement. A causal claim is a claim about a **comparison** — between the world we observe and a world in which the cause is absent. This comparison is always counterfactual (we cannot observe it) and always theory-laden (we need a theory to tell us what the counterfactual world would look like). The discipline of constructing counterfactuals is what distinguishes causal analysis from storytelling.

Scope condition: Counterfactuals are only as good as the theory that generates them. A counterfactual that violates everything we know about the world is not a useful comparison; it is a fantasy. The standard is **"minimal rewrite"** — change only the cause in question, hold everything else constant, and ask what would plausibly follow.

Observable implication: If a causal claim is well-specified, you should be able to identify (a) the mecha-

nism, (b) the counterfactual, and (c) the observable implications that would differ in the counterfactual world. If you cannot do all three, the claim is not yet a causal claim.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Process tracing, comparative method, and counterfactuals are complementary tools, not rivals

The claim: IR has three main methods for establishing causal claims: **process tracing** (within-case), **comparative method** (across-case), and **counterfactual analysis** (against-case). They are not competitors; they answer different questions, and the strongest analyses use more than one.

Process tracing. Process tracing is the systematic examination of the **sequence of events within a single case** to identify the causal mechanism that links an independent variable to an outcome. It asks: *Did the mechanism that the theory predicts actually operate in this case?*

The method was formalized by Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, and is now the dominant qualitative method in IR. It involves:

1. **Specifying the mechanism** that the theory predicts (e.g., "NATO enlargement → Russian perception of existential threat → decision to invade").
2. **Identifying observable implications** at each step (e.g., Russian military planning documents, Putin's speeches, diplomatic exchanges).
3. **Testing the evidence** against the mechanism (e.g., did Russian planners actually cite NATO enlargement as a threat? Did Putin's speeches escalate in response to NATO decisions?).
4. **Ruling out alternative mechanisms** (e.g., was the invasion driven by domestic politics, economic interests, or Putin's personal ideology rather than NATO enlargement?).

Process tracing is especially powerful for **testing mechanisms** — it can show whether the causal process that a theory predicts actually occurred. It is less powerful for **estimating causal effects** — it cannot tell you how much of the outcome was due to the mechanism in question versus other factors.

The comparative method. The comparative method examines **variation across cases** to identify causal relationships. It uses John Stuart Mill's methods of agreement and difference, formalized by Arend Lijphart and others:

- **Most-similar systems design:** Compare cases that are similar on most variables but differ on the outcome. If they also differ on one independent variable, that variable may be the cause. *Example:* Compare two African states with similar colonial legacies, similar ethnic compositions, and similar resource endowments, where one experienced a coup and the other did not. If the difference is explained by a single variable (e.g., the presence of a foreign military base), that variable may be causal.
- **Most-different systems design:** Compare cases that are different on most variables but share the same outcome. If they also share one independent variable, that variable may be the cause. *Example:* Compare the collapse of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire — very different contexts, but both were multi-ethnic empires that collapsed under the pressure of nationalism and great-power competition.

The comparative method is powerful for **identifying associations** and for **ruling out rival explanations** (by showing that a variable that is present in one case and absent in another does or does not co-vary with the

outcome). It is less powerful for **establishing mechanisms** — it can show that two variables are associated without showing how the association works.

Counterfactual analysis. Counterfactual analysis constructs an explicit alternative world in which the cause is absent or different, and asks what would plausibly follow. It is the method that makes causation **observable by implication** rather than by direct observation.

The classic statement is James Fearon's "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science" (1991), which distinguishes **causal effects** (the difference between the observed outcome and the counterfactual outcome) from **causal mechanisms** (the process that produces the outcome). Fearon argues that counterfactuals are unavoidable in causal inference, but they must be disciplined by theory and evidence.

The discipline of counterfactual construction involves:

1. **Specifying the counterfactual** precisely: what is the cause being removed or changed, and what is held constant?
2. **Deriving implications** from theory: what would we expect to see in the counterfactual world?
3. **Testing those implications** against evidence: are there historical cases that approximate the counterfactual? Are there observable traces of the counterfactual world in the actual world?

The complementarity. The strongest causal analyses combine all three:

- **Process tracing** establishes that the mechanism operated in the case.
- **Comparative method** establishes that the cause and effect co-vary across cases.
- **Counterfactual analysis** establishes that the effect would not have occurred without the cause.

Worked illustration — the end of the Cold War. The peaceful end of the Cold War (1989–1991) is one of the most studied cases in IR. How would each method approach it?

- **Process tracing:** Examine the sequence of decisions by Gorbachev, the East European revolutions, and the Soviet withdrawal. Did Gorbachev's ideas (new thinking, common European home) cause the peaceful transition? Did the material pressures of Soviet decline cause it? Did the transnational diffusion of norms cause it? The method would trace the mechanism through archival evidence, memoirs, and interviews.
- **Comparative method:** Compare the end of the Cold War with other hegemonic transitions — the British decline, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the end of the Napoleonic wars. What distinguishes the peaceful Cold War transition from transitions that produced war? The method would identify the variable that explains the difference.
- **Counterfactual analysis:** What if Gorbachev had responded to the East European revolutions with force, as Brezhnev had in 1968? Would the Soviet Union have survived? Would the transition have been violent? The method would construct the counterfactual and test it against evidence (e.g., the Soviet leadership's debates, the military's reluctance to intervene).

None of these methods alone gives a complete answer. Together, they provide a more robust causal claim.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Selection bias is the most common error in IR, and it is usually invisible to the analyst

The claim: The cases you choose to study determine what you can conclude. If you select cases on the basis of the outcome you are trying to explain, you will systematically overestimate the importance of whatever variable is present in those cases — because you have excluded the cases where the outcome did not occur.

The problem. This is called **selection on the dependent variable**, and it is the most common methodological error in IR. The classic statement is by Barbara Geddes, who showed that studies of economic development that selected only successful developers would conclude that "the policies of successful developers cause development" — without examining whether unsuccessful developers also adopted those policies.

In IR, the problem takes many forms:

- **Studying only wars:** If you study only wars, you will find that arms races, alliances, and territorial disputes are present in all of them. But you will not know whether those factors are also present in **peaceful** cases — and if they are, they do not explain war.
- **Studying only successful coups:** If you study only coups that succeeded, you will conclude that certain conditions (economic crisis, military factionalism) cause coups. But you will not know whether those conditions are also present in cases where coups were attempted and failed.
- **Studying only cases where a theory applies:** If you study only cases where realism seems to explain behavior, you will conclude that realism is a powerful theory. But you will not know whether it also explains the cases where it seems not to apply — and if it does not, its scope is narrower than claimed.

The mechanism. Selection bias operates through **truncation** — the cases you exclude are not random. They are systematically different from the cases you include, in ways that are correlated with both the cause and the effect. The result is **biased inference**: the relationship you observe in your sample is not the relationship in the population.

How to correct for it. There are three main strategies:

1. **Select on the independent variable:** Choose cases that vary on the cause you are interested in, and examine whether the outcome varies accordingly. This is what most-similar and most-different systems designs do.
2. **Select on the outcome and then examine the counterfactual:** If you must select on the outcome (e.g., you are studying wars because wars are what you care about), explicitly examine the cases where the outcome did not occur, and ask whether the cause was present or absent.
3. **Use large-N data:** If you can measure the cause and the outcome across many cases, you can estimate the relationship without selecting on either. This is what quantitative IR does, and it is one reason why quantitative methods are valuable even for qualitative researchers.

Scope condition: Selection bias is a problem for **causal inference**, not for **description** or **interpretation**. If you are trying to describe how a particular war unfolded, selection bias is irrelevant. If you are trying to explain why wars occur, it is fatal.

Observable implication: If a study is vulnerable to selection bias, you should be able to identify the cases it excludes and show that those cases would change the conclusion. If the excluded cases are similar to the included cases on the cause but different on the outcome, the study's conclusion is suspect.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The five perspectives approach historical evidence differently, and those differences are themselves evidence

The claim: Historical method is not a neutral set of techniques. Different traditions approach the archive, the source, and the narrative with different assumptions about what counts as evidence, whose voice is authoritative, and what the purpose of historical reconstruction is. These differences are not obstacles to analysis; they are **data** about how different traditions understand the international.

2.5.1 The African perspective (primary) **Core commitments.** African historiography begins from the recognition that the archive is a **colonial institution**. Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* (1995) argues that history is produced through a process of **silencing** — the production of historical narratives always involves the exclusion of certain voices, and the silences are not accidents but constitutive features of the narrative. Ann Laura Stoler's *Along the Archival Grain* (2009) shows that colonial archives are not neutral records but **epistemic machines** that classified, categorized, and governed colonized peoples — and that reading "against the grain" of the archive can recover the agency that the archive was designed to erase.

How this perspective approaches historical method. African historiography emphasizes:

- **Oral history and non-archival sources:** Written archives are disproportionately colonial; oral traditions, songs, and material culture carry historical knowledge that the archive excludes.
- **Reading against the grain:** The colonial archive records the colonizer's categories. Reading against the grain means asking what the colonized were doing that the archive did not record, and what the archive's silences reveal about power.
- **History from below:** The experiences of ordinary people, not only elites, are central to understanding how international order was experienced and contested.
- **The coloniality of knowledge:** The categories of social science — "state," "sovereignty," "development" — are themselves products of colonial history. Using them uncritically reproduces colonial ways of knowing.

What this perspective contributes to causal inference. It insists that **the evidence you have is shaped by power**. The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence; it may be evidence of silencing. It also insists that **the categories you use to organize evidence** are themselves historical products, not neutral containers.

What it occludes: It can underplay the value of quantitative evidence and formal methods; it can romanticize the "voice" of the colonized; it can make causal inference difficult by emphasizing the uniqueness of each historical experience.

2.5.2 The Chinese perspective **Core commitments.** Chinese historical method is shaped by a **civilizational and cyclical** understanding of history. The "century of humiliation" (1839–1949) is the central historical narrative in Chinese IR: the period of foreign invasion, unequal treaties, and territorial loss that is understood as the foundational trauma of modern China. This narrative is not merely descriptive; it is **prescriptive** — it defines what China must never allow to happen again, and it frames contemporary sovereignty and non-interference as defenses against a repeat of that history.

How this perspective approaches historical method. Chinese historiography emphasizes:

- **Continuity and civilizational time:** Chinese history is understood in terms of dynastic cycles and long continuities, not in terms of the sharp ruptures that Western historiography emphasizes.

- **The "century of humiliation" as method:** The narrative is used to interpret contemporary events — NATO enlargement, sanctions, human-rights criticism are all read through the lens of the humiliation narrative.
- **Relational historiography:** History is understood as the unfolding of relationships and hierarchies, not as the interaction of discrete sovereign states.
- **The state as the subject of history:** Chinese historiography tends to treat the state as the primary agent, with less attention to non-state actors and civil society than Western historiography.

What this perspective contributes to causal inference. It insists that **historical memory is a causal variable** — the way states remember the past shapes how they interpret the present. It also insists that **long-run continuities** matter more than the short-run events that Western IR tends to study.

What it occludes: It can underplay the diversity of Chinese historical experience; it can treat the state's narrative as the only narrative; it can make it difficult to distinguish between historical memory as a cause and historical memory as a justification.

2.5.3 The Russian perspective **Core commitments.** Russian historical method is shaped by a **civilizational and grievance-based** narrative. The repeated invasions of Russia from the West (Napoleon 1812, Hitler 1941) are the central historical reference points. The collapse of the Soviet Union is understood as a catastrophe — the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century," in Putin's words — and the post-Cold War settlement is understood as a humiliation imposed by the West.

How this perspective approaches historical method. Russian historiography emphasizes:

- **Geopolitical determinism:** Geography and the absence of natural defenses are treated as the fundamental drivers of Russian history.
- **The "whataboutism" method:** Russian official discourse frequently responds to criticism by citing Western historical crimes (colonialism, slavery, the Iraq war) — not as a defense but as a way of delegitimizing Western moral authority.
- **Civilizational narrative:** Russia is understood as a distinct civilization with its own historical path, not as a backward version of Europe.
- **The state as the guardian of history:** The Russian state has increasingly regulated historical memory (e.g., laws against "falsifying history," the rehabilitation of Stalin).

What this perspective contributes to causal inference. It insists that **historical grievance and humiliation are causal variables** — states that feel historically wronged may behave differently from states that do not. It also insists that **the historical narrative itself is a political resource** — the way a state narrates its past is a form of power.

What it occludes: It can naturalize aggression by framing it as a response to historical grievance; it can treat the state's narrative as the only narrative; it can make it difficult to distinguish between grievance as a cause and grievance as a justification.

2.5.4 The Western perspective **Core commitments.** Western historical method is shaped by the **scientific aspiration** — the belief that historical and social phenomena can be studied with the same rigor as natural phenomena. This aspiration produced:

- **Positivist historiography:** The search for general laws and causal regularities, using comparative

method and quantitative data.

- **Archival research:** The systematic use of primary documents, with a strong emphasis on source criticism and the verification of claims.
- **The "linguistic turn":** The recognition that historical narratives are constructed, and that the historian's own position shapes the narrative.
- **The "history from below" tradition:** The recovery of the experiences of ordinary people, marginalized groups, and colonized peoples — a tradition that overlaps with African historiography but emerged independently within Western historiography.

What this perspective contributes to causal inference. It provides the **methodological toolkit** — process tracing, comparative method, counterfactual analysis, source criticism — that the discipline uses. It also provides the **self-critique** — the recognition that the toolkit is not neutral and that the historian's position matters.

What it occludes: It can treat Western historical experience as universal; it can underplay the colonial genealogy of its own methods; it can be overly confident in the possibility of objective knowledge.

2.5.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN approaches historical method through the lens of **institutional memory and legal precedent**. The UN's historical work is not primarily academic; it is **operational** — the documentation of conflicts, the recording of resolutions, and the accumulation of precedent for future action.

How this perspective approaches historical method. The UN's historical practice emphasizes:

- **Documentation:** The UN produces vast archives of resolutions, reports, and debates that serve as the institutional memory of the international community.
- **Legal precedent:** Historical interpretation in the UN is oriented toward establishing what the law requires, not toward explaining why events occurred.
- **The "lessons learned" genre:** The UN produces retrospective reports on its own failures (e.g., Rwanda, Srebrenica, Sri Lanka) that are intended to improve future practice.
- **The normative narrative:** The UN's historical narrative is progressive — the story of the expansion of human rights, decolonization, and international law — even as it acknowledges failures.

What this perspective contributes to causal inference. It provides the **institutional record** — the documented decisions, resolutions, and debates that are essential evidence for any causal claim about international politics. It also provides the **normative benchmark** — the standards against which state behavior is judged.

What it occludes: It can be selective in its documentation; it can treat legal precedent as a substitute for causal explanation; it can underplay the power dynamics that shape its own institutional memory.

2.5.6 The comparison matrix

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
What counts as evidence	Oral history, material culture, reading against the archive	Civilizational continuity, state narrative	Geopolitical determinism, grievance narrative	Archival documents, comparative data, source criticism	Institutional records, legal precedent
Purpose of history	Recovering silenced voices; critiquing colonial knowledge	Establishing continuity; interpreting the present through the humiliation narrative	Asserting civilizational identity; justifying sovereignty	Explaining causal regularities; testing theories	Documenting precedent; improving practice
Key occlusion	Quantitative evidence; causal inference	Diversity of experience; non-state voices	Grievance as justification; neighbors' experience	Colonial genealogy of method; universality claims	Power dynamics of institutional memory

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2.6 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: The Rwandan genocide of 1994 killed approximately 800,000 people in 100 days. The international community — the UN, the US, France, Belgium — failed to intervene effectively. Why?

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why did the international community fail to intervene to stop the Rwandan genocide, despite the clear evidence of mass atrocities and the existence of a UN peacekeeping mission (UNAMIR) on the ground?*

Level of analysis: The failure is best explained at the **systemic and state levels**, with the individual level providing the proximate trigger.

- **Systemic level:** The post-Cold War moment had produced a normative expectation of humanitarian intervention (the "new world order"), but it had not produced the institutional capacity or political will to act. The Security Council was reluctant to authorize a robust mission; the US had just experienced the "Black Hawk Down" failure in Somalia (1993) and was unwilling to intervene in Africa.
- **State level:** The US, France, and Belgium had different interests in Rwanda. France had supported the Habyarimana regime and was implicated in the arming of the genocidaires. Belgium was the former colonial power and had a special responsibility. The US was focused on domestic politics and had no strategic interest in Rwanda.
- **Individual level:** The UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, was sympathetic but constrained by the Security Council. The UNAMIR commander, Roméo Dallaire, requested reinforcements but was denied. The US Ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, was constrained by Washington.

Method 1 — Process tracing: Trace the sequence of decisions from April to July 1994:

- April 6: Habyarimana's plane is shot down; the genocide begins.
- April 7–14: Dallaire requests reinforcements; the Security Council debates.
- April 21: The Security Council votes to reduce UNAMIR's force from 2,500 to 270.
- May: The genocide escalates; the US resists using the word "genocide" to avoid legal obligations.
- June: France launches Operation Turquoise, a unilateral intervention that is widely criticized for protecting perpetrators.
- July: The RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) captures Kigali and ends the genocide.

Process tracing reveals the mechanism: the Security Council's decision to reduce UNAMIR was not a response to new information; it was a response to the **political pressure from the US**, which did not want to be drawn into a peace enforcement mission. The mechanism is **state-level interest**, operating through the **systemic institution** of the Security Council.

Method 2 — Comparative method: Compare Rwanda with other post-Cold War humanitarian crises:

- **Somalia (1992–93):** The US intervened, then withdrew after casualties. The failure of Somalia shaped the US response to Rwanda.
- **Bosnia (1992–95):** The international community intervened belatedly, but eventually with NATO air power. Why Bosnia and not Rwanda? Because Bosnia was in Europe, had a higher strategic profile, and the media coverage was more sustained.
- **Kosovo (1999):** NATO intervened without UN authorization. Why Kosovo and not Rwanda? Because Kosovo was in Europe and the US had a domestic political interest.

The comparative method reveals that the variable that explains intervention is **strategic interest**, not the severity of the humanitarian crisis. Rwanda was in Africa, had no strategic resources, and was not a priority for the US or Europe.

Method 3 — Counterfactual analysis: What if the US had been willing to support a robust UNAMIR mission?

- **Minimal rewrite:** The US changes its position on UNAMIR reinforcements, but all other factors remain constant.
- **Theory:** The genocide was organized by a small elite (the akazu) and depended on the state apparatus. A robust international force could have disrupted the command structure and protected civilians.
- **Observable implications:** If the counterfactual is correct, we should see evidence that the genocide was vulnerable to external disruption — e.g., the RPF's success in ending it, the capacity of UNAMIR to protect civilians when it had the mandate and resources, the rapid collapse of the genocide once the RPF advanced.
- **Evidence:** The RPF, a relatively small force, was able to defeat the genocidal regime. This suggests that a well-equipped international force could have intervened effectively. Dallaire's reports suggest that a force of 5,000 could have made a difference.

Perspective reconstruction:

- **African perspective:** The failure is read through the colonial archive. The genocide was not a "tribal conflict" but a **political project** organized by a state elite, enabled by the colonial legacy of ethnic classification (the Belgians' 1933 identity cards) and the impunity of the Habyarimana regime, which was a French ally. The international community's failure is read as **racialized indifference** — African

lives were deemed expendable because they were African.

- **Chinese perspective:** The failure is read as a failure of **Western interventionism** — the West intervened in Bosnia and Kosovo because they were in Europe, but not in Rwanda because it was in Africa. The lesson is that **sovereignty must be respected** and that **external powers cannot be trusted** to protect African lives.
- **Russian perspective:** The failure is read as evidence of **Western hypocrisy** — the West claims to care about human rights but intervenes only where its interests are at stake. The lesson is that **great-power interests** determine the fate of small states.
- **Western perspective:** The failure is read as a **failure of political will** and **institutional capacity**. The US was traumatized by Somalia; the UN was constrained by the P5; the media did not cover the genocide adequately. The lesson is that **institutions need better mandates and resources** and that **early warning must be matched by early action**.
- **UN perspective:** The failure is read as a **failure of the Security Council** to act on the Secretary-General's warnings. The UN's own "lessons learned" report (the Carlsson Report) is a primary document of institutional self-criticism.

Adjudication. Which perspective best explains the *failure to intervene*? The African perspective captures the **racialized structure of international concern** — the fact that African lives were not considered worth the risk of intervention. The Western perspective captures the **proximate political mechanism** — the US decision not to support UNAMIR, the Security Council's reduction of the force, the failure to use the word "genocide." The Chinese and Russian perspectives capture the **structural skepticism** of great-power intervention, which is itself a reason why interventions do not happen. The UN perspective captures the **institutional failure** of the Security Council.

A complete explanation combines the **systemic level** (the post-Somalia reluctance to intervene) with the **state level** (US, French, and Belgian interests) and the **transnational level** (the racialized structure of international concern). The African perspective is essential because it identifies the **racial hierarchy** that made the failure possible — not as a conspiracy, but as a structured indifference.

2.7 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the three methods and the perspective comparison. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: In July 2023, a military junta overthrew Niger's elected president, Mohamed Bazoum. France and the US had military bases in Niger and had been key security partners. The junta demanded that French troops leave; they did, by the end of 2023. The junta then deepened ties with Russia (via the Africa Corps) and China. ECOWAS threatened military intervention, but did not intervene. The junta remains in power.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely: why did the coup lead to the expulsion of France and the realignment toward Russia and China, rather than to a restoration of the previous alignment?
2. Apply process tracing to the sequence of events from July 2023 to the present. What mechanism does the evidence suggest?
3. Apply the comparative method: compare Niger with Mali (2020 coup) and Burkina Faso (2022 coup).

What explains the similar outcomes? What variable distinguishes these cases from coups that did not lead to realignment?

4. Construct a counterfactual: what if France had negotiated with the junta rather than demanding Bazoum's reinstatement? What would we expect to see if the counterfactual is correct?
5. Reconstruct the African and Russian perspectives on this case. How do they interpret the junta's actions?
6. Write a 300-word adjudication: which perspective best explains the realignment, and what does it miss?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did Niger's coup lead to the expulsion of France and realignment toward Russia and China, rather than to a restoration of the previous alignment or a negotiated settlement?

Process tracing: The sequence is: - July 26, 2023: The presidential guard, led by General Tchiani, detains Bazoum and declares a coup. - July 30: ECOWAS issues a seven-day ultimatum demanding Bazoum's reinstatement and threatens military intervention. - August: The junta refuses; Mali and Burkina Faso pledge to defend Niger; the AU does not endorse intervention. - September: France refuses to recognize the junta and insists on Bazoum's release; the junta demands the withdrawal of French troops. - October: France announces the withdrawal of its ambassador and troops. - December: The last French troops leave. - 2024: The junta deepens ties with Russia (Africa Corps) and China (mining and infrastructure deals).

The mechanism is **mutual escalation and the search for external alternatives**. France's refusal to negotiate, combined with ECOWAS's threat of intervention, made the junta dependent on external security partners. Russia provided security assistance without conditionality; China provided economic engagement without governance conditions. The junta used the external competition to consolidate power and legitimize its rule through anti-French nationalism.

Comparative method: Compare Niger with Mali (2020) and Burkina Faso (2022): - All three had military coups, all three experienced a breakdown in relations with France, and all three realigned toward Russia. - The variable that distinguishes them from coups that did not lead to realignment (e.g., the 2021 coup in Guinea, which remained aligned with France) is **the presence of a significant French military footprint and the failure of French-led counterterrorism**. In Mali and Burkina Faso, French forces were present and had failed to contain the insurgency; in Guinea, there was no French military presence and the junta did not frame its legitimacy around anti-French nationalism. - The comparative method suggests that the French military presence and the failure of French counterterrorism are the key variables.

Counterfactual: What if France had negotiated with the junta rather than demanding Bazoum's reinstatement? - **Minimal rewrite:** France changes its strategy but all other factors remain constant. - **Theory:** The junta's primary interest was regime survival, not alignment with Russia per se. If France had offered security cooperation without demanding Bazoum's reinstatement, the junta might have maintained ties with France. - **Observable implications:** If the counterfactual is correct, we should see evidence that the junta was open to negotiation with France — e.g., statements from the junta suggesting willingness to cooperate on security, diplomatic back-channels, or comparisons with other cases where negotiation produced a different outcome. - **Evidence:** The junta's early statements emphasized sovereignty and the failure of French counterterrorism, not an ideological commitment to Russia. The junta's subsequent deals with Russia and China were instrumental, not ideological. This suggests that a different French strategy might have produced a different outcome.

African perspective: The junta's actions are interpreted as a **rational assertion of sovereignty** against a former colonial power that had failed to provide security and had imposed conditions. The anti-French sentiment is not irrational; it reflects a long history of colonial and neocolonial relations, and it is shared by significant portions of the population. The junta's realignment is a strategy of **multi-alignment** — using external competition to increase Niger's bargaining power.

Russian perspective: The junta's actions are interpreted as a **sovereign choice** by a state that has been abandoned by the West. Russia is a reliable partner that provides security without political conditions. The realignment is a symptom of the collapse of Western hegemony and the emergence of a multipolar order.

Adjudication: The African perspective best explains the *legitimacy* of the realignment — why the junta's anti-French posture was popular and why it could sustain itself. The Russian perspective explains the *opportunity* — why the junta had alternatives to France. The Western perspective explains the *proximate cause* — the French refusal to negotiate and the ECOWAS threat made the realignment inevitable. The comparative method suggests that the French military presence and the failure of French counterterrorism are the key structural variables. A complete explanation combines the African, Russian, and Western perspectives: the structural failure of French counterterrorism (Western), the availability of Russian alternatives (Russian), and the legitimacy of anti-colonial sovereignty assertion (African).

2.8 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The collapse of the JCPOA and Iran's withdrawal from the treaty (2018–2025).

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** What causal process explains the collapse? Specify the level of analysis and the mechanism (economic pressure, political signaling, or reciprocal escalation).
2. **Method:** Apply process tracing, comparative method, and counterfactual analysis to the case. What does each method contribute?
3. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives explain the collapse and interpret the evidence? (One paragraph or table entry each.)
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would prove your explanation wrong? What would you need to observe to abandon it?

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish mechanism from correlation? Does it specify the counterfactual? Does it identify the evidence that would falsify the claim?

2.9 HINGE QUESTION

A scholar argues: "The Arab Spring happened because of the combination of youth unemployment and social media." A critic responds: "But youth unemployment and social media were also present in countries that did not experience an Arab Spring." What methodological problem is the critic identifying?

- A) Endogeneity
- B) Selection on the dependent variable
- C) Presentism
- D) Teleology

Answer: B. The critic is identifying selection on the dependent variable. The scholar has selected cases where the Arab Spring occurred and identified factors present in those cases. But the critic points out that those factors are also present in cases where the Arab Spring did not occur — which means the factors do not explain the outcome. To establish causation, the scholar would need to examine the cases where the factors were present but the outcome did not occur.

If you answered A: Endogeneity refers to a situation where the cause is itself caused by the effect (reverse causation) or where cause and effect are mutually constitutive. The critic's point is about case selection, not endogeneity. **If you answered C:** Presentism refers to reading the past through the lens of the present. The critic's point is about case selection, not presentism. **If you answered D:** Teleology refers to explaining events as if they were directed toward a predetermined end. The critic's point is about case selection, not teleology.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground the lesson's methodological concepts in empirical work.

Task: Using the summary data below, analyze the relationship between economic inequality and civil war onset.

Table 1: Civil war onset and inequality (illustrative data, simplified)

Country	Gini coefficient (year before onset)	Civil war onset (within 5 years)?	Colonial legacy?	Resource dependence?
Country A	0.52	Yes	Yes	High
Country B	0.48	No	Yes	High
Country C	0.61	Yes	No	Low
Country D	0.39	No	No	Low
Country E	0.55	Yes	Yes	Low
Country F	0.42	No	Yes	Low

Analysis questions:

1. **Association:** Is there an association between inequality and civil war onset in this data? What about colonial legacy and resource dependence?
2. **Selection bias:** If you selected only the countries with civil war onset (A, C, E), what would you conclude about the causes of civil war? How does including the non-onset cases change your conclusion?
3. **Mechanism:** What mechanism might link inequality to civil war? What mechanism might link colonial legacy to civil war? How would you test these mechanisms?
4. **Counterfactual:** Choose one case and construct a counterfactual: what would have happened if the inequality had been lower? What evidence would you need to support the counterfactual?

5. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret this data? (African: colonial legacy and structural inequality; Chinese: underdevelopment and external interference; Russian: Western hegemony and resource extraction; Western: grievance and opportunity; UN: governance and development.)

Rule: Complete the data lab before the independent memo.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The three methods. Draw three overlapping circles labeled "Process tracing," "Comparative method," and "Counterfactual analysis." In the overlap, write "Robust causal claim." For each circle, write one question it answers and one limitation.

Visual 2: Selection bias. Draw a 2×2 table: rows = "Cause present" and "Cause absent"; columns = "Outcome present" and "Outcome absent." Shade the cell that selection on the dependent variable excludes. Write a sentence explaining why excluding that cell biases inference.

Visual 3: The five perspectives on historical method. Draw a five-column table with rows: "What counts as evidence," "Purpose of history," "Key occlusion." Fill from memory.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
What is a causal claim?	A claim that if the cause were absent, the effect would be absent, with a mechanism
What are the three methods?	Process tracing (within-case), comparative method (across-case), counterfactual (against-case)
What is selection on the dependent variable?	Selecting cases based on the outcome, which biases inference
What are the five perspectives on historical method?	African: archive as colonial institution; Chinese: civilizational continuity and humiliation; Russian: grievance and geopolitical determinism; Western: scientific aspiration and source criticism; UN: institutional memory and legal precedent
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.5; Fearon (1991); Geddes (1990); Trouillot (1995); Stoler (2009)
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the difference between correlation and causation to a smart non-specialist in 150–200 words, using an example from IR.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for process tracing. Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "Process tracing is like a detective reconstructing a crime — but unlike a detective, the IR analyst cannot interview the suspects, and the evidence may have been deliberately destroyed.")

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What is selection on the dependent variable?
Mechanism	How does process tracing establish a causal mechanism?
Application	A study finds that all wars in the sample were preceded by arms races. What methodological error might it be making?
Comparison	How do most-similar and most-different systems designs differ?
Source	What did Fearon argue about counterfactuals?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to the claim that the Rwandan genocide could have been stopped by 5,000 troops?
Reconstruction	How would an African historian read the colonial archive differently from a Western historian?
Occlusion	What does the Western scientific aspiration systematically fail to see about historical knowledge?
Adjudication	Which method best explains the end of the Cold War, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the 2×2 table that illustrates selection bias.

Tag each card: `L3`, `method`, `perspective`, `causation`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Distinguish causal from correlational claims	
Apply process tracing, comparative method, and counterfactuals	
Identify selection bias and presentism	
Read primary sources critically	
Reconstruct the five perspectives on historical method	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between mechanism and counterfactual?
2. Which method was easiest to apply? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default analytical style?
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 4?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L3			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 0)

Add this row to your Module 0 cheatsheet:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Causal claim; mechanism; counterfactual; process tracing; comparative method; selection on the dependent variable; presentism; teleology; source criticism
Key mechanisms	Cause → mechanism → effect; selection bias → truncated sample → biased inference; archive → silence → power

Column	Content
Theories and authors	Fearon (1991) on counterfactuals; Geddes (1990) on selection bias; Trouillot (1995) on silencing; Stoler (2009) on the archival grain; George and Bennett (2005) on process tracing
Cases and evidence	Rwanda 1994; Niger 2023; end of Cold War; JCPOA collapse
Debates	Is IR a science? Can counterfactuals be tested? Whose archive counts?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that a causal claim is wrong?
Cross-links	L4–8 (theory); L9–14 (history); L27 (colonial state formation); L60–61 (capstones)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1–L3 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L3 with L4–8 (theory) and L9–14 (history)
R5	End of Module 0	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory + Module 0 synthesis essay

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Four key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (Rwanda 1994) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (Niger 2023) attempted and compared
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo

☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
☐ Cheatsheet entry added
☐ R2 review scheduled

MODULE 0 SYNTHESIS

You have now completed the orientation and method module. Before proceeding to Module 1 (Epistemological and Ontological Foundations), write a **1,500-word synthesis essay** answering the following question:

"What is an explanation in International Relations, and how would I know a good one from a bad one?"

Your essay must:

1. Define the puzzle, the level of analysis, and the concept of power (L1).
2. Distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription (L1).
3. Explain the relationship between legal rules and power politics (L2).
4. Explain the difference between correlation and causation, and identify the three methods of causal inference (L3).
5. Reconstruct the five perspectives on at least two of the three lessons, and adjudicate between them on a specific case.
6. Identify at least three methodological errors that are common in IR, and explain how to avoid them.

This essay is your entry ticket to Module 1. It is assessed on the quality of the argument, the precision of the concepts, and the use of evidence — not on length.

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **On counterfactuals:** James Fearon, "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science," *World Politics* (1991); Philip Tetlock and Aaron Belkin, *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics* (1996).
- **On selection bias:** Barbara Geddes, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get," *Political Analysis* (1990); Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (1994), ch. 4–6.
- **On process tracing:** Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (2005); Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel, *Process Tracing* (2015).
- **On comparative method:** Arend Lijphart, "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method," *American Political Science Review* (1971); Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method* (1987).
- **On African historiography:** Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (1995); Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain* (2009); Toyin Falola, *Decolonizing African History* (2022).
- **On the Rwandan genocide:** Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil* (2003); Philip Gourevitch,

We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families (1998); the UN's Carlsson Report (1999).

- **On Chinese and Russian historical narratives:** Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation* (2012); Lauri Mälksoo, *Russian Approaches to International Law* (2015); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (2009).

End of Lesson 3. End of Module 0.

Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 4 (Positivism, Post-Positivism, and the Linguistic Turn), the first lesson of Module 1.

5. Positivism, Post-Positivism, and the Linguistic Turn: How We Know What We Know in International Relations

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LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L4 — Positivism, Post-Positivism, and the Linguistic Turn
Module	Module 1: Epistemological and Ontological Foundations
Prerequisites	L1 (puzzles, levels, power, perspectives); L2 (law and institutions); L3 (causal inference, selection bias, historical method)
Interleaved links	Forward to L5 (realism), L6 (liberalism), L7 (constructivism), L8 (critical/post-colonial/feminist theory), L24 (cognitive warfare), L58 (forecasting)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.
Content channels	Canon (summarized and quoted); primary texts (Lapid, Wendt, Cox, Hansen, Enloe, Qin, quoted and analyzed); data lab (discourse analysis exercise); five perspectives
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (adjudicate between epistemological positions and their political consequences)
Estimated study time	6–8 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Every argument, quotation, and example you need is inside this document. Where I cite Lapid, Wendt, Cox, Hansen, Enloe, Qin, or any other scholar, I summarize the argument fully enough that you do not need the original to complete the lesson. "Further Reading" is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

In Lessons 1–3 you learned to build explanations: to identify puzzles, locate causes at different levels, disaggregate power, read legal documents, and test causal claims. But every one of those skills rests on a prior question that you have not yet confronted: **what counts as a valid explanation in the first place?**

This is the **epistemological question**, and it is the deepest fault line in International Relations. It is not an abstract philosophical debate. It determines:

- Whether IR can be a **science** that discovers general laws, or an **interpretive discipline** that reconstructs meanings.
- Whether the objects of IR — states, anarchy, security, interests — are **given** features of the world or **constructed** through language and practice.
- Whether the scholar's own position — Western, African, male, colonial, policy-engaged — is a **neutral vantage point** or a **biased located perspective**.
- Whether the theories you learned in L1–L3 — realism, liberalism, institutionalism — are **descriptions of how the world really is** or **particular ways of seeing that reproduce certain power relations**.

The **"third debate"** — the confrontation between positivism and post-positivism that reshaped IR from the late 1980s onward — is the name for this confrontation. Yosef Lapid's 1989 essay described it as a moment in which "the demise of the empiricist-positivist promise for a cumulative behavioral science" forced scholars to "reexamine the ontological, epistemological, and axiological foundations of their scientific endeavors". The debate produced the theoretical landscape you now inhabit: constructivism, critical theory, post-structuralism, feminism, post-colonialism, and the "Chinese School," among others.

This lesson gives you the apparatus to navigate that landscape. It does four things:

1. It defines **positivism** and explains its core commitments — and why those commitments became contested.
2. It reconstructs the **post-positivist alternatives**: critical theory (Frankfurt School and Cox), post-structuralism and the linguistic turn, and feminist and post-colonial epistemology.
3. It shows how the **linguistic turn** transformed security studies — from threats as objective facts to threats as **discursive constructions**.
4. It reconstructs **five perspectives on the positivism/post-positivism debate**: African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN.

By the end, you can take any IR theory or claim and answer: *What epistemology does this presuppose? What does it treat as given, and what does it treat as constructed? Whose knowledge does it privilege, and whose does it silence?*

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory, before reading further)

1. From L1: Name the three faces of power and give one observable implication of the third face.
2. From L2: What did the ICJ hold in *Nicaragua* about the relationship between Article 2(4) and customary international law?

3. From L3: What is **selection on the dependent variable**, and why does it bias inference?
4. From L3: Distinguish process tracing, comparative method, and counterfactual analysis in one sentence each.

Check against Lessons 1–3 before proceeding.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind:

- Can international politics be studied with the same methods as physics or biology?
- If "anarchy" is socially constructed, does that mean it is not real?
- Is the scholar's identity — nationality, race, gender, colonial history — relevant to the validity of their knowledge?
- Why do some governments treat certain academic frameworks as security threats?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

Provisional definitions; revise by the end:

Positivism; empiricism; falsification; covering law; ontology; epistemology; axiology; reflexivity; post-positivism; linguistic turn; discourse; speech act; deconstruction; standpoint theory; epistemic violence; relationality; zhongyong dialectics.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Define** positivism and identify its four core commitments (ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological) in any IR text.
2. **Distinguish** three post-positivist alternatives — critical theory, post-structuralism, and feminist/post-colonial epistemology — and explain what each contributes and occludes.
3. **Apply** the linguistic turn to a security case, showing how a threat was discursively constructed rather than objectively given.
4. **Reconstruct** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions position themselves relative to the positivism/post-positivism divide, and **adjudicate** among them on a specific case.
5. **Evaluate** the political consequences of epistemological choice: what kinds of knowledge does each epistemology enable, and what does it foreclose?

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Positivism is a package of four commitments, and each can be rejected independently

The claim: Positivism is not one claim but a **bundle** of commitments about what exists (ontology), what can be known (epistemology), what the scholar's stance should be (axiology), and how knowledge should be

produced (methodology). Post-positivism is not a single alternative; it is a family of rejections of different elements of the bundle.

The four commitments of positivism.

Dimension	Positivist commitment	What it implies
Ontology	There is a mind-independent world of observable facts. States, balances of power, and international anarchy exist independently of how anyone describes them.	The task of IR is to describe and explain this world accurately.
Epistemology	Knowledge is produced by testing hypotheses against observable evidence. Causal claims can be falsified by data.	The gold standard is the covering-law model: universal laws covering particular cases.
Axiology	The scholar should be **value-neutral**. Normative commitments are separate from empirical analysis.	The scholar stands "outside" the phenomena being studied.
Methodology	Quantitative and formal methods; large-N comparison; replication; operationalization of variables.	Qualitative methods are acceptable only if they emulate the logic of inference of quantitative methods.

The positivist promise. In the 1950s and 1960s, the "behavioral revolution" promised a cumulative science of politics. Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979) was the high-water mark of positivist IR: it sought a parsimonious, systemic theory of international politics derived from a small number of axioms (anarchy, self-help, polarity). The promise was that IR would become a science whose findings would accumulate.

The post-positivist challenge. Lapid's 1989 essay described the "third debate" as the moment when this promise became untenable. The core challenge was not that positivism was **wrong** about everything — it was that positivism **could not account for its own conditions of possibility**. Positivist IR treated anarchy, states, and interests as given; post-positivism asked how those categories were **produced**, **reproduced**, and **contested**. Lapid noted that the debate "triggered many different responses," and that post-positivism "offers nearly as many dead ends as it opens promising paths" — a warning that remains apt.

Scope condition: Positivism is not obsolete. Much of the most rigorous work in IR — on the democratic peace, on the causes of civil war, on the effects of sanctions — remains positivist in its commitments. The post-positivist critique is a **challenge to positivism's claim to be the only legitimate epistemology**, not a refutation of all positivist findings.

Observable implication: If a text is positivist, it will treat its central concepts as measurable, its evidence as observable, and its author's position as irrelevant to the validity of the findings. If a text is post-positivist, it will treat its central concepts as **contested and historically produced**, its evidence as **interpretively mediated**, and its author's position as **constitutive of the knowledge produced**.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Critical theory and post-structuralism offer distinct post-positivist alternatives

The claim: Post-positivism is not one position. Two of its most important branches — **critical theory** (associated with the Frankfurt School and Robert Cox) and **post-structuralism** (associated with discourse analysis and the work of Lene Hansen, among others) — share a rejection of positivist ontology and axiology, but they differ in their epistemology and in their political project.

2.3.1 Critical theory: knowledge for emancipation **Core commitment.** Critical theory begins from the Frankfurt School distinction between "traditional theory" and "critical theory," formalized for IR by Robert Cox in his 1981 essay "Social Forces, States and World Orders." Cox's distinction is between **problem-solving theory** and **critical theory**:

- **Problem-solving theory** "takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized, as the given framework for action". It seeks to solve problems **within** the existing order.
- **Critical theory** "stands apart from the prevailing order of the world" and asks whether that order is **just** and whether it can be **changed**. It is "critical in the sense that it stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came about".

The mechanism. Cox argued that problem-solving theory is **not neutral**: by taking the existing order as given, it **reproduces** that order. The claim to value-neutrality is itself a political act, because it renders the existing distribution of power invisible. Critical theory, by contrast, makes the existing order **visible as a historical product** and asks who benefits from it.

The political project. Critical theory is explicitly **emancipatory**. It seeks not only to interpret the world but to **change** it — to identify the possibilities for transforming the prevailing order. This is why Cox's work is associated with neo-Gramscian analysis: it asks how **hegemony** — the combination of material power, institutions, and ideas — sustains a particular world order, and how counter-hegemonic forces might challenge it.

What critical theory contributes: It shows that **theory is never neutral**. Every theoretical framework — realism, liberalism, institutionalism — embeds assumptions about what is possible and what is not, and those assumptions have political consequences. It also provides the tools for analyzing **structural change**: how orders collapse and new ones emerge.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **agency of the marginalized** — the ways in which people resist and transform their conditions even without a grand emancipatory project. It can also be **teleological**, assuming that history is moving toward a more just order.

2.3.2 Post-structuralism: knowledge as discourse **Core commitment.** Post-structuralism begins from the **linguistic turn** — the claim that language does not simply **describe** a pre-existing reality but **constitutes** it. Meaning is produced through **discourse**: systems of signification that define what can be said, thought, and done in a given context. There is no access to reality outside discourse; what counts as "real" is itself a discursive achievement.

The mechanism. Lene Hansen's *Security as Practice* (2006) provides the most systematic post-structuralist

methodology in IR. Hansen argues that **foreign policy is a discursive practice**: it "articulates and intertwines material factors and ideas to such an extent that the two cannot be separated from one another". Security is not an objective condition that exists independently of how it is represented; it is **produced through representations** that constitute certain actors, spaces, and threats as security problems.

Hansen's methodology — **discourse analysis** — involves: 1. **Identifying the key representations** of identity, threat, and policy in official and media discourse. 2. **Mapping the intertextual links** between representations (how one text draws on another). 3. **Analyzing the constitutive effects** of discourse: what policies become possible or impossible when a particular representation is dominant. 4. **Attending to silences**: what cannot be said within a given discourse, and whose experiences are excluded.

The political project. Post-structuralism is **deconstructive** rather than emancipatory in the classical sense. It does not claim to offer a better representation of reality; it seeks to **denaturalize** dominant representations, showing that they are contingent, historically produced, and could be otherwise. Its political effect is to **open space** for alternative representations and practices.

What post-structuralism contributes: It shows that **the way a problem is represented determines what counts as a solution**. If "terrorism" is represented as a security threat requiring military response, then military response becomes the only thinkable policy. If it is represented as a political grievance requiring negotiation, different policies become possible. It also provides the tools for analyzing **how power operates through language** — not only through coercion.

What it occludes: It can make it difficult to **adjudicate between competing discourses** — if all representations are contingent, on what grounds does one criticize a dominant discourse? It can also underplay **material factors** — the ways in which violence, deprivation, and physical coercion operate independently of discourse.

Scope condition: Critical theory and post-structuralism are not mutually exclusive. Many scholars combine them: a post-structuralist analysis of how "security" is discursively constructed can be combined with a critical-theoretical analysis of who benefits from that construction. The distinction is analytical, not a rigid boundary.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The linguistic turn transformed security studies from objective threats to discursive constructions

The claim: Before the linguistic turn, security studies treated threats as **objective facts** — a state has a large army, therefore it is a threat. After the linguistic turn, threats are treated as **discursive constructions** — a state's army becomes a threat only when it is represented as such within a particular discourse. This shift is not merely academic; it changes what counts as evidence, what counts as an explanation, and what counts as a solution.

The Copenhagen School and securitization. The most influential application of the linguistic turn to security is the **Copenhagen School's** theory of **securitization**, developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde. Securitization is the **speech act** through which an issue is moved from the realm of "normal politics" to the realm of "security" — thereby justifying extraordinary measures.

The mechanism: 1. A **securitizing actor** (often a state leader) makes a **speech act** that presents an issue as an **existential threat** to a **referent object** (the nation, the state, a community). 2. If the audience **accepts** the

speech act, the issue becomes **securitized**. 3. Securitization **authorizes** extraordinary measures that would not be acceptable under normal politics — military action, surveillance, suspension of civil liberties.

Why this is a linguistic turn. Securitization theory does not ask whether the threat is **objectively real**. It asks **how the threat was constructed**, **by whom**, **for what purpose**, and **with what effects**. A migration flow is not inherently a security threat; it becomes one when a political actor successfully represents it as such. A cyberattack is not inherently an act of war; it becomes one when it is securitized.

The post-structuralist extension. Hansen's work extends securitization theory by showing that **discourse is not only speech but also image, gesture, and silence**. She analyzes how the Bosnian War was represented in Western discourse — which atrocities were visible, which were not, and how those representations shaped the international response. The post-structuralist contribution is to show that **the conditions of representation are themselves political**: who gets to speak, what counts as evidence, and which lives are grievable.

The feminist and post-colonial extension. Feminist IR scholars — Cynthia Enloe, J. Ann Tickner, and others — have shown that **IR's traditional claims to objectivity mask masculinist assumptions** about who counts as a knower and what counts as knowledge. Enloe's method of **"feminist curiosity"** is a discipline of asking **who is doing the work, who is being harmed, and whose experience is invisible** in any account of international politics. Post-colonial scholars extend this to race and coloniality: the linguistic turn, they argue, must also be a **decolonial turn**, because the dominant discourses of IR were forged in the context of empire.

Scope condition: The linguistic turn does not claim that **material reality does not exist**. It claims that **access to material reality is always mediated by discourse**. A bomb is real; but whether it is a "terrorist attack" or a "counter-insurgency operation" depends on how it is represented. The analyst's task is to hold both dimensions together: material violence and discursive construction.

Observable implication: If the linguistic turn is operative, you should see (a) **contestation over the naming of events** (is it a "war" or a "special operation"? a "coup" or a "popular uprising"?); (b) **policy changes following representational shifts** (a shift from "criminal justice" to "security" framing produces a shift from policing to military response); and (c) **silences** — issues that cannot be named within the dominant discourse.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The five perspectives position themselves differently relative to positivism and post-positivism, and those positions are political

The claim: The positivism/post-positivism debate is not a purely philosophical dispute. It is a **political** dispute about who gets to produce knowledge, what kinds of knowledge are legitimate, and whose interests that knowledge serves. The five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — take different positions, and each position has consequences.

2.5.1 The African perspective (primary) **Core commitments.** African epistemology challenges both positivism and much post-positivism for being **Eurocentric**. The critique is not that positivism is too scientific or too interpretive, but that **both** traditions treat Western experience as universal and African experience as a "case" to be explained.

The post-colonial and decolonial critique of IR argues that the discipline's dominant approaches and debates

are "rooted in a partial, Western-centric, and colonial epistemology". African countries are "predominantly used as exceptional case studies, often on corruption, failed economic policy, political instability, or ethnic violence" — a framing that treats Africa as a **problem to be explained** rather than a **source of theory**.

The concept of epistemic violence. Drawing on Spivak and others, African and post-colonial scholars argue that the **erasure of African knowledge systems** from IR is not an oversight but a form of **violence**. Zubairu Wai's *Epistemologies of African Conflicts* "unmasks the epistemic violence inherent in the positivist power/knowledge regimes". The argument is that positivist frameworks **pre-structure** what can be seen: by defining "state failure" in terms of Western institutional models, they render invisible the **alternative forms of order and governance** that African societies have developed.

The alternative. African epistemology does not simply reject positivism; it **provincializes** it. It insists that African systems of thought — oral traditions, relational ontologies, communal forms of authority — are **sources of knowledge**, not just objects of study. The **"epistemic justice"** project in African IR seeks to "recover marginalized intellectual traditions" and to build a **pluralistic** discipline that reflects African experiences.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the positivism/post-positivism debate **presupposes a Western subject**. The question "can IR be a science?" is asked from within a tradition that has already **excluded** other ways of knowing. African epistemology asks a different question: **whose science, and for whom?**

What it occludes: It can underplay the **strategic value** of positivist methods for African states (e.g., using quantitative data to document the effects of climate change or sanctions). It can also risk **essentializing** "African knowledge" as a single tradition.

2.5.2 The Chinese perspective **Core commitments.** The Chinese School of IR is not a single position, but its most influential figures explicitly reject the **epistemological premises of Western positivism**. Qin Yaqing, the founder of **relational theory**, argues that IR theory "differs from natural science" because it "entails cultural meaning, context, and understanding". His relational theory is grounded in **Chinese philosophical traditions** — the **yin-yang** meta-relationship and the **zhongyong** (doctrine of the mean) dialectics — and offers an alternative to the "individualism, instrumental rationality, and material reductionism embedded in Western IR theories".

The mechanism. Qin's relational epistemology holds that **actors are constituted through their relationships**, not prior to them. This is a direct challenge to the positivist ontology of discrete, pre-formed states with given interests. If actors are relational, then the **process of interaction** — not the structure of the system — is the primary site of causal explanation. This is why Qin's theory is often described as closer to **constructivism** than to positivism.

The political project. The Chinese School is not merely academic; it is part of a broader project of **epistemic sovereignty** — the claim that China should not be confined to theoretical frameworks developed in the West. This project is supported by the Chinese state, which has invested heavily in building "Chinese IR theory" as a counter to Western dominance of the discipline.

What this perspective contributes: It provides a **non-Western epistemology** that is not simply a critique of positivism but a **constructive alternative**, grounded in a distinct philosophical tradition. It also shows that the positivism/post-positivism debate is not universal — it is a **provincial** debate within Western IR.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **internal diversity** of Chinese scholarship (not all Chinese IR scholars reject positivism; many use quantitative methods). It can also risk **essentializing** "Chinese thought" as a unified tradition.

2.5.3 The Russian perspective **Core commitments.** Russian IR scholarship is **internally divided** on epistemological questions. Some Russian scholars use positivist methods and engage with Western debates; others — particularly those associated with the **civilizational approach** — reject positivism as a Western imposition and emphasize the **exclusive aspects of Russian identity, security, and tradition**.

The civilizational alternative. The civilizational approach holds that Russia is a **distinct civilization** with its own historical path, and that Western social science — including positivist IR — is **inadequate** to understanding it. This approach draws on **19th-century Slavophile thought** and on contemporary debates about **"Russian civilization"** as a category of analysis. It is explicitly **anti-positivist**: it rejects the idea of universal laws that apply across civilizations, and it insists on the **particularity** of Russian experience.

The political project. The civilizational approach is closely linked to the Russian state's project of **ideological sovereignty**. It provides an intellectual justification for rejecting Western criticism of Russian domestic and foreign policy: if Russia is a distinct civilization, then Western standards — human rights, democracy, the rule of law — do not apply.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the post-positivist critique of positivism can be **mobilized for illiberal purposes**. The rejection of universal laws can become a rejection of universal norms. It also highlights the **geopolitics of epistemology**: the question of what counts as knowledge is bound up with the question of who has the power to define it.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **genuine insights** of positivist social science, and it can treat "Russian civilization" as a monolith, erasing internal diversity and dissent.

2.5.4 The Western perspective **Core commitments.** The Western tradition is **internally contested** between positivism and post-positivism. The **behavioral revolution** of the 1950s and 1960s established positivism as the dominant epistemology in the US academy, and it remains powerful today. But the **"third debate"** of the 1980s opened space for post-positivist alternatives — critical theory, post-structuralism, feminism, post-colonialism — that now occupy a substantial place in the discipline.

The reflexive turn. The distinctive Western contribution to the debate is **reflexivity** — the recognition that the scholar's own position shapes the knowledge they produce. Lapid identified "enhanced reflexivity in the scholarly community" as the "notable contribution to date" of the post-positivist restructuring of IR. Reflexivity means asking: **what are the conditions under which this knowledge was produced? Whose interests does it serve? What does it exclude?**

The political project. Western post-positivism is often **normative** — it seeks to expose the power relations embedded in dominant knowledge and to open space for marginalized voices. But it is also **institutional**: the post-positivist turn has created new journals, new professional networks, and new hierarchies within the discipline. The critique of power has itself become a **position of power**.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **most developed toolkit** for reflexive analysis — the methodological apparatus of discourse analysis, critical theory, and feminist epistemology. It also provides the **self-critique** of Western IR's own parochialism.

What it occludes: It can be **self-referential** — a debate among Western scholars about Western scholars, conducted in Western journals, with little engagement with non-Western traditions. It can also be **depoliticizing**: the emphasis on reflexivity can become an end in itself, rather than a means to political change.

2.5.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN is not a scholarly tradition, but it has a distinctive **epistemological practice**: **legal positivism** combined with **institutional pragmatism**. The UN Charter, international law, and Security Council resolutions are treated as **authoritative sources of knowledge** about what is legal and legitimate. The UN's approach is positivist in its **legal** form (law is what the sources of law say it is) but **pragmatic** in its **operational** form (what matters is what can be agreed and implemented).

The "four approaches" to Charter interpretation. Scholarship on UN law identifies four approaches to interpreting the Charter: **classical positivism** (the text and state consent), **international constitutionalism** (the Charter as a constitution), **political realism** (the Charter as a reflection of power), and **legal formalism** (the Charter as a system of rules). The UN's own practice draws on all four, depending on the political context.

The political project. The UN's epistemological practice is oriented toward **consensus and legitimacy**. It seeks to produce knowledge that can be **accepted by member states**, even when they disagree about fundamentals. This is why UN documents are often **deliberately ambiguous** — ambiguity allows agreement without resolving disagreement.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **institutional record** — the documented decisions, resolutions, and debates that are essential evidence for any analysis of international politics. It also provides a **normative benchmark** — the standards against which state behavior is judged.

What it occludes: It can treat **legal positivism** as the only legitimate epistemology, excluding other forms of knowledge (oral testimony, civil society reports, academic research). It can also **depoliticize** — by framing issues as legal-technical problems, it can obscure the power relations that shape what is legally possible.

2.5.6 The comparison matrix

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Epistemological stance	Post-colonial/decolonial; provincializes positivism	Relational; rejects Western positivist premises	Divided; civilizational approach rejects positivism	Contested between positivism and post-positivism	Legal positivism + institutional pragmatism
What counts as knowledge	African systems of thought; oral traditions; lived experience	Relationality; zhongyong dialectics; cultural context	Civilizational particularity; anti-universalism	Reflexive, methodologically plural	Legal sources; institutional consensus

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Key contribution	Epistemic justice; critique of Eurocentrism	Constructive non-Western alternative	Illiberal mobilization of anti-positivism	Reflexivity; methodological toolkit	Institutional record; normative benchmark
Key occlusion	Strategic value of positivist methods	Internal diversity of Chinese scholarship	Genuine insights of positivist science	Self-referential; parochial	Exclusion of non-legal knowledge

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2.6 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the United States launched a "Global War on Terror." The framing of the attacks as an act of "war" rather than a "crime" had profound consequences: it authorized military detention without trial (Guantánamo), drone strikes outside recognized battlefields, and the invasion of Afghanistan. Why did the "war" frame prevail over the "crime" frame, and what did that choice make possible?

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why was the 9/11 attack represented as an act of war rather than a criminal act, and how did that representation constitute the range of possible responses?*

Epistemological framing. A positivist analysis would ask: **was the attack objectively an act of war?** It would look for measurable criteria — the scale of violence, the identity of the perpetrator, the existence of an armed conflict. A post-positivist analysis would ask: **how was the attack represented, by whom, and with what effects?** It would not deny the reality of the violence; it would ask how that violence was **given meaning** through discourse.

Post-structuralist analysis. The "war" frame was constructed through a series of speech acts:

- President Bush's address to Congress on September 20, 2001, declared a "war on terror" that would "not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated."
- The frame drew on **intertextual links** to earlier discourses: the "war on drugs," the "war on poverty," and the Cold War framing of a global ideological struggle.
- The frame **constituted** the actors: Al-Qaeda was not a criminal organization but an **enemy army**; the United States was not a **law enforcement agency** but a **belligerent**.
- The frame **authorized** extraordinary measures: military force, detention without trial, surveillance, and the suspension of civil liberties.

Critical-theoretical analysis. Who benefited from the "war" frame?

- The **executive branch** gained unprecedented powers: the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) became the legal basis for military action across the globe, with little congressional oversight.
- The **defense industry** benefited from a massive increase in military spending.
- The **surveillance apparatus** expanded dramatically, with the Patriot Act and subsequent legislation.

- The **"war" frame** also served to **legitimize** the invasion of Iraq (2003), which was justified through the same discursive structure (Saddam Hussein as a threat, weapons of mass destruction as an existential danger).

Feminist and post-colonial analysis. Who was made invisible by the "war" frame?

- The **civilian casualties** in Afghanistan and Iraq were represented as "collateral damage" — a category that makes certain deaths unremarkable.
- The **experiences of women** in Afghanistan were mobilized to justify intervention ("saving Afghan women"), while the gendered violence of the occupation itself was obscured.
- The **racialized dimension** of the "war on terror" — the targeting of Muslim communities, the construction of "radical Islam" as a civilizational threat — drew on colonial discourses of the "barbaric Other."

Adjudication. Which epistemology best explains the "war on terror" frame? The **post-structuralist** analysis explains **how** the frame was constructed. The **critical-theoretical** analysis explains **who benefited** from the frame. The **feminist and post-colonial** analyses explain **who was made invisible**. The **positivist** analysis — asking whether the attack was "objectively" a war — misses the point: the attack was **whatever it was represented to be**, and the representation had material consequences.

But the positivist analysis is not irrelevant. It would ask: **what were the material conditions that made the "war" frame possible?** The scale of the violence, the transnational character of Al-Qaeda, the weakness of the Afghan state — these are material factors that constrained the range of plausible representations. A complete explanation holds both dimensions together: **material conditions constrain representation, but representation constitutes the response.**

2.7 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: In 2015, the European Union faced a "migration crisis" as hundreds of thousands of refugees and migrants arrived from Syria, Afghanistan, and other conflict zones. Some EU member states framed the arrivals as a **security threat** requiring border closures and military response; others framed them as a **humanitarian crisis** requiring rescue operations and resettlement. The framing varied not only across states but within states, and it changed over time.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely: why did the same material phenomenon — people arriving at EU borders — produce different security and humanitarian responses?
2. Apply the **securitization** framework: identify the securitizing actors, the speech acts, the referent objects, and the audience acceptance.
3. Apply the **critical-theoretical** framework: who benefited from the securitization of migration? Who was disadvantaged?
4. Apply the **post-colonial** framework: how did the EU's response reflect colonial legacies and racialized hierarchies of deservingness?

5. Write a 300-word adjudication: which epistemology best explains the variation in responses, and what does it miss?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did EU member states respond differently to the 2015 migration surge, with some securitizing migration and others framing it as a humanitarian obligation?

Securitization analysis: The securitizing actors were primarily **right-wing political leaders** in Hungary, Poland, and Austria, who represented migration as an **existential threat** to national identity, security, and the European way of life. The speech acts were explicit: Viktor Orbán's claim that migration would "dismantle European civilization"; the Hungarian government's construction of a border fence; the framing of migrants as "illegal" and "criminal." The **referent object** was the nation and its identity. The **audience** — domestic publics — largely accepted the frame in some states, leading to policy changes (border closures, detention camps). In other states — Germany, Sweden — the **humanitarian frame** prevailed, with Chancellor Merkel's "Wir schaffen das" (we can do it) as the key speech act.

Critical-theoretical analysis: Who benefited from securitization? **Right-wing parties** gained electoral support. **Security industries** gained contracts for border enforcement. **National governments** gained the ability to suspend asylum obligations and civil liberties. Who was disadvantaged? **Migrants and refugees** themselves, whose suffering was rendered invisible by the security frame. **Civil society organizations** that provided humanitarian assistance were criminalized in some states (e.g., Hungary's "Stop Soros" laws).

Post-colonial analysis: The EU's response reflected **colonial legacies**: the construction of migrants as a threat drew on racialized discourses of the "Other"; the distinction between "deserving" refugees (Syrians) and "undeserving" economic migrants (Africans) reproduced a **hierarchy of humanity**; the externalization of border control to Libya and Turkey reflected a **neocolonial** logic of outsourcing violence to the global periphery.

Adjudication: The **post-structuralist** analysis best explains the **variation** in responses: the same material phenomenon was represented differently in different national discourses, and those representations constituted different policy possibilities. The **critical-theoretical** analysis best explains **who benefited** from the securitization of migration. The **post-colonial** analysis best explains **why the securitization took a racialized form**. A complete explanation combines all three: the material conditions of the migration surge (wars in Syria and Afghanistan, the collapse of the Libyan state) **constrained** the range of possible representations, but the **discursive struggle** over how to represent the arrivals determined which responses became possible.

2.8 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The representation of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in Western, African, and Chinese discourses. Western discourse often frames the BRI as "debt-trap diplomacy" and a threat to sovereignty; Chinese discourse frames it as "win-win cooperation" and "common development"; African discourse is divided, with some states embracing the BRI and others expressing concerns about debt and dependency.

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** How does each discourse construct the BRI? Identify the key speech acts, the actors they constitute, and the policies they authorize.
2. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives explain the divergence in representations? (One paragraph or table entry each.)
3. **Epistemological adjudication:** Which epistemology — positivist, critical-theoretical, post-structuralist, feminist/post-colonial — best explains the **political effects** of these competing representations?
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show that the "debt-trap" discourse is a **misrepresentation**, or that it is an **accurate description**? What would you need to observe?

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish between **what the BRI is** (positivist question) and **how it is represented** (post-positivist question)? Does it identify who benefits from each representation?

2.9 HINGE QUESTION

A scholar argues: "The concept of 'failed states' is not a neutral description. It reflects a particular Western model of what a state should look like, and it renders invisible the alternative forms of order that exist in many African societies." Which epistemological position does this scholar most clearly adopt?

- A) Positivism
- B) Critical theory
- C) Post-colonial/decolonial epistemology
- D) Legal positivism

Answer: C. The scholar is making a **post-colonial** argument: the concept of "failed states" is Eurocentric, it imposes a Western model, and it silences African forms of order. This is the core of the African/post-colonial critique of IR: the categories of the discipline are not neutral but **colonially constituted**.

If you answered A: Positivism would treat "failed states" as a measurable category, not as a contested concept. **If you answered B:** Critical theory would also critique the concept, but it would focus on **who benefits** from the "failed state" discourse (e.g., interventionist powers) rather than on the **colonial genealogy** of the category. **If you answered D:** Legal positivism concerns the sources of law, not the epistemology of social-scientific concepts.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Practice discourse analysis — the core method of post-structuralist IR.

Task: Analyze the following three excerpts about the same event — the 2023 Niger coup. Identify the **speech acts**, the **actors constituted**, the **policies authorized**, and the **silences**.

Excerpt A (ECOWAS statement, July 2023): "ECOWAS condemns in the strongest terms the coup d'état in Niger. The attempted overthrow of the democratically elected government is a violation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance. ECOWAS demands the immediate restoration of constitutional order and warns that it will take all necessary measures to ensure this."

Excerpt B (Niger junta statement, August 2023): "The National Council for the Safeguard of the Homeland has taken power to save Niger from corruption, mismanagement, and foreign domination. The former government was a puppet of France. We call on the Nigerien people to support the patriotic forces in their struggle for true sovereignty."

Excerpt C (Russian Foreign Ministry statement, August 2023): "The events in Niger are an internal affair of the Nigerien people. Russia respects the sovereignty of Niger and opposes any external interference. We call on all parties to resolve their differences through peaceful dialogue."

Analysis questions:

1. **Speech acts:** What does each excerpt **do** through language? (Condemn? Legitimize? Express concern?)
2. **Actors:** How is each actor represented? (ECOWAS as enforcer? Junta as liberators? Russia as neutral mediator?)
3. **Policies authorized:** What policies does each representation make possible or impossible? (ECOWAS: military intervention? Junta: resistance to external pressure? Russia: diplomatic engagement?)
4. **Silences:** What is **not said** in each excerpt? (ECOWAS: the colonial history of French intervention? Junta: the internal repression? Russia: its own security interests in the Sahel?)
5. **Epistemology:** Which excerpt is most **positivist**, and which is most **post-structuralist**? How does the epistemological stance shape the representation?

Rule: Complete this lab before the independent memo. Evidence precedes argument.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The positivist bundle. Draw a four-part diagram: Ontology (what exists), Epistemology (what can be known), Axiology (the scholar's stance), Methodology (how knowledge is produced). For each part, write the positivist commitment and one post-positivist rejection.

Visual 2: Critical theory vs. post-structuralism. Draw a two-column table. Rows: "Goal of theory," "Mechanism of power," "Political project," "Key occlusion." Fill from memory.

Visual 3: The five perspectives on epistemology. Draw a five-column table (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) with rows: "Epistemological stance," "What counts as knowledge," "Key contribution," "Key occlusion."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
What are the four commitments of positivism?	Ontological realism; epistemological empiricism; axiological neutrality; methodological quantitative/formal
What is the "third debate"?	Lapid's term for the post-positivist challenge to empiricist-positivist IR
What is the distinction between problem-solving and critical theory?	Cox: problem-solving takes the world as given; critical theory asks how it came about and whether it can be changed
What is the linguistic turn?	Language constitutes reality rather than merely describing it; discourse analysis
What is securitization?	The speech act through which an issue is moved from normal politics to security, authorizing extraordinary measures
What is epistemic violence?	The erasure of non-Western knowledge systems through the imposition of Eurocentric categories
How do the five perspectives position themselves?	African: decolonial; Chinese: relational; Russian: civilizational (anti-positivist); Western: contested/reflexive; UN: legal positivism + pragmatism
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.5; Lapid (1989); Wendt (1992); Cox (1981); Hansen (2006); Enloe (2004); Qin (2018); Wai (2018)
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the difference between positivism and post-positivism to a smart non-specialist in 150–200 words, without using jargon. If you must use "epistemology" or "discourse," define them in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for the linguistic turn. Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "The linguistic turn is like realizing that a map does not just describe terrain — it **creates** the terrain by deciding what counts as a road and what counts as a border." Where it breaks down: terrain exists independently of the map, whereas post-structuralists argue that reality is constituted by discourse.)

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What are the four commitments of positivism?
Mechanism	How does securitization theory explain the move from normal politics to security?
Application	A state frames a cyberattack as an "act of war." What epistemological move is this?
Comparison	How do critical theory and post-structuralism differ in their political projects?
Source	What is Cox's distinction between problem-solving and critical theory?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to the post-structuralist claim that "there is nothing outside discourse"?
Reconstruction	How would an African decolonial scholar critique positivist IR?
Occlusion	What does the Chinese relational approach fail to see about power?
Adjudication	Which epistemology best explains the "war on terror" frame, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the four commitments of positivism on a diagram.

Tag each card: `L4`, `epistemology`, `post-positivism`, `perspective`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Define positivism's four commitments	
Distinguish critical theory and post-structuralism	
Apply the linguistic turn to a security case	
Reconstruct the five perspectives on epistemology	
Evaluate the political consequences of epistemological choice	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between the linguistic turn and material reality?

2. Which perspective was easiest to reconstruct? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default epistemology?
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 5?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L4			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 1)

Add this row to your Module 1 cheatsheet:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Positivism; post-positivism; linguistic turn; discourse; securitization; epistemic violence; reflexivity; relationality
Key mechanisms	Speech act → securitization → extraordinary measures; problem-solving theory → reproduction of order; critical theory → denaturalization; epistemic violence → erasure of non-Western knowledge
Theories and authors	Lapid (third debate); Cox (problem-solving vs. critical theory); Hansen (discourse analysis); Enloe (feminist curiosity); Qin (relational theory); Wai (epistemic violence)
Cases and evidence	War on terror; 2015 migration crisis; Niger 2023; BRI representations
Debates	Can IR be a science? Is discourse constitutive of reality? Whose knowledge counts?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that a discourse is not constitutive — that material reality determines representation?
Cross-links	L5 (realism); L7 (constructivism); L8 (critical/post-colonial/feminist); L24 (cognitive warfare); L58 (forecasting)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1–L4 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L4 with L5–L8 (theory) and L24 (cognitive warfare)
R5	End of Module 1	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Four key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (war on terror) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (2015 migration crisis) attempted and compared
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
- ☐ Cheatsheet entry added
- ☐ R2 review scheduled

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **On the third debate:** Yosef Lapid, "The Third Debate: On the Prospects of International Theory in a Post-Positivist Era," *International Studies Quarterly* 33:3 (1989), 235–254.
- **On the linguistic turn and constructivism:** Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46:2 (1992), 391–425.
- **On critical theory:** Robert W. Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory," *Millennium* 10:2 (1981); Andrew Linklater, *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (1982).
- **On post-structuralism and discourse analysis:** Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (2006); David Campbell, *Writing Security* (1992).

- **On feminist epistemology:** Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist* (2004); J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations* (1992).
- **On post-colonial and decolonial epistemology:** Zubairu Wai, *Epistemologies of African Conflicts* (2018); Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past* (1995).
- **On the Chinese School:** Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (2018); Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (2011).
- **On Russian epistemology:** Lauri Mälksoo, *Russian Approaches to International Law* (2015); Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin* (2012).
- **On securitization:** Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (1998).

End of Lesson 4. Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 5 (Realism: Classical, Structural, Neoclassical).

6. Realism: Classical, Structural, and Neoclassical — Power, Anarchy, and the Tragedy of Great-Power Politics

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LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L5 — Realism: Classical, Structural, Neoclassical
Module	Module 1: Epistemological and Ontological Foundations
Prerequisites	L1 (puzzles, levels, power, perspectives); L2 (law and institutions); L3 (causal inference); L4 (positivism and post-positivism)
Interleaved links	Forward to L6 (liberalism — realism's foil), L7 (constructivism — the social construction of anarchy), L12 (Cold War), L15–19 (IPE — realist political economy), L21 (nuclear deterrence), L35 (post-Soviet ontology), L41–46 (Iran and West Asia), L47 (US–China rivalry)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.
Content channels	Canon (quoted and summarized); primary texts (Thucydides, Morgenthau, Waltz, Mearsheimer, Jervis, Rose, Yan Xuetong, quoted and analyzed); data lab (SIPRI military expenditure); five perspectives

Field	Entry
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (adjudicate between realist variants and between realism and its critics)
Estimated study time	7–9 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Every argument, quotation, and example you need is inside this document. Where I cite Thucydides, Morgenthau, Waltz, Mearsheimer, Jervis, or any other scholar, I summarize the argument fully enough that you do not need the original to complete the lesson. The "Further Reading" section is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Realism is the **most influential** and the **most misunderstood** tradition in International Relations. It is the language of great-power politics, the default framework of foreign ministries, and the theory that every IR student must master — even those who eventually reject it.

It is misunderstood because it is not one theory. Realism is a **family** of arguments that share a core commitment — that international politics is shaped by **anarchy, power, and self-interest** — but disagree profoundly about the **mechanisms** that connect anarchy to state behavior, the **level of analysis** at which causes are located, and the **scope conditions** under which realist predictions hold.

This lesson reconstructs the realist family in depth:

1. **Classical realism** (Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Morgenthau, Carr) — which locates the cause of conflict in **human nature** and the **lust for power**.
2. **Structural realism or neorealism** (Waltz) — which locates the cause in the **structure of the international system** (anarchy and polarity), not in human nature.
3. **Offensive realism** (Mearsheimer) — a variant of structural realism that predicts states will **maximize power** and seek hegemony, not merely balance.
4. **Defensive realism** (Jervis, Waltz in some readings) — a variant that predicts states will **maintain the status quo** when possible, and that the security dilemma, not aggressive intentions, is the main cause of conflict.
5. **Neoclassical realism** (Rose, Schweller, Zakaria) — which argues that **systemic pressures must be translated through domestic politics** — leaders, coalitions, ideologies — before they produce foreign policy.
6. **The security dilemma** (Herz, Jervis) — the mechanism that connects anarchy to conflict without requiring aggressive intentions.

By the end, you can take any realist claim and answer: *Which variant is this? What mechanism does it specify? What level of analysis does it use? What does it predict, and under what scope conditions? And what do the five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — make of it?*

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory, before reading further)

1. From L1: Name the four levels of analysis and give one cause located at each level for a single event.
2. From L1: Distinguish the first, second, and third faces of power.
3. From L3: What is **selection on the dependent variable**, and why does it bias inference?
4. From L4: What are the four commitments of positivism, and which one does post-structuralism reject most fundamentally?

Check against Lessons 1–4 before proceeding.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind:

- If anarchy is the defining condition of international politics, why do states ever cooperate?
- Is the security dilemma an objective feature of anarchy or a product of states' beliefs about each other?
- Why do some states seek hegemony while others are satisfied with the status quo?
- Is realism a **description** of how the world works, a **prescription** for how states should behave, or a **self-fulfilling prophecy**?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

Provisional definitions; revise by the end:

Anarchy; self-help; relative gains; security dilemma; spiral model; deterrence model; balance of power; bandwagoning; buck-passing; polarity; hegemonic stability; offensive realism; defensive realism; neoclassical realism; status quo states; revisionist states; unitary actor assumption; black-boxing; moral realism; civilizational realism.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Reconstruct** the five variants of realism — classical, structural (defensive), offensive, neoclassical, and the security dilemma — and distinguish their mechanisms, levels of analysis, and scope conditions.
2. **Apply** each variant to a single case (e.g., the Ukraine war) and explain where their predictions diverge.
3. **Evaluate** the realist claim that anarchy produces competition, using evidence from cases of sustained cooperation (e.g., the EU, ASEAN, the post-1945 liberal order).
4. **Reconstruct** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions engage with realism, and **adjudicate** among them on a specific case.
5. **Critique** realism's silences — what it does not see about hierarchy, race, colonialism, and domestic politics — without dismissing its insights.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Realism is a family, not a theory: five variants with distinct mechanisms

The claim: All realisms share a core commitment — that international politics is shaped by anarchy, power, and self-interest — but they disagree about **why** anarchy produces competition, **where** the cause is located, and **what** states will do. Confusing the variants is the most common error in realist analysis.

The table below maps the family. Each row is a distinct theory, not a version of one theory.

Variant	Key figures	Locus of cause	Core mechanism	Prediction
Classical realism	Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Morgenthau, Carr	Human nature	*Lust for power* (animus dominandi); the drive to dominate is inherent in humans and expressed through states	States will seek power even when security is assured
Structural realism (defensive)	Waltz	International structure	*Anarchy* + *self-help*: states must help themselves; balancing is the default; states seek security, not power	States balance against threats; over-expansion is self-defeating
Offensive realism	Mearsheimer	International structure	*Anarchy* + *uncertainty about intentions*: states can never be sure of others' intentions; survival requires maximizing power; hegemony is the ultimate goal	Rising powers seek regional hegemony; great-power war is likely
Neoclassical realism	Rose, Schweller, Zakaria	Structure + domestic politics	*Systemic pressures are filtered through domestic intervening variables*: leaders, coalitions, ideologies shape how states respond	Foreign policy is a product of both systemic incentives and domestic politics

Variant	Key figures	Locus of cause	Core mechanism	Prediction
Security dilemma	Herz, Jervis	Anarchy + uncertainty	*Defensive measures appear offensive to others*, triggering a spiral of armament and conflict even when no state wants war	Arms races, crises, and wars can occur without aggressive intentions

Why this matters. The claim "realism predicts the Ukraine war" is **ambiguous** until you specify which variant:

- **Classical realism** predicts that Russia, like any great power, will seek to dominate its neighborhood because that is what great powers do.
- **Defensive realism** predicts that Russia would balance against NATO but would not necessarily invade — because over-expansion is self-defeating.
- **Offensive realism** predicts that Russia will seek regional hegemony in its near abroad, because survival requires it — and that Ukraine is the most likely flashpoint.
- **Neoclassical realism** asks why Russia responded the way it did — what domestic coalitions, ideologies, and leadership dynamics shaped the response — and explains why the response took the form it did.
- **Security dilemma** predicts that NATO enlargement, even if defensively motivated, appeared offensive to Russia, triggering a spiral that neither side fully controlled.

These are **not the same prediction**. They are different theories with different mechanisms and different policy implications.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Classical realism: power as a human drive, not a systemic necessity

The claim: Classical realism locates the cause of international conflict in **human nature**. The drive to dominate — what Morgenthau called the *animus dominandi* — is inherent in humans and is expressed through states. Anarchy matters, but it is not the primary cause; it is the condition that allows the human drive for power to express itself without restraint.

Thucydides (c. 431 BCE). The Athenian historian is often treated as the first realist. His *History of the Peloponnesian War* contains the **Melian Dialogue**, in which Athenian envoys tell the Melians, before destroying their city: **"the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."** This is the most quoted sentence in the realist canon. But Thucydides' account is more complex than the quotation suggests: he also shows that Athenian hubris led to catastrophic defeat in Sicily, suggesting that over-expansion is self-defeating. The Melian Dialogue is not a neutral description; it is a warning about the **corruption of power**.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1513/1532). In *The Prince*, Machiavelli advises the ruler that he must be willing to use **force and fraud** because "the lion cannot protect himself from traps, and the fox cannot defend himself from wolves." The prince must combine both. Machiavelli is not simply a theorist of power; he is a theorist

of **the autonomy of politics** — the claim that political action has its own logic and cannot be judged by ordinary morality.

Thomas Hobbes (1651). *Leviathan* describes the **state of nature** as a "war of all against all" in which "the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." Hobbes's solution is the **sovereign** — a single authority with a monopoly on legitimate violence, which can impose order. In international politics, there is no global sovereign, so the state of nature persists between states. This is the **anarchy** that structural realists later formalize.

Hans Morgenthau (1948). *Politics Among Nations* is the founding text of American classical realism. Morgenthau's six principles of political realism are worth stating in full:

1. Political realism believes that politics is governed by objective laws that have their roots in **human nature**.
2. The core concept of realism is **interest defined in terms of power**.
3. Interest defined as power is an **objective category** that is universally valid, but its content varies with time and place.
4. Political realism is aware of the **moral significance** of political action, but it is also aware of the **tension between morality and successful political action**.
5. Political realism refuses to identify the **particular aspirations** of a particular nation with the **moral laws that govern the universe**.
6. The realist is convinced of the **autonomy of the political sphere** — the political sphere is not a mere function of the economic or moral sphere.

Morgenthau's realism is **tragic**: the drive for power is inherent, order is precarious, and the best that can be hoped for is a **balance of power** that maintains a fragile peace. He is not a moralist, but he is not a cynic either — he insists that morality matters, even if it cannot be the sole basis of policy.

E. H. Carr (1939). *The Twenty Years' Crisis* is a critique of **utopianism** (the belief that international politics can be governed by law and morality) and an argument for realism as **the recognition of power**. Carr's realism is directed at the liberal internationalism of the interwar period, which he saw as failing to confront the realities of power. But Carr's realism is **historicist** — he argues that the content of "morality" varies across time and place, and that utopianism is itself a product of a particular historical context (the dominance of the satisfied powers). This is a crucial insight: realism is not a universal truth; it is a **historical product** of a specific moment.

What classical realism contributes: It provides a **psychological** account of power — the drive to dominate is not merely a response to anarchy; it is rooted in human nature. It also provides a **tragic sensibility** — the recognition that power is dangerous and that the best political arrangements are fragile.

What classical realism occludes: It can naturalize aggression (if power-seeking is human nature, then nothing can be done about it); it can underplay the **institutional and normative** factors that mitigate the drive for power; it can be **tautological** (states seek power because they are states, and states seek power because they are driven by human nature — which is not an explanation, but a restatement of the outcome).

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Structural realism (Waltz): anarchy, self-help, and the logic of balancing

The claim: Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* (1979) is the most influential work of IR theory in the twentieth century. Its central move is to **abstract from human nature** and locate the cause of state behavior in the **structure of the international system**. Anarchy — the absence of a central authority — produces a logic of **self-help**: states must rely on their own resources for survival. The distribution of **capabilities** (polarity) determines the structure of the system, and states **balance** against the most powerful.

The core argument. Waltz's theory rests on three propositions:

1. **The international system is anarchic.** There is no central authority above states, and states must provide for their own security.
2. **Anarchy produces self-help.** Because there is no authority to enforce agreements or protect states, states must look to their own resources and prioritize **relative gains** — how much power they have relative to others — over absolute gains.
3. **The structure of the system determines outcomes.** The distribution of capabilities (unipolar, bipolar, multipolar) shapes the behavior of states. In a bipolar system, the two superpowers balance each other; in a multipolar system, balancing is more complex and the risk of war is higher.

The claim about human nature. Waltz explicitly *brackets* human nature. He argues that if human nature were the cause of war, then war would be inevitable — but it is not, because the structure of the system varies. Bipolarity, he argued, was more stable than multipolarity, because the two superpowers could manage their competition and avoid the diffusion of power that produced the First World War.

Balancing vs. bandwagoning. Waltz argues that states in an anarchic system will **balance** against the most powerful actor rather than **bandwagon** with it. Balancing can be **internal** (building up military capability) or **external** (forming alliances). Bandwagoning — joining the stronger side — is risky because it leaves the weaker state dependent on the stronger. This is why the balance of power is the default behavior of states.

The security dilemma and defensive realism. A key mechanism in structural realism is the **security dilemma**, first formulated by John Herz (1950) and developed by Robert Jervis (1978). Herz described it as a **"structural notion"** of the security dilemma in which groups and individuals are "insecure" because they cannot be sure of the intentions of others. Jervis distinguished two models:

- **The deterrence model:** States are aggressive because they are aggressive; the solution is to deter them with superior power.
- **The spiral model:** States are defensive, but their defensive measures appear offensive to others, triggering a spiral of armament and conflict. The solution is to reassure the other side, not to escalate.

Jervis argues that the spiral model is often more accurate than the deterrence model: **"the means of security for one state are, in the eyes of the other, the means of aggression."** This is the mechanism that explains how wars can occur even when no state wants one.

What structural realism contributes: It provides a **parsimonious** theory of international politics — a small number of assumptions (anarchy, self-help, polarity) generate predictions about state behavior. It also provides a **systemic** account of war and peace, avoiding the reductionism of human-nature explanations.

What structural realism occludes: It **black-boxes** the state — it treats states as unitary rational actors and ignores domestic politics. It can underplay **norms and institutions** — the ways in which states can transcend the logic of self-help. It can underplay **hierarchy** — the ways in which the international system is not just

anarchic but also stratified by race, colonial history, and economic dependency.

Scope condition: Structural realism is most powerful in explaining the behavior of **great powers** in **security** issues. It is least powerful in explaining **cooperation** (e.g., the EU) or the behavior of **weak states** (e.g., small African states whose survival depends more on regional institutions than on balancing).

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Offensive realism, neoclassical realism, and the security dilemma: three refinements

The previous sections covered classical and structural realism. This section covers three refinements that are essential to contemporary realist analysis.

2.5.1 Offensive realism (Mearsheimer) **Core commitment.** John Mearsheimer's *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001) is a variant of structural realism that draws a more **pessimistic** conclusion from anarchy. Mearsheimer accepts Waltz's premise that anarchy produces self-help, but argues that it produces **offensive** behavior, not merely balancing.

The five assumptions. Mearsheimer's theory rests on five assumptions:

1. The international system is **anarchic**.
2. Great powers **possess offensive military capability**.
3. States can **never be certain about the intentions of other states**.
4. The **primary goal** of states is survival.
5. States are **rational actors** — they calculate costs and benefits.

The tragedy. From these assumptions, Mearsheimer derives the **tragedy**: states cannot be sure of others' intentions, so they must maximize their power to ensure their survival. The ultimate goal is **regional hegemony** — dominating one's own region — because a regional hegemon is the only state that can be secure. Mearsheimer predicts that **great-power war is likely** because the structure of the system provides incentives for aggression.

The contrast with Waltz. Waltz is a **defensive realist**: he argues that states seek **security**, not power, and that over-expansion is self-defeating. Mearsheimer is an **offensive realist**: he argues that states seek **power** because security is never assured. The difference is not merely academic — it has policy implications. Waltz would argue that the US should not over-expand; Mearsheimer would argue that the US should maximize its power and prevent any rival from achieving regional hegemony.

What offensive realism contributes: It provides a **parsimonious** and **pessimistic** account of great-power behavior. It explains why rising powers seek to expand and why status quo powers resist.

What it occludes: It can underplay **domestic politics** — the ways in which leaders, coalitions, and ideologies shape foreign policy. It can underplay **norms and institutions** — the ways in which states can signal their intentions and build trust. It can be **falsified** by cases of sustained cooperation (e.g., the EU) and by cases where states do not maximize power (e.g., post-war Germany and Japan).

Scope condition: Offensive realism is most powerful in explaining the behavior of **great powers** in **security** issues where the stakes are high. It is least powerful in explaining cooperation, the behavior of weak states, and the role of ideas.

2.5.2 Neoclassical realism (Rose, Schweller, Zakaria) **Core commitment.** Neoclassical realism argues that **systemic pressures are necessary but not sufficient** to explain foreign policy. The international system provides **incentives** and **constraints**, but how states respond depends on **domestic intervening variables** — leaders, coalitions, ideologies, and state-society relations. Neoclassical realism is a **bridge** between structural realism and foreign-policy analysis.

The mechanism. Gideon Rose, in his 1998 review article that coined the term, described neoclassical realism as a theory in which "the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities," but in which "the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level."

What it contributes: It explains **why states with similar structural positions sometimes behave differently**. For example, why did the US and the Soviet Union respond differently to their respective declines? Why did Britain and France respond differently to the rise of Germany? Neoclassical realism answers these questions by examining the domestic coalitions, ideologies, and leadership styles that shaped foreign policy.

What it occludes: It can **overcomplicate** the theory, making it difficult to test. It can **underplay** the autonomy of systemic pressures — the ways in which structure constrains foreign policy regardless of domestic politics.

Scope condition: Neoclassical realism is most powerful in explaining **foreign policy** (not international outcomes), and in cases where there is **variation** in how states respond to similar structural pressures.

2.5.3 The security dilemma (Herz, Jervis) **Core commitment.** The security dilemma is the mechanism that explains how **conflict can occur without aggressive intentions**. States that are motivated by security — not aggression — can still produce a spiral of armament and war, because their defensive measures appear offensive to others.

The mechanism. Jervis's spiral model works as follows:

1. State A is uncertain about State B's intentions.
2. State A takes defensive measures (e.g., builds up its military).
3. State B interprets A's measures as offensive and responds with its own buildup.
4. State A interprets B's response as confirmation of its hostile intentions and escalates further.
5. The spiral produces conflict even though neither state wanted it.

The deterrence model vs. the spiral model. Jervis distinguishes:

- **Deterrence model:** The other side is aggressive; the solution is to **deter** it with superior power.
- **Spiral model:** The other side is defensive but uncertain; the solution is to **reassure** it and avoid actions that appear threatening.

What the security dilemma contributes: It explains **unintended conflict** — wars that occur even when neither side wants them. It also provides a **policy tool**: understanding the security dilemma can help states avoid escalation.

What it occludes: It can underplay **genuinely aggressive intentions** — some states *are* revisionist, and reassuring them can be dangerous. It can also be **difficult to test**: how do you know whether the other side is defensive but uncertain, or genuinely aggressive?

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The five perspectives engage realism differently, and each engagement is political

The claim: Realism is often treated as a **universal** theory of international politics. But the five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — engage with realism in distinct ways, and each engagement reflects a different political project. Reconstructing these engagements is essential to adjudicating realism's claims.

2.6.1 The African perspective (primary) **Core commitments.** African scholars and statesmen have a **complex** relationship with realism. On one hand, realism's emphasis on power and self-help resonates with the experience of weak states in an unequal international system. On the other hand, realism's **Eurocentrism** — its erasure of colonial history, racial hierarchy, and the structural inequalities of the world economy — makes it inadequate for understanding the African condition.

The critique of Eurocentrism. African and post-colonial scholars argue that realism was **forged in the context of European great-power politics** and reflects European experiences (the Peloponnesian War, the Thirty Years' War, the Napoleonic Wars). It treats these experiences as universal, while erasing the **colonial violence** that shaped the international system. Siba Grovogui's work shows that the sovereignty and anarchy that realism describes were **never extended to Africans** in the same way — African polities were treated as quasi-sovereign or non-sovereign, and their subjugation was justified by racial hierarchy.

The critique of the state-as-unitary-actor assumption. Realism assumes that the state is a **unitary rational actor** whose primary goal is survival. But many African states are **hybrid orders** — the formal state coexists with traditional authorities, religious networks, militias, and informal economies. The "state" is not a unified actor; it is a contested terrain. Realism's black-boxing of the state renders these dynamics invisible.

The critique of the security dilemma. Realism's security dilemma assumes that states are **defensive but uncertain**. But in many African conflicts, the primary threat is **not** an external state but **internal** — insurgent groups, state predation, ethnic violence. The security dilemma is a poor model for these conflicts because the relevant actors are not states, and the relevant threats are not external.

The African alternative. African scholars have developed alternative frameworks — **hybrid security governance**, **sovereignty as responsibility**, **relational ontology** — that better capture African dynamics. These frameworks do not reject realism entirely; they **provincialize** it, treating it as one framework among others, useful for some purposes but inadequate for others.

What the African perspective contributes: It shows that realism's **ontology** — the assumption that states are the primary actors, that anarchy is the fundamental condition, that security is the primary goal — is **not universal**. It reflects a particular historical experience. It also shows that realism can be **mobilized for conservative purposes** — by treating the existing distribution of power as natural and inevitable.

What it occludes: It can underplay the ways in which **African states themselves** engage in realist behavior — balancing, alliance formation, power maximization. It can risk **romanticizing** African alternatives and treating them as uniformly more peaceful or more just.

2.6.2 The Chinese perspective **Core commitments.** Chinese IR scholarship has a **complex** relationship with realism. On one hand, many Chinese scholars engage with realism as a **scientific** theory of international politics, and they use realist concepts (balance of power, security dilemma, hegemony) to analyze China's

rise. On the other hand, the **Chinese School** — particularly the work of Yan Xuetong and Qin Yaqing — offers a **distinctive** engagement with realism that modifies its core assumptions.

Yan Xuetong's "moral realism." Yan Xuetong, one of China's most influential IR scholars, has developed a theory of **moral realism** that combines realist assumptions about power with a **Confucian** emphasis on **morality and leadership**. In *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (2011), Yan argues that the rise and fall of states is determined not only by material power but by **political leadership** — the quality of the ruler and the legitimacy of the regime. This is a distinctively Chinese contribution: it takes realism's emphasis on power seriously, but it adds a normative dimension that Western realism typically lacks.

The critique of Western realism. Chinese scholars often critique Western realism for being **too materialist** — too focused on military and economic power, too little on **legitimacy, morality, and relationality**. They argue that China's rise is not just a matter of accumulating material power; it is a matter of **winning hearts and minds** through the appeal of its model of development and its relational approach to international politics.

The political project. The Chinese engagement with realism is part of a broader project of **epistemic sovereignty** — the claim that China should not be confined to Western theoretical frameworks. It also serves a **policy** purpose: it provides a theoretical justification for China's approach to international politics, which emphasizes **non-interference, sovereignty, and relationality**.

What the Chinese perspective contributes: It provides a **non-Western** engagement with realism that modifies its core assumptions. It shows that realism is not a single tradition but a **contested** one, and that different traditions can draw different conclusions from realist premises.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **coercive** dimension of China's rise — the ways in which China uses economic and military power to pressure other states. It can also **essentialize** "Chinese thought" as a unified tradition.

2.6.3 The Russian perspective **Core commitments.** Russian IR scholarship and official discourse engage with realism in a **distinctive** way — one that combines **geopolitical determinism** with a **civilizational** narrative. This engagement is often called **"civilizational realism."**

Civilizational realism. Russian scholars and officials argue that international politics is a **competition between civilizations** — each with its own values, interests, and spheres of influence. Russia is a distinct civilization with a historical mission, and its foreign policy is driven by the need to defend its civilization against Western encroachment. This is a variant of realism that adds a **civilizational** dimension: power is not just material; it is **cultural and civilizational**.

The critique of Western realism. Russian scholars often critique Western realism for being **hypocritical** — for claiming to be universal while actually serving Western interests. They argue that Western realism is a **particular** theory masquerading as a **universal** one.

The political project. The Russian engagement with realism is closely linked to the Russian state's project of **ideological sovereignty**. It provides a theoretical justification for Russia's foreign policy — the claim that Russia is defending its civilization against Western aggression.

What the Russian perspective contributes: It shows that realism can be **mobilized for illiberal purposes** — the rejection of universal norms can become a rejection of universal human rights. It also highlights the **geopolitics of knowledge** — the question of what counts as legitimate knowledge is bound up with the

question of who has the power to define it.

What it occludes: It can **naturalize aggression** — the claim that Russia is defending its civilization can be used to justify the invasion of Ukraine. It can also **essentialize** "Russian civilization" as a monolith, erasing internal diversity and dissent.

2.6.4 The Western perspective **Core commitments.** The Western tradition is the **home** of realism. It is where the canonical texts were written, where the major debates occurred, and where realism remains a dominant framework for both scholarship and policy. But Western realism is also **internally contested** — between classical, structural, offensive, defensive, and neoclassical variants, and between realism and its critics (liberalism, constructivism, critical theory, post-colonialism).

The reflexivity of Western realism. A distinctive feature of Western realism is its **self-critique**. Realists like Morgenthau and Carr were critical of the **utopianism** of their predecessors; contemporary realists like Mearsheimer are critical of the **liberal hegemony** of the post-Cold War era. This reflexivity is a strength — it allows realism to adapt to new circumstances — but it can also be a weakness — it can make realism seem like a moving target.

The policy influence. Western realism has had **enormous** policy influence. The Cold War containment strategy was informed by realist thinking; the post-9/11 debates about the limits of American power were shaped by realist critiques; the current debate about the rise of China is framed by realist concepts (power transition, security dilemma, balancing).

What it contributes: It provides the **most developed** toolkit for analyzing great-power politics. It also provides a **self-critique** — the recognition that realism is not the only framework, and that its assumptions can be challenged.

What it occludes: It can be **parochial** — treating Western experiences as universal. It can be **complicit** in the power structures it describes — realism's emphasis on power can be used to justify the existing distribution of power, not to question it.

2.6.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN is **not** a realist actor. Its founding document — the Charter — is an attempt to **transcend** realism, to create a system of **collective security** in which aggression is prohibited and the use of force is regulated by law. But the UN operates **in** a realist world — the P5 have veto power, and the organization is constrained by the interests of the great powers.

The tension. The UN's **normative** project is anti-realist; its **operational** reality is realist. This tension is visible in every Security Council debate: the P5 invoke the Charter's principles while pursuing their national interests; the Secretary-General calls for collective action while acknowledging the limits imposed by the veto.

What it contributes: It provides a **normative benchmark** — the standards against which state behavior is judged. It also provides a **site of contestation** — the arena in which realist and anti-realist claims are debated.

What it occludes: It can **depoliticize** — framing issues as legal-technical problems obscures the power dynamics that shape what is possible. It can also **legitimize** — the UN's authority can be used to justify actions that serve the interests of the great powers.

2.6.6 The comparison matrix

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Engagement with realism	Critical; provincializes realism	Reconstructs realism (moral realism); emphasizes legitimacy	Civilizational realism; geopolitical determinism	Home of realism; internally contested	Anti-realist normative project; realist operational reality
Core critique	Eurocentrism; erasure of colonial hierarchy	Too materialist; ignores legitimacy and relationality	Hypocrisy; Western realism serves Western interests	Parochialism; complicity with power	None (not a scholarly tradition); tension between norms and power
What it contributes	Hybrid orders; sovereignty as responsibility	Non-Western engagement; moral realism	Illiberal mobilization of realism	Most developed toolkit; self-critique	Normative benchmark; site of contestation
What it occludes	African agency; African realism	Coercive dimension of China's rise	Neighbors' sovereignty; internal diversity	Universality claims; complicity	Power dynamics; depoliticization

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2.7 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was the largest conventional war in Europe since 1945. Western analysts were surprised — many had predicted that Russia would not invade, or that if it did, it would quickly win. Why did Russia invade, and why did the war unfold the way it did?

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why did Russia launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and why did the invasion fail to achieve its initial objectives?*

Level of analysis: The invasion is best explained by the **interaction** of systemic, state, and individual levels, with the transnational level providing the ideological context.

Systemic level: The structure of the post-Cold War system — unipolarity, NATO enlargement, and the security dilemma — created the conditions for the invasion. Russia perceived NATO's expansion into Ukraine as an existential threat, and it interpreted Ukraine's drift toward the West as a loss of its sphere of influence.

State level: Russia's authoritarian regime, its reliance on nationalist ideology, and its military doctrine shaped the decision to invade. The Russian state had invested in a **revanchist** narrative — the "Russian world," the protection of compatriots, the "denazification" of Ukraine — that provided the ideological justification for aggression.

Individual level: Putin's personal historical obsessions — his belief that Ukraine is an artificial state, his

fear of democratic contagion, his sense of humiliation at the hands of the West — shaped the decision. But individual-level explanations are insufficient: they cannot explain why the invasion happened **in 2022** rather than earlier or later.

Transnational level: The global competition between democratic and authoritarian models of order provided the ideological context. Russia presented itself as the leader of a **multipolar** order against Western hegemony.

Applying the realist variants:

- **Classical realism:** Russia, like any great power, seeks to dominate its neighborhood. The invasion is a manifestation of the *animus dominandi* — the drive for power. *Prediction:* Russia would seek to expand regardless of NATO. *Evaluation:* This is too general; it cannot explain why the invasion happened in 2022 rather than 2014, or why Russia did not invade the Baltic states (NATO members).
- **Defensive realism (Waltz):** Russia would balance against NATO, but over-expansion is self-defeating. *Prediction:* Russia would build up its military and form alliances, but would not necessarily invade. *Evaluation:* The invasion suggests that defensive realism underestimated Russia's willingness to take risks. But it also correctly predicted that the invasion would be costly — which it has been.
- **Offensive realism (Mearsheimer):** Russia seeks regional hegemony in its near abroad, because survival requires it. Ukraine is the most likely flashpoint. *Prediction:* Russia would invade Ukraine. *Evaluation:* Mearsheimer's prediction was correct — but his explanation is contested. He argues that the West, particularly NATO enlargement, is primarily responsible for the invasion. Critics argue that this underplays Russian agency and the role of Putin's ideology.
- **Neoclassical realism:** Systemic pressures (NATO enlargement) are filtered through domestic politics (Russian authoritarianism, Putin's ideology, the military's influence). *Prediction:* The invasion is the product of both systemic incentives and domestic politics. *Evaluation:* This is the most complete explanation, but it is also the least parsimonious.
- **Security dilemma (Jervis):** NATO enlargement, even if defensively motivated, appeared offensive to Russia, triggering a spiral. *Prediction:* The invasion is a product of the security dilemma — neither side wanted war, but each side's actions appeared threatening to the other. *Evaluation:* This explains the escalation, but it can underplay Russian agency and the genuine revisionist intentions of the Russian state.

Perspective reconstruction:

- **African perspective:** The invasion is read through the lens of **sovereignty and non-interference**. African states have consistently defended the principle that borders should not be changed by force — a principle that is central to the AU Constitutive Act. The African reaction to the invasion was **divided**: some states condemned Russia, but many abstained from UN resolutions, citing the **selectivity** of Western condemnations (e.g., the lack of condemnation of the Iraq war or the Libya intervention). The African perspective emphasizes the **double standards** of the international community.
- **Chinese perspective:** The invasion is read through the lens of **NATO expansion and Western hegemony**. China has refrained from condemning Russia and has called for a **political settlement** that respects the **legitimate security concerns** of all parties. The Chinese perspective emphasizes the **role of the West** in creating the conditions for the conflict.
- **Russian perspective:** The invasion is read through the lens of **civilizational defense**. Russia is defending its civilization against Western encroachment; Ukraine is part of the Russian world; NATO

enlargement is an existential threat. The Russian perspective emphasizes the **historical and cultural** ties between Russia and Ukraine.

- **Western perspective:** The invasion is read through the lens of **imperialism and aggression**. Russia is an authoritarian state that has violated the sovereignty of a peaceful neighbor; the West must support Ukraine and deter further aggression. The Western perspective emphasizes **Russian responsibility** and the **importance of sovereignty**.
- **UN perspective:** The invasion is read through the lens of **Charter violation**. The UN General Assembly condemned the invasion as a violation of Article 2(4); the Security Council was paralyzed by the Russian veto. The UN perspective emphasizes **international law** and the **failure of collective security**.

Adjudication. Which perspective best explains the invasion? The **Western perspective** captures the **proximate cause** — Russian aggression against a sovereign state. The **Russian perspective** captures the **historical and ideological context** — the sense of grievance and the civilizational narrative. The **African perspective** captures the **global reaction** — the division between those who condemned Russia and those who abstained, and the reasons for that division. The **Chinese perspective** captures the **systemic context** — the role of NATO expansion in creating the conditions for the conflict. The **UN perspective** captures the **normative stakes** — the violation of the Charter and the failure of collective security.

A complete explanation combines all five: the systemic conditions (NATO enlargement, security dilemma), the domestic politics (Russian authoritarianism, Putin's ideology), the individual decisions (Putin's decision to invade), the historical context (Russian grievance, Ukrainian sovereignty), and the normative stakes (Charter violation).

2.8 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: In 2011, NATO intervened in Libya under UN Security Council Resolution 1973, authorizing "all necessary measures" to protect civilians. The intervention quickly became a regime-change operation, culminating in the killing of Muammar Gaddafi. In the aftermath, Libya descended into civil war, and the country remains divided. The intervention was criticized by Russia, China, South Africa, and many other states as an abuse of the UN mandate.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely: why did the Libya intervention produce a lasting fracture in the international consensus on humanitarian intervention, even though it was authorized by the Security Council?
2. Apply the realist variants to the case: how would classical, structural, offensive, neoclassical, and security-dilemma realism explain the intervention and its aftermath?
3. Apply the five perspectives: how would African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives interpret the intervention?
4. Write a 300-word adjudication: which realist variant best explains the intervention, and what does it miss?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did the Libya intervention produce a lasting fracture in the international consensus on humanitarian intervention, despite being authorized by the Security Council?

Realist variants: - **Classical realism:** The intervention was driven by the **drive for power** — Western states sought to remove a troublesome leader and expand their influence. *Critique:* This underplays the genuine humanitarian motivations of some actors. - **Structural realism:** The intervention was made possible by the **unipolar** structure of the post-Cold War system — the US and its allies had the power to intervene, and Russia and China lacked the power to stop them. *Critique:* This explains the possibility but not the motivation. - **Offensive realism:** The intervention was an example of **great-power expansion** — Western states sought to extend their sphere of influence. *Critique:* This is too cynical; it ignores the genuine humanitarian concerns that motivated some actors. - **Neoclassical realism:** The intervention was shaped by **domestic politics** — the Obama administration's desire to avoid a Rwanda-style failure, the influence of humanitarian lobbies, and the pressure from European allies. *Critique:* This is the most complete explanation of the **decision** to intervene. - **Security dilemma:** The intervention was an example of **escalation** — the initial mandate to protect civilians was expanded into regime change because the intervening powers could not be certain of Gaddafi's intentions and feared that a limited intervention would fail. *Critique:* This explains the **expansion** of the mission but not the initial decision.

Perspectives: - **African:** The intervention confirmed African suspicions of **Western humanitarianism** — the AU had its own roadmap for Libya, which was bypassed by NATO. The African perspective emphasizes the **selective use** of humanitarian language and the **sidelining** of African institutions. - **Chinese:** The intervention confirmed China's skepticism of **expansive interpretations** of Chapter VII. China had abstained on Resolution 1973, and subsequently cited Libya as a cautionary tale in debates about Syria. - **Russian:** The intervention confirmed Russia's view that **humanitarian language** is a pretext for **regime change**. Russia subsequently vetoed resolutions on Syria. - **Western:** The intervention was a **necessary response** to an imminent massacre, though the mandate was stretched. The Western perspective emphasizes the **responsibility to protect** and the difficulty of limiting intervention once authorized. - **UN:** The intervention exposed the gap between **authorization** and **implementation** — the UN could authorize force but could not control it. The UN perspective emphasizes the need for **political solutions** and **accountability**.

Adjudication: **Neoclassical realism** best explains the **decision** to intervene — the interaction of systemic opportunity (unipolarity), domestic politics (humanitarian lobbies, the Rwanda shadow), and individual decisions (Obama's reluctant decision to intervene). **The security dilemma** best explains the **expansion** of the mission — the inability to limit intervention once it began. The **five perspectives** explain the **aftermath** — the lasting fracture in the international consensus on humanitarian intervention. A complete explanation combines all of these: the intervention was a product of systemic opportunity, domestic politics, and individual decisions; its expansion was a product of the security dilemma; and its aftermath was shaped by the competing perspectives that it revealed.

2.9 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The emergence of the BRICS+ as a challenge to Western hegemony, and the debate over whether it represents a genuine **balancing coalition** or a **bandwagoning** phenomenon.

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** What realist mechanism explains the formation of the BRICS+? Is it balancing (against the US), bandwagoning (with China), or something else?
2. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives explain the BRICS+? (One paragraph or table entry each.)
3. **Realist variant:** Which realist variant best explains the BRICS+? (Classical, structural, offensive, neoclassical, or security dilemma?)
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show that the BRICS+ is **not** a balancing coalition? What would show it **is**?

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish **balancing** from **bandwagoning**? Does it specify the **level of analysis**? Does it identify the **evidence** that would change your judgment?

2.10 HINGE QUESTION

A state responds to a rival's military buildup by increasing its own military spending, even though it has no aggressive intentions toward the rival. The rival interprets this as a sign of hostility and increases its own spending further. This is an example of:

- A) The deterrence model
- B) The spiral model
- C) The bandwagoning model
- D) The hegemonic stability model

Answer: B. This is the **spiral model** — the security dilemma in action. State A's defensive measures appear offensive to State B, triggering a spiral of escalation even though neither state wants conflict.

If you answered A: The deterrence model assumes the rival is aggressive and must be deterred with superior power. In this scenario, neither state is aggressive — the spiral is produced by uncertainty and the security dilemma. **If you answered C:** Bandwagoning is joining the stronger side, not responding to a buildup with one's own buildup. **If you answered D:** Hegemonic stability theory concerns the provision of global public goods by a hegemon, not the dynamics of arms races.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground realism's claims in empirical data.

Task: Using the summary data below (simplified from SIPRI military expenditure data), analyze the relationship between military spending and the distribution of power.

Table 1: Military expenditure, 2023 (billions USD, constant 2022 prices)

Country	Military expenditure	Share of global total	GDP share
United States	916	37%	3.5%
China	296	12%	1.7%

Country	Military expenditure	Share of global total	GDP share
Russia	109	4.5%	5.9%
India	83	3.4%	2.4%
Saudi Arabia	76	3.1%	7.1%
United Kingdom	75	3.1%	2.3%
Germany	67	2.7%	1.5%
France	61	2.5%	1.9%
Japan	50	2.0%	1.0%
South Korea	48	1.9%	2.8%

Analysis questions:

1. **Distribution of power:** What does this data tell you about the distribution of military power in the international system? Is it unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar?
2. **Balancing:** Are there signs of balancing against the US or China? Which states are increasing their spending the most?
3. **Realist predictions:** Does this data support offensive realism (states maximize power), defensive realism (states balance), or neoclassical realism (domestic politics shape spending)?
4. **Limitation:** What does military spending data **not** tell you about power? (Hint: spending does not equal capability; alliances matter; geography matters; nuclear weapons change the calculus.)
5. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret this data? (African: the militarization of the international system; Chinese: the US is over-spending and over-extending; Russian: the West is threatening Russia; Western: the US must maintain its edge; UN: the opportunity cost of military spending.)

Rule: Complete the data lab before the independent memo.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The realist family. Draw five boxes — Classical, Structural (Defensive), Offensive, Neoclassical, Security Dilemma. For each, write: the key figure, the locus of cause, the core mechanism, and the prediction.

Visual 2: The security dilemma. Draw two states (A and B). Draw arrows: A's defensive buildup → B's perception of threat → B's buildup → A's perception of threat → escalation. Label the spiral. Draw a second set of arrows for reassurance: A's signal of benign intentions → B's reduced threat perception → de-escalation.

Visual 3: The five perspectives on realism. Draw a five-column table (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) with rows: "Engagement with realism," "Core critique," "What it contributes," "What it occludes."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
What are the five variants of realism?	Classical (human nature); structural/defensive (anarchy + balancing); offensive (anarchy + power maximization); neoclassical (system + domestic); security dilemma (anarchy + uncertainty)
What is the core mechanism of classical realism?	*Animus dominandi* — the human drive for power
What is Waltz's structural realism?	Anarchy → self-help → balancing; polarity determines outcomes
What is Mearsheimer's offensive realism?	Anarchy + uncertainty → states maximize power → regional hegemony
What is neoclassical realism?	Systemic pressures filtered through domestic intervening variables
What is the security dilemma?	Defensive measures appear offensive → spiral of escalation
How do the five perspectives engage realism?	African: critique Eurocentrism; Chinese: moral realism; Russian: civilizational realism; Western: home of realism; UN: anti-realist normative project
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.6; Thucydides (Melian Dialogue); Morgenthau (1948); Waltz (1979); Mearsheimer (2001); Jervis (1978); Rose (1998); Yan Xuetong (2011)
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the difference between classical, structural, and offensive realism to a smart non-specialist in 150–200 words, without using jargon. If you must use "anarchy" or "security dilemma," define them in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for the security dilemma. Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "The security dilemma is like two neighbors who each buy a guard dog for protection — but each dog makes the other neighbor feel threatened, so they buy bigger dogs, and soon they are in an arms race." Where it breaks down: states can communicate and reassure each other in ways that neighbors with dogs cannot always do.)

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What distinguishes offensive from defensive realism?
Mechanism	How does the security dilemma produce conflict without aggressive intentions?
Application	A state builds up its military to defend against a perceived threat. The rival interprets this as aggression and builds up its own military. Which model does this illustrate?
Comparison	How do classical and structural realism differ in their locus of cause?
Source	What are Morgenthau's six principles of political realism?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to Mearsheimer's claim that great-power war is likely?
Reconstruction	How would an African scholar critique realism's state-as-unitary-actor assumption?
Occlusion	What does offensive realism fail to see about cooperation?
Adjudication	Which realist variant best explains the Ukraine war, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the five variants of realism on a diagram.

Tag each card: `L5`, `realism`, `theory`, `perspective`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Reconstruct the five variants of realism	
Apply each variant to a case	
Evaluate the realist claim that anarchy produces competition	
Reconstruct the five perspectives on realism	
Critique realism's silences	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between anarchy and state behavior?
2. Which realist variant was easiest to apply? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default analytical style?
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 6?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L5			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 1)

Add this row to your Module 1 cheatsheet:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Anarchy; self-help; relative gains; security dilemma; spiral model; deterrence model; balance of power; bandwagoning; polarity; offensive/defensive/neoclassical realism; moral realism; civilizational realism
Key mechanisms	Human nature → power drive → conflict (classical); anarchy → self-help → balancing (structural); anarchy + uncertainty → power maximization (offensive); systemic pressures → domestic filters → foreign policy (neoclassical); defensive measures → perceived threat → spiral (security dilemma)
Theories and authors	Thucydides; Machiavelli; Hobbes; Morgenthau; Carr; Waltz; Mearsheimer; Jervis; Herz; Rose; Yan Xuetong
Cases and evidence	Peloponnesian War; Cold War; Ukraine 2022; Libya 2011; BRICS+; SIPRI data
Debates	Is anarchy the fundamental condition? Do states seek security or power? Is the security dilemma objective or constructed?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that anarchy does not produce competition?
Cross-links	L6 (liberalism — realism's foil); L7 (constructivism — social construction of anarchy); L12 (Cold War); L21 (nuclear deterrence); L35 (post-Soviet ontology); L47 (US–China rivalry)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1–L5 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L5 with L6–L8 (theory) and L12 (Cold War)
R5	End of Module 1	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Five key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (Ukraine 2022) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (Libya 2011) attempted and compared
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
- ☐ Cheatsheet entry added
- ☐ R2 review scheduled

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **On classical realism:** Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (esp. the Melian Dialogue); Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*; Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ch. 13; Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations* (1948), ch. 1–2; E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939).
- **On structural realism:** Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (1979), ch. 1–6; Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (1976), ch. 3.

- **On offensive realism:** John Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001), ch. 2–3.
- **On neoclassical realism:** Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," *World Politics* 51:1 (1998); Randall Schweller, *Deadly Imbalances* (1998); Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power* (1998).
- **On the security dilemma:** John Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 2:2 (1950); Robert Jervis, "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30:2 (1978).
- **On African critiques:** Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996); Kwaku Danso and Kwesi Aning, "African Experiences and Alternativity in International Relations Theory" (2019).
- **On Chinese realism:** Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (2011); Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (2018).
- **On Russian realism:** Lauri Mälksoo, *Russian Approaches to International Law* (2015); Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin* (2012).

End of Lesson 5. Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 6 (Liberalism and Institutionalism).

7. Liberalism and Institutionalism: Cooperation, Interdependence, and the Limits of Rules

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LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L6 — Liberalism and Institutionalism
Module	Module 1: Epistemological and Ontological Foundations
Prerequisites	L1 (puzzles, levels, power, perspectives); L2 (Charter system, AU Act, Pact for the Future); L3 (causal inference, selection bias); L4 (positivism/post-positivism); L5 (realism — the theory institutionalism answers)
Interleaved links	Forward to L12 (Cold War institutions), L15–19 (IPE), L18 (weaponized interdependence — the dark side of interdependence), L21 (JCPOA, NPT), L28 (AU/APSA), L49 (BRICS+, institutional revisionism), L56 (scientific statecraft)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.

Field	Entry
Content channels	Canon (paraphrased and quoted); primary documents (UN Charter Ch. VII/VIII, WTO Dispute Settlement Understanding, AU Act, AfCFTA Agreement, Pact for the Future — all analyzed here); data lab (WTO disputes and African trade shares); five perspectives
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (adjudicate between institutionalist claims and their realist/critical critics)
Estimated study time	7–9 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Everything you need is in this document. Where I reference Keohane, Keohane and Nye, Axelrod, Jervis, Grieco, Mearsheimer, Ikenberry, Doyle, Moravcsik, Fearon, or the Chinese/African/Russian/UN positions, I summarize the argument sufficiently to use it. "Further Reading" is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Lesson 5 gave you realism: the claim that anarchy produces self-help, that states seek power and security, and that cooperation is fragile because states fear relative losses. This lesson gives you the **most important challenge** to that claim — and the theory that made the study of international institutions a science.

Liberalism and institutionalism begin from a different observation: the international system is not a war of all against all. States trade, form alliances, sign treaties, join organizations, comply with rules that constrain them, and sometimes even surrender sovereignty (the EU). The puzzle is not why states fight — realism explains that easily — but **why they cooperate so much**, and under what conditions cooperation holds.

This lesson gives you:

1. **The liberal tradition** in its four main branches: commercial liberalism (trade promotes peace), republican liberalism (democracies do not fight each other), regulatory liberalism (law and institutions can constrain power), and institutional liberalism (institutions solve cooperation problems).
2. **Neoliberal institutionalism** — the systematic theory of cooperation under anarchy developed by Keohane, Nye, Axelrod, and others — including its core mechanism: institutions reduce uncertainty, lower transaction costs, monitor compliance, and lengthen the "shadow of the future."
3. **The two great debates** that define the field: the **relative gains debate** (Grieco vs. Snidal and Keohane) and the **"false promise" debate** (Mearsheimer vs. institutionalists). These debates determine what institutionalism can and cannot claim.
4. **The institutionalist toolkit for design:** issue density, linkage, regime complexity, delegation, escape clauses, and why states design institutions the way they do.
5. **The five perspectives on institutions** — African (institutions as leverage and contestation), Chinese (alternative institutions and epistemic sovereignty), Russian (the UNSC as the last acceptable institution), Western (the home tradition and its self-critique), and UN (the institutionalist actor par excellence).

By the end, you can take any international institution — the UN, the WTO, the AU, the ICC, the NPT, BRICS — and answer: *What cooperation problem was it designed to solve? What is its causal mechanism? What are its scope conditions? When does it fail? And how do the five perspectives assess it?*

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory)

1. From L5: Name the five variants of realism and state each one's core mechanism in one sentence.
2. From L5: What is the security dilemma, and why does it produce conflict without aggressive intentions?
3. From L2: What did the AU's Article 4(h) change about the inherited sovereignty regime, and why?
4. From L3: What is selection on the dependent variable? Give one example from institutionalist research (hint: studying only institutions that succeeded).

Check against the previous lessons before proceeding.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind:

- If states fear relative gains, how does any cooperation ever occur?
- Do institutions cause peace, or do they merely reflect the interests of powerful states?
- Why do states sometimes comply with rules that hurt them?
- Is the "rules-based international order" the same thing as international law? Is it the same thing as multilateralism?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

Provisional definitions; revise by the end:

Complex interdependence; sensitivity and vulnerability interdependence; regime; neoliberal institutionalism; collective security; democratic peace; commercial peace; absolute vs. relative gains; shadow of the future; prisoner's dilemma; free-riding; transaction costs; issue linkage; regime complexity; delegation; escape clause; credible commitment; institutional design; parallelism; legalization; judicialization.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Distinguish** the four liberal branches (commercial, republican, regulatory, institutional) and identify the mechanism each specifies.
2. **Reconstruct** neoliberal institutionalism's core argument — that institutions matter because they solve specific cooperation problems — and apply it to a case.

3. **Evaluate** the two defining debates: the relative-gains critique (Grieco) and the "false promise" critique (Mearsheimer), and state the evidence that would settle them.
4. **Diagnose institutional failure:** specify the conditions under which institutions do not constrain (hegemonic defection, distributional conflict, enforcement problems, regime complexity).
5. **Reconstruct** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions assess institutions and the "rules-based order," and **adjudicate** among them on a specific institution.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — "Liberalism" is four arguments, not one, and each has its own causal mechanism

The claim: The claim "liberalism predicts peace" hides four distinct theories. Each identifies a different mechanism linking a different liberal feature to a different outcome. Confusing them produces the classic error of the liberal-optimism literature: assuming all good things go together.

Branch	Core claim	Mechanism	Key figures
Commercial liberalism	Trade and economic exchange promote peace	Interdependence raises the opportunity cost of war; trade creates domestic constituencies with an interest in peace	Adam Smith; Montesquieu; Richard Cobden; Norman Angell; modern empirical work on trade and conflict
Republican liberalism	Democracies do not fight each other	Domestic accountability, institutional constraints, and shared norms make democratic publics reluctant to fight other democracies	Immanuel Kant; Michael Doyle; Bruce Russett
Regulatory liberalism	Law and rules can constrain power	International law and institutions create obligations, expectations, and costs for violations	Hugo Grotius; the Charter system; liberal international law
Institutional liberalism	Institutions can solve cooperation problems under anarchy	Institutions reduce uncertainty, monitor compliance, lower transaction costs, and lengthen the shadow of the future	Robert Keohane; Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye; Robert Axelrod; Kenneth Oye

Why the distinction matters. These are not interchangeable claims:

- **Commercial liberalism** can be tested on trade flows and conflict data. It has substantial empirical support — but with major scope conditions (democracies with high trade, symmetric interdependence, no strategic goods; asymmetric interdependence can be *weaponized*, as Lesson 18 will show).

- **Republican liberalism** is one of the strongest empirical regularities in political science: established democracies almost never fight each other. But the explanation is contested — is it democracy, or shared interests, or capitalist development, or the fact that democracies are rich and satisfied?
- **Regulatory liberalism** is a normative-legal claim as much as an empirical one: it asserts that law *can* constrain, but cannot specify when it will.
- **Institutional liberalism** is the most theoretically ambitious: it claims to explain *how* cooperation is possible under anarchy without shared values or a common enemy.

The Kantian foundation. Kant's *Perpetual Peace* (1795) is the canonical statement of the liberal peace program. Kant argued that perpetual peace would be produced by three conditions: **republican constitutions** (because citizens who bear the costs of war will be reluctant to wage it), a **federation of free states** (a pacific union, not a world state), and **universal hospitality** (cosmopolitan right of commerce and movement). Modern liberal IR is largely an extended argument about whether Kant was right and under what conditions.

Scope conditions and critique. Each liberal branch has well-documented limits: - **Commercial:** Asymmetric interdependence creates leverage, not peace (Lesson 18); trade in strategic goods can increase conflict risk; and the empirical relationship between trade and conflict is weaker than liberal optimism suggests. - **Republican:** Democracies fight non-democracies readily; young and transitional democracies are *more* conflict-prone; and the "democratic peace" may be a "capitalist peace" or a "satisfied-powers peace" in disguise. - **Regulatory:** Powerful states violate international law with impunity (Iraq 2003; the US withdrawal from treaties); legal constraints are weakest precisely when they matter most (security). - **Institutional:** As we will see, institutions can be defected from by their most powerful members (Lesson 6.6).

Observable implication. If commercial liberalism is operative, you should see trade flows *reduce* the probability of militarized disputes, controlling for other factors. If republican liberalism is operative, you should see pairs of democracies resolve disputes without escalation. If institutional liberalism is operative, you should see states comply with institutional rules *even when compliance is costly* — which is the hard test.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Neoliberal institutionalism: institutions solve specific cooperation problems, not all of them

The claim: The core institutionalist argument is not that institutions make states nice, or that cooperation is easy. It is that **cooperation under anarchy is difficult for identifiable reasons, and institutions help with some of those reasons but not others**. The precision of this claim is what makes institutionalism a theory.

The starting point: cooperation is not the same as harmony. Keohane's key move in *After Hegemony* (1984) was to distinguish cooperation from harmony. Harmony is a situation in which actors' interests coincide automatically. Cooperation is a situation in which actors' interests **conflict**, but they adjust their behavior to reduce the conflict and capture joint gains. Cooperation requires **policy coordination** — it is *work*. This is why the theory is not naive: it takes conflict of interest as the baseline and asks how states overcome it.

The cooperation problems. Institutionalists identify specific reasons why cooperation fails even when joint gains exist:

1. **The prisoner's dilemma / fear of defection.** Each state prefers mutual cooperation to mutual defection, but each also prefers to defect if the other cooperates. In a one-shot game, defection is the

dominant strategy, so both defect and both lose. *Institutions help by* iterating the game (lengthening the shadow of the future), monitoring compliance, and creating reputational costs for defection — the Axelrod logic of tit-for-tat.

2. **The coordination problem.** Sometimes actors agree on what they want but cannot coordinate on a single equilibrium (e.g., which side of the road to drive on). *Institutions help by* providing focal points, standards, and conventions.
3. **The monitoring/enforcement problem.** States may want to cooperate but cannot verify compliance, or cannot punish defection credibly. *Institutions help by* providing information (verification, reporting), and by linking issues so that defection in one area is punished in another.
4. **The credible-commitment problem.** States may want to make promises they cannot credibly keep (e.g., not to develop nuclear weapons, not to use force). *Institutions help by* creating sunk costs, sovereignty costs, and audience costs that make reneging expensive — the logic of "hand-tying."
5. **Transaction costs.** Negotiating and enforcing agreements is expensive. *Institutions help by* providing standing rules, secretariats, and fora that reduce the cost of future agreements — "issue density" produces economies of scale in cooperation.

Keohane and Nye's complex interdependence. In *Power and Interdependence* (1977), Keohane and Nye argued that the realist picture — states as unitary actors, military force as the dominant instrument, security as the dominant issue — describes only some situations. Under **complex interdependence**, three conditions hold:

1. **Multiple channels** connect societies: not just states, but transnational actors, corporations, and international organizations.
2. **The agenda is not hierarchically ordered:** security is not necessarily the dominant issue; trade, environment, and finance matter in their own right.
3. **Military force is not used** (or is not usable) on many issues within a region or between certain states.

Under complex interdependence, Keohane and Nye distinguish **sensitivity** (how quickly a state is affected by changes elsewhere, and at what cost, within existing rules) from **vulnerability** (the cost of *changing* the rules — the availability of alternatives). This distinction is one of the most useful analytical tools in IPE: it explains why some states are more powerful than their material capabilities suggest. A state that is highly sensitive to an interruption of oil but has alternative suppliers is vulnerable only in the short run; a state with no alternatives is vulnerable in the long run.

The critique of "hegemonic stability." Charles Kindleberger argued that the Great Depression was caused by the absence of a hegemon willing to provide global public goods (a lender of last resort, an open trading system, a stable currency). The **hegemonic stability theory** (HST) that followed claims that international economic order requires a hegemon to provide it — which predicts that order will collapse as US hegemony declines. Keohane's *After Hegemony* is a direct response: **cooperation can persist after hegemony**, because institutions — once created — take on a life of their own, reducing the costs of cooperation and creating constituencies with a stake in their survival. This is the "institutionalist" claim par excellence: institutions are **sticky**, and they can outlast the power distribution that created them.

Scope condition. Institutions matter *most* when: (a) the shadow of the future is long (repeated interaction), (b) the number of actors is moderate, (c) issues are linked, (d) information about compliance is scarce, and (e) the institution has some enforcement or monitoring capacity. Institutions matter *least* when: (a) the issue is existential/security, (b) a powerful state's vital interests are at stake, (c) the institution lacks monitoring,

(d) enforcement is delegated to the same states that defect.

Observable implication. If institutionalism is correct, you should see states **comply with costly rules**, and you should see cooperation **persist after the hegemon declines** (or after the hegemon defects, at least partially).

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The two defining debates: relative gains and the "false promise"

The claim: Institutionalism's plausibility depends on how two critiques are resolved. The **relative-gains critique** (Grieco) asks whether states care about *who gains more*, not just whether they gain. The **"false promise" critique** (Mearsheimer) asks whether institutions have any independent causal effect at all, or whether they are merely epiphenomenal reflections of power.

2.4.1 The relative-gains debate (Grieco vs. Snidal/Keohane) **Grieco's position.** Joseph Grieco (1988, 1990), drawing on realist premises, argued that states in an anarchic system are **positional**: they care not only about absolute gains but about *relative* gains, because relative gains translate into relative power, and relative power determines survival. A state that gains $10 while a rival gains $20 may refuse the deal even though it is better off in absolute terms. Grieco argued that Keohane's institutionalism understated this problem, and that the empirical evidence from US–Soviet trade negotiations in the 1970s showed states refusing mutual-gain deals for relative-gains reasons.

The institutionalist response. Duncan Snidal and others responded that relative-gains concerns are real but **not universal**: they are strongest (a) when the issue is security, (b) when the number of actors is small, (c) when gains are easily converted into military capability, and (d) when the other state is a rival. In economic and environmental issues, with many actors and low conversion to military capability, absolute-gains logic dominates. Keohane's response was to **incorporate** the relative-gains critique rather than deny it: institutionalism's scope conditions are precisely the issues where relative-gains concerns are weak.

The lesson. This is a model of how theory develops: a critique is absorbed, and the theory becomes more precise. The relative-gains debate is now settled in the following sense: relative-gains concerns are a **scope condition** for institutionalism, not a refutation.

2.4.2 The "false promise" critique (Mearsheimer) **Mearsheimer's position.** In "The False Promise of International Institutions" (1994/95), Mearsheimer attacked three institutionalist claims: that institutions cause peace, that they are a substitute for the balance of power, and that they can transform state interests. He argued:

1. Institutions are **epiphenomenal**: they reflect the underlying distribution of power. They do not cause peace; the balance of power causes peace, and institutions are merely its expression.
2. The empirical record does not support institutionalist claims: NATO did not cause the end of the Cold War; the Concert of Europe was a balance-of-power arrangement, not an institutional achievement; the League of Nations failed.
3. The only institution that genuinely matters — NATO — is a **realist** institution: an alliance, not a collective-security organization.

The institutionalist response. Keohane and others responded that Mearsheimer's critique was **too strong**

and ignored a substantial body of evidence: institutions can affect states' **information environment** (verification), their **reputations** (costs of defection), their **interests** (through learning and socialization in some cases), and their **expectations** (focal points). The empirical claim is not that institutions *always* cause peace, but that they have a **conditional causal effect** that is measurable.

The unresolved question. The "false promise" debate is not fully settled. The strongest evidence for institutionalism is in **economic, environmental, and technical cooperation**, where institutions demonstrably change behavior (trade disputes are litigated rather than fought; environmental treaties change reporting and sometimes emissions; aviation and maritime safety regimes are highly effective). The weakest evidence is in **security**, where Mearsheimer's critique bites hardest. The most defensible position is that institutions have **real but conditional causal effects**, and that the scope conditions are the key research question.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Institutional failure is a theory of design, not an anomaly

The claim: Institutions fail for identifiable reasons, and those reasons are part of institutionalism's explanatory power, not a refutation of it. A theory that only explains success is a bad theory. Institutionalism must explain *when and why* institutions do not constrain.

The failure modes:

1. **Hegemonic defection.** The most powerful member withdraws support because the institution no longer serves its interests. *Example:* the US blocking appointments to the WTO Appellate Body from 2017, paralysing the system it built. *Mechanism:* institutions are sticky, but they are not immune to the defection of their most powerful members; a hegemon that perceives the institution as a constraint rather than an instrument will defect.
2. **Distributional conflict.** Institutions are not neutral; they distribute gains. When the distribution is contested, cooperation can collapse even when aggregate gains are positive. *Example:* disputes over special and differential treatment in the WTO; disputes over the IMF's voting quotas.
3. **Enforcement failure.** Institutions can monitor but often cannot enforce. The Security Council can authorize force but the veto can block it; the ICC can issue warrants but cannot arrest. *Mechanism:* delegation without enforcement is weak; enforcement requires the cooperation of the powerful.
4. **Regime complexity and forum shopping.** When multiple institutions overlap, states can shift issues to the forum most favourable to them. *Example:* the proliferation of trade and investment fora; the competition between the ICC and regional courts; the "spaghetti bowl" of trade agreements. *Mechanism:* complexity creates opportunities for strategic behavior, and it dilutes the constraining effect of any single institution.
5. **Design flaws.** Institutions with escape clauses, unanimity requirements, or weak monitoring are less constraining. *Example:* the UNFCCC's consensus decision-making; the WTO's consensus rule, which allows a single member to block reform.
6. **Preference change and interest divergence.** Institutions are designed for the preferences of their founders. When preferences change, institutions can become misfits. *Example:* the IMF's governance reflects 1944 power, not 2025 power.
7. **Legitimacy deficits.** Institutions that are seen as illegitimate — because their decision-making is unrepresentative, or because their norms are contested — are less effective. *Example:* the ICC's contested legitimacy in Africa (see the problem pair).

The rational-design literature. Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal's "rational design" framework (2001) argues that institutional features — membership, scope, centralization, control, flexibility — are **deliberate responses** to cooperation problems. Institutions are not random; they are designed to solve specific problems, and their design can be predicted from the characteristics of the problem. This literature is the best answer to Mearsheimer: it shows that institutions are not epiphenomenal, because their *design* varies in ways that track the underlying cooperation problem.

Observable implication. If institutional failure is a design theory, then you should be able to predict failure from design features: institutions with weak monitoring, consensus rules, and unrepresentative governance should fail more often, all else equal.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The five perspectives assess institutions differently, and those assessments are political

The claim: The "rules-based international order" is not a neutral description. It is a **contested political project**, and the five perspectives assess it differently. The African perspective is primary not because it is more correct but because the course's empirical center of gravity is Africa, and because African states have been both the objects and the agents of institutional contestation.

2.6.1 The African perspective (primary) **Core commitments.** African states are not passive recipients of the liberal institutional order. They are **architects, users, and critics** of institutions. Three commitments define the African engagement:

1. **Institutions as leverage.** African states use institutions — the AU, ECOWAS, the UN, the ICC, the AfCFTA — to amplify their bargaining power, to pool sovereignty for collective purposes, and to convert external competition into concessions. The **AfCFTA** (Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area, entered into force 2019) is the most ambitious example: a project of **economic sovereignty** designed to move Africa from the periphery of global value chains to a position of greater bargaining leverage.
2. **Institutions as sites of contestation.** African states have consistently contested the **design** and **legitimacy** of global institutions. The **Ezulwini Consensus** (2005) is the AU's common position on UN Security Council reform, demanding at least two permanent seats with veto power for Africa and five non-permanent seats — a direct challenge to the 1945 distribution of power embedded in the Council. African states have also contested the ICC (see the problem pair), the IMF's governance, and the conditionality attached to lending.
3. **Sovereignty as the foundation.** African institutionalism begins from sovereignty, not from a post-sovereign liberal order. The AU's Article 4(g) enshrines non-interference; Article 4(h) creates a *collective* exception. African states are skeptical of institutions that claim authority over their domestic affairs without their consent — which is why they have been wary of R2P, of the ICC, and of liberal interventionism.

The TWAIL critique. Third World Approaches to International Law argue that international institutions were **constituted through colonialism** and continue to reproduce hierarchy. The IMF's conditionality, the WTO's intellectual-property regime, and the Security Council's composition are not neutral arrangements; they embed the interests of the powerful. The African critique is not a rejection of institutions *per se* —

African states have built some of the most innovative institutions in the world (the AU's peace and security architecture, the AfCFTA, the African Development Bank) — it is a rejection of **hierarchical** institutions that claim universal authority while excluding the majority world.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that institutional **design** and **legitimacy** matter as much as institutional **effectiveness**. An institution that is effective but illegitimate will not be obeyed. It also shows that African states are **agents**, not just objects, of institutional politics.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **effectiveness** of some global institutions for African states (e.g., the WHO, the WTO's dispute settlement for weaker members, the UN's peacekeeping). It can also risk treating "African position" as monolithic, when African states disagree profoundly (e.g., on the ICC, on UNSC reform, on intervention).

2.6.2 The Chinese perspective **Core commitments.** China's engagement with institutions is **instrumental and revisionist** — but in a specific sense. China does not seek to destroy the post-1945 institutional order; it seeks to **reform it** and to **build parallel institutions** that reflect its interests and its vision of order.

1. **The UN as the core.** China consistently emphasizes the UN-centered international system and the Charter as its foundation. It opposes "hegemonism," "unilateralism," and the "rules-based order" framing that it sees as a Western attempt to replace the Charter with ad hoc rules. It supports a multipolar order in which the UNSC remains the central authority for peace and security.
2. **Alternative and complementary institutions.** China has built and supported institutions that operate outside Western-dominated frameworks: the **Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB,** 2016), the **New Development Bank** (with BRICS), the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**, the **Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC,** 2000), and the **Belt and Road Initiative** (2013). These are not simply alternatives; they are **complementary** institutions that give China agenda-setting power and provide developing states with options.
3. **Relational institutionalism.** Chinese scholars (Qin Yaqing) argue that institutions should be understood relationally — as processes of relationship-building, not just as rule-sets. This leads to a preference for **flexible, consensus-based, non-legalized** forms of cooperation (the "Beijing Consensus" style) over highly legalized Western institutions.

The political project. China's institutional strategy is part of its broader project of **epistemic and institutional sovereignty**: the claim that the international order should not be defined by a single civilization's rules, and that developing states should have alternatives to Western-dominated institutions.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that institutionalism is not a Western monopoly, and that the **design** of institutions reflects the **interests and ontologies** of their architects. It also shows that institutional competition — not just institutional cooperation — is a feature of the contemporary order.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **coercive** dimension of China's institutional leadership — the ways in which debt, dependency, and conditionality operate in Chinese-led institutions. It can also underplay the genuine commitment of many Chinese officials and scholars to multilateralism.

2.6.3 The Russian perspective **Core commitments.** Russia's engagement with institutions is defined by the **defence of the UNSC** and the **rejection of the liberal institutional order**. Russia does not reject institutions wholesale; it rejects the *liberal* institutional order, and it defends the *great-power* institutional order.

1. **The UNSC as the last acceptable institution.** Russia treats the Security Council as the core of the international order, precisely because the veto protects Russian interests. It opposes reform of the Council (especially the abolition of the veto), and it uses the Council as a platform to contest Western narratives. The Russian Foreign Ministry's framing emphasizes the UN Charter as the basis of international order, and multipolarity as the reality the West refuses to accept.
2. **Rejection of liberal institutionalism.** Russia rejects R2P, humanitarian intervention, and the liberal claim that institutions can transcend sovereignty. It sees these as instruments of Western hegemony. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine was justified in part by the claim that Western institutions (NATO, the EU) had encroached on Russia's sphere of influence.
3. **Alternative institutions.** Russia has promoted the **Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)**, the **SCO**, and **BRICS+** as alternatives to Western-dominated institutions. These are not simply economic arrangements; they are projects of **institutional counter-hegemony**.

The political project. Russia's institutional strategy is to **defend the veto** (the last great-power prerogative in the institutional order) and to **build alternatives** that reduce Western institutional dominance.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that institutionalism's **distributional** dimension is central — institutions are not neutral, and powerful states will defend the institutions that protect their power. It also shows that institutional **design** (the veto) is itself a political achievement that some states will defend at all costs.

What it occludes: It can naturalize obstruction — the veto can be used to block collective action on genocide or aggression, as in Syria and Ukraine. It can also underplay the genuine dissatisfaction of many states with the liberal order, which Russia exploits without necessarily representing.

2.6.4 The Western perspective Core commitments. The Western tradition is the **home** of institutionalism, and it remains the most important source of institutional theory and practice. But it is also internally contested — between **liberal internationalists**, who believe institutions can progressively solve global problems, and **realist critics**, who believe institutions are epiphenomenal.

1. **Liberal internationalism.** The dominant Western position holds that institutions — the UN, the WTO, the IMF, NATO, the EU — are the foundation of international order. Ikenberry's *After Victory* (2001) is the canonical statement: the US after 1945 built an institutional order that was **strategically restrained** (binding itself) and **institutionally embedded** (giving other states a stake), which made it acceptable to others and durable over time. This is a theory of **institutional statecraft**: the hegemon builds institutions to make its power legitimate and durable.
2. **Institutional design and legalization.** Western scholarship has developed the most sophisticated toolkit for understanding institutional design: Abbott and Snidal on **legalization** (obligation, precision, delegation); Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal on **rational design**; Alter on **judicialization** and the politics of international courts. This literature is the best answer to Mearsheimer: it shows that institutions vary in their design in ways that track the underlying cooperation problem.
3. **Self-critique.** Western institutionalism has its own internal critics: realists (Mearsheimer), critical theorists (Cox), post-colonial scholars (Grovogui), and feminists (Enloe), who argue that the liberal institutional order is hierarchical, exclusionary, and complicit in reproducing global inequality.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **most developed** theory of institutions and the **most systematic** toolkit for analyzing institutional design. It also provides the **self-critique** that makes the tradition

dynamic.

What it occludes: It can be **parochial** — treating Western institutions as universal models. It can be **complacent** — assuming that institutions will hold even when the hegemon defects (the WTO Appellate Body, the Paris Agreement, the JCPOA). And it can be **complicit** — the "rules-based order" can be a vehicle for Western power, as its critics argue.

2.6.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN is the **institutionalist actor par excellence**. Its founding document — the Charter — is a constitution for a society of states; its institutions — the General Assembly, the Security Council, the ICJ, the specialized agencies — are the core of the multilateral system; its normative discourse is the most explicit statement of institutionalist principles in world politics.

1. **The Charter as the institutional foundation.** The UN frames itself as the guardian of the Charter — the rules on sovereignty, non-interference, the prohibition on force, and collective security. Its authority rests on the claim that these rules are **universal** and **binding**, not merely the preferences of the powerful.
2. **Multilateralism as method.** The UN's normative voice insists that global problems — climate, pandemics, AI, peace and security — require **collective, multilateral solutions**. The *Pact for the Future* (2024) is the most recent statement: a recommitment to "multilateralism, solidarity and international law," with commitments on Security Council reform, nuclear disarmament, and the governance of emerging technologies.
3. **Adaptation and reform.** The UN acknowledges that its institutions must adapt: peace operations must be "adaptable, inclusive, politically grounded"; the international financial architecture must be reformed; the Security Council must be made more representative. The UN's own discourse identifies the **gap between principle and practice** — the veto, selective enforcement, and the failure to implement Charter norms — as the central institutional problem.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **normative benchmark** — the standards against which institutional performance is judged. It also provides the **institutional record** — the resolutions, reports, and debates that are essential evidence for any analysis.

What it occludes: It can **depoliticize** — framing institutional failures as technical problems obscures the power dynamics that produce them. It can **legitimize** — the UN's authority can be used to justify actions that serve the interests of the powerful. And it can **underplay** its own structural bias — the P5 veto is not a technical flaw but a constitutional feature that protects great-power interests.

2.6.6 The comparison matrix

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Stance toward institutions	Architects, users, critics; leverage and contestation	Instrumental and revisionist; build alternatives	Defend UNSC; reject liberal institutionalism	Home of institutionalism; internally contested	Institutionalist actor par excellence

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Key institution	AU, AfCFTA, ECOWAS; UNSC reform	AIIB, SCO, FOCAC, BRI; UN-centered	UNSC, EAEU, SCO, BRICS+	UN, WTO, IMF, NATO, EU	The Charter system
Core critique	Hierarchical, exclusionary institutions	Western-dominated rules; "rules-based order" as hegemony	Liberal institutionalism as Western hegemony	(Self-critique) parochialism, complacency	(Self-critique) gap between principle and practice
What it contributes	Legitimacy and design matter; African agency	Institutional competition; relational design	Distributional dimension; veto as political achievement	Most developed toolkit; self-critique	Normative benchmark; institutional record
What it occludes	Effectiveness of some global institutions; diversity of African positions	Coercive dimension of Chinese institutions	Obstruction; exploitation of dissatisfaction	Universality claims; complicity	Power dynamics; structural bias

2.7 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: The WTO's dispute settlement system was the most legalized and judicialized institution in the international system. From 1995 to 2019, it resolved hundreds of trade disputes, and compliance rates were high. Yet from 2017, the United States — the institution's principal architect — blocked appointments to the Appellate Body, and by December 2019 the body was paralysed. Why did the hegemon that built the most legalized institution in history destroy its central mechanism?

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why did the United States undermine the WTO Appellate Body, an institution it created and that served its interests for two decades?*

Level of analysis:

- **Systemic:** The distribution of power shifted. China's rise changed the WTO's distributional consequences: the institution that served US interests in 1995 no longer served them in 2017. The US perceived the dispute settlement system as constraining its ability to respond to Chinese state capitalism.
- **State:** US domestic politics — the bipartisan turn against trade liberalization, the influence of protectionist constituencies, and the Trump administration's "America First" agenda — made defection politically attractive.
- **Institutional:** The Appellate Body's design features — compulsory jurisdiction, binding decisions,

appellate review, precedent-like reasoning — made it unusually constraining. The US objected to "judicial overreach": the AB's treatment of domestic law as factual, its issuance of advisory opinions, its failure to meet the 90-day deadline, and its reliance on precedent. These were **design features** that the US had accepted in 1995 but now rejected.

- **Individual:** The Trump administration's transactional approach to institutions and its willingness to break norms shaped the timing and form of the defection.

Applying the theoretical apparatus:

- **Institutionalism predicts** that institutions are sticky and that cooperation persists after hegemony. The WTO's dispute settlement system is a test case: it persisted for two decades, and its **dispute settlement continued** in modified form (the MPIA, the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement, which the EU and others created in 2020). This is partial support for institutionalism: the institution adapted, and cooperation did not collapse entirely.
- **But institutionalism also predicts** the conditions for failure: when the hegemon's vital interests are at stake, when the issue is strategic (not technical), and when the institution is highly constraining, defection is likely. The WTO case fits the scope conditions of institutional failure.
- **The relative-gains critique** is relevant: the US perceived the WTO as producing relative gains for China, and it defected.
- **The rational-design literature** explains why the AB was designed as it was (to solve the credible-commitment problem) and why it became vulnerable (because the US had not anticipated the distributional consequences).
- **The hegemonic-stability critique:** the US had provided the public good of a legalized trading system, but it withdrew when the good became costly. This is a classic HST prediction, and it challenges Keohane's optimism about post-hegemonic cooperation.

Perspective reconstruction:

- **African perspective:** The WTO's dispute settlement system was never equally accessible to African states, which lacked the legal capacity and resources to use it. The paralysis of the AB is a symptom of the **hierarchical** character of the institution: it worked for the powerful, and when it stopped working for the most powerful, it was dismantled. African states' response has been to pursue **regional** alternatives (the AfCFTA's dispute settlement mechanism) and to demand reform of the global system.
- **Chinese perspective:** The AB's paralysis confirms China's view that the "rules-based order" is a **Western instrument** that is abandoned when it no longer serves Western interests. China has responded by strengthening the WTO's **multilateral** character and by building alternative institutions. It frames its own approach as defending the **UN-centered** system against unilateralism.
- **Russian perspective:** The AB's paralysis confirms Russia's view that institutions are **instruments of power**, not neutral arbiters. Russia is a marginal player in the WTO (it joined in 2012), and it interprets the US defection as evidence of Western hypocrisy and the collapse of the liberal order.
- **Western perspective:** The AB's paralysis is a **crisis of the liberal order**, caused by the hegemon's defection. Western scholars debate whether the cause is US domestic politics, Chinese state capitalism, or the institution's design. The policy response — the MPIA — is an attempt to preserve the institutionalist project without the hegemon.
- **UN perspective:** The AB's paralysis is not a UN issue directly, but it exemplifies the UN's broader

concern: the **erosion of multilateralism** and the **rule of law** in international affairs. The UN's *Pact for the Future* calls for reform of the international financial architecture and for a recommitment to multilateral institutions — precisely because cases like the WTO show how fragile they are.

Adjudication. Which theory best explains the AB's paralysis? **Neoclassical institutionalism** (if we may coin a term) best captures the interaction: the systemic shift (China's rise) changed the distributional consequences of the institution; domestic politics (US trade policy) made defection politically viable; and the institution's **design features** (compulsory jurisdiction, binding review) made it unusually constraining. The **relative-gains critique** explains why the US defected. **Hegemonic stability theory** explains why the institution became vulnerable. **Institutionalism** explains why the system did not collapse entirely — the MPIA and continued dispute settlement show that institutions are sticky, even in crisis.

A complete explanation holds all four: **systemic change, domestic politics, institutional design, and hegemonic defection**. No single theory captures the whole.

2.8 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: The International Criminal Court (ICC), established by the Rome Statute (1998, in force 2002), is the first permanent international court with jurisdiction over genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression. African states were among its strongest supporters at Rome. Yet by 2017, the African Union had adopted a **non-binding strategy of collective withdrawal**, and Burundi, South Africa, and The Gambia notified withdrawal (The Gambia and South Africa later reversed). In 2023, the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin, and South Africa — an ICC member — faced a dilemma when Putin was expected to attend a BRICS summit. The ICC's legitimacy in Africa is contested.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely: why did the ICC — an institution that African states helped build — become the object of African contestation?
2. Apply institutionalism's claims: what cooperation problem was the ICC designed to solve? What is its causal mechanism? What are its scope conditions?
3. Apply the relative-gains and "false promise" critiques to the ICC.
4. Reconstruct the African and Western perspectives on the ICC. How do they differ in their assessment of the institution's legitimacy?
5. Write a 300-word adjudication: is the ICC's legitimacy crisis a **design failure**, a **distributional conflict**, or a **legitimacy deficit** — or all three?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did the ICC, an institution that African states supported at its creation, become the object of African contestation and threatened withdrawal?

Institutionalism's claims: The ICC was designed to solve a **credible-commitment problem**: states wanted to commit to ending impunity for the worst crimes, but they could not credibly promise to prosecute their own leaders. The ICC solves this by **delegating** prosecution to an independent court. Its mechanism is **judi-**

cialization: the court issues indictments, warrants, and judgments that create legal obligations and political costs. Its scope conditions: it works when states are willing to cooperate (arrest suspects), when the court's legitimacy is accepted, and when the P5 do not block referrals.

Relative-gains critique: African states perceived the ICC as producing **asymmetric costs**: the court investigated and indicted African leaders disproportionately (before 2016, all of the ICC's active investigations were in Africa), while it did not investigate alleged crimes by Western states (e.g., Iraq, Afghanistan). The distributional conflict is real: the ICC's enforcement depends on the cooperation of the powerful, and the powerful are rarely its targets.

"False promise" critique: The ICC's critics — including the AU — argue that the court is **epiphenomenal**: it reflects the power of Western states, which use it to prosecute their adversaries while shielding their own. The African critique is not that the court is ineffective, but that it is **selective**.

African perspective: The AU's position is that the ICC has become a **neo-colonial** institution that targets African leaders while ignoring Western crimes. The AU's 2017 withdrawal strategy was a demand for **reform** — particularly the exemption of sitting heads of state, and a greater role for African courts. The African perspective emphasizes **legitimacy** and **distributional fairness**, not effectiveness. It is also a demand for **African agency**: African states want to resolve African conflicts through African institutions (the AU's own criminal jurisdiction, which has been proposed but not yet established).

Western perspective: Western states and scholars defend the ICC as a **universal** institution and argue that the African critique is misplaced: the court investigates where the evidence leads, and African states themselves referred many cases. The Western perspective emphasizes **legal universalism** and the importance of **accountability**.

Adjudication: The ICC's legitimacy crisis is **all three** — a design failure (the court's dependence on great-power cooperation makes it selectively effective), a distributional conflict (African states bear the costs of enforcement without shaping the court's agenda), and a legitimacy deficit (the court's authority is contested because its composition and its enforcement are seen as unequal). Institutionalism explains **why** the ICC was created and **how** it works; it does not explain **why** it became contested. The African perspective explains the contestation; the Western perspective explains the defense. A complete analysis must hold both: the ICC is a **genuine institutional achievement** and a **contested political project**.

2.9 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which entered into force in 2019. Proponents argue it will boost intra-African trade, create a single market of 1.3 billion people, and increase Africa's bargaining power in global supply chains. Critics argue that implementation is slow, that overlapping regional economic communities (the "spaghetti bowl") undermine it, and that it will not overcome the structural barriers of poor infrastructure, weak states, and external dependency.

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** What cooperation problem does the AfCFTA solve? Apply institutionalism's mecha-

nisms: reducing transaction costs, lengthening the shadow of the future, monitoring, credible commitment. Which mechanisms are plausibly operative here?
2. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives assess the AfCFTA? (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — one paragraph each or a table.)
3. **Design and failure:** What design features of the AfCFTA (flexibility, escape clauses, dispute settlement, implementation timelines) predict success or failure? What are the scope conditions?
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show the AfCFTA is working? What evidence would show it is not? Specify observable implications.

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish the AfCFTA's **stated goals** from its **causal mechanism**? Does it specify **scope conditions**? Does it reconstruct the African perspective as **agency**, not just critique?

2.10 HINGE QUESTION

Two states are negotiating a trade agreement. State A would gain $100 million and State B would gain $200 million. State A refuses the agreement, even though it would be better off in absolute terms, because it fears that State B's larger gain will translate into greater military capability. This is an example of:

- A) Absolute-gains logic
- B) Relative-gains logic
- C) The security dilemma
- D) Complex interdependence

Answer: B. State A is refusing a mutually beneficial agreement because it cares about **relative** gains, not just absolute gains. This is Grieco's critique of institutionalism: positional concerns can block cooperation even when joint gains exist.

If you answered A: Absolute-gains logic would predict that State A accepts the deal, because it is better off in absolute terms. The scenario describes the opposite. **If you answered C:** The security dilemma concerns defensive measures appearing offensive and triggering a spiral. The scenario is about bargaining over gains, not about armament spirals. **If you answered D:** Complex interdependence describes multiple channels, a non-hierarchical agenda, and limited use of force — not the relative-gains logic of bargaining.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground institutionalism's claims in empirical data.

Task: Using the summary data below, analyze the relationship between institutional membership and cooperation.

Table 1: WTO dispute settlement — disputes initiated and compliance (illustrative)

Period	Disputes initiated	Share involving developing countries	Compliance with rulings (estimated)
1995–2000	180	35%	~80%

Period	Disputes initiated	Share involving developing countries	Compliance with rulings (estimated)
2001–2010	250	45%	~80%
2011–2019	180	50%	~75%
2020–2024 (post-AB paralysis)	120	55%	~50% (estimated)

Table 2: Intra-regional trade shares (2023, approximate)

Region	Intra-regional trade share
European Union	~60%
Asia (ASEAN+3)	~55%
North America (USMCA)	~50%
Africa	~15%
Latin America	~25%

Analysis questions:

1. **Institutional effects:** What does the WTO data suggest about compliance with institutional rulings? Does compliance persist after the Appellate Body's paralysis? What are the alternative explanations (e.g., reputation, reciprocity, power)?
2. **Regional variation:** Why is intra-African trade so low, despite the AfCFTA? What does this suggest about the scope conditions of institutionalism? (Hint: infrastructure, border costs, colonial trade patterns, the "spaghetti bowl" of RECs.)
3. **Institutionalism vs. realism:** Does the data support institutionalism (institutions cause cooperation) or realism (power and interests cause cooperation)? What evidence would distinguish them?
4. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the AfCFTA data? (African: the project is young and the structural barriers are legacies of colonialism; Chinese: infrastructure investment is the key to unlocking trade; Russian: the liberal trade order is not the answer; Western: the AfCFTA needs deeper institutional design; UN: the AfCFTA supports the SDGs and regional integration.)
5. **Limitation:** What does the data **not** tell you? (Hint: trade shares do not measure the *distribution* of gains; institutional membership does not measure institutional *effectiveness*; and low intra-African trade may reflect colonial-era infrastructure that oriented African economies outward.)

Rule: Complete the data lab before the independent memo.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The four liberal branches. Draw four boxes — Commercial, Republican, Regulatory, Institutional. For each, write: the core claim, the mechanism, one key figure, and one scope condition.

Visual 2: The cooperation problem. Draw a 2×2 prisoner's dilemma matrix. Label the strategies (cooperate/defect) for State A and State B. Write the payoffs in each cell (e.g., mutual cooperation = 3,3; mutual defection = 1,1; A defects/B cooperates = 4,0; A cooperates/B defects = 0,4). Then draw arrows showing how institutions change the payoffs: iteration (shadow of the future), monitoring (information), and issue linkage (punishment).

Visual 3: The five perspectives on institutions. Draw a five-column table (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) with rows: "Stance toward institutions," "Key institution," "Core critique," "Key occlusion."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
What are the four liberal branches?	Commercial; republican; regulatory; institutional
What is the difference between cooperation and harmony?	Harmony = interests coincide; cooperation = interests conflict but actors coordinate to capture joint gains
What cooperation problems do institutions solve?	Prisoner's dilemma (defection); coordination (focal points); monitoring; credible commitment; transaction costs
What is complex interdependence?	Multiple channels; non-hierarchical agenda; limited use of force; sensitivity vs. vulnerability
What is the relative-gains critique?	Grieco: states are positional; relative gains matter; institutionalism understates this
What is the "false promise" critique?	Mearsheimer: institutions are epiphenomenal; power causes outcomes, not institutions
What are the modes of institutional failure?	Hegemonic defection; distributional conflict; enforcement failure; regime complexity; design flaws; preference change; legitimacy deficits
How do the five perspectives assess institutions?	African: leverage and contestation; Chinese: instrumental/revisionist; Russian: defend UNSC, reject liberal institutionalism; Western: home tradition + self-critique; UN: institutionalist actor par excellence
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.6; Keohane (1984); Keohane & Nye (1977); Axelrod (1984); Grieco (1988); Mearsheimer (1994/95); Koremenos, Lipson & Snidal (2001); Ikenberry (2001); AfCFTA Agreement; UN Pact for the Future
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the institutionalist argument to a smart non-specialist in 150–200 words, without using jargon. If you must use "anarchy," "regime," or "shadow of the future," define them in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for institutions. Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "Institutions are like traffic rules — they coordinate behavior and reduce the risk of collisions, but they only work if most drivers follow them and if the police can enforce them." Where it breaks down: international institutions have no police, and the most powerful drivers can ignore the rules with impunity.)

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What is the difference between sensitivity and vulnerability interdependence?
Mechanism	How do institutions lengthen the shadow of the future?
Application	A state complies with a WTO ruling even though it loses the case. What institutionalist mechanism explains this?
Comparison	How do commercial and republican liberalism differ in their mechanisms?
Source	What did Keohane argue in *After Hegemony* about cooperation after hegemony?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to Mearsheimer's "false promise" critique?
Reconstruction	How would an African TWAIL scholar assess the WTO dispute settlement system?
Occlusion	What does liberal institutionalism fail to see about hierarchy and race?
Adjudication	Which theory best explains the WTO Appellate Body's paralysis, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the four liberal branches on a diagram.

Tag each card: `L6`, `institutionalism`, `liberalism`, `perspective`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Distinguish the four liberal branches	
Reconstruct neoliberal institutionalism's core argument	
Evaluate the relative-gains and "false promise" debates	
Diagnose institutional failure	
Reconstruct the five perspectives on institutions	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between institutions and power?
2. Which liberal branch was easiest to apply? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default analytical style?
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 7?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L6			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 1)

Add this row to your Module 1 cheatsheet:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Complex interdependence; sensitivity/vulnerability; regime; neoliberal institutionalism; relative vs. absolute gains; shadow of the future; credible commitment; delegation; legalization; regime complexity; institutional design
Key mechanisms	Institutions reduce uncertainty → lengthen shadow of the future → cooperation; monitoring → compliance; issue linkage → punishment; delegation → credible commitment; hegemonic defection → institutional failure

Column	Content
Theories and authors	Kant; Doyle; Keohane & Nye; Keohane; Axelrod; Grieco; Mearsheimer; Koremenos, Lipson & Snidal; Ikenberry; Abbott & Snidal
Cases and evidence	WTO Appellate Body paralysis; ICC and Africa; AfCFTA; EU; JCPOA; NPT
Debates	Do institutions matter? Relative vs. absolute gains; is the "rules-based order" universal or Western?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that institutions have no independent causal effect? What would show they do?
Cross-links	L5 (realism — the foil); L7 (constructivism — social construction of cooperation); L18 (weaponized interdependence); L21 (JCPOA); L28 (AU/APSA); L49 (institutional revisionism)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1–L6 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L6 with L7–L8 (theory) and L18 (weaponized interdependence)
R5	End of Module 1	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Five key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (WTO Appellate Body) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (ICC and Africa) attempted and compared
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)

- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
- ☐ Cheatsheet entry added
- ☐ R2 review scheduled

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **On liberal theory:** Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (1795); Michael Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1983); Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace* (1993).
- **On complex interdependence:** Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (1977), ch. 1–3.
- **On neoliberal institutionalism:** Robert Keohane, *After Hegemony* (1984), ch. 1–6; Kenneth Oye (ed.), *Cooperation Under Anarchy* (1986); Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (1984).
- **On the relative-gains debate:** Joseph Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation," *International Organization* (1988); Duncan Snidal, "Relative Gains and the Pattern of International Cooperation," *American Political Science Review* (1991).
- **On the "false promise" debate:** John Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* (1994/95); Robert Keohane and Lisa Martin, "The Promise of Institutionalist Theory," *International Security* (1995).
- **On institutional design:** Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson, and Duncan Snidal, "The Rational Design of International Institutions," *International Organization* (2001); Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal, "Hard and Soft Law in International Governance," *International Organization* (2000).
- **On the liberal order:** G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory* (2001); G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan* (2011).
- **On African institutionalism:** the AU Constitutive Act; the AfCFTA Agreement; the Ezulwini Consensus (2005); Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996); TWAIL scholarship (Makau Mutua, "What Is TWAIL?").
- **On Chinese and Russian institutional strategies:** Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (2018); the AIIB Articles of Agreement; the SCO Charter; the EAEU Treaty; Russian Foreign Ministry statements on the UN Charter and multipolarity.
- **On the UN:** UN Charter; *Pact for the Future* (2024); UN Secretary-General's reports on multilateralism and institutional reform.

End of Lesson 6. Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 7 (Constructivism and the English School).

8. Constructivism and the English School: The Social Construction of International Reality

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LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L7 — Constructivism and the English School
Module	Module 1: Epistemological and Ontological Foundations
Prerequisites	L1 (puzzles, levels, power, perspectives); L2 (Charter system, AU Act); L3 (causal inference); L4 (positivism/post-positivism); L5 (realism — the theory constructivism challenges); L6 (institutionalism — the theory constructivism extends)
Interleaved links	Forward to L8 (critical/post-colonial/feminist theory), L9–14 (historical construction of order), L24 (cognitive warfare — the weaponization of constructed identities), L28 (Pan-Africanism and AU norms), L35 (post-Soviet ontology — the ontological security crisis par excellence), L42 (Iranian identity and *Velayat-e Faqih*), L47 (US–China identity competition)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.
Content channels	Canon (quoted and summarized); primary texts (Wendt, Onuf, Kratochwil, Finnemore & Sikkink, Mitzen, Steele, Bull, Wight, Buzan, Zhang, Qin, quoted and analyzed); data lab (UN voting patterns and norm diffusion); five perspectives
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (adjudicate between constructivist and English School claims, and between them and their critics)
Estimated study time	7–9 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Every argument, quotation, and example you need is inside this document. Where I cite Wendt, Onuf, Kratochwil, Finnemore and Sikkink, Mitzen, Steele, Bull, Wight, Buzan, or any other scholar, I summarize the argument fully enough that you do not need the original to complete the lesson. "Further Reading" is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Lessons 5 and 6 gave you the two dominant traditions in IR. **Realism** says anarchy produces self-help, states seek power, and cooperation is fragile. **Institutionalism** says institutions can solve cooperation problems even under anarchy, and that cooperation can persist after hegemony declines. Both traditions share a common premise: **states are the basic units of international politics, with given interests and identities.** Realism assumes states want power and security; institutionalism assumes states want to maximize joint gains. Neither asks where those wants come from.

Constructivism asks that question. Its core claim — stated most famously by Alexander Wendt — is that **anarchy is what states make of it**. Anarchy does not automatically produce self-help, competition, or security dilemmas. It produces whatever states' **shared understandings** make of it. If states understand each other as enemies, anarchy produces war; if they understand each other as rivals, anarchy produces competition; if they understand each other as friends, anarchy can produce a security community in which war is unthinkable. Interests and identities are **socially constructed**, not exogenously given.

The English School asks a related question: is there a **society** of states, not just a **system**? Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society* (1977) argued that states do not merely interact; they share norms, rules, and institutions — sovereignty, diplomacy, international law, the balance of power — that constitute a **society** even in the absence of a world government. The English School provides the conceptual vocabulary for analyzing how norms and institutions create order, and how that order can be **pluralist** (respecting sovereignty and difference) or **solidarist** (pursuing shared values like human rights and justice).

This lesson gives you:

1. **The constructivist challenge** to rationalist IR: anarchy is what states make of it; identities and interests are endogenous; norms constitute actors.
2. **The mechanisms of social construction:** norms (regulative and constitutive), the logic of appropriateness, the norm life cycle, socialization, and ontological security.
3. **The English School framework:** international system vs. international society vs. world society; pluralism vs. solidarism; primary vs. secondary institutions; the expansion of international society.
4. **The relationship between constructivism and the English School** — they are not the same, but they share a common insight: international politics is shaped by shared ideas, not just material power.
5. **The five perspectives on constructivism and the English School** — African (colonial genealogy, Pan-African norm entrepreneurship), Chinese (relational constructivism, hierarchical society), Russian (civilizational constructivism, ontological insecurity), Western (the home tradition and its internal debates), and UN (the institutional embodiment of international society).

By the end, you can take any international outcome — a war, a norm, an institution, an identity — and answer: *How was it socially constructed? By whom? Through what mechanisms? What does its construction make possible and what does it foreclose? And how do the five perspectives reconstruct it?*

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory)

1. From L5: Name the five variants of realism and state each one's core mechanism in one sentence.

2. From L5: What is the security dilemma, and how does it produce conflict without aggressive intentions?
3. From L6: What is the difference between cooperation and harmony in Keohane's institutionalism?
4. From L6: What are the two defining critiques of institutionalism (relative gains; "false promise"), and how does institutionalism respond?

Check against the previous lessons before proceeding.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind:

- If anarchy is what states make of it, what are the limits of that "making"? Can states construct any world they want?
- Is the "international community" a real thing, or a fiction that the powerful invoke?
- How do norms change? Do they emerge from the powerful, from entrepreneurs, from crises, or from all three?
- Why do states sometimes act against their material interests to preserve their identity or status?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

Provisional definitions; revise by the end:

Social construction; constitutive vs. regulative norms; logic of appropriateness; logic of consequences; norm entrepreneur; norm life cycle; norm cascade; socialization; internalization; ontological security; biographical continuity; anxiety management; international system; international society; world society; pluralism; solidarism; primary institutions; secondary institutions; standard of civilization; expansion of international society; relationality; zhongyong; civilizational state.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Reconstruct** Wendt's constructivist argument — anarchy is what states make of it — and distinguish it from realism and institutionalism.
2. **Apply** the mechanisms of social construction — constitutive norms, the norm life cycle, the logic of appropriateness, socialization — to a case of norm change.
3. **Explain** ontological security and its implications for state behavior, including cases where states act against material interests to preserve identity.
4. **Distinguish** the English School's three concepts — international system, international society, world society — and its two positions — pluralism and solidarism — and apply them to the "expansion of international society."
5. **Reconstruct** how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions engage with constructivism and the English School, and **adjudicate** among them on a specific case.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Anarchy is what states make of it: identities and interests are socially constructed

The claim: The core constructivist claim is not that "ideas matter" — that is trivially true — but that **the identities and interests of states are produced through social interaction**, not exogenously given. Realism and institutionalism both assume that states have fixed interests (power, security, or gains) and that the international system is a strategic environment in which those interests are pursued. Constructivism argues that the international system is a **social environment** in which states' identities and interests are **constituted** through interaction.

Wendt's argument. Alexander Wendt's 1992 article "Anarchy is What States Make of It" is the founding text of constructivist IR. Wendt's argument has three steps:

1. **Anarchy does not logically entail self-help.** Waltz argued that anarchy produces self-help because states must rely on their own resources. Wendt responds: anarchy is a **condition**, not a **cause**. What anarchy produces depends on the **shared understandings** that states bring to their interactions. If states understand each other as enemies, anarchy produces a security dilemma. If they understand each other as rivals, anarchy produces competition within rules. If they understand each other as friends, anarchy can produce a **security community** — a group of states that do not expect to fight each other (the EU is the paradigm case).
2. **Identities and interests are endogenous to interaction.** States do not have fixed interests that exist prior to their interactions. Their interests are **constituted** by their identities, and their identities are **produced** through interaction. The US did not have an interest in containing the Soviet Union before the US had constructed the Soviet Union as an adversary. The identity "adversary" and the interest "containment" were produced together through the Cold War.
3. **Social structures are constituted by shared ideas, not just material capabilities.** Wendt distinguishes between the **material** structure of power (which realists emphasize) and the **ideational** structure of shared understandings (which constructivists emphasize). The same material distribution of power can produce different outcomes depending on the shared understandings. Five hundred British nuclear weapons are less threatening to the US than five North Korean nuclear weapons, because the US shares an identity of "friend" with Britain and "adversary" with North Korea.

The "three cultures of anarchy." Wendt's later work (*Social Theory of International Politics*, 1999) developed this argument into a typology of three "cultures of anarchy":

Culture	How states relate	Logic of interaction	Example
Hobbesian	As enemies	War of all against all; the logic of kill or be killed	Pre-Westphalian Europe; the state of nature
Lockean	As rivals	Competitive coexistence; sovereignty is recognized, but war is legitimate	The Westphalian system; the Cold War

Culture	How states relate	Logic of interaction	Example
Kantian	As friends	Security community; war is unthinkable within the community	The EU; the North Atlantic security community

The mechanism. The shift from one culture to another is produced by **interaction**: states send signals of their intentions, interpret the signals of others, and gradually build or destroy shared understandings. Wendt's key example is the end of the Cold War: the US and the Soviet Union shifted from a Lockean culture of rivalry to a Kantian culture of friendship, not because the material balance of power changed, but because their **ideas about each other** changed.

Onuf and the "world of our making." Nicholas Onuf's *World of Our Making* (1989) is the other founding text of constructivism. Onuf's argument is more radical than Wendt's: he argues that **all** of international politics is constructed through **rules and speech acts**. Rules do not just regulate behavior; they **constitute** the actors and the situations in which they operate. Onuf's constructivism is therefore closer to post-structuralism than Wendt's: it emphasizes the **linguistic** production of reality, not just the cognitive.

Scope conditions. Constructivism is most powerful when: 1. **Identities are contested or in flux** (e.g., post-Cold War Europe, post-colonial Africa, post-Soviet Russia). 2. **Norms are new or changing** (e.g., the emergence of R2P, the evolution of sovereignty norms). 3. **Interaction is repeated and dense** (e.g., the EU, ASEAN, the AU). 4. **Material explanations are indeterminate** (e.g., why did the Cold War end peacefully? Why do some states join NATO and others do not?).

What constructivism contributes: It explains **change** — how the international system evolves, how norms emerge and diffuse, how identities are transformed. It also explains **why states sometimes act against material interests** — to preserve identity, status, or ontological security.

What constructivism occludes: It can underplay **material power** — the ways in which economic and military capabilities constrain what can be constructed. It can underplay **genuine conflict of interest** — if everything is constructed, it becomes difficult to say which constructions are better or worse. And it can be **methodologically difficult** — it is hard to test constructivist claims against positivist standards of evidence.

Observable implication. If constructivism is operative, you should see states **changing their identities and interests** through interaction — e.g., Germany and France moving from "enemies" to "friends" through European integration; South Africa moving from "pariah" to "norm entrepreneur" through the anti-apartheid struggle and post-apartheid diplomacy.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Norms constitute and regulate: the logic of appropriateness and the norm life cycle

The claim: Constructivism's central empirical mechanism is the **norm**. Norms are not just rules that constrain behavior; they are **shared expectations** that constitute identities, define appropriate behavior, and produce the social world in which states operate. Understanding norms — how they emerge, diffuse, and become internalized — is the key to understanding social construction.

Constitutive vs. regulative norms. A crucial distinction, developed by John Searle and applied to IR by

Onuf, Kratochwil, and others:

- **Regulative norms** "regulate" pre-existing activities. They tell actors what they should do within a given activity. *Example:* traffic rules regulate driving, but they do not constitute the activity of driving.
- **Constitutive norms** "constitute" the activity itself. They create the possibility of the activity. *Example:* the rules of chess constitute the game; without them, there is no game. Similarly, the norm of sovereignty **constitutes** the state as a sovereign entity — it is not a rule that states obey or violate, but the rule that makes "statehood" possible in the first place.

The logic of appropriateness. James March and Johan Olsen distinguished two logics of action:

- **Logic of consequences:** Actors calculate costs and benefits and choose the action that maximizes expected utility. This is the logic of rational choice, realism, and institutionalism.
- **Logic of appropriateness:** Actors ask "What kind of situation is this? What is my role? What is the appropriate behavior for someone like me in this situation?" They act according to **norms and identities**, not just interests.

The logic of appropriateness is the mechanism by which norms influence behavior. States do not just calculate; they **interpret their identity and the situation**, and they act in ways that are consistent with that interpretation.

The norm life cycle. Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink's 1998 article "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change" provides the most influential model of how norms emerge and diffuse. The model has three stages:

1. **Norm emergence:** Norm entrepreneurs — individuals or organizations — attempt to persuade a critical mass of states to adopt a new norm. *Example:* the anti-slavery movement; the anti-landmine campaign; the campaign for the ICC.
2. **Norm cascade:** Once a critical mass of states adopts the norm (often a "tipping point" of about one-third of states), the norm begins to cascade. States adopt it not because they are convinced but because they want to be seen as legitimate by their peers. *Mechanism:* socialization, shaming, and the desire for status.
3. **Norm internalization:** The norm becomes taken for granted — it is no longer contested, and it shapes behavior automatically. *Example:* the prohibition on slavery; the prohibition on chemical weapons; the norm of decolonization.

Socialization. How do norms diffuse? The key mechanism is **socialization** — the process through which actors are inducted into the norms and identities of a community. Alastair Iain Johnston's *Social States* (2008) shows that states can be socialized into new norms through **instrumental adaptation** (imitating successful states), **social influence** (wanting to be seen as legitimate), and **persuasion** (genuinely changing beliefs). The EU and NATO are paradigmatic cases of socialization: candidate states adopt norms not just because they are forced to, but because they want to be accepted as members.

Observable implication. If the norm life cycle is operative, you should see (a) the emergence of new norms through entrepreneurial advocacy, (b) a cascade once a critical mass of states adopts them, and (c) internalization such that violations become rare and costly.

Scope condition. The norm life cycle is not universal. It works best when the norm is **specific**, **consistent with existing norms**, and **endorsed by powerful actors**. It works least well when the norm is **contested**

(e.g., R2P, humanitarian intervention, the ban on autonomous weapons).

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Ontological security: states seek identity continuity, not just physical survival

The claim: One of the most important constructivist contributions to IR is the concept of **ontological security** — the security of a state's **self-identity**, not just its physical survival. States do not just want to survive; they want to be **who they are**, and they will sometimes act against their material interests to preserve their identity.

The concept. Ontological security was developed by Anthony Giddens in sociology and applied to IR by Jennifer Mitzen and Brent Steele.

- **Mitzen's argument:** States seek **biographical continuity** — a stable sense of self that persists over time. Ontological security is achieved through **routines** — repeated practices that confirm the state's identity. Even adversarial relationships can provide ontological security: the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War were each other's **significant other** — the enemy that confirmed the other's identity. The end of the Cold War was not just a material event; it was an **identity crisis** for both the US and Russia, which had to reconstruct their identities without the other as a permanent enemy.
- **Steele's argument:** States care about **honor, status, and reputation** — not just material interests. When a state's identity is threatened, it may act to defend its identity even at high material cost. Steele's *Ontological Security in International Relations* (2008) argues that states have an "identity security dilemma": their actions to preserve their identity can trigger anxiety and conflict.

The mechanism. Ontological security is maintained through:

1. **Routines:** Repeated practices that confirm identity. *Example:* the regular meetings of the EU Council, which confirm the member states' identities as "Europeans."
2. **Narratives:** Stories that states tell about themselves. *Example:* the "century of humiliation" narrative in China, which confirms China's identity as a rising power correcting historical wrongs.
3. **Significant others:** External actors who confirm the state's identity by opposing or supporting it. *Example:* Britain's relationship with the US, which confirms Britain's identity as a great-power ally; Russia's relationship with the West, which confirms Russia's identity as a sovereign great power.
4. **Anxiety management:** When routines are disrupted, states experience anxiety, and they may engage in **defensive identity practices** to restore ontological security.

The Russian case. The collapse of the Soviet Union was the most dramatic ontological security crisis of the twentieth century. Russia lost its empire, its ideology, and its identity as a superpower. The Putin regime has constructed a new narrative — Russia as a "sovereign civilization" defending traditional values against Western liberalism — that provides ontological security. The Ukraine war can be read, in part, as a **defensive identity practice**: Ukraine's drift toward the West threatens Russia's narrative of itself as the leader of the Russian world.

The Chinese case. China's "century of humiliation" narrative is a paradigmatic case of ontological security. The narrative constructs China's identity as a victim of imperialism that is now rising to correct historical wrongs. This narrative shapes Chinese responses to perceived slights — e.g., the response to NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, or the response to criticism of China's human rights record.

What ontological security contributes: It explains **why states sometimes act against material interests** — to preserve identity, status, and honor. It also explains **why conflicts can persist** even when material conditions change — because the conflict provides ontological security for the parties involved.

What it occludes: It can be **tautological** — any action can be explained as serving ontological security, so the concept can become unfalsifiable. It can underplay **material constraints** — states cannot always afford to preserve their identity at high material cost. And it can be **hard to operationalize** — how do you measure ontological security?

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The English School: international system, international society, world society

The claim: The English School provides a distinct framework for analyzing international order — one that is neither purely realist (power) nor purely liberal (cooperation) but **social**: it asks whether states form a **society**, not just a **system**, and how that society is constituted and expanded.

The three concepts. Hedley Bull's *The Anarchical Society* (1977) is the canonical statement. Bull distinguishes:

1. **International system:** Two or more states interact with sufficient frequency that their behavior affects each other. The system is defined by **interaction** — trade, war, diplomacy. Interaction may be conflictual or cooperative; the system exists as long as states interact.
2. **International society:** A group of states **conscious of common interests and common rules**, and **sharing institutions**. The society is defined by **shared norms and institutions** — sovereignty, diplomacy, international law, the balance of power, war. States in an international society recognize each other as legitimate members and are bound by common rules.
3. **World society:** A society of **individuals**, not just states — a cosmopolitan order in which human beings, not states, are the primary subjects. The concept is aspirational: it describes the possibility of a global civil society or a cosmopolitan order that transcends the society of states.

The English School's key insight. The international order is neither a war of all against all (as realism suggests) nor a liberal institutional order (as institutionalism suggests). It is an **anarchical society** — a society without a government, held together by shared norms and institutions. The English School asks: **What are the institutions that sustain international society, and how do they work?**

Primary vs. secondary institutions. This is one of the most useful concepts in the English School (especially as developed by Barry Buzan). It distinguishes:

- **Primary institutions:** Deep, historically evolved practices that constitute international society. They are not created by any single act; they emerge over time. *Examples:* sovereignty, territoriality, diplomacy, great-power management, the balance of power, international law, war, nationalism, the market.
- **Secondary institutions:** Formal, created organizations. They are the specific, contemporary instantiations of primary institutions. *Examples:* the UN, the WTO, the ICC, the AU, NATO.

The distinction is crucial: the UN is a **secondary institution** that instantiates several **primary institutions** (sovereignty, international law, diplomacy, great-power management). It can fail as a secondary institution while the primary institutions it embodies continue to function. This is why the UN's paralysis does not mean the collapse of international society.

Pluralism vs. solidarism. The English School contains two positions:

- **Pluralism:** International society is a society of sovereign states with diverse values and interests. The primary goal is **order**, not justice. Sovereignty and non-interference are the key institutions; intervention is a threat to order. The pluralist position is associated with Bull and with the "classical" English School.
- **Solidarism:** International society has a deeper set of shared values — human rights, democracy, the rule of law — and can legitimately intervene to enforce them. The primary goal is **justice**, not just order. The solidarist position is associated with Nicholas Wheeler, Tim Dunne, and others.

The tension. The pluralism/solidarism debate is the English School's version of the realism/liberalism debate. Pluralists see order as fragile and intervention as dangerous; solidarists see order as compatible with justice and intervention as necessary. The debate is particularly relevant to Africa, where the AU's Article 4(h) is a **solidarist** innovation within a **pluralist** framework.

The expansion of international society. The English School's historical narrative is the **expansion** of European international society to the rest of the world. Bull and Adam Watson's *The Expansion of International Society* (1984) traces how the European society of states — with its specific institutions (sovereignty, diplomacy, international law) — expanded through colonialism, decolonization, and the entry of non-European states into the international system. The expansion was not neutral: it imposed European institutions on the rest of the world, and it produced resistance, adaptation, and contestation. This is the English School's most important contribution to the study of Africa: it provides a framework for understanding how African states entered the international society, what they made of it, and how they have shaped it.

What the English School contributes: It provides the **conceptual vocabulary** for analyzing international order as a social phenomenon — not just power (realism) or institutions (institutionalism). It also provides the **historical narrative** of the expansion of international society, which is essential for understanding the post-colonial world.

What it occludes: It can be **Eurocentric** — the "expansion" narrative is told from the perspective of the expanding powers, not the expanded. It can **underplay material power** — the English School's focus on norms and institutions can obscure the role of coercion and exploitation. And it can be **conservative** — the pluralist emphasis on order can justify inaction in the face of injustice.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The five perspectives engage constructivism and the English School differently, and each engagement is political

The claim: Constructivism and the English School are not neutral frameworks. They are **traditions** with specific historical origins and political implications. The five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — engage with them differently, and those engagements are political.

2.6.1 The African perspective (primary) Core commitments. African scholars engage with constructivism and the English School in three distinct ways:

1. **Sovereignty as a social construct with a colonial genealogy.** African constructivists accept that sovereignty is socially constructed, but they insist that its construction was **colonial**. The sovereignty that African states inherited was not a neutral institution; it was a product of the Berlin Conference, the

mandate system, and the decolonization struggle. The African critique is that Western constructivism often treats sovereignty as an abstract social construct, ignoring the **racial hierarchy** that structured its construction and continues to structure its application.

2. **Pan-Africanism as norm entrepreneurship.** African states and intellectuals have been **norm entrepreneurs** in international society. The OAU's enshrinement of non-interference, the AU's Article 4(h), the Ezulwini Consensus on UNSC reform, and the AU's Agenda 2063 are all examples of African agency in shaping international norms. The African perspective emphasizes that African states are **not just objects** of norm diffusion but **creators** of norms.
3. **The AU as an international society.** The AU is a self-conscious project of building an **African international society** — a regional society of states with its own norms, institutions, and identity. The AU's Constitutive Act is a constitution-like document that establishes a set of primary institutions for the African region. The African perspective uses the English School's vocabulary to analyze the AU, but it also critiques the English School for its Eurocentrism.

The critique of the English School. African scholars critique the English School's "expansion" narrative for being **Eurocentric**: it treats the expansion of European international society as the story of international society, rather than as the story of European imperialism. The African perspective insists that the history of international society must include the **resistance and agency** of colonized peoples — the Bandung Conference, the Non-Aligned Movement, the anti-apartheid struggle, and the creation of the AU.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that constructivism and the English School can be **deployed for decolonial purposes** — to analyze how norms were constructed to serve colonial interests, and how they can be reconstructed to serve African interests. It also shows that African states are **agents** of international society, not just subjects of it.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **genuine diversity** of African positions — not all African states agree on norms (e.g., on the ICC, on intervention, on UNSC reform). It can also risk **essentializing** "African norms" as a unified tradition.

2.6.2 The Chinese perspective **Core commitments.** Chinese scholars have developed a distinctive engagement with constructivism, which is often called **relational constructivism**.

1. **Qin Yaqing's relational theory.** Qin Yaqing, the founder of the Chinese School of relational theory, argues that **relations, not states, are the basic units** of international politics. This is a constructivist argument, but it is grounded in **Chinese philosophy** — the **yin-yang** dialectic and the **zhongyong** (doctrine of the mean) — rather than in Western social theory. Qin's relationalism is a **constructivism without norms**: it emphasizes the **process** of interaction and the **relationships** that constitute actors, rather than the norms that constrain them.
2. **The English School and Chinese thought.** Chinese scholars have engaged with the English School because it provides a framework for analyzing international society **without** assuming a Western liberal order. The English School's concept of a **hierarchical international society** resonates with Chinese thinking about **Tianxia** (all under heaven) — a hierarchical order in which the legitimate ruler provides order for all.
3. **Civilizational state.** The Chinese concept of the **civilizational state** is a constructivist claim: China is not a nation-state but a **civilization** that has persisted for millennia. This claim shapes China's identity and interests — it justifies a foreign policy oriented toward **civilizational survival** rather than just territorial security.

The political project. The Chinese engagement with constructivism is part of the broader project of **epistemic sovereignty** — the claim that Chinese thought provides an **alternative** to Western social theory, and that China should not be confined to Western frameworks.

What this perspective contributes: It provides a **constructivism from below** — a theory that starts from relationships and processes rather than from states and norms. It also shows that the English School's concepts can be **provincialized** — used to analyze non-Western forms of international society.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **coercive dimension** of Chinese power — the ways in which relationships can be hierarchical and exploitative. It can also **essentialize** "Chinese thought" as a unified tradition.

2.6.3 The Russian perspective **Core commitments.** Russian scholarship and official discourse engage with constructivism through the lens of **civilizational identity** and **ontological security**.

1. **Civilizational constructivism.** Russian scholars argue that Russia is a **distinct civilization** with its own values, history, and mission. This is a constructivist claim — Russian identity is constructed — but it is used to justify a **realist** foreign policy: Russia must defend its civilization against Western encroachment. The "Russian world" (*Russkiy mir*) is a constructivist concept — a transnational community united by language, culture, and Orthodox Christianity — that provides ontological security for Russia.
2. **Ontological insecurity after the Cold War.** The collapse of the Soviet Union produced a profound ontological security crisis. Russia lost its identity as a superpower, its empire, and its ideology. The Putin regime's construction of Russia as a "sovereign civilization" is a response to this crisis. The Ukraine war can be analyzed as an **ontological security practice**: Russia is defending its narrative of itself as a great power with a sphere of influence.
3. **The critique of Western constructivism.** Russian scholars critique Western constructivism for being **normative** — for assuming that the spread of liberal norms is progressive and that resistance to them is illegitimate. The Russian perspective insists that **all** identities are constructed, including Western identities, and that the Western claim to universality is itself a construction.

The political project. The Russian engagement with constructivism is **defensive**: it uses constructivist concepts to defend a **realist** foreign policy and to resist the spread of liberal norms.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that constructivism can be used for **illiberal purposes** — to construct a civilizational identity that justifies aggression. It also shows that **ontological insecurity** is a real and powerful force in international politics.

What it occludes: It can naturalize aggression by framing it as a defense of identity. It can also treat "Russian civilization" as a monolith, erasing internal diversity and dissent.

2.6.4 The Western perspective **Core commitments.** The Western tradition is the **home** of both constructivism and the English School. Both emerged from Western academic debates, and both remain predominantly Western in their institutional locations and their empirical focus.

1. **Constructivism: from critical to mainstream.** Constructivism began as a **critical** challenge to rationalist IR — Wendt's 1992 article was a direct response to Waltz. But over time, it became **mainstream**: it is now taught in every IR department, published in the top journals, and used by governments and international organizations. This mainstreaming has strengths (constructivism is now part of the dis-

ciplinary toolkit) and weaknesses (it has lost some of its critical edge).

2. **The English School: a distinct tradition.** The English School is a **distinct** Western tradition — neither realist nor liberal, but **social**. Its key figures — Wight, Bull, Watson, Buzan, Dunne — are all Western, and its historical focus is overwhelmingly on the **European** experience. The English School's strengths are its historical depth and its conceptual vocabulary; its weaknesses are its Eurocentrism and its conservatism.

The internal debates. Western constructivism and the English School are internally contested:

- **Thin vs. thick constructivism:** "Thin" constructivism (Wendt) accepts the basic rationalist framework and adds ideas; "thick" constructivism (Onuf, Kratochwil) rejects the rationalist framework altogether and emphasizes the **linguistic** constitution of reality.
- **Pluralism vs. solidarism:** The English School's central debate, as described above.
- **Critical vs. problem-solving:** Whether constructivism should be a critical theory (Cox) or a problem-solving theory (Wendt).

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **most developed** versions of both constructivism and the English School, and the most systematic **self-critique** of each.

What it occludes: It can be **parochial** — treating Western experiences as universal. It can be **self-referential** — a debate among Western scholars about Western scholars, with little engagement with non-Western traditions. And it can be **complicit** — constructivism's emphasis on norms and identities can be used to obscure the material power that shapes which norms and identities prevail.

2.6.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN is the **institutional embodiment** of international society. Its Charter is a constitution for the society of states; its institutions — the General Assembly, the Security Council, the ICJ — are the core of the multilateral system; its normative discourse is the most explicit statement of international society's shared values.

1. **The UN as a norm entrepreneur.** The UN has been a **norm entrepreneur** in international society. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Genocide Convention (1948), the decolonization resolutions (1960), the R2P framework (2005), the Sustainable Development Goals (2015), and the *Pact for the Future* (2024) are all examples of UN norm entrepreneurship. The UN's norms are not just rules; they are **constitutive** of international society's identity.
2. **The UN as an arena of contestation.** The UN is not just a norm entrepreneur; it is also an **arena** in which norms are contested. The Security Council is divided between the P5; the General Assembly is divided between blocs; the Human Rights Council is divided between the West and the rest. The UN's normative discourse is a **compromise** between competing visions of international society — pluralist and solidarist, Western and post-colonial, liberal and conservative.
3. **The UN as the institutionalization of the English School's "international society."** The UN is the closest thing to an **institutionalized** international society. Its Charter enshrines the primary institutions of sovereignty, non-interference, and the prohibition on force; its organs instantiate the secondary institutions of diplomacy, law, and collective security. The UN's **legitimacy** rests on its claim to represent the society of states.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **normative benchmark** — the standards against which international society's performance is judged. It also provides the **institutional record** — the resolutions,

reports, and debates that are essential evidence for any analysis.

What it occludes: It can **depoliticize** — framing norms as universal obscures the power dynamics that shape them. It can **legitimize** — the UN's authority can be used to justify actions that serve the interests of the powerful. And it can **underplay** the gap between the UN's normative commitments and its actual practice.

2.6.6 The comparison matrix

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Engagement with constructivism	Sovereignty as colonial construct; Pan-African norm entrepreneurship	Relational constructivism; civilizational state	Civilizational constructivism; ontological insecurity	Home of constructivism; thin vs. thick; critical vs. problem-solving	Norm entrepreneur; arena of contestation
Engagement with English School	AU as African international society; critique of Eurocentrism	Hierarchical society; Tianxia	Civilizational society; sphere of influence	Home of English School; pluralism vs. solidarism	Institutional embodiment of international society
Key contribution	Colonial genealogy; African agency	Relational process; alternative ontology	Ontological security; illiberal constructivism	Most developed versions; self-critique	Normative benchmark; institutional record
Key occlusion	Diversity of African positions	Coercive dimension of relationships	Naturalization of aggression	Parochialism; complicity	Power dynamics; gap between norms and practice

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2.7 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: The **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)** was adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly at the 2005 World Summit. It seemed to be a new global norm — a commitment that states would protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, and that the international community would intervene if a state failed to do so. Yet in the two decades since, R2P has been invoked inconsistently and has been contested by many states, particularly in Africa and the Global South. Why did a norm that seemed to have universal support become so contested?

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why did R2P, adopted unanimously in 2005, fail to become an internalized international norm, and why is it contested by the very states it was designed to protect?*

Constructivist analysis:

- **Norm emergence:** R2P emerged from the **norm entrepreneurship** of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), established by the Canadian government in 2000. The Commission's report reframed sovereignty as **responsibility** — a state that fails to protect its population loses its claim to sovereignty. This was a **constitutive** move: it changed the meaning of sovereignty.
- **Norm cascade:** R2P cascaded after the 2005 World Summit, when it was endorsed by the General Assembly and the Security Council. States adopted it because it was endorsed by the UN and because they wanted to be seen as legitimate. But the cascade was **shallow**: many states endorsed R2P without fully internalizing it.
- **Norm internalization:** R2P has **not** been internalized. It is invoked inconsistently; it is contested by Russia, China, and many African states; and it has not changed state behavior in cases like Syria, Myanmar, and Gaza.

The contestation. Why has R2P not been internalized? Constructivism suggests several reasons:

1. **The norm is contested in its content.** What counts as "failure to protect"? Who decides? The ICISS report said the Security Council should decide, but the Council is divided.
2. **The norm is contested in its application.** The Libya intervention (2011) was justified in R2P terms, but it became a regime-change operation, which confirmed the suspicions of Russia, China, and many African states that R2P is a **Western instrument**.
3. **The norm is contested in its genealogy.** Many African and post-colonial states see R2P as a **recolonization** of the humanitarian impulse — a new "standard of civilization" that justifies intervention in the Global South.
4. **The norm is contested in its distribution.** R2P is invoked against weak states but not against powerful ones. This **selectivity** undermines its legitimacy.

The African perspective. The African engagement with R2P is **complex**. On one hand, the AU's Article 4(h) is a **solidarist** innovation — a collective right of intervention in genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. On the other hand, African states have been **skeptical** of R2P because it has been used selectively and because it threatens the sovereignty that African states fought for. The African position is not a rejection of R2P but a **demand for its multilateralization** — intervention should be authorized by the UN or the AU, not by ad hoc Western coalitions.

The Chinese and Russian perspectives. China and Russia have consistently contested R2P, framing it as a Western instrument for regime change. They emphasize **sovereignty and non-interference**, and they argue that R2P is a violation of the UN Charter. Their position is a **pluralist** one: order requires respecting sovereignty, not intervening to enforce justice.

The Western perspective. Western states are the **principal advocates** of R2P, but they are also its **principal violators**: they invoke it selectively and they resist its application to their own actions. The Western position is **solidarist** in rhetoric but **pluralist** in practice.

The UN perspective. The UN has tried to **institutionalize** R2P through the office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect, and through the "three pillars" framework (the state's responsibility to protect; the international community's responsibility to assist; the international community's responsibility to intervene). The UN's position is that R2P is a **Charter-based** norm, not a Western imposition.

Adjudication. Which theory best explains R2P's contested status?

- **Constructivism** explains the **emergence** of R2P and its **shallow cascade**. It also explains why the norm has not been internalized: the norm is contested in its content, application, and genealogy.
- **The English School** explains the **pluralism/solidarism** tension: R2P is a solidarist norm in a pluralist international society. The contestation is not a failure of R2P; it is a **structural feature** of international society.
- **Realism** explains **why R2P is invoked selectively**: the powerful invoke it when it serves their interests and ignore it when it does not.
- **Post-colonial theory** explains **why R2P is contested in the Global South**: it reproduces the colonial trope of the "civilized" intervening in the "uncivilized."

A complete explanation combines all four: R2P is a **genuinely new norm** that emerged through entrepreneurship and cascaded through the UN system; but its **internalization** has been blocked by the **pluralist structure** of international society, the **selective application** of the norm by the powerful, and the **post-colonial suspicion** that it is a new form of Western interventionism. The contestation over R2P is not a failure of the norm; it is a **window into the deeper contestation** over what international society is and should be.

2.8 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: The **African Union's Constitutive Act** (2000) created a novel set of norms for the African region: it retained **non-interference** (Article 4(g)) but added a **right of the Union to intervene** in a member state in cases of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity (Article 4(h)), and a **condemnation of unconstitutional changes of government** (Article 4(p)). The AU has invoked Article 4(p) to suspend member states after coups (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Gabon), but it has never invoked Article 4(h) to intervene in a member state. Why did the AU create a norm it has never used?

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely: why did the AU create a right of intervention (Article 4(h)) that it has never invoked?
2. Apply the constructivist mechanisms: how did the norm emerge? Who were the norm entrepreneurs? What was the norm cascade? Has it been internalized?
3. Apply the English School: is the AU a **pluralist** or **solidarist** international society? How does Article 4(h) fit into the pluralism/solidarism debate?
4. Reconstruct the African perspective: how do African states themselves explain the gap between the norm's creation and its non-use?
5. Write a 300-word adjudication: is the AU's Article 4(h) a **failed norm**, a **symbolic norm**, or a **norm in waiting**?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did the AU create a right of intervention in Article 4(h) that it has never invoked?

Constructivist analysis: - **Norm emergence:** Article 4(h) emerged from the **learning process** after the

Rwandan genocide (1994). The OAU's absolute non-interference was widely seen as having enabled the genocide. The norm entrepreneurs were African leaders and intellectuals — particularly those involved in the AU's creation — who argued that the OAU's principle of non-interference had to be modified to prevent future atrocities. - **Norm cascade:** The norm cascaded within Africa because it was endorsed by the AU Assembly and because it was consistent with the emerging global norm of R2P. But the cascade was **regional**, not global. - **Norm internalization:** The norm has **not** been internalized in practice. The AU has never invoked Article 4(h) to intervene. This suggests that the norm is **symbolic** rather than operational.

English School analysis: The AU is a **pluralist** international society with **solidarist** aspirations. Article 4(g) enshrines pluralism; Article 4(h) enshrines solidarism. The tension between them is the AU's central normative dilemma. The AU's non-use of Article 4(h) reflects the **pluralist** structure of the AU: member states are reluctant to authorize intervention in each other's affairs, even when the norm permits it.

African perspective: African states themselves explain the gap in three ways: 1. **The norm is a last resort.** Article 4(h) is designed for **grave circumstances** — genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity — and these have not occurred (or have not been recognized as occurring) in cases where the AU could intervene. 2. **The AU lacks capacity.** The AU does not have the military capacity to intervene without external support, and external support (e.g., from the UN or Western powers) is politically problematic. 3. **The norm is a deterrent.** The **existence** of Article 4(h) may deter atrocities, even if it is never invoked. The norm's **symbolic** function is as important as its operational function.

Adjudication: Article 4(h) is best understood as a **norm in waiting** — a norm that has been created but not yet operationalized. It is not a failed norm, because it has shaped the AU's discourse and its institutional architecture (the AU's Peace and Security Council, the African Standby Force). It is not merely symbolic, because it has been invoked as a **normative resource** in debates about intervention. It is a **norm in waiting** because the conditions for its invocation — grave circumstances, AU capacity, and political will — have not yet coincided. The constructivist framework explains the norm's emergence and its shallow internalization; the English School explains the pluralist structure that constrains its use; the African perspective explains the **agency** of African states in creating and interpreting the norm.

2.9 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The **"century of humiliation"** narrative in Chinese foreign policy. The narrative — which recounts China's victimization by foreign powers from the First Opium War (1839–42) to the founding of the People's Republic (1949) — is central to Chinese identity and shapes China's responses to perceived slights, its emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference, and its skepticism of Western human-rights criticism.

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** How does the "century of humiliation" narrative function as a constructivist mechanism? What identities and interests does it constitute? What does it make possible and what does it foreclose?
2. **Ontological security:** How does the narrative provide ontological security for China? What anxieties does it manage? What would happen if the narrative were disrupted?
3. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the narrative?

(African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — one paragraph each or a table.)

4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show that the narrative is **not** a significant cause of Chinese foreign policy? What would show that it **is**?

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish the narrative's **constitutive** effects (how it shapes identity) from its **regulative** effects (how it constrains behavior)? Does it specify the **mechanism** by which the narrative influences policy?

2.10 HINGE QUESTION

A scholar argues: "The Cold War ended peacefully because Gorbachev and Reagan changed their ideas about each other. The material balance of power did not change significantly, but the shared understandings did." Which theoretical tradition does this argument most clearly belong to?

- A) Structural realism
- B) Neoliberal institutionalism
- C) Constructivism
- D) Offensive realism

Answer: C. The argument claims that the end of the Cold War was caused by a change in **shared understandings** (ideas), not by a change in the material balance of power. This is the core constructivist claim: ideas and identities are causally significant, and they can change independently of material conditions.

If you answered A: Structural realism would explain the end of the Cold War through changes in the distribution of power (e.g., Soviet decline), not through changes in ideas. **If you answered B:** Neoliberal institutionalism would explain the end of the Cold War through institutions (e.g., the CSCE, arms control agreements), not primarily through changes in ideas. **If you answered D:** Offensive realism would predict that the Cold War would end in conflict, not peacefully, because states maximize power.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground constructivism's claims in empirical data.

Task: Using the summary data below, analyze the diffusion of **human rights norms** and **sovereignty norms** across the international system.

Table 1: Ratification of core human rights treaties (number of states parties, selected years)

Treaty	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
ICCPR	60	90	145	165	173
CEDAW	50	100	165	186	189
Convention on the Rights of the Child	0	100	191	193	196
Rome Statute (ICC)	—	—	20	114	123
Convention Against Torture	20	60	120	147	170

Table 2: UN General Assembly votes on R2P-related resolutions (illustrative)

Resolution	Year	In favor	Against	Abstain
World Summit Outcome (R2P paragraphs)	2005	190	0	0 (adopted by consensus)
Syria humanitarian access	2014	120	13	40
Myanmar R2P resolution	2019	130	8	30
Gaza ceasefire	2023	120	14	45

Analysis questions:

1. **Norm cascade:** What does the ratification data suggest about the cascade of human rights norms? Is there evidence of a **tipping point**? Which norms have cascaded most fully?
2. **Norm internalization:** Does ratification equal internalization? What evidence would you need to distinguish **formal** adoption from **genuine** internalization? (Hint: ratification is a formal act; internalization would require evidence of compliance and normative acceptance.)
3. **Contestation:** What does the R2P voting data suggest about the **contestation** of norms? Why has R2P not cascaded as fully as human rights treaties?
4. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the data? (African: human rights norms are universal but their application is selective; Chinese: human rights norms are Western instruments; Russian: human rights norms are instruments of Western hegemony; Western: human rights norms are progressive; UN: human rights norms are Charter-based.)
5. **Limitation:** What does the data **not** tell you? (Hint: ratification does not measure compliance; voting does not measure belief; and the data does not capture **informal** norms.)

Rule: Complete the data lab before the independent memo.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The three cultures of anarchy. Draw three boxes — Hobbesian, Lockean, Kantian. For each, write: the relationship (enemies, rivals, friends), the logic of interaction (kill or be killed, competitive coexistence, security community), and one example.

Visual 2: The norm life cycle. Draw a three-stage cycle: Norm emergence → Norm cascade → Norm internalization. For each stage, write the key actors, the mechanism, and one example.

Visual 3: The English School's three concepts. Draw three concentric circles: International system (outer), International society (middle), World society (inner). For each, write the defining feature and one example.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
What is constructivism's core claim?	Anarchy is what states make of it; identities and interests are socially constructed through interaction
What are the three cultures of anarchy?	Hobbesian (enemies); Lockean (rivals); Kantian (friends)
What is the difference between regulative and constitutive norms?	Regulative norms regulate pre-existing activities; constitutive norms constitute the activity itself
What is the norm life cycle?	Emergence → cascade → internalization (Finnemore & Sikkink)
What is ontological security?	The security of a state's self-identity; states seek biographical continuity and manage anxiety
What are the English School's three concepts?	International system (interaction); international society (shared norms and institutions); world society (individuals)
What is the pluralism/solidarism debate?	Pluralism: order through sovereignty and non-interference; solidarism: order through shared values and intervention
What are primary vs. secondary institutions?	Primary: deep, historically evolved practices (sovereignty, diplomacy); secondary: formal organizations (UN, WTO)
How do the five perspectives engage constructivism and the English School?	African: colonial genealogy + agency; Chinese: relational constructivism; Russian: civilizational constructivism; Western: home tradition; UN: institutional embodiment
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.6; Wendt (1992, 1999); Onuf (1989); Kratochwil (1989); Finnemore & Sikkink (1998); Mitzen (2006); Steele (2008); Bull (1977); Buzan (2004)
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the constructivist argument to a smart non-specialist in 150–200 words, without using jargon. If you must use "anarchy," "norms," or "identity," define them in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for social construction. Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "Social construction is like the game of chess — the pieces have no meaning outside the rules of the game,

and the rules create the possibilities for action. But unlike chess, international politics has no rulebook that exists independently of the players; the rules themselves are contested and changing." Where it breaks down: chess has a fixed rulebook, whereas international politics has no fixed rules — the rules are what the players are arguing about.)

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What is the difference between constitutive and regulative norms?
Mechanism	How does the norm life cycle explain the diffusion of human rights norms?
Application	A state changes its identity from "enemy" to "friend" through repeated interaction. Which constructivist mechanism does this illustrate?
Comparison	How do the English School's three concepts (system, society, world society) differ?
Source	What did Wendt mean by "anarchy is what states make of it"?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to the constructivist claim that "ideas matter"?
Reconstruction	How would an African post-colonial scholar critique the English School's "expansion" narrative?
Occlusion	What does constructivism fail to see about material power?
Adjudication	Which theory best explains the contestation over R2P, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the three cultures of anarchy on a diagram.

Tag each card: `L7`, `constructivism`, `English School`, `norms`, `perspective`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Reconstruct Wendt's constructivist argument	
Apply the norm life cycle to a case	

Objective	Confidence
Explain ontological security and its implications	
Distinguish the English School's three concepts	
Reconstruct the five perspectives on constructivism and the English School	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between ideas and material power?
2. Which perspective was easiest to reconstruct? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default analytical style?
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 8?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L7			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 1)

Add this row to your Module 1 cheatsheet:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Social construction; anarchy is what states make of it; constitutive vs. regulative norms; logic of appropriateness; norm life cycle; ontological security; international system/society/world society; pluralism/solidarism; primary vs. secondary institutions
Key mechanisms	Interaction → shared understandings → identities/interests; norm entrepreneurship → cascade → internalization; routines → ontological security; expansion of international society → contestation
Theories and authors	Wendt; Onuf; Kratochwil; Finnemore & Sikkink; Mitzen; Steele; Bull; Wight; Watson; Buzan; Qin Yaqing

Column	Content
Cases and evidence	End of the Cold War; R2P; ICC and Africa; AU Article 4(h); "century of humiliation"; human rights treaty ratification
Debates	Do ideas matter independently of power? Is international society pluralist or solidarist? Is constructivism critical or problem-solving?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that ideas do not matter — that material power determines outcomes regardless of shared understandings?
Cross-links	L4 (post-positivism — the epistemology of constructivism); L5 (realism — the foil); L6 (institutionalism — the extension); L8 (critical theory — the radicalization); L24 (cognitive warfare — the weaponization of constructed identities); L28 (AU norms); L35 (post-Soviet ontology); L42 (Iranian identity)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1–L7 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L7 with L4 (post-positivism) and L8 (critical theory)
R5	End of Module 1	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Five key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (R2P) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (AU Article 4(h)) attempted and compared

- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
- ☐ Cheatsheet entry added
- ☐ R2 review scheduled

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **On constructivism:** Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of It," *International Organization* (1992); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999), ch. 1–3; Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making* (1989); Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions* (1989).
- **On norms:** Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* (1998); Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (1996); Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States* (2008).
- **On ontological security:** Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* (2006); Brent Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations* (2008); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991).
- **On the English School:** Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (1977); Martin Wight, *Systems of States* (1977); Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, *The Expansion of International Society* (1984); Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society?* (2004); Tim Dunne, *Inventing International Society* (1998); Nicholas Wheeler, *Saving Strangers* (2000).
- **On African engagement:** Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996); the AU Constitutive Act; the Ezulwini Consensus (2005); Kwaku Danso and Kwesi Aning, "African Experiences and Alternativity in International Relations Theory" (2019).
- **On Chinese constructivism:** Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (2018); Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia* (2021); Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (2011).
- **On Russian constructivism:** Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin* (2012); Lauri Mälksoo, *Russian Approaches to International Law* (2015); the Valdai Club reports on Russian identity and multipolarity.
- **On R2P:** ICISS, *The Responsibility to Protect* (2001); the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, paragraphs 138–139; Alex Bellamy, *Responsibility to Protect* (2015); UN Secretary-General reports on R2P.

End of Lesson 7. Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 8 (Critical, Marxist, Post-Colonial, and Feminist/Queer IR).

9. Critical, Marxist, Post-Colonial, and Feminist/Queer IR: The Politics of Knowledge, Class, Race, and Gender

LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L8 — Critical, Marxist, Post-Colonial, and Feminist/Queer IR
Module	Module 1: Epistemological and Ontological Foundations
Prerequisites	L4 (positivism/post-positivism, the linguistic turn); L5 (realism); L6 (institutionalism); L7 (constructivism, ontological security)
Interleaved links	Forward to L9–14 (historical architecture), L15–19 (IPE — world-systems, dependency), L27–34 (African state formation, conflict political economy), L41–46 (West Asia — sectarian and gendered framings), L50 (transnational non-state actors), L51 (climate geopolitics)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.
Content channels	Canon (quoted and summarized); primary texts (Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, Rodney, Nkrumah, Fanon, Cabral, Cox, Gramsci, Said, Spivak, Quijano, Mutua, Grovogui, Enloe, Tickner, Peterson, Weber, Crenshaw, Lugones, Oyěwùmí, Butler, Puar — all paraphrased and analyzed here); data lab (value-chain and labor data); five perspectives
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (adjudicate between critical traditions and between them and mainstream IR)
Estimated study time	8–10 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Every argument, quotation, and example you need is inside this document. Where I cite Marx, Lenin, Rodney, Nkrumah, Fanon, Cox, Gramsci, Said, Spivak, Quijano, Enloe, Tickner, Peterson, Weber, Crenshaw, Lugones, Oyěwùmí, Butler, or Puar, I summarize the argument fully enough that you do not need the original to complete the lesson. "Further Reading" is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Lessons 5–7 gave you the **mainstream** theoretical landscape. Realism, institutionalism, and constructivism disagree profoundly, but they share a set of **unexamined premises**: that states are the natural units of international politics, that anarchy is the fundamental condition, that the international system is a realm of formal equality among sovereigns, and that the scholar's own position — class, race, gender, colonial location — is irrelevant to the validity of their knowledge.

This lesson assembles the **traditions that interrogate those premises**. They are not "add-ons" to IR; they are **independent theorizations** of what the international is. Each begins from a different question:

- **Marxism and historical materialism:** Who owns the means of production, and how does the capitalist world-economy structure international politics? Why does the majority world remain poor despite formal independence?
- **Critical theory:** Whose interests does "problem-solving" theory serve? What would it mean for theory to be **emancipatory**?
- **Post-colonial and decolonial IR:** How was the international system constituted through colonial conquest and racial hierarchy, and how does that constitution persist? Whose knowledge counts, and whose is erased?
- **Feminist and queer IR:** How do gendered and sexualized logics constitute states, militaries, security, and the international itself? Who is made invisible by the discipline's supposedly neutral categories?

The African perspective is **primary** in this lesson, because Africa is where these traditions have been most productive — and because African scholars have produced some of the most important work in each tradition, not as "applications" of European theory but as original theorization.

This lesson has five key ideas:

1. **Marxism and historical materialism:** the capitalist world-economy as the structuring force of international politics.
2. **Critical theory:** theory is never neutral; the distinction between problem-solving and critical theory.
3. **Post-colonial and decolonial IR:** the colonial constitution of the international, and the politics of knowledge.
4. **Feminist and queer IR:** the gendered and sexualized constitution of states, security, and the international.
5. **The five perspectives** on these traditions, and the **adjudication** among them.

By the end, you can take any international outcome and ask: *Who owns the means of production? Whose knowledge is being privileged? Whose bodies are being governed? Whose labor is invisible? And how do the five perspectives reconstruct it?*

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory)

1. From L5: What are the five variants of realism, and what is each one's core mechanism?
2. From L6: What is the difference between cooperation and harmony in Keohane's institutionalism?

3. From L7: What did Wendt mean by "anarchy is what states make of it"?
4. From L7: What is the difference between constitutive and regulative norms, and what is the norm life cycle?

Check against the previous lessons before proceeding.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind:

- Why is Africa poor despite decades of development aid and formal independence?
- Whose knowledge counts as "theory" in IR, and whose is treated as "case material"?
- Is the state a neutral container of political authority, or is it gendered and racialized?
- What does it mean to say that "the personal is international"?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

Provisional definitions; revise by the end:

Historical materialism; mode of production; base and superstructure; surplus value; primitive accumulation; imperialism; neo-colonialism; unequal exchange; dependency; world-systems; core/periphery/semi-periphery; hegemony (Gramscian); organic intellectuals; problem-solving vs. critical theory; emancipation; Orientalism; subaltern; epistemic violence; coloniality of power; coloniality of gender; intersectionality; standpoint theory; gendered ontology of the state; militarized masculinity; homonationalism; queer IR.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Reconstruct** the Marxist and world-systems account of international inequality, distinguishing it from liberal and realist accounts.
2. **Apply** Cox's distinction between problem-solving and critical theory to a mainstream IR theory (realism or institutionalism).
3. **Explain** the post-colonial and decolonial critique of IR — Orientalism, subalternity, epistemic violence, coloniality of power — and apply it to a specific case.
4. **Reconstruct** the feminist and queer critique of IR — gendered ontology of the state, militarized masculinity, intersectionality, homonationalism — and apply it to a specific case.
5. **Reconstruct** how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions engage with these critical traditions, and **adjudicate** among them on a specific case.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Marxism and world-systems: the capitalist world-economy as the structuring force of international politics

The claim: For Marxist and world-systems approaches, the fundamental structure of international politics is **not anarchy** (realism) or **institutions** (institutionalism) or **shared ideas** (constructivism). It is **capitalism** — a global system of production, exchange, and accumulation that distributes power and wealth unequally, and that reproduces that inequality through political, military, and ideological means.

The core concepts.

Historical materialism. Marx's central claim is that the **mode of production** — the way a society organizes the production of goods — shapes the **social relations** of that society, including its politics, law, culture, and ideas. Marx's famous formulation: "The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their being determines their consciousness." The **base** (the economic structure) shapes the **superstructure** (the state, law, culture, ideology) — though Marx and Engels also insisted that the relationship is not one-way.

Surplus value and exploitation. For Marx, capitalism is defined by the extraction of **surplus value** from labor. Workers produce more value than they are paid in wages, and the difference — surplus value — is appropriated by the capitalist. This is not a moral complaint; it is a structural analysis of how capitalism works. The same logic operates internationally: capital in the core extracts surplus value from labor in the periphery.

Primitive accumulation. Marx argued that capitalism was born through **primitive accumulation** — the violent dispossession of peasants, the enclosure of commons, the colonization of the Americas, the slave trade, and the expropriation of land. Rosa Luxemburg extended this argument: capitalism **requires** non-capitalist spaces to exploit and expand into. Colonialism was not an aberration of capitalism; it was **constitutive** of it.

Lenin and imperialism. V. I. Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) argued that imperialism is the **monopoly stage** of capitalism: as competition within the core drives down profits, capitalists export capital to the periphery, where labor is cheap and resources are abundant. Imperialism is therefore not a policy choice but a **structural necessity** of monopoly capitalism. Lenin's argument was contested by other Marxists (e.g., Kautsky's "ultra-imperialism" thesis, which predicted that capitalists would cooperate rather than compete), but it established the framework for later dependency and world-systems theory.

Dependency theory. In the 1960s and 1970s, Latin American, African, and Caribbean scholars developed **dependency theory** as a critique of modernization theory. Andre Gunder Frank's formulation — "the development of underdevelopment" — argued that the periphery is not undeveloped because it is isolated from capitalism; it is underdeveloped **because of** its integration into capitalism on unequal terms. The periphery specializes in raw materials; the core specializes in manufactured goods; the terms of trade favor the core; and the surplus is transferred from periphery to core through unequal exchange.

Samir Amin. The Egyptian political economist Samir Amin developed dependency theory into a theory of **delinking** — the argument that the periphery cannot develop within the capitalist world-system and must delink from it to pursue autonomous development. Amin's work is one of the most important non-Western contributions to international political economy.

Walter Rodney. The Guyanese historian Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) is the most influential application of dependency theory to Africa. Rodney argued that Africa's underdevelopment

was **produced** by European colonialism: the slave trade, the extraction of resources, the destruction of local industries, and the imposition of monoculture economies. His central claim: "Underdevelopment is not the absence of development; it is a product of the development of capitalism."

Kwame Nkrumah. Ghana's first president, in *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), argued that formal independence did not end colonial exploitation. "The State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside." Nkrumah's concept of **neo-colonialism** became a foundational concept in African IR.

World-systems analysis. Immanuel Wallerstein's **world-systems analysis** generalizes dependency theory into a historical sociology of the capitalist world-economy. The world-system has three zones:

- **Core:** high-wage, high-technology, high-profit production; strong states; diversified economies.
- **Periphery:** low-wage, low-technology, low-profit production; weak states; monoculture economies.
- **Semi-periphery:** intermediate; a mix of core and peripheral production; often the site of political contestation.

The key insight is that the **world-system is a single unit of analysis** — it is not a collection of separate national economies but a single division of labor. Giovanni Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994) added a theory of **hegemonic cycles**: hegemony is not just military dominance but a combination of production, finance, and military power, and hegemonic powers rise and decline through predictable cycles.

Gramscian hegemony. Antonio Gramsci's concept of **hegemony** — developed in his *Prison Notebooks* — is the most important Marxist contribution to IR after Lenin. For Gramsci, hegemony is not just coercion but **consent**: a ruling class maintains power not only through force but through **ideological** dominance — by making its worldview appear as common sense. Robert Cox applied this to IR: **hegemony** is "an order within a world economy with a dominant mode of production which penetrates into all countries and links into other subordinate modes of production," supported by "a complex of international social relationships which connect the social classes of the different countries," and expressed in "a particular configuration of forces" — material, institutional, and ideational.

What Marxism and world-systems contribute: They explain **structural inequality** — why the majority world remains poor despite formal independence and decades of development aid. They explain **the colonial origins of capitalism** — why slavery, dispossession, and extraction were not aberrations but constitutive of the system. They explain **the role of ideology** — how the powerful make their interests appear as universal common sense.

What they occlude: They can be **economically deterministic** — reducing politics and culture to the economy. They can **underplay agency** — treating the periphery as passive victims of structure rather than as actors. They can **underplay the autonomy of the state** — treating the state as a mere instrument of capital. And they can be **outdated** — the original dependency and world-systems theories were developed in the 1960s–70s, and the world economy has changed dramatically since then (financialization, global value chains, the rise of China).

Scope condition: Marxist and world-systems analysis is most powerful for explaining **long-run structural patterns** — persistent inequality, the global division of labor, the recurrence of financial crises. It is less powerful for explaining **short-run events** — decisions, crises, wars — which require more granular analysis.

Observable implication. If the Marxist account is operative, you should see (a) a persistent **structural**

hierarchy in the world economy, (b) the **transfer of surplus** from periphery to core through trade, finance, and debt, and (c) the **ideological legitimation** of this hierarchy through discourses of development, modernization, and "good governance."

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Critical theory: theory is never neutral, and the point is to change the world

The claim: The critical tradition in IR — associated with the Frankfurt School, Gramsci, and Robert Cox — makes a claim that is both epistemological and political: **theory is never neutral**. Every theory embeds assumptions about what is possible, what is natural, and what can be changed. The choice of theory is therefore a **political choice**, and the task of critical theory is to make that choice visible.

The Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School — Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Habermas, and others — developed a critique of **instrumental reason**: the reduction of reason to technical calculation, which they saw as the intellectual foundation of both capitalism and totalitarianism. Horkheimer's 1937 essay "Traditional and Critical Theory" distinguished:

- **Traditional theory:** Theory that describes the world as it is, taking the existing order as given.
- **Critical theory:** Theory that aims at **emancipation** — at freeing people from domination. Critical theory is "critical" in the Kantian sense (it examines its own conditions) and in the Marxian sense (it aims at changing the world, not just interpreting it).

Robert Cox's distinction. Cox's 1981 essay "Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory" is the most important application of the Frankfurt School to IR. Cox's central distinction:

- **Problem-solving theory** "takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organized, as the given framework for action." Its goal is to solve problems **within** the existing order. Realism, institutionalism, and much constructivism are problem-solving theories.
- **Critical theory** "stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came about." It asks whether the existing order is **just**, and whether it can be **changed**. It is "critical in the sense that it stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came about."

Cox's famous formulation: **"Theory is always for someone and for some purpose."** There is no such thing as a neutral theory. Every theory serves some interests and excludes others. The task of critical theory is to make those interests visible.

Gramsci and hegemony. As described above, Gramsci's concept of **hegemony** is the most important concept in critical IR. Hegemony is not just domination but **consent** — the process by which the ruling class's worldview becomes the common sense of the whole society. Applied internationally, hegemony is the process by which the dominant state's worldview becomes the common sense of the international system — through institutions (the UN, the IMF, the WTO), through ideas (development, human rights, the "rules-based order"), and through material power.

Cox's concept of **"historical structures"** — the combination of material capabilities, ideas, and institutions — is his framework for analyzing how hegemony is produced and reproduced. Hegemony is not just a state of affairs; it is a **structure** that must be continuously reproduced.

Emancipation. Critical theory is explicitly **emancipatory**. It seeks not only to interpret the world but to

change it — to identify the possibilities for transforming the prevailing order. This is why Cox's work is associated with **counter-hegemonic** movements: the anti-globalization movement, the World Social Forum, the struggle for a New International Economic Order, and contemporary movements for climate justice and reparations.

What critical theory contributes: It shows that **theory is political**. It provides the tools for analyzing **how power operates through ideas** — not just through coercion. It insists on the possibility of **change** — that the existing order is not natural or inevitable but historical and contingent.

What it occludes: It can be **vague about alternatives** — critical theory is better at critique than at construction. It can be **elitist** — the critical theorist often speaks *for* the oppressed rather than *with* them. It can be **Eurocentric** — the Frankfurt School's critique of modernity is still a critique *within* modernity, and it has been slow to engage with colonial and racial domination.

Scope condition: Critical theory is most powerful as a **meta-theory** — a framework for analyzing other theories. It is less powerful as an empirical theory — it does not generate testable predictions about specific outcomes.

Observable implication. If critical theory is operative, you should see (a) **contestation over the framing of issues** (e.g., "development" vs. "underdevelopment," "humanitarian intervention" vs. "imperialism"), (b) **structural** explanations of outcomes that mainstream theories treat as accidental, and (c) the **possibility of transformation** — moments when the existing order is contested and reshaped.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Post-colonial and decolonial IR: the colonial constitution of the international, and the politics of knowledge

The claim: Post-colonial and decolonial IR begin from the claim that **the international system was constituted through colonialism**, and that this constitution persists. The task is not just to add "Africa" or "the colonized" to existing theories, but to show how the categories of IR — sovereignty, anarchy, development, security — were **produced** through colonial relations and continue to reproduce colonial hierarchies.

Edward Said and Orientalism. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is the founding text of post-colonial theory. Said's argument: "the Orient" is not a geographical fact but a **discursive construction** — a set of representations produced by Western scholars, writers, and administrators that construct the "East" as exotic, backward, irrational, and feminized, in contrast to the "West" as rational, modern, and masculine. Orientalism is not just a body of knowledge; it is a **system of power** — "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."

Said's argument applies directly to IR: the categories of the discipline — "developed" vs. "developing," "modern" vs. "traditional," "stable" vs. "fragile" — are not neutral descriptions. They are **representations** that construct the objects they claim to describe, and they serve to justify intervention, hierarchy, and domination.

Spivak and the subaltern. Gayatri Spivak's 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is the other founding text. Spivak's argument: the **subaltern** — the colonized, the marginalized, those excluded from dominant discourse — cannot speak in a way that is heard within the dominant structures. When Western scholars claim to "give voice" to the subaltern, they often **reproduce** the subaltern's silence by speaking *for* them.

Spivak's concept of **epistemic violence** — the violence done to knowledge systems and ways of knowing

through colonial domination — is central to post-colonial IR. Epistemic violence is not just the suppression of knowledge; it is the **imposition** of a particular way of knowing that makes other ways of knowing invisible or illegitimate.

Quijano and the coloniality of power. Aníbal Quijano's concept of the **coloniality of power** (2000) is the most influential concept in decolonial theory. Quijano argues that colonialism was not just a political and economic system; it was a **system of classification** that established a hierarchy of races, with Europeans at the top and colonized peoples at the bottom. This classification persists **after** formal decolonization — it is what Quijano calls **coloniality**.

The coloniality of power operates in three domains: **labor** (the global division of labor organized by race), **knowledge** (the privileging of Western knowledge and the marginalization of non-Western knowledge), and **authority** (the concentration of political power in the hands of the former colonial powers and their allies).

Mignolo and decoloniality. Walter Mignolo's **decoloniality** is a more radical version of post-colonial theory. Mignolo argues that **modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same coin** — there is no modernity without coloniality. The task of decoloniality is not just to critique modernity but to **delink** from it — to recover and build alternative ways of knowing and being.

African post-colonial and decolonial IR. African scholars have made fundamental contributions to these traditions:

- **Frantz Fanon.** *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) are foundational. Fanon's analysis of the **psychology of colonialism** — the internalization of inferiority by the colonized and the construction of the colonizer's identity through the negation of the colonized — is essential for understanding how colonial hierarchies persist in the minds and bodies of the colonized.
- **Amílcar Cabral.** The Guinea-Bissauan revolutionary and theorist argued that national liberation is not just a military struggle but a **cultural** one — the colonized must reclaim their culture and their history as part of the struggle for freedom.
- **Siba Grovogui.** Grovogui's *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) is the most important African contribution to IR theory. Grovogui argues that the sovereignty that IR treats as universal was **never extended to Africans** — African polities were treated as quasi-sovereign or non-sovereign, subject to the "standard of civilization" and to external tutelage. The international system is not just anarchic; it is **hierarchical**, and the hierarchy is **racial**.
- **Makau Mutua.** In "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights" (2001), Mutua argues that the human rights discourse constructs a **metaphor** in which the non-Western world is the "savage," the victim of human rights violations, and the West is the "savior." This metaphor obscures the West's own complicity in producing the conditions it claims to remedy.

The critique of IR. Post-colonial and decolonial IR argue that IR's core concepts — **sovereignty, anarchy, the state, security, development** — were forged in the context of empire and continue to carry colonial assumptions:

- **Sovereignty** was never universal; it was extended selectively to the "civilized" nations.
- **Anarchy** is not a neutral description; it is a **racialized** description of the non-European world as disorderly and dangerous.
- **Development** is a discourse that constructs the non-Western world as backward and in need of tutelage.
- **Security** is often framed in ways that securitize the racialized Other — the migrant, the terrorist, the

"failed state."

What post-colonial and decolonial IR contribute: They show that **the international is not neutral** — its categories are historically produced and carry power. They show that **knowledge is political** — what counts as legitimate knowledge is itself a site of contestation. They provide the analytical tools for understanding **how colonial hierarchies persist** in the post-colonial world.

What they occlude: They can be **overly textual** — focusing on representations rather than material conditions. They can **underplay the agency** of the colonized — treating them as objects of colonial discourse rather than as actors. They can be **essentializing** — treating "the West" and "the non-West" as monolithic. And they can be **pessimistic** — if coloniality is so pervasive, it is difficult to see how it can be overcome.

Scope condition: Post-colonial and decolonial IR is most powerful for explaining **how the international is represented** — how categories, discourses, and frameworks carry colonial assumptions. It is less powerful for explaining **specific material outcomes** — wars, trade, crises — which require additional theoretical tools.

Observable implication. If post-colonial theory is operative, you should see (a) **representations** of the non-Western world that construct it as backward, dangerous, or in need of salvation; (b) **hierarchies of knowledge** — who gets to produce theory, and who is treated as case material; and (c) **persistence** of colonial-era patterns in the post-colonial era.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Feminist and queer IR: the gendered and sexualized constitution of states, security, and the international

The claim: Feminist and queer IR begin from the claim that **the international is gendered and sexualized** — not in the sense that it is "about women" or "about sexuality," but in the sense that its core categories — state, sovereignty, security, war, power — are **constituted** through gendered and sexualized logics. Gender and sexuality are not add-ons to international politics; they are **constitutive** of it.

The gendered ontology of the state. Feminist IR scholars argue that the state is not a neutral container of political authority; it is a **gendered** institution. Spike Peterson's work in particular argues that the **sovereign state** is constructed through a set of gendered dichotomies: public/private, reason/emotion, rationality/bodily, protector/protected. The state is imagined as **masculine** — rational, autonomous, decisive — and the domain of the state is imagined as **public**, in contrast to the domestic sphere, which is feminized and privatized.

The consequence is that **what counts as "international politics"** is itself gendered. The high politics of statecraft, diplomacy, and war is coded as masculine; the low politics of reproduction, care, and welfare is coded as feminine and relegated to the domestic sphere. Feminist IR insists that **the personal is international** — that the way states govern bodies, families, and reproduction is a central part of international politics, not a private matter outside it.

Militarized masculinity. Feminist IR scholars — Cynthia Enloe, Carol Cohn, Jean Elshtain, and others — have analyzed how militaries and wars are constructed through **militarized masculinity**. Carol Cohn's "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals" (1987) is a classic: Cohn shows that the language of nuclear strategy is saturated with gendered and sexualized imagery — "strategic virginity," "penetration," "hard target," "decapitation" — and that this language shapes how strategists think about nuclear weapons, making the unthinkable thinkable.

Cynthia Enloe's *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989) is the other foundational text. Enloe's method of **"feminist curiosity"** — asking "where are the women?" — reveals that women are not marginal to international politics but **central** to it: as factory workers in export-processing zones, as domestic workers for diplomats, as military wives, as sex workers on military bases, as camp followers, as combatants, as peace activists. Enloe's insight: "the personal is international" and "the international is personal."

J. Ann Tickner and the critique of Morgenthau. Tickner's "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation" (1988) is a landmark. Tickner takes Morgenthau's six principles and shows that each one presupposes a **masculinist** conception of politics:

- Morgenthau's "interest defined as power" assumes a **competitive, autonomous, rational** actor — traits coded as masculine.
- Morgenthau's "objective laws rooted in human nature" universalizes a **particular** (masculine) conception of human nature.
- Morgenthau's "autonomy of the political sphere" ignores the **domestic and reproductive** sphere, which is feminized and devalued.

Tickner's reformulation does not simply reject realism; it shows that realism's apparent neutrality is **gendered**.

Intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of **intersectionality** (1989) — developed in the context of Black women's legal experience — is central to contemporary feminist IR. Intersectionality holds that gender, race, class, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity are **interlocking** and cannot be analyzed in isolation. A Black woman's experience of discrimination, for example, is not the sum of "racism" and "sexism" but a **distinct** form of oppression produced by their intersection.

Applied to IR, intersectionality means that the analysis of gender cannot be separated from the analysis of race, class, and coloniality. The **racialized and gendered** construction of the "migrant," the "terrorist," the "failed state," and the "humanitarian subject" are all intersectional phenomena.

Post-colonial feminism and the coloniality of gender. María Lugones's concept of the **coloniality of gender** (2007) argues that gender itself is a **colonial** category. Before colonialism, many societies — including many African societies — had forms of social organization that were not organized around the Western binary of male/female. Colonialism **imposed** the gender binary as part of its civilizing mission. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) makes a similar argument for Yoruba society: the categories of "man" and "woman" were not central to pre-colonial Yoruba social organization; they were introduced through colonialism and Christian missionary activity.

This is a profound challenge to Western feminism: it suggests that "gender" is not a universal category but a **colonial** one, and that the imposition of the gender binary was itself a form of colonial violence.

Queer IR. Queer IR — associated with Cynthia Weber, Jasbir Puar, and others — extends the feminist critique to **sexuality**. Queer IR argues that the international is **heteronormative**: it assumes and reproduces heterosexual norms — the heterosexual family, the heterosexual citizen, the heterosexual nation.

Cynthia Weber's *Queer International Relations* (2016) argues that sovereignty is itself a **sexualized** concept: the sovereign state is imagined as a **heterosexual** body, and challenges to sovereignty are represented as **sexual** deviance. Jasbir Puar's concept of **homonationalism** (2007) argues that the US has incorporated certain forms of homosexuality into its national identity — as a way of distinguishing itself from the "homophobic" Muslim world — while continuing to marginalize other forms of queerness. Homonationalism is a form of

sexual exceptionalism that serves imperial purposes.

What feminist and queer IR contribute: They show that **gender and sexuality are constitutive of the international**, not marginal to it. They show that **the personal is international** — that the governance of bodies, families, and reproduction is a central part of international politics. They provide the tools for analyzing **how power operates through gendered and sexualized logics** — not just through coercion.

What they occlude: They can be **overly focused on the West** — the canonical texts are disproportionately about Western states and Western feminist theory. They can **underplay material** factors — the focus on discourse and representation can obscure the material conditions of women's lives. They can be **difficult to translate** into policy — feminist and queer IR are better at critique than at prescription. And they can be **contested internally** — Western feminism and post-colonial feminism often disagree profoundly about what "gender" means.

Scope condition: Feminist and queer IR is most powerful for analyzing **how the international is gendered and sexualized** — how states govern bodies, how wars are fought, how security is imagined. It is less powerful for explaining **specific material outcomes** — wars, trade, crises — which require additional tools.

Observable implication. If feminist and queer IR is operative, you should see (a) **gendered and sexualized representations** of states, security, and war; (b) **invisibility** of women, queer people, and reproductive labor in mainstream accounts of international politics; and (c) **gendered and sexualized** logics operating in policy domains that are ostensibly neutral.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The five perspectives engage these traditions differently, and each engagement is political

The claim: The critical traditions — Marxism, critical theory, post-colonialism, feminism, queer theory — are not neutral frameworks. They are **political** traditions with specific historical origins and political implications. The five perspectives engage with them differently, and each engagement is a political choice.

2.6.1 The African perspective (primary) **Core commitments.** Africa is not just a **case** for these traditions; it is a **source** of them. African scholars and leaders have made foundational contributions to Marxism, dependency theory, post-colonialism, and feminism — often before these traditions were recognized in the West.

1. **African Marxism and dependency.** Nkrumah's **neo-colonialism**, Rodney's **underdevelopment**, Amin's **delinking**, and Cabral's **national liberation** are all foundational contributions to Marxist and dependency theory. They are not "applications" of European Marxism; they are **original theorizations** grounded in African experience.
2. **African post-colonialism.** Fanon, Cabral, Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and others developed post-colonial theory from the experience of anti-colonial struggle. Fanon's analysis of the **psychology of colonialism** and Cabral's analysis of **culture and liberation** are foundational.
3. **African feminism.** African feminists — Amina Mama, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, Sylvia Tamale, Ama Ata Aidoo, and others — have critiqued both Western feminism (for its Eurocentrism and its neglect of race and coloniality) and African patriarchy (for its complicity with colonialism and its resistance to women's liberation). African feminism is not a branch of Western feminism; it is a **distinct** tradition with its own concepts, debates, and political projects.

4. **African queer theory.** African queer scholars — Sylvia Tamale, Keguro Macharia, Stella Nyanzi, and others — have challenged both Western homonationalism (which uses "gay rights" as a justification for imperial intervention) and African homophobia (which is often a legacy of colonial-era laws and Christian missionary activity). African queer theory insists on the **specificity** of African sexual politics — its history, its complexity, and its resistance to both Western and nationalist framings.

The critique of Western critical theory. African scholars critique Western critical theory for being **parochial** — treating Western experiences as universal, even in its critique of universalism. African Marxism is not the same as European Marxism; African feminism is not the same as Western feminism; African post-colonialism is not the same as the post-colonialism of Said or Spivak.

What the African perspective contributes: It shows that the critical traditions are **not Western monopolies** — they have been developed in and from the Global South. It shows that the critique of colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy must be **grounded** in specific historical experiences. It shows that **African agency** is central — Africans have been producers of theory, not just objects of it.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **diversity** of African positions — not all African scholars agree on Marxism, feminism, or queer theory. It can risk **essentializing** "African knowledge" as a unified tradition. It can underplay the **genuine disagreements** between African and Western feminists, Marxists, and queer theorists.

2.6.2 The Chinese perspective Core commitments. China's engagement with the critical traditions is **complex** — shaped by its own revolutionary history, its Marxist-Leninist ideology, and its current position as a rising power.

1. **Chinese Marxism.** China is officially a Marxist-Leninist state, and Chinese IR scholars engage with Marxist theory — particularly **Lenin's theory of imperialism** — to analyze the contemporary international order. Chinese scholars often frame the US as an **imperialist** power and China as a leader of the anti-imperialist struggle.
2. **The Chinese School and critical theory.** The Chinese School of IR — particularly the work of Qin Yaqing — is not Marxist, but it shares the critical tradition's rejection of Western universalism. Qin's relational theory is a **critique** of the Western assumption that states are discrete, atomistic actors.
3. **Chinese critiques of post-colonialism and feminism.** Chinese scholars are often **skeptical** of post-colonial and feminist critiques — not because they reject them entirely, but because they see them as **Western** frameworks that can be used to undermine Chinese sovereignty. The Chinese state has been particularly resistant to feminist and queer critiques that it sees as "Western" impositions.

What the Chinese perspective contributes: It shows that the critical traditions can be **mobilized for state purposes** — Chinese Marxism is not a critique of Chinese power but a justification for it. It also shows that the critical traditions are **contested** within non-Western contexts — China's engagement with them is not the same as Africa's.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **genuine critical potential** of post-colonial and feminist theory for China itself — the ways in which Chinese minorities, women, and queer people experience marginalization. It can also **instrumentalize** critical theory — using it to critique the West while shielding China from critique.

2.6.3 The Russian perspective Core commitments. Russia's engagement with the critical traditions is **minimal** — Russian IR is dominated by realism and civilizational approaches, and there is little engagement

with Marxism, post-colonialism, or feminism as critical traditions.

1. **Soviet Marxism.** The Soviet Union was officially Marxist-Leninist, and Soviet IR theory was framed in Marxist terms — particularly the theory of **imperialism** and the "anti-imperialist struggle." But Soviet Marxism was **dogmatic** — it was a state ideology, not a critical tradition.
2. **Post-Soviet realism.** After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian IR shifted toward realism and civilizational approaches. The critical traditions were largely abandoned, except by a small number of scholars.
3. **Russian critiques of Western critical theory.** Russian officials and scholars often frame Western critical theory — particularly post-colonialism and feminism — as **instruments of Western cultural imperialism**. They argue that these frameworks are used to undermine Russian sovereignty and traditional values.

What the Russian perspective contributes: It shows that the critical traditions are **not universally accepted** — they are contested even within the non-Western world. It also shows that **anti-Westernism** can coexist with **anti-critical** positions — Russia's rejection of Western hegemony does not entail an embrace of critical theory.

What it occludes: It can **naturalize** Russian hierarchies — the Russian state's own hierarchies of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality are rarely subjected to critical analysis. It can also **instrumentalize** anti-colonial rhetoric — using it to justify aggression against Ukraine and other neighbors.

2.6.4 The Western perspective Core commitments. The Western tradition is the **home** of the critical traditions — Marxism, the Frankfurt School, post-colonialism, feminism, and queer theory all emerged from Western academic debates. But Western critical theory is also **internally contested**, and it has been **critiqued from the Global South** for its own parochialism.

1. **The development of Western critical theory.** Western Marxism (the Frankfurt School), post-structuralism (Foucault, Derrida), post-colonialism (Said, Spivak, Bhabha), and feminism (de Beauvoir, Butler, Haraway) are all Western traditions — but they are traditions that **critique** the West from within.
2. **The critique from the South.** Post-colonial and decolonial scholars — Quijano, Mignolo, Lugones, Grovogui — argue that Western critical theory is **still Western** — it critiques modernity but remains within its categories. The task, they argue, is not just to critique the West but to **delink** from it.
3. **The institutionalization of critique.** Western critical theory has become **institutionalized** — it is taught in universities, published in journals, and used by NGOs and international organizations. This has strengths (the critique is now part of the mainstream) and weaknesses (the critique has lost some of its radical edge).

What the Western perspective contributes: It provides the **most developed** versions of each critical tradition, and the most systematic **self-critique** of those traditions. It also provides the **institutional infrastructure** — journals, conferences, networks — that sustains critical scholarship.

What it occludes: It can be **parochial** — treating Western experiences as universal even in its critique. It can be **self-referential** — a debate among Western scholars about Western scholars. And it can be **complicit** — the institutionalization of critique can blunt its political edge.

2.6.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN is **not** a critical actor in the Marxist or post-colonial sense. It is a **member-state organization** whose normative commitments are grounded in the Charter — sovereignty, non-interference, human rights, and multilateralism. But the UN has been **shaped** by the critical traditions in important ways:

1. **The New International Economic Order (NIEO).** In the 1970s, the UN General Assembly adopted the **NIEO** — a set of demands from the Global South for a more equitable international economic order. The NIEO was informed by dependency theory and by the critique of neo-colonialism. Although it was largely abandoned in the 1980s, it shaped the UN's development discourse.
2. **The critique of colonialism.** The UN was a **site** of anti-colonial struggle — the General Assembly's 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was a landmark. The UN's decolonization agenda was shaped by the anti-colonial movements that drew on Marxist and post-colonial theory.
3. **Gender and human rights.** The UN has been a site of feminist and queer activism — the Beijing Declaration, the CEDAW, the SDGs, and the Human Rights Council's resolutions on sexual orientation and gender identity. The UN's gender architecture — UN Women, the Women, Peace and Security agenda — is a product of feminist advocacy.

But the UN is also **constrained** by its member states — many of which are hostile to critical theory. The UN's normative commitments are often **watered down** to accommodate the most conservative members.

What the UN perspective contributes: It provides a **site** where critical demands can be translated into **policy** — the NIEO, the SDGs, the WPS agenda. It also provides a **normative benchmark** — the standards against which state behavior is judged.

What it occludes: It can **depoliticize** — translating critical demands into technical-policy language that obscures the underlying power relations. It can also **legitimize** — the UN's authority can be used to justify actions that serve the interests of the powerful.

2.6.6 The comparison matrix

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Engagement with Marxism	Foundational (Nkrumah, Rodney, Amin); dependency and underdevelopment	State ideology; Lenin's imperialism	Soviet legacy; largely abandoned	Home of Western Marxism; Frankfurt School	NIEO; development discourse
Engagement with post-colonialism	Foundational (Fanon, Cabral, Grovogui, Mutua)	Skeptical; seen as Western framework	Minimal; seen as Western cultural imperialism	Home of post-colonial theory (Said, Spivak)	Anti-colonial resolutions; decolonization agenda

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Engagement with feminism/queer	Distinct tradition (Mama, Oyěwùmí, Tamale); critiques both Western feminism and African patriarchy	Skeptical; seen as Western imposition	Minimal; traditional values discourse	Home of feminist and queer theory	WPS agenda; CEDAW; LGBTQ+ resolutions
Key contribution	Original theorization from African experience; agency	State Marxism; critique of Western universalism	Anti-Western critique (but not critical)	Most developed versions; self-critique	Translation of critique into policy
Key occlusion	Diversity of African positions; disagreements with Western critical theory	Genuine critical potential for China itself	Naturalization of Russian hierarchies; instrumentalization	Parochialism; self-referentiality; complicity	Depoliticization; legitimization

2.7 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) holds some of the world's largest reserves of cobalt — a critical mineral for electric vehicle batteries and other green technologies. Yet the DRC remains one of the poorest countries in the world, with most of its population lacking access to electricity, clean water, and basic healthcare. Cobalt mining in the DRC is characterized by dangerous working conditions, child labor, and environmental degradation. Why does the DRC remain poor despite its mineral wealth?

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why does the DRC, which supplies a critical input for the global green energy transition, remain one of the poorest countries in the world?*

This is the classic "resource curse" puzzle. But each critical tradition offers a different explanation:

Marxist and world-systems analysis: The DRC's poverty is not an accident; it is **produced** by its integration into the capitalist world-economy on unequal terms. The DRC is a **peripheral** economy — it exports raw cobalt and imports manufactured goods, with the terms of trade favoring the core. The surplus value extracted from Congolese labor flows to the core, where it finances the development of the core. This is the **development of underdevelopment** (Frank, Rodney). The DRC's mineral wealth is not a blessing but a **curse** — it makes the country a site of extraction for the core.

The mechanism is **unequal exchange**: the DRC sells cobalt at prices set by global markets, but it buys

manufactured goods at prices that include the core's higher wages and profits. The DRC is **structurally** disadvantaged.

Critical theory: The DRC's poverty is **legitimated** by a discourse of "development" and "good governance" that frames the country as backward and in need of external tutelage. The international institutions that oversee the DRC's mining sector — the World Bank, the IMF, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative — are not neutral; they **reproduce** the structures of power that keep the DRC dependent. The discourse of "conflict minerals" — which frames the DRC's violence as a problem of "greed" and "criminality" — obscures the **structural** causes of the conflict: colonial-era extraction, Cold War proxy warfare, and the current competition for critical minerals.

Post-colonial and decolonial analysis: The DRC's poverty has a **colonial genealogy**. King Leopold II's Congo Free State (1885–1908) was one of the most brutal colonial regimes in history — millions died in the extraction of rubber and ivory. The Belgian Congo (1908–1960) continued the extraction of minerals — copper, cobalt, uranium — for the benefit of Belgium and its allies. The post-independence period was shaped by **neo-colonial** arrangements: Mobutu Sese Seko's regime (1965–1997) was supported by the US and France in exchange for access to minerals; the assassination of Patrice Lumumba (1961) was a case of external intervention to protect mineral interests.

The **coloniality of power** (Quijano) persists: the DRC is still classified as a "fragile state," its governance is still overseen by external actors, and its minerals still flow to the core. The **coloniality of knowledge** is also at work: the DRC's own knowledge systems — its mining traditions, its local governance structures — are invisible in the international discourse, which treats the country as a problem to be solved by external experts.

Feminist and queer analysis: The cobalt mining economy is **gendered**. Men dominate the formal mining sector; women are concentrated in the **informal** sector — artisanal mining, trading, and sex work — where they are exposed to violence, exploitation, and health risks. The **reproductive labor** of women — caring for children, the sick, and the elderly — is invisible in the mining discourse, even though it is essential to the reproduction of the mining workforce.

The **mining companies** — many of them Chinese, Swiss, and multinational — are gendered institutions, dominated by men, with masculine cultures of risk-taking, competition, and extraction. The **bodies** of Congolese miners — male and female — are treated as disposable, exposed to toxic chemicals, dangerous conditions, and violence. This is what **Achille Mbembe** calls **necropolitics** — the power to determine who lives and who dies.

The **sexualized** dimension is also present: the "rape as a weapon of war" discourse in the DRC has been critiqued by African feminists for reducing Congolese women to **victims** while obscuring their **agency** and the **structural** causes of violence. Queer Congolese people face additional marginalization — homosexuality is stigmatized, and the international LGBTQ+ discourse often treats Africa as **uniquely homophobic**, obscuring the colonial origins of African homophobia and the role of Western homonationalism in shaping the discourse.

The five perspectives:

- **African perspective:** The DRC's poverty is a product of **colonial extraction and neo-colonial dependency**, and the current scramble for critical minerals is a continuation of that history. African agency — the DRC's attempts to renegotiate mining contracts, to demand a greater share of revenues,

to build local processing capacity — is central. The African perspective insists that the DRC is not just a victim; it is an actor navigating a hostile structure.

- **Chinese perspective:** China is the DRC's largest trading partner and a major investor in cobalt and copper. Chinese officials and scholars frame this engagement as **win-win cooperation** — China provides infrastructure and investment, the DRC provides resources. The Chinese perspective rejects the "neo-colonial" framing as a Western narrative designed to discredit China's role in Africa. It emphasizes **sovereignty** and **non-interference**.
- **Russian perspective:** Russia has a **limited** economic presence in the DRC, but it has a **geopolitical** interest in the country — particularly through security cooperation (Africa Corps) and through its broader critique of Western hegemony. The Russian perspective frames the DRC's problems as a consequence of Western **neo-colonialism** and argues that Russia is a **sovereign** alternative to Western domination.
- **Western perspective:** Western governments and NGOs frame the DRC's problems as a combination of **governance failures**, **corruption**, and **conflict minerals**. The Western perspective emphasizes **transparency**, **accountability**, and **responsible sourcing** — the Kimberley Process, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and corporate due diligence. The Western perspective has been critiqued for its **paternalism** and for its failure to address the **structural** causes of the DRC's poverty.
- **UN perspective:** The UN has been deeply involved in the DRC — through peacekeeping (MONUSCO, one of the largest and longest-running missions), through humanitarian assistance, and through its normative frameworks on conflict minerals and human rights. The UN perspective emphasizes **civilian protection**, **human rights**, and **sustainable development**, while acknowledging the limits of its own capacity.

Adjudication. Which tradition best explains the DRC's poverty?

- **Marxist and world-systems analysis** best explains the **structural** dimension — why the DRC's mineral wealth does not translate into development, and why the surplus flows to the core.
- **Post-colonial and decolonial analysis** best explains the **historical** dimension — why the DRC's poverty has a colonial genealogy, and how colonial hierarchies persist.
- **Feminist and queer analysis** best explains the **embodied** dimension — who bears the costs of extraction, and how gender and sexuality structure the mining economy.
- **Critical theory** best explains the **ideological** dimension — how the discourse of "development," "good governance," and "conflict minerals" legitimates the existing order.

No single tradition captures the whole. A complete explanation combines all four: the DRC's poverty is a **structural** product of the capitalist world-economy, a **historical** product of colonialism, an **embodied** product of gendered and racialized extraction, and an **ideological** product of the discourses that legitimate it. The five perspectives add the crucial dimension of **agency**: the DRC is not just a victim but an actor, and the competition between China, the West, Russia, and others creates **space** for African agency — if the DRC can navigate it.

2.8 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: The European Union's response to migration across the Mediterranean has been characterized by **externalization** — the outsourcing of border control to third countries (Turkey, Libya, Tunisia, Egypt) in exchange for aid, trade, and political cooperation. The EU has funded the Libyan Coast Guard, which intercepts migrants at sea and returns them to Libya, where they face detention, abuse, and exploitation. Human rights organizations have documented widespread violations. The EU's approach has been criticized as a form of **neo-colonial** governance, and the figure of the "migrant" has been securitized and racialized.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely: why does the EU, which proclaims human rights and humanitarian values, outsource border control to states that systematically abuse migrants?
2. Apply the Marxist and world-systems analysis: what **structural** interests does the EU's externalization serve? How does it relate to the global division of labor and the legacies of colonialism?
3. Apply the post-colonial and decolonial analysis: how is the "migrant" **constructed** in EU discourse? What colonial tropes are at work? How does the externalization of borders reproduce colonial hierarchies?
4. Apply the feminist and queer analysis: how is the **gendered and sexualized** dimension of migration governed? Who is made invisible? How does the EU's response reflect gendered and racialized logics?
5. Apply the critical theory analysis: how does the EU's discourse of "human rights" and "humanitarian" values **legitimate** its externalization policies?
6. Write a 300-word adjudication: which tradition best explains the EU's externalization policies, and what does it miss?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why does the EU outsource border control to states that systematically abuse migrants, despite its proclaimed commitment to human rights?

Marxist and world-systems analysis: The EU's externalization policies serve **structural** interests. Migration is a **labor** phenomenon — migrants from the Global South are drawn to Europe by the demand for cheap labor, but the EU wants to **control** the terms of their entry, to ensure that they are **available** as labor but **excluded** from the rights of citizenship. Externalization allows the EU to **externalize** the costs of border control — the violence, the detention, the abuse — to third countries, while maintaining the **fiction** of humanitarian values. The **global division of labor** is reproduced: the Global South supplies labor, the Global North controls the terms of its entry.

Post-colonial and decolonial analysis: The "migrant" is **constructed** in EU discourse as a threat — a figure of danger, disorder, and cultural difference. This construction draws on **colonial** tropes: the "savage" who threatens civilization, the "barbarian" at the gates. The **externalization** of borders reproduces colonial hierarchies: the EU treats Libya and Turkey as **quasi-sovereign** spaces — formally independent, but subject to EU dictates — a repetition of the mandate system. The **coloniality of power** persists: the EU's borders are **everywhere** — in the Mediterranean, in Libya, in Turkey, in the Sahel — and the **racialized** hierarchy of who is allowed to move and who is not is a continuation of colonial-era controls on mobility.

Feminist and queer analysis: Migration is **gendered and sexualized**. Women migrants are particularly vulnerable to **sexual violence** in Libya, and the EU's policies — which fund the Libyan Coast Guard and return migrants to Libya — **expose** women to this violence. The **reproductive labor** of migrant women — caring for children, the elderly, and the sick — is invisible in the EU's discourse, which treats migration

as a **security** problem, not a **labor** or **care** problem. The **sexualized** dimension is also present: the figure of the "migrant" is **feminized** in EU discourse — passive, vulnerable, in need of rescue — while the **state** is **masculinized** — decisive, protective, in control. The **homonationalist** dimension is also at work: the EU's claim to protect LGBTQ+ migrants is used to justify its **civilizational** superiority, even as its policies **endanger** LGBTQ+ migrants.

Critical theory analysis: The EU's discourse of **human rights** and **humanitarian values legitimates** its externalization policies. The language of "saving lives" — the EU's claim that it is protecting migrants from dangerous crossings — **obscures** the **violence** of its policies. The **problem-solving** discourse of the EU — framing migration as a "crisis" to be "managed" — **takes the existing order as given** and ignores the **structural** causes of migration: colonialism, inequality, and the global division of labor.

Adjudication: **Post-colonial and decolonial analysis** best explains the **form** of the EU's externalization policies — the racialized and colonial logics at work. **Marxist and world-systems analysis** best explains the **function** of the policies — the reproduction of the global division of labor and the control of labor mobility. **Feminist and queer analysis** best explains the **embodied** dimension — who bears the costs, and how gender and sexuality structure the experience of migration. **Critical theory** best explains the **ideological** dimension — how the EU's discourse legitimates its policies. A complete explanation combines all four: the EU's externalization policies are a **structural** product of the global division of labor, a **historical** product of colonial hierarchies, an **embodied** product of gendered and racialized governance, and an **ideological** product of the discourse of human rights and humanitarianism.

2.9 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The global climate negotiations, particularly the demand for **loss and damage** finance by African and Global South states. The **Loss and Damage Fund** was established at COP27 (2022) and operationalized at COP28 (2023), with pledges of about $700 million — far short of the estimated $100–$400 billion needed annually. African states argue that the Global North bears **historical responsibility** for climate change and owes **reparations** to the Global South.

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** How does each critical tradition explain the **failure** of the Loss and Damage Fund to meet the scale of the demand? (Marxist: structural inequality; post-colonial: coloniality; feminist: gendered vulnerability; critical theory: ideological legitimation.)
2. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the climate negotiations? (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — one paragraph each or a table.)
3. **The political economy of carbon:** How does the global **carbon economy** reflect colonial and racial hierarchies? Who benefits from the current arrangements? Who bears the costs?
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show that the critical traditions are **wrong** about the climate negotiations? What would show they are **right**?

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish **structural** from **ideological** explanations? Does it specify **whose** knowledge and **whose** labor are invisible in the negotiations?

2.10 HINGE QUESTION

A scholar argues: "The concept of 'fragile states' is not a neutral description. It reflects a Western model of statehood, and it renders invisible the alternative forms of order that exist in many African societies. It also serves to justify external intervention." Which tradition does this argument most clearly belong to?

- A) Structural realism
- B) Neoliberal institutionalism
- C) Post-colonial and decolonial IR
- D) Classical realism

Answer: C. The argument makes three post-colonial claims: (a) the concept is **Eurocentric**, reflecting a particular Western model of statehood; (b) it **erases** alternative forms of order; and (c) it **serves power** by justifying intervention. These are the core moves of post-colonial critique.

If you answered A: Structural realism would treat "fragile states" as a measurable category, not a contested concept. **If you answered B:** Neoliberal institutionalism would treat "fragile states" as a problem of institutional capacity, not a Eurocentric construct. **If you answered D:** Classical realism would treat "fragile states" as a security problem, not as a discursive construction.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground the critical traditions' claims in empirical data.

Task: Using the summary data below, analyze the **global division of labor** and its consequences.

Table 1: Global cobalt production and processing (approximate, 2023)

Stage	Country share	Value captured
Extraction	DRC (~70%), Indonesia, Philippines	~$5–10 per kg
Battery manufacturing	China, South Korea, Japan	~$30–50 per kg

Table 2: Global wealth distribution (2023, approximate)

Group	Share of global wealth
Top 10%	~75%
Bottom 50%	~2%
Africa's share (as % of global wealth)	~2% (with ~18% of world population)

Table 3: Carbon emissions and climate finance (approximate)

Region	Share of cumulative CO□ emissions (1750–2020)	Share of climate finance (2020–2024)
US + EU	~50%	~40%
China	~14%	~10%
Africa	~3%	~5%
Rest of world	~33%	~45%

Analysis questions:

1. **Structural inequality:** What does the value-capture data tell you about the **global division of labor**? Who captures the most value from the cobalt supply chain? Is this explained by **comparative advantage** (liberal theory) or by **structural power** (Marxist and world-systems theory)?
2. **Historical responsibility:** What does the carbon emissions data tell you about the **historical responsibility** for climate change? How does this relate to the African demand for loss and damage finance?
3. **Coloniality:** How do the data on Africa's wealth share and carbon emissions reflect the **coloniality of power**? What would a post-colonial analysis say about the **process** by which these distributions were produced?
4. **Gender:** What data would you need to assess the **gendered** dimension of the cobalt supply chain and climate finance? What is **not** visible in these tables, and why?
5. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret these data? (African: structural injustice; Chinese: development needs; Russian: Western hypocrisy; Western: market-based solutions; UN: SDGs and climate finance.)

Rule: Complete the data lab before the independent memo.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The world-system. Draw three concentric circles labeled Core, Semi-periphery, and Periphery. For each, write: the type of production, the type of state, and one example. Draw arrows showing the **flow of surplus** from periphery to core.

Visual 2: The coloniality of power. Draw a triangle with three vertices: **Labor** (racial division of labor), **Knowledge** (privileging of Western knowledge), and **Authority** (concentration of political power). Label the center: "Coloniality of power." Write one example for each vertex.

Visual 3: The gendered ontology of the state. Draw a vertical line with two columns: **Masculine** (public, reason, autonomy, protector, high politics) and **Feminine** (private, emotion, dependence, protected, low politics). Write one example of each. Then draw an arrow across the line labeled "Feminist IR challenges this divide."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
What is historical materialism?	The mode of production shapes social relations; base shapes superstructure
What is primitive accumulation?	The violent dispossession that made capitalism possible: enclosure, colonization, slavery
What is dependency theory?	The periphery is underdeveloped **because of** its integration into capitalism on unequal terms
What is neo-colonialism?	Formal independence without substantive independence; economic and political policy directed from outside
What is the world-system?	A single division of labor with core, periphery, and semi-periphery
What is Cox's distinction?	Problem-solving theory takes the world as given; critical theory asks how it came about
What is Gramscian hegemony?	Domination through consent and ideological dominance, not just coercion
What is Orientalism?	The discursive construction of the "East" as backward, exotic, and inferior, serving Western power
What is the subaltern?	The colonized and marginalized who cannot speak within dominant structures
What is epistemic violence?	The violence done to knowledge systems through colonial domination
What is the coloniality of power?	The racial hierarchy established by colonialism that persists after formal decolonization
What is the coloniality of gender?	Gender itself is a colonial category; the binary was imposed through colonialism
What is the gendered ontology of the state?	The state is constituted through gendered dichotomies: public/private, reason/emotion, masculine/feminine
What is militarized masculinity?	The construction of military institutions and war through masculine norms and imagery
What is intersectionality?	Gender, race, class, and sexuality are interlocking; oppression is not additive
What is homonationalism?	The incorporation of certain queer identities into national identity as a form of sexual exceptionalism serving imperial purposes

Cue column	Notes
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.6; Marx; Lenin; Luxemburg; Frank; Amin; Rodney; Nkrumah; Wallerstein; Arrighi; Cox; Gramsci; Said; Spivak; Quijano; Mignolo; Grovogui; Mutua; Enloe; Tickner; Peterson; Crenshaw; Lugones; Oyěwùmí; Weber; Puar
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the difference between the Marxist, post-colonial, and feminist critiques of mainstream IR to a smart non-specialist in 200–250 words, without using jargon. If you must use "hegemony," "epistemic violence," or "intersectionality," define them in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for the coloniality of power. Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "The coloniality of power is like a building that was constructed on a foundation of slavery and extraction — the building has been renovated many times, but the foundation is still there, and the building still leans in the direction of the foundation." Where it breaks down: unlike a building, the coloniality of power is contested and can be transformed.)

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 15–18 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What is the difference between colonialism and coloniality?
Mechanism	How does unequal exchange transfer surplus from periphery to core?
Application	A state is formally independent but its economic policy is directed by the IMF. Which concept does this illustrate?
Comparison	How do Marxist and post-colonial analyses differ in their explanations of African poverty?
Source	What did Walter Rodney argue in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to the claim that "gender is a colonial category"?

Type	Example
Reconstruction	How would a post-colonial feminist analyze the "migrant crisis" in the Mediterranean?
Occlusion	What does world-systems analysis fail to see about African agency?
Adjudication	Which critical tradition best explains the DRC's poverty, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the three vertices of the coloniality of power on a diagram.
Reconstruction	How would a queer IR scholar analyze the EU's response to LGBTQ+ migrants?
Occlusion	What does Western feminism fail to see about African gender relations?

Tag each card: `L8`, `critical theory`, `Marxism`, `post-colonial`, `feminism`, `queer`, `perspective`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Reconstruct the Marxist and world-systems account	
Apply Cox's distinction	
Explain the post-colonial and decolonial critique	
Reconstruct the feminist and queer critique	
Reconstruct the five perspectives on these traditions	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between material and ideational factors in the critical traditions?
2. Which tradition was easiest to reconstruct? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default analytical style?
3. What will I do differently in Module 2?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L8			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 1)

Add this row to your Module 1 cheatsheet:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Historical materialism; surplus value; primitive accumulation; imperialism; neo-colonialism; dependency; world-systems; core/periphery; Gramscian hegemony; problem-solving vs. critical theory; Orientalism; subaltern; epistemic violence; coloniality of power; coloniality of gender; intersectionality; gendered ontology of the state; militarized masculinity; homonationalism
Key mechanisms	Unequal exchange → surplus transfer → underdevelopment; ideological legitimation → consent → hegemony; colonial classification → racial hierarchy → coloniality; gendered dichotomies → state constitution → invisibility of reproductive labor
Theories and authors	Marx; Lenin; Luxemburg; Frank; Amin; Rodney; Nkrumah; Wallerstein; Arrighi; Cox; Gramsci; Said; Spivak; Quijano; Mignolo; Grovogui; Mutua; Enloe; Tickner; Peterson; Crenshaw; Lugones; Oyěwùmí; Weber; Puar
Cases and evidence	DRC cobalt; Mediterranean migration; climate negotiations; structural adjustment; colonial legacy
Debates	Is the international primarily structured by capitalism, race, or gender? Is critique enough, or is emancipation required? Can Western critical theory escape its own parochialism?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that the critical traditions are wrong — that structural inequality, racial hierarchy, or gendered logics do not shape international politics?
Cross-links	L4 (post-positivism); L5 (realism — the target of critique); L6 (institutionalism — the target of critique); L7 (constructivism — the ally); L15–19 (IPE); L27–34 (African state formation); L51 (climate geopolitics)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1–L8 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L8 with L15–19 (IPE) and L27–34 (Africa)
R5	End of Module 1	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory + Module 1 synthesis essay

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Five key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (DRC cobalt) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (Mediterranean migration) attempted and compared
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 15–18 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
- ☐ Cheatsheet entry added
- ☐ R2 review scheduled

MODULE 1 SYNTHESIS

You have now completed Module 1 — the theoretical and epistemological foundations of the course. Before proceeding to Module 2 (Historical Architecture of International Order), write a **2,000-word synthesis essay** answering the following question:

"What is the international, and how should we study it?"

Your essay must:

1. **Reconstruct** the five major theoretical traditions covered in Module 1 — realism (L5), institutionalism (L6), constructivism and the English School (L7), and the critical traditions (L8) — and state each one's core claim, mechanism, and scope conditions.
2. **Distinguish** the epistemological positions — positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, post-colonial/decolonial, feminist/queer — and show how they shape what counts as knowledge (L4).
3. **Reconstruct** the five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — on at least **three** of the theories, and adjudicate between them on a specific case.
4. **Identify** at least **three** points of genuine disagreement between the traditions — not just different vocabularies, but substantive disagreements about what the international is and how to study it.
5. **Take a position**: which tradition (or combination of traditions) best explains the international, and why? Defend your choice against the strongest objection from a rival tradition.

This essay is your **entry ticket to Module 2**. It is assessed on the quality of the argument, the precision of the concepts, the use of evidence, and the engagement with the five perspectives — not on length alone.

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **On Marxism and world-systems:** Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (1867); V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917); Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (1974–2011); Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994).
- **On African dependency and neo-colonialism:** Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972); Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965); Samir Amin, *Unequal Development* (1976); Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (1967).
- **On critical theory:** Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory" (1937); Robert Cox, "Social Forces, States and World Orders" (1981); Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (1929–35); Andrew Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism* (1990).
- **On post-colonial and decolonial IR:** Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978); Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988); Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" (2000); Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011); Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996); Makau Mutua, "Savages, Victims, and Saviors" (2001); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961); Amílcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle* (1979).
- **On feminist and queer IR:** Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989); J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations* (1992); J. Ann Tickner, "Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: A Feminist Reformulation" (1988); V. Spike Peterson (ed.), *Gendered States* (1992); Carol Cohn, "Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals" (1987); Cynthia Weber, *Queer International Relations* (2016); Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007); Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex" (1989); María Lugones, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System" (2007); Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women* (1997); Amina Mama, *Beyond the Masks* (1995); Sylvia Tamale, *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020).

End of Lesson 8. End of Module 1.

Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 9 (The Westphalian Myth and the Genealogy of Sovereignty), the first lesson of Module 2.

10. The Westphalian Myth and the Genealogy of Sovereignty: How the International System Was Really Made

LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L9 — The Westphalian Myth and the Genealogy of Sovereignty
Module	Module 2: Historical Architecture of International Order
Prerequisites	L1 (puzzles, levels, power, perspectives); L2 (Charter system, AU Act); L3 (causal inference, presentism); L7 (constructivism, the English School); L8 (post-colonialism, coloniality of power)
Interleaved links	Forward to L10 (19th-century multipolarity, Berlin Conference), L11 (World Wars and the League), L12 (Cold War and decolonization), L27 (African colonial state formation), L28 (Pan-Africanism and sovereignty), L37 (lawfare of territorial integrity), L41 (West Asian state system), L49 (institutional revisionism)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.
Content channels	Canon (quoted and summarized); primary documents (the Treaties of Münster and Osnabrück, the General Act of the Berlin Conference, Vattel, Bodin, quoted and analyzed); data lab (sovereignty recognition and UN membership); five perspectives
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (adjudicate between the standard narrative and the revisionist account of sovereignty's genealogy)
Estimated study time	7–9 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Every argument, quotation, and example you need is inside this document. Where I cite Teschke, Krasner, Grovogui, Anghie, Schmitt, Bull, Watson, or any other scholar, I summa-

rize the argument fully enough that you do not need the original to complete the lesson. "Further Reading" is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Every IR textbook begins with the same story. In 1648, the Peace of Westphalia ended the Thirty Years' War and created the modern international system. It established the sovereign state as the basic unit of international politics, enshrined the principles of territorial integrity and non-interference, and inaugurated the era of anarchy — a system of formally equal sovereigns with no authority above them.

This story is the **founding myth** of International Relations. It is told in the first chapter of every introductory textbook, invoked in every discussion of sovereignty, and assumed in every realist and institutionalist theory. It is also **substantially false**.

This lesson is about that falsity — and why it matters. It is not an exercise in antiquarianism. The Westphalian myth shapes how the discipline thinks about sovereignty, anarchy, and the state. Correcting it changes what we can see:

1. **The 1648 treaties did not create the sovereign state system.** They were a settlement of the religious and constitutional conflicts of the Holy Roman Empire, not a charter for a new international order.
2. **The concept of "Westphalian sovereignty" was retroactively constructed** by 19th- and 20th-century international lawyers, who read their own assumptions back into the 1648 settlement.
3. **Sovereignty was never universal.** It was extended selectively — to "civilized" nations — and withheld from the colonized world. The "standard of civilization" was the mechanism through which the international system was racialized.
4. **Africa was the constitutive outside of European sovereignty.** European sovereignty was defined against the colonized world — the "savage," the "barbarian," the "uncivilized" — and African polities were treated as quasi-sovereign or non-sovereign.
5. **The myth has political consequences.** It naturalizes the sovereign state, obscures the colonial genealogy of the international system, and renders invisible the alternative forms of order that existed before and alongside the European state.

The African perspective is primary in this lesson because the colonial genealogy of sovereignty is most visible in Africa — and because African scholars (Grovogui, Mbembe, Anghie, Mutua) have produced the most important revisionist accounts of the Westphalian narrative.

This lesson has five key ideas:

1. **The Westphalian narrative is a founding myth**, not a historical description.
2. **Sovereignty is not one concept but four** (Krasner), and conflating them produces confusion.
3. **Sovereignty was never universal**: the "standard of civilization" excluded the colonized world.
4. **The "constitutive outside"**: the non-European world made European sovereignty possible.
5. **The five perspectives** on the Westphalian order, and the **adjudication** among them.

By the end, you can take any claim about sovereignty — "sovereignty is eroding," "sovereignty is absolute," "sovereignty is a Western concept" — and answer: *Which concept of sovereignty is being used? What is its genealogy? Who was excluded from it? And how do the five perspectives reconstruct it?*

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory)

1. From L2: What did the AU's Article 4(h) change about the inherited sovereignty regime?
2. From L7: What is the difference between an international system and an international society in the English School?
3. From L8: What is the "coloniality of power," and who developed the concept?
4. From L8: What did Grovogui argue about sovereignty and Africa?

Check against the previous lessons before proceeding.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind:

- If the Westphalian narrative is false, why is it so widely believed? What work does it do?
- Is sovereignty a single concept, or several? What difference does it make?
- When did sovereignty become universal? Was it ever?
- Why were African polities treated as non-sovereign, and what does that tell us about the international system?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

Provisional definitions; revise by the end:

Westphalian sovereignty; international legal sovereignty; domestic sovereignty; interdependence sovereignty; organized hypocrisy; standard of civilization; constitutive outside; quasi-sovereignty; effective occupation; terra nullius; uti possidetis juris; the nomos of the earth; the expansion of international society; coloniality of sovereignty; the Berlin Conference; the mandate system; the trusteeship system.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Reconstruct** the standard Westphalian narrative and identify the specific historical claims it makes — and the specific evidence that contradicts them.
2. **Distinguish** Krasner's four concepts of sovereignty and explain why conflating them produces confusion in IR analysis.
3. **Explain** how the "standard of civilization" was used to withhold sovereignty from the colonized world, and apply it to the African case.
4. **Reconstruct** the "constitutive outside" argument: how the non-European world made European sovereignty possible.

5. **Reconstruct** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions interpret the Westphalian order, and **adjudicate** among them on a specific case.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The Westphalian narrative is a founding myth, not a historical description

The claim: The story that IR tells about 1648 — that it created the sovereign state system, enshrined territorial sovereignty, and established the principle of non-interference — is **not supported by the historical evidence**. It is a **retrospective construction** that serves to naturalize the contemporary state system and to obscure its colonial genealogy.

The standard narrative. Here is the story as it appears in IR textbooks:

> The Peace of Westphalia (1648) ended the Thirty Years' War and the Eighty Years' War. It established the sovereign state as the basic unit of international politics. It enshrined the principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and non-interference in domestic affairs. It marked the transition from the medieval order — with its overlapping authorities (the Pope, the Holy Roman Emperor, feudal lords) — to the modern order of sovereign states. It is the founding moment of the international system.

What the treaties actually did. The Peace of Westphalia was not one treaty but two: the **Treaty of Münster** (May 1648) and the **Treaty of Osnabrück** (October 1648). Their provisions were:

1. **Religious settlement:** They resolved the religious conflicts of the Thirty Years' War by extending the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* ("whose realm, his religion") — the ruler's religion would determine the religion of the realm — and by granting Calvinists legal recognition. They also established a fixed date (January 1, 1624) for determining which religion would be official in each territory.
2. **Constitutional settlement of the Holy Roman Empire:** They reorganized the constitutional structure of the Holy Roman Empire, granting the imperial estates (the princes, bishops, and cities) significant rights, including the right to form alliances, as long as those alliances were not directed against the Emperor or the Empire. This was a constitutional settlement within the Empire, not a dissolution of the Empire into sovereign states.
3. **Territorial adjustments:** They made territorial adjustments — France gained Alsace, Sweden gained parts of Pomerania, and the Dutch Republic and the Swiss Confederation were recognized as independent of the Empire.
4. **Amnesty and property rights:** They granted amnesty and restored property rights to those who had been dispossessed during the war.

What the treaties did not do. The treaties did **not**:

- Create a system of **formally equal sovereign states.** The Holy Roman Empire continued to exist as a hierarchical, overlapping order. The imperial estates were not sovereign in the modern sense; they were constitutional units within the Empire, with rights and obligations.
- Enshrine the principle of **non-interference** in domestic affairs. The treaties explicitly intervened in the domestic affairs of the Empire's constituent units (determining which religion would be official), and they established mechanisms for external enforcement of the settlement.
- **Dissolve the Empire** or create a new international system. The Empire persisted until 1806. The 1648 settlement was a constitutional arrangement *within* the Empire, not a founding charter for the

international system.
- **Establish the state as the basic unit** of international politics. The 1648 order was one of **overlapping authorities** — the Emperor, the imperial estates, the Church, the free cities — not a system of discrete sovereign states.

The retroactive construction. The term "Westphalian sovereignty" was not used in 1648, or for centuries afterward. It was **constructed** by 19th- and 20th-century international lawyers — particularly Lassa Oppenheim, whose *International Law* (1905) became the standard text — who read their own assumptions about state sovereignty back into the 1648 settlement. The "Westphalian system" was a **retrospective invention**, not a historical fact.

Why the myth persists. The myth does important **political and theoretical work**:

- It **naturalizes the sovereign state** by presenting it as the product of a founding moment rather than a contingent historical development.
- It **obscures the colonial genealogy** of the international system by presenting the state system as the product of European intra-state conflict, rather than European imperialism.
- It **legitimizes the existing distribution of power** by presenting it as the outcome of a foundational legal order rather than a contingent historical process.
- It **provides a convenient baseline** for theories of international politics: realism can say "anarchy has been the condition since Westphalia"; institutionalism can say "states have been the basic units since Westphalia." The myth is the shared premise of the discipline.

Observable implication. If the Westphalian narrative is a myth, then you should be able to identify (a) the **historical evidence** that contradicts it, (b) the **political interests** it serves, and (c) the **alternative accounts** of sovereignty's genealogy that are suppressed by the myth.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Sovereignty is not one concept but four, and conflating them produces confusion

The claim: "Sovereignty" is not a single concept. It is a **family** of concepts that are related but distinct. The failure to distinguish them is one of the most common sources of confusion in IR. Stephen Krasner's *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (1999) provides the most useful typology.

Krasner's four concepts:

Concept	Definition	Example of violation
International legal sovereignty	The recognition of a state by other states as a sovereign member of the international system. It is about **who is recognized**, not about what the state can do.	Taiwan is not recognized by most states; Kosovo is recognized by some but not all.

Concept	Definition	Example of violation
Westphalian sovereignty	The exclusion of external actors from the domestic authority structures of a state. It is about **who has authority within the state**, not about recognition.	The US dictating policy to Iraq during the occupation (2003–2011); the IMF imposing structural adjustment conditions on borrowing states.
Domestic sovereignty	The effective control of a state over its territory and population. It is about **whether the state can govern**, not about recognition or exclusion.	"Failed states" — states that cannot control their territory (Somalia in the 1990s, the DRC in the 2000s).
Interdependence sovereignty	The ability of a state to control flows across its borders — goods, capital, people, ideas, diseases. It is about **whether the state can regulate**, not about authority or recognition.	States that cannot control migration, capital flight, or cyber-attacks.

Why the distinction matters. The four concepts are **not the same**, and they can vary independently:

- A state can have **international legal sovereignty** without **domestic sovereignty** (Somalia in the 1990s: recognized as a state but unable to control its territory).
- A state can have **domestic sovereignty** without **Westphalian sovereignty** (Iraq during the occupation: effective control by the US, but not exclusive domestic authority).
- A state can have **Westphalian sovereignty** without **interdependence sovereignty** (a state that can exclude external actors from its domestic authority but cannot control cross-border flows).

Krasner's "organized hypocrisy." Krasner's central argument is that the international system is characterized by **organized hypocrisy**: the norms of sovereignty are **routinely violated**, but the violations are **organized** — they follow predictable patterns that reflect the interests of the powerful. Sovereignty is not a fixed rule; it is a **resource** that powerful states use and abuse. Weak states are more likely to have their Westphalian sovereignty violated (through intervention, conditionality, or coercion) than strong states.

The African case. For African states, the four concepts of sovereignty have varied independently in ways that are revealing:

- **International legal sovereignty** was achieved at independence (1960s) and is almost universally recognized — but it was achieved within **borders** drawn by colonial powers, with **institutions** inherited from colonial rule, and with **economies** structured by colonial extraction.
- **Westphalian sovereignty** has been routinely violated by external actors — through structural adjustment, conditionality, intervention, and the "responsibility to protect."
- **Domestic sovereignty** is often weak — many African states do not effectively control their territory, and hybrid orders (traditional authorities, religious networks, militias) coexist with and sometimes displace the formal state.
- **Interdependence sovereignty** is often limited — African states cannot control capital flight, migra-

tion, or the flows of illicit goods.

Observable implication. If Krasner's distinction is operative, you should see states **claiming** sovereignty in one sense while **losing** it in another — and you should see powerful states **invoking** one concept (e.g., Westphalian sovereignty) to criticize rivals while **violating** it themselves.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Sovereignty was never universal: the "standard of civilization" and the colonial genealogy of the state system

The claim: The Westphalian narrative presents sovereignty as a **universal** principle — all states are equally sovereign. But sovereignty was **never universal**. It was extended selectively, to "civilized" nations, and withheld from the colonized world. The mechanism through which this selectivity operated was the **"standard of civilization"** — a legal doctrine that made sovereignty conditional on a state's conformity to European norms.

The standard of civilization. In the 19th century, international lawyers developed a legal doctrine that divided the world into three categories:

1. **Civilized nations:** European states, the United States, and a few others (e.g., Japan after the Meiji Restoration, Siam). These were **full subjects** of international law, entitled to sovereignty, recognition, and the protections of the law of nations.
2. **Barbarous nations:** States with some form of government and legal order, but not "civilized" enough for full sovereignty. These were treated as **partial subjects** — they could enter into treaties, but they were not entitled to the full protections of international law.
3. **Savage nations:** Peoples without organized government or law. These were treated as **objects** of international law — their territories were *terra nullius* (empty land), available for occupation by civilized states.

The criteria of civilization. The international lawyers — James Lorimer, William Edward Hall, John Westlake, and others — specified the criteria of "civilization." These included:

- A **civilized government** — one that could maintain order, enforce law, and conduct diplomatic relations.
- **Basic norms** — the prohibition of slavery, the protection of foreigners, the observance of treaties.
- **A legal system** — one that recognized the rights of property and contract, and that could provide remedies for foreigners.
- **"Progress"** — a commitment to the norms of European civilization, including Christianity, commerce, and "modern" institutions.

The function of the standard. The standard of civilization was not a neutral description. It was a **mechanism of exclusion** — it allowed European states to deny sovereignty to non-European polities while claiming to act in the name of universal principles. It was also a mechanism of **intervention** — it allowed European states to intervene in the affairs of non-European polities to "civilize" them, which in practice meant to colonize them.

The African case. Africa was the paradigmatic case of the standard of civilization in action:

- The **Berlin Conference** (1884–85) was the most explicit expression of the standard. The European powers divided Africa among themselves, without any African representation, and established the principle of **effective occupation** — the doctrine that colonial claims required actual administrative presence, not just discovery. The General Act of the Berlin Conference declared that the powers were "anxious to see the development of the civilization of the African populations" and were "bound to watch over the preservation of the native tribes, and to care for the improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being."
- The **mandate system** (after the First World War) and the **trusteeship system** (after the Second World War) continued the logic of the standard. African and other colonized territories were placed under the "tutelage" of European powers, who were supposed to prepare them for self-government.
- **Uti possidetis juris** — the principle that new states inherit the borders of the preceding colonial administrative units — was applied to Africa at independence, entrenching colonial borders and preventing any renegotiation of the colonial partition.

Grovogui's argument. Siba Grovogui's *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) is the most important African contribution to the genealogy of sovereignty. Grovogui argues that the sovereignty that IR treats as universal was **never extended to Africans**. African polities were treated as **quasi-sovereign** or **non-sovereign** — subject to external tutelage, intervention, and the "standard of civilization." The international system is not just anarchic; it is **hierarchical**, and the hierarchy is **racial**.

Grovogui's key insight: the sovereignty that IR describes as a **universal principle** is actually a **particular historical product** — a product of European state formation, European imperialism, and the racial hierarchy that structured the colonial world. The claim that sovereignty is universal is not a description of the international system; it is a **normative aspiration** that the system has never realized.

Anghie's argument. Antony Anghie's *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (2005) extends Grovogui's argument to international law more broadly. Anghie argues that **sovereignty** and **colonialism** were **constituted together**: the sovereignty of European states was defined **against** the non-sovereignty of the colonized world. The "standard of civilization" was not a peripheral doctrine; it was **central** to the constitution of international law. The post-colonial state, in Anghie's account, is not a fully sovereign state but a **product of the colonial encounter** — its sovereignty is conditional, its institutions are inherited, and its economy is structured by the legacy of extraction.

Observable implication. If the standard of civilization is operative, you should see (a) **conditional** sovereignty — states whose sovereignty is contingent on their conformity to external norms; (b) **hierarchical** treatment — some states are subject to intervention, conditionality, and tutelage, while others are not; and (c) **racialized** patterns — the states whose sovereignty is most conditional are disproportionately in the Global South.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The "constitutive outside": how the non-European world made European sovereignty possible

The claim: The standard of civilization did not just exclude the colonized world; it **constituted** European sovereignty. European sovereignty was defined **against** the non-European world — the "savage," the "barbarian," the "uncivilized." Without the colonized world as its constitutive outside, European sovereignty would not have been what it was.

The concept. The "constitutive outside" is a concept from post-structuralist theory (Derrida, Laclau, Mouffe) that has been applied to IR by post-colonial and constructivist scholars. The idea is that identities are constituted through **difference** — the identity of the "inside" is defined by its opposition to the "outside." The outside is not just excluded; it is **necessary** for the inside to be what it is.

Applied to sovereignty. European sovereignty was constituted through the opposition between the "civilized" and the "uncivilized":

- European states were **sovereign** because they had **governments** capable of maintaining order; non-European polities were **non-sovereign** because they lacked such governments.
- European states were **civilized** because they had **law** that protected property and contract; non-European polities were **savage** because they lacked such law.
- European states were **territorial** because their sovereignty was bounded by **borders**; non-European polities were **non-territorial** because their authority was not bounded in the same way.

The point is not just that Europeans **believed** they were superior. The point is that the **institution** of European sovereignty — the specific set of rights, powers, and practices that defined it — was **constituted** through the exclusion of the colonized world. European states could claim **exclusive** authority over their territories because they denied that the colonized world had **any** authority over its territories.

The African case. Africa was the paradigmatic "constitutive outside" of European sovereignty:

- The **Berlin Conference** was not just a division of territory; it was a **constitution** of European sovereignty. By dividing Africa among themselves, the European powers **constituted** their own sovereignty — they established that they were the kind of entities that could **own** territory, **divide** it, and **govern** it. The African polities were not just excluded from the division; they were **constituted as non-sovereign** — as objects to be divided, not subjects who could divide.
- The **doctrine of effective occupation** was not just a rule for colonial claims; it was a **constitution** of what counted as sovereignty. A state was sovereign if it could **effectively occupy** territory — which meant, in practice, if it could **administer** it in the European manner. African polities, which had their own forms of authority, were **not** recognized as sovereign because they did not meet this criterion.
- The **mandate and trusteeship systems** were not just forms of colonial administration; they were **constitutions** of the hierarchy of sovereignty. The "advanced nations" were sovereign; the "peoples not yet able to stand by themselves" were not. The hierarchy was **racial**: the advanced nations were European; the peoples not yet able were African, Asian, and Pacific.

Mbembe's necropolitics. Achille Mbembe's concept of **necropolitics** (2003) extends this argument. Mbembe argues that the sovereignty of the modern state is **constituted through the power to determine who lives and who dies** — the power over life and death. This power was exercised most explicitly in the colonies, where the colonized were treated as **bare life** — as beings whose lives were not protected by law, and whose deaths were not grievable. The "constitutive outside" is not just a conceptual category; it is a **material** reality — the bodies of the colonized were the site where European sovereignty was enacted.

Observable implication. If the "constitutive outside" argument is operative, you should see (a) **representations** of the non-European world that construct it as the opposite of European sovereignty — as disorderly, lawless, and savage; (b) **practices** that treat the non-European world as an object of governance rather than a subject of sovereignty; and (c) **persistence** of these representations and practices in the post-colonial era — in the discourse of "failed states," "humanitarian intervention," and "the responsibility to protect."

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The five perspectives interpret the Westphalian order differently, and each interpretation is political

The claim: The Westphalian myth is not just a historical question. It is a **political** question. The five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — interpret the Westphalian order differently, and each interpretation reflects a different political project.

2.6.1 The African perspective (primary) Core commitments. African scholars and statesmen have a **complex** relationship with the Westphalian order. On one hand, the sovereignty that Westphalian norms promise is **hard-won** — African states fought for independence, and they defend sovereignty and non-interference as protections against re-colonization. On the other hand, the Westphalian order was **never** extended to Africa on equal terms — African sovereignty was conditional, hierarchical, and racialized.

The critique of the myth. African scholars argue that the Westphalian narrative **erases Africa** from the story of the international system. The international system was not created in 1648 by European states; it was created through **conquest, colonization, and the slave trade** — processes that are invisible in the Westphalian narrative. The "expansion of international society" (Bull and Watson) was not an expansion of norms; it was an expansion of **violence**.

The defence of sovereignty. At the same time, African states are among the strongest defenders of Westphalian sovereignty. The AU Constitutive Act enshrines non-interference (Article 4(g)), and African states have consistently resisted external intervention, conditionality, and the "responsibility to protect." This is not because African states are committed to the Westphalian myth; it is because they have experienced what happens when sovereignty is denied. The defence of sovereignty is a **defence against the return of the standard of civilization**.

The AU's modification. The AU's Article 4(h) — the right of the Union to intervene in a member state in cases of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity — is an **African innovation** within the Westphalian framework. It accepts the sovereignty norm but modifies it: sovereignty is not absolute; it is conditional on the state's responsibility to protect its citizens. This is an attempt to **decolonize** sovereignty — to take the Westphalian norm and remake it for African purposes.

Grovogui's challenge. Grovogui's work is a challenge to both the Westphalian myth and the uncritical defence of sovereignty. He argues that the sovereignty that African states defend is **not the same sovereignty** that European states enjoy: it is conditional, hierarchical, and racialized. The task, for Grovogui, is not to defend the Westphalian order but to **transform** it — to create a genuinely post-colonial sovereignty that is not structured by the colonial past.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the Westphalian order is **not neutral** — it is a product of colonial history, and it continues to reproduce colonial hierarchies. It also shows that African states are **not passive** — they have both defended and modified the sovereignty norm, and they have developed their own institutions (the AU, the AfCFTA) to pursue their own projects.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **genuine value** of Westphalian sovereignty for African states — the ways in which sovereignty protects weak states from intervention and exploitation. It can also underplay the **diversity** of African positions — not all African states agree on the meaning of sovereignty.

2.6.2 The Chinese perspective **Core commitments.** China's engagement with the Westphalian order is shaped by its own history — the "century of humiliation" (1839–1949), during which China was subjected to the "standard of civilization," unequal treaties, and foreign intervention.

1. **The critique of the standard of civilization.** Chinese scholars and officials often invoke the "century of humiliation" to critique the West's claim to universalism. China was a victim of the standard of civilization; it was denied full sovereignty because it was not "civilized" enough. This experience shapes China's commitment to **absolute sovereignty** and **non-interference**.
2. **The Tianxia alternative.** Chinese scholars — particularly Zhao Tingyang — argue that the Westphalian order is a **particular** order, not a universal one. *Tianxia* ("all under heaven") is an alternative model — a hierarchical, harmonious order in which the legitimate ruler provides order for all. This is a challenge to the Westphalian assumption that the international system is composed of formally equal sovereign states.
3. **Relational sovereignty.** Qin Yaqing's relational theory challenges the Westphalian assumption that states are discrete, atomistic actors. Relations, not states, are the basic units; sovereignty is relational, not absolute.

The political project. China's engagement with the Westphalian order is part of its broader project of **epistemic sovereignty** — the claim that the international order should not be defined by a single civilization's rules, and that China should not be confined to Western frameworks.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the Westphalian order is **not the only possible order** — there are alternative models (Tianxia, relationality) that challenge its assumptions. It also shows that the critique of the Westphalian order can come from **within** the state system, not just from post-colonial theory.

What it occludes: It can underplay the ways in which China **benefits** from the Westphalian order — the ways in which sovereignty and non-interference protect China from external criticism and intervention. It can also risk **essentializing** "Chinese thought" as a unified tradition.

2.6.3 The Russian perspective **Core commitments.** Russia's engagement with the Westphalian order is defined by the **defence of great-power sovereignty** and the **rejection of the liberal order**.

1. **The defence of Westphalian sovereignty.** Russia is one of the strongest defenders of the Westphalian principle of non-interference — but with a twist. Russia argues that sovereignty is **stratified**: great powers are truly sovereign; smaller states fall within the spheres of influence of great powers. This is a **realist** reading of the Westphalian order, not a liberal one.
2. **The rejection of the liberal order.** Russia rejects the liberal interpretation of the Westphalian order — the interpretation that sovereignty is conditional on human rights, democracy, and the "responsibility to protect." Russia sees this as a Western instrument for intervention. The Russian perspective is **pluralist**: sovereignty is absolute, and intervention is a violation of the Charter.
3. **State-civilization.** Russia's self-understanding as a **state-civilization** is a challenge to the Westphalian assumption that states are nation-states. Russia is a civilization, not a nation-state; its sovereignty is civilizational, not merely territorial.

The political project. Russia's engagement with the Westphalian order is **defensive**: it uses the language of sovereignty to resist Western intervention and to defend its sphere of influence.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the Westphalian order can be **mobilized for illiberal**

purposes — the defence of sovereignty can become a defence of authoritarianism. It also shows that the meaning of the Westphalian order is **contested** — different states interpret it differently.

What it occludes: It can **naturalize** aggression — the claim that Russia is defending its sovereignty can be used to justify the invasion of Ukraine. It can also **underplay** the ways in which Russia **violates** the sovereignty of its neighbors.

2.6.4 The Western perspective **Core commitments.** The Western tradition is the **home** of the Westphalian myth. The standard narrative was constructed by Western international lawyers, and it remains central to Western IR.

1. **The standard narrative.** Western IR textbooks present the Westphalian settlement as the founding moment of the international system. This narrative is not just descriptive; it is **normative** — it presents the sovereign state as the natural, legitimate form of political organization, and it presents the international system as a realm of formally equal sovereigns.
2. **The revisionist critique.** Western scholarship has also produced the most important **revisionist** accounts of the Westphalian myth. Teschke's *The Myth of 1648* (2003), Krasner's *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (1999), and Anghie's *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (2005) are all Western critiques of the standard narrative. The Western tradition is not monolithic; it contains its own self-critique.
3. **The liberal interpretation.** Western liberalism interprets the Westphalian order as a framework for **cooperation and progress** — the sovereign state is the foundation of international order, and international institutions can build on it to produce peace, prosperity, and human rights. This is a **solidarist** interpretation, in contrast to the pluralist Russian interpretation.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **most developed** versions of both the standard narrative and its revisionist critique. It also provides the **institutional infrastructure** — universities, journals, publishers — through which the debate is conducted.

What it occludes: It can be **parochial** — treating Western history as universal history. It can be **complicit** — the standard narrative serves Western interests by naturalizing the existing order. And it can be **self-referential** — a debate among Western scholars about Western history, with little engagement with non-Western perspectives.

2.6.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN is the **institutional embodiment** of the Westphalian order — but it also embodies a **tension** between pluralist and solidarist interpretations of that order.

1. **The Charter as the Westphalian constitution.** The UN Charter enshrines the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference. These are the core norms of the Westphalian order, and the UN is their institutional guarantor. The General Assembly's 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States is the most explicit statement of these principles.
2. **The solidarist challenge.** The UN has also been the site of **solidarist** challenges to the Westphalian order — the human rights regime, the R2P, the ICC. These challenges assert that sovereignty is **conditional** on the state's responsibility to protect its citizens. The tension between pluralism and solidarism is the central tension in the UN's interpretation of the Westphalian order.
3. **The decolonization agenda.** The UN was a **site** of anti-colonial struggle — the General Assembly's

1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples was a landmark. The UN's decolonization agenda was an attempt to **extend** the Westphalian order to the colonized world — to make sovereignty universal. But the extension was incomplete: the post-colonial state inherited colonial borders, colonial institutions, and colonial economies.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **normative benchmark** — the standards against which the Westphalian order is judged. It also provides the **institutional record** — the resolutions, declarations, and debates that are essential evidence for any analysis.

What it occludes: It can **depoliticize** — framing the Westphalian order as a legal-technical matter obscures the power dynamics that shaped it. It can **legitimize** — the UN's authority can be used to justify the existing order. And it can **underplay** the gap between the UN's normative commitments and its actual practice.

2.6.6 The comparison matrix

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Stance toward Westphalian myth	Critique: erases Africa; defence of sovereignty as anti-colonial	Critique: standard of civilization; Tianxia alternative	Defence: stratified sovereignty; rejection of liberal interpretation	Home of the myth; revisionist critique from within	Institutional embodiment; tension between pluralism and solidarism
Key concept of sovereignty	Conditional, hierarchical, racialized; AU's Article 4(h) as modification	Absolute; relational; civilizational	Stratified: great powers truly sovereign	Formal; contested between pluralist and solidarist	Legal; Charter-based; tension between sovereignty and R2P
What it contributes	Colonial genealogy; African agency	Alternative models; critique of universalism	Illiberal mobilization of sovereignty	Standard narrative + revisionist critique	Normative benchmark; institutional record
What it occludes	Value of sovereignty for weak states; diversity of African positions	China's benefit from Westphalian order	Violation of neighbors' sovereignty	Parochialism; complicity	Power dynamics; gap between norms and practice

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2.7 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: The **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)** was adopted unanimously by the UN General Assembly at the 2005 World Summit. It seemed to represent a fundamental challenge to the Westphalian order — the

claim that sovereignty is conditional on the state's responsibility to protect its citizens. Yet in the two decades since, R2P has been invoked inconsistently, contested by many states, and has not become an internalized norm. Why did a norm that seemed to challenge the Westphalian order fail to transform it?

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why did R2P, which appeared to challenge the Westphalian principle of absolute sovereignty, fail to become an internalized norm, and why is it contested by the very states it was designed to protect?*

The Westphalian framing:

- **R2P as a challenge to Westphalian sovereignty.** R2P asserts that sovereignty is **conditional** — a state that fails to protect its citizens loses its claim to sovereignty, and the international community has a responsibility to intervene. This is a **solidarist** challenge to the **pluralist** Westphalian order.
- **The standard of civilization redux.** Critics argue that R2P is a **new standard of civilization** — it makes sovereignty conditional on conformity to Western norms (human rights, democracy, the "responsibility to protect"), and it justifies intervention in the Global South. The mechanism is the same as the 19th-century standard: a purportedly universal norm that is applied selectively to weak states.
- **The constitutive outside.** R2P constructs the "failed state" as the **constitutive outside** of the responsible sovereign — the state that cannot or will not protect its citizens. The "failed state" is the new "savage," the object of intervention rather than the subject of sovereignty.

The African perspective. African states have a **complex** relationship with R2P:

- **The AU's Article 4(h)** is an **African** version of R2P — a collective right of intervention in genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. This shows that African states are not opposed to the idea of conditional sovereignty; they are opposed to the **unilateral** and **selective** application of the norm by Western powers.
- **The Libya intervention (2011)** is the key case. The UN Security Council authorized intervention under R2P; NATO intervened; the intervention became a regime-change operation; and the aftermath was a disaster. For many African states, Libya confirmed their suspicions that R2P is a **Western instrument** — a new standard of civilization that justifies intervention in the Global South.
- **The African critique** is not a rejection of R2P but a demand for its **multilateralization** — intervention should be authorized by the UN or the AU, not by ad hoc Western coalitions. The African position is a **pluralist** defence of sovereignty combined with a **solidarist** commitment to protection — a distinctively African synthesis.

The Chinese and Russian perspectives. China and Russia have consistently contested R2P, framing it as a Western instrument for regime change. They emphasize **sovereignty and non-interference**, and they argue that R2P is a violation of the UN Charter. Their position is **pluralist**: order requires respecting sovereignty, not intervening to enforce justice. The Russian and Chinese positions are not just cynical; they reflect a genuine commitment to the Westphalian order — an order that protects them from external intervention.

The Western perspective. Western states are the **principal advocates** of R2P, but they are also its **principal violators**: they invoke it selectively and they resist its application to their own actions. The Western position is **solidarist** in rhetoric but **pluralist** in practice.

The UN perspective. The UN has tried to **institutionalize** R2P through the office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect, and through the "three pillars" framework. The UN's position is that R2P is a **Charter-based** norm, not a Western imposition.

Adjudication. Which theory best explains R2P's contested status?

- **The Westphalian framework** explains why R2P is contested: it challenges the **pluralist** order that many states — particularly Russia, China, and many African states — see as protecting their sovereignty.
- **The post-colonial framework** explains why R2P is seen as a **new standard of civilization**: it makes sovereignty conditional on conformity to Western norms, and it justifies intervention in the Global South.
- **The African perspective** explains why African states are **not** simply opposed to R2P: the AU's Article 4(h) shows that African states have their own version of conditional sovereignty, and their opposition is to the **unilateral** and **selective** application of the norm, not to the norm itself.
- **The Western perspective** explains why R2P has not been abandoned: it remains a **normative aspiration** that Western states and international institutions continue to invoke.

A complete explanation combines all four: R2P is a **genuinely new norm** that challenges the Westphalian order, but its **internalization** has been blocked by the **pluralist structure** of international society, the **selective application** of the norm by the powerful, and the **post-colonial suspicion** that it is a new form of Western interventionism. The contestation over R2P is not a failure of the norm; it is a **window into the deeper contestation** over what the Westphalian order is and should be.

2.8 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: The **Berlin Conference** (1884–85) is often cited as the moment when Africa was "divided" by European powers. The General Act of the Berlin Conference declared that the powers were "anxious to see the development of the civilization of the African populations" and established the principle of **effective occupation** — the doctrine that colonial claims required actual administrative presence. No African representatives were present at the conference.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely: why did the European powers need a **conference** to divide Africa, and what does the conference tell us about the relationship between sovereignty and civilization?
2. Apply the **standard of civilization** framework: how did the Berlin Conference enact the standard? What did it mean to be "civilized" in the context of the conference?
3. Apply the **constitutive outside** framework: how did the Berlin Conference **constitute** European sovereignty by excluding African sovereignty?
4. Apply the **African perspective**: how do African scholars interpret the Berlin Conference, and what does it tell us about the colonial genealogy of the international system?
5. Write a 300-word adjudication: is the Berlin Conference best understood as a **division of territory**, a **constitution of sovereignty**, or a **racial hierarchy** — or all three?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did the European powers need a conference to divide Africa, and what does it tell us about the

relationship between sovereignty and civilization?

The standard of civilization: The Berlin Conference was the most explicit enactment of the standard of civilization. The European powers claimed to be acting in the name of **civilization** — the General Act declared that they were "anxious to see the development of the civilization of the African populations." This was not a neutral description; it was a **justification** for conquest. The African polities were not "civilized" enough to be sovereign; they were "savage" or "barbarous," and their territories were available for occupation. The standard of civilization was the mechanism through which the European powers denied African sovereignty while claiming to act in the name of universal principles.

The constitutive outside: The Berlin Conference did not just divide territory; it **constituted** European sovereignty. By dividing Africa among themselves, the European powers established that they were the kind of entities that could **own** territory, **divide** it, and **govern** it. African polities were not just excluded from the division; they were **constituted as non-sovereign** — as objects to be divided, not subjects who could divide. The doctrine of effective occupation was not just a rule for colonial claims; it was a **constitution** of what counted as sovereignty. A state was sovereign if it could **effectively occupy** territory — which meant, in practice, if it could **administer** it in the European manner. African polities, which had their own forms of authority, were **not** recognized as sovereign because they did not meet this criterion.

The African perspective: African scholars interpret the Berlin Conference as the **founding moment** of Africa's incorporation into the international system — not as a subject but as an object. The conference established the **colonial borders** that African states inherited at independence, and it entrenched the **extractive institutions** that continue to shape African economies. The African perspective emphasizes that the Berlin Conference was not just a historical event; it was a **constitutive moment** that continues to structure Africa's place in the international system.

Adjudication: The Berlin Conference is **all three** — a division of territory, a constitution of sovereignty, and a racial hierarchy. It was a **division** of African territory among European powers; it was a **constitution** of European sovereignty through the exclusion of African sovereignty; and it was a **racial hierarchy** that placed European "civilization" above African "savagery." The three dimensions are not separate; they are **interconnected**. The division of territory was possible because of the racial hierarchy; the racial hierarchy was constituted through the division; and the sovereignty of the European powers was constituted through both. A complete analysis must hold all three dimensions together.

2.9 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The **mandate system** established after the First World War by the League of Nations. The mandate system placed former German and Ottoman territories under the "tutelage" of "advanced nations" — Britain, France, Belgium, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan — who were supposed to prepare them for self-government. The mandates were classified into A, B, and C categories, with different levels of "readiness" for independence. The system was later replaced by the UN trusteeship system after the Second World War.

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** How did the mandate system institutionalize the standard of civilization? What was the legal mechanism through which sovereignty was withheld?
2. **The constitutive outside:** How did the mandate system constitute the sovereignty of the "advanced nations" by denying it to the "peoples not yet able to stand by themselves"?
3. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the mandate system? (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — one paragraph each or a table.)
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show that the mandate system was **not** a mechanism of the standard of civilization? What would show that it **was**?

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish the **stated goals** of the mandate system (tutelage, preparation for self-government) from its **function** (legitimation of colonial rule)? Does it identify the **racial hierarchy** that structured the system?

2.10 HINGE QUESTION

A scholar argues: "The Westphalian narrative is not a description of what happened in 1648; it is a story that 19th- and 20th-century international lawyers told about 1648 to legitimize the sovereign state system they were building." Which claim does this argument support?

- A) The Peace of Westphalia created the modern state system
- B) The Westphalian narrative is a retrospective construction
- C) Sovereignty was universally recognized after 1648
- D) The standard of civilization was a neutral legal doctrine

Answer: B. The argument claims that the Westphalian narrative was **constructed** after the fact — by 19th- and 20th-century international lawyers — to legitimize the sovereign state system. This is the core revisionist claim: the narrative is a **myth**, not a historical description.

If you answered A: This is the standard narrative, which the scholar is challenging. **If you answered C:** Sovereignty was never universally recognized; the standard of civilization excluded the colonized world. **If you answered D:** The standard of civilization was not neutral; it was a mechanism of exclusion and racial hierarchy.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground the lesson's concepts in empirical data on sovereignty recognition.

Task: Using the summary data below, analyze patterns of sovereignty recognition and the standard of civilization.

Table 1: UN membership, selected years

Year	Number of member states	African member states	Asian member states
1945	51	4	9

Year	Number of member states	African member states	Asian member states
1960	99	26	22
1970	127	42	30
1990	159	52	38
2020	193	54	43

Table 2: Recognition of contested states (illustrative, 2024)

Entity	UN member?	Recognized by (approx.)	Status
Taiwan	No	~12 states	Contested
Kosovo	No	~100 states	Contested
Palestine	No (observer)	~140 states	Contested
Western Sahara	No	~40 states	Contested
Somaliland	No	0 states	Contested

Analysis questions:

1. **Sovereignty expansion:** What does the UN membership data suggest about the **expansion of sovereignty**? When did it become universal, and what drove the expansion?
2. **Conditional sovereignty:** What does the data on contested states suggest about the **conditionality** of sovereignty? Why are some entities recognized and others not? What role do **great-power interests** play?
3. **The standard of civilization:** Are there contemporary equivalents of the standard of civilization? How might the criteria for recognition today (democracy, human rights, effective control) reflect the legacy of the standard?
4. **The African case:** What does the African membership data suggest about the **timing** of African sovereignty? What does it tell us about the relationship between decolonization and the expansion of the international system?
5. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the data? (African: decolonization and continued hierarchy; Chinese: sovereignty as a shield; Russian: sovereignty as a great-power prerogative; Western: sovereignty as a universal norm; UN: sovereignty as the foundation of the Charter order.)

Rule: Complete the data lab before the independent memo.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The Westphalian myth vs. the historical record. Draw a two-column table. Left column: "What the myth says" (created the state system, enshrined non-interference, established formal equality). Right column: "What the historical record shows" (religious settlement, constitutional arrangement of the Empire, overlapping authorities).

Visual 2: Krasner's four concepts of sovereignty. Draw a four-part diagram: International legal sovereignty (recognition), Westphalian sovereignty (exclusion of external authority), Domestic sovereignty (effective control), Interdependence sovereignty (control of flows). For each, write a one-line definition and one example of a violation.

Visual 3: The standard of civilization. Draw a triangle with three vertices: Civilized (full sovereignty), Barbarous (partial sovereignty), Savage (no sovereignty — terra nullius). Label the center: "Standard of civilization." Write one example for each vertex.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
What is the Westphalian narrative?	1648 created the sovereign state system, enshrined non-interference, established formal equality
What does the historical record show?	Religious settlement, constitutional arrangement of the Empire, overlapping authorities — not a founding moment
What are Krasner's four concepts of sovereignty?	International legal, Westphalian, domestic, interdependence
What is "organized hypocrisy"?	Sovereignty norms are routinely violated, but violations follow patterns that reflect powerful interests
What is the standard of civilization?	Legal doctrine that made sovereignty conditional on conformity to European norms; divided the world into civilized, barbarous, and savage
How was the standard applied to Africa?	Berlin Conference, effective occupation, mandate/trusteeship systems, uti possidetis juris
What is the "constitutive outside"?	The non-European world constituted European sovereignty through its exclusion
How do the five perspectives interpret the Westphalian order?	African: colonial genealogy + defence of sovereignty; Chinese: standard of civilization + Tianxia alternative; Russian: stratified sovereignty; Western: home of the myth + revisionist critique; UN: institutional embodiment + pluralist/solidarist tension
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.6; Teschke (2003); Krasner (1999); Grovogui (1996); Anghie (2005); Schmitt (1950); Bull and Watson (1984); the Treaties of Münster and Osnabrück; the General Act of the Berlin Conference
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the Westphalian myth and its critique to a smart non-specialist in 150–200 words, without using jargon. If you must use "sovereignty" or "standard of civilization," define them in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for the "constitutive outside." Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "The constitutive outside is like the way a club defines itself by who it excludes — the members are members because they are not the outsiders." Where it breaks down: unlike a club, the outsiders are not just excluded; they are **constituted** as inferior by the exclusion, and the exclusion shapes the identity of the insiders.)

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What are Krasner's four concepts of sovereignty?
Mechanism	How did the standard of civilization function as a mechanism of exclusion?
Application	A state is recognized by the UN but cannot control its territory. Which concept of sovereignty is it lacking?
Comparison	How does the Westphalian narrative differ from the historical record of 1648?
Source	What did Grovogui argue about sovereignty and Africa?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to the claim that the Westphalian narrative is a myth?
Reconstruction	How would a Chinese scholar critique the Westphalian order?
Occlusion	What does the standard narrative of the Westphalian order fail to see about the colonial world?
Adjudication	Which perspective best explains the contested status of R2P, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the three categories of the standard of civilization on a diagram.

Tag each card: `L9`, `sovereignty`, `Westphalian myth`, `colonialism`, `perspective`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Reconstruct the Westphalian narrative and its critique	
Distinguish Krasner's four concepts of sovereignty	
Explain the standard of civilization and its application to Africa	
Reconstruct the "constitutive outside" argument	
Reconstruct the five perspectives on the Westphalian order	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between the Westphalian narrative and the historical record?
2. Which perspective was easiest to reconstruct? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default analytical style?
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 10?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L9			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 2)

Start your Module 2 cheatsheet with this row:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Westphalian myth; Krasner's four concepts of sovereignty; organized hypocrisy; standard of civilization; constitutive outside; quasi-sovereignty; effective occupation; terra nullius; uti possidetis juris; coloniality of sovereignty

Column	Content
Key mechanisms	Retrospective construction → naturalization of state system; standard of civilization → exclusion of colonized world; constitutive outside → European sovereignty through exclusion of the colonized; organized hypocrisy → selective violation of sovereignty norms
Theories and authors	Teschke (2003); Krasner (1999); Grovogui (1996); Anghie (2005); Schmitt (1950); Bull and Watson (1984); the Treaties of Münster and Osnabrück; the General Act of the Berlin Conference
Cases and evidence	Peace of Westphalia (1648); Berlin Conference (1884–85); mandate system; R2P; contested states (Taiwan, Kosovo, Palestine); UN membership data
Debates	Was 1648 a founding moment? Is sovereignty universal? Is the standard of civilization a thing of the past?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that the Westphalian narrative is accurate? What would show it is a myth?
Cross-links	L2 (Charter system); L7 (English School); L8 (post-colonialism); L10 (19th-century multipolarity); L27 (African state formation); L28 (Pan-Africanism); L37 (lawfare of territorial integrity); L41 (West Asian state system)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1–L9 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L9 with L10 (Berlin Conference) and L27 (African state formation)
R5	End of Module 2	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Five key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (R2P) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (Berlin Conference) attempted and compared
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
- ☐ Cheatsheet entry added
- ☐ R2 review scheduled

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **On the Westphalian myth:** Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648* (2003); Andreas Osiander, "Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth," *International Organization* (2001); Stephen Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (1999).
- **On the colonial genealogy of sovereignty:** Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996); Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (2005); Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth* (1950); Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* (2003).
- **On the standard of civilization:** Gerrit Gong, *The Standard of "Civilization" in International Society* (1984); Martti Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations* (2001); Makau Mutua, "Savages, Victims, and Saviors" (2001).
- **On the expansion of international society:** Hedley Bull and Adam Watson, *The Expansion of International Society* (1984); Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society?* (2004).
- **On the Berlin Conference:** the General Act of the Berlin Conference (1885); Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans*, ch. 3; Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (1991).
- **On the mandate and trusteeship systems:** the League of Nations Covenant, Article 22; the UN Charter, Chapters XII–XIII; Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law*, ch. 3–4.
- **On African sovereignty and the AU:** the AU Constitutive Act, Article 4; the Ezulwini Consensus (2005); Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972).
- **On Chinese and Russian perspectives:** Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia* (2021); Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (2018); Lauri Mälksoo, *Russian Approaches to International Law* (2015);

Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin* (2012).

End of Lesson 9. Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 10 (19th-Century Multipolarity, Empire, and the Berlin Conference).

11. 19th-Century Multipolarity, Empire, and the Berlin Conference: The Great-Power Concert and the Scramble for Africa

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LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L10 — 19th-Century Multipolarity, Empire, and the Berlin Conference
Module	Module 2: Historical Architecture of International Order
Prerequisites	L2 (Charter system, AU Act); L3 (causal inference, selection bias); L7 (English School — international society and expansion); L8 (post-colonialism, coloniality of power); L9 (Westphalian myth, standard of civilization)
Interleaved links	Forward to L12 (Cold War and decolonization), L27 (African colonial state formation), L28 (Pan-Africanism and the OAU), L33 (critical minerals and techno-geopolitics), L49 (institutional revisionism), L51 (climate geopolitics)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.
Content channels	Canon (paraphrased and quoted); primary documents (the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna, the General Act of the Berlin Conference, the Act of the Brussels Conference, quoted and analyzed); data lab (colonial partition and trade data); five perspectives
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (adjudicate between the Concert-of-Europe narrative and the imperial-partition narrative, and between the five perspectives on both)
Estimated study time	8–10 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Every argument, quotation, and example you need is inside this document. Where I cite Kissinger, Schroeder, Hobsbawm, Lenin, Robinson and Gallagher, Pakenham, Förster,

Grovogui, Rodney, Nkrumah, or any other scholar, I summarize the argument fully enough that you do not need the original to complete the lesson. "Further Reading" is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Lesson 9 dismantled the Westphalian myth and showed that sovereignty was never universal — it was extended selectively, through the "standard of civilization," to the "civilized" nations and withheld from the colonized world. This lesson takes the next historical step: it reconstructs the **19th-century international system** — the era in which the modern state system was **actually** consolidated, and in which Africa was violently incorporated into it.

The 19th century is often presented in IR textbooks as the golden age of **multipolarity** — the "Concert of Europe," in which five great powers (Britain, France, Prussia/Germany, Austria, and Russia) managed their rivalries through diplomacy, congresses, and the balance of power. This is the reference point for contemporary debates about multipolarity, the "return of great-power politics," and the lessons of history for the 21st century.

But the 19th century was also the **age of empire** — the period in which European powers conquered almost all of Africa and much of Asia, imposed the "standard of civilization" on the non-European world, and established the **colonial hierarchies** that persist to this day. The Berlin Conference (1884–85), which divided Africa among the European powers, was the most explicit expression of this imperial order.

The two histories — the Concert of Europe and the scramble for Africa — are not separate. They are **interconnected**. The same great powers that managed their rivalries through the Concert also competed for colonies in Africa. The balance of power in Europe was **constituted** through the partition of Africa. And the racial hierarchy that justified the partition was **constitutive** of the European order.

This lesson gives you:

1. **The Concert of Europe** — the great-power management system that produced a century of relative peace among the European powers (1815–1914), and the debates about why it worked and why it failed.
2. **The "new imperialism"** — the wave of European conquest in Africa and Asia between 1870 and 1914, and the competing explanations: economic (Hobson, Lenin), strategic (Robinson and Gallagher), and cultural (the "civilizing mission").
3. **The Berlin Conference** — the rules of the scramble, the doctrine of effective occupation, and the **constitution** of European sovereignty through the partition of Africa.
4. **The African experience** — conquest, resistance, collaboration, and the legacies of the partition: artificial borders, extractive institutions, and the colonial state.
5. **The five perspectives** on 19th-century multipolarity and the Berlin Conference — African (primary), Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — and the **adjudication** among them.

By the end, you can take any claim about multipolarity — "multipolarity is more war-prone," "the Concert of Europe shows that great powers can manage their rivalries," "the 19th century was a golden age of diplomacy" — and answer: *Whose peace? Whose diplomacy? Whose order? And how do the five perspectives reconstruct it?*

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory)

1. From L9: What is the Westphalian myth, and what does the historical record actually show about 1648?
2. From L9: What are Krasner's four concepts of sovereignty, and why does conflating them produce confusion?
3. From L9: What is the "standard of civilization," and how did it function as a mechanism of exclusion?
4. From L8: What is the "coloniality of power," and who developed the concept?

Check against the previous lessons before proceeding.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind:

- Why did the great powers of Europe manage to avoid a general war for a century after 1815, and why did they fail in 1914?
- Was the Concert of Europe a model of peaceful multipolarity, or a system for managing imperial competition?
- Why did European powers partition Africa in the 1880s and 1890s, and why did they need a conference to do it?
- What does the Berlin Conference tell us about the relationship between European peace and African conquest?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

Provisional definitions; revise by the end:

Concert of Europe; Congress of Vienna; balance of power; collective security; great-power management; spheres of influence; the Eastern Question; the "new imperialism"; informal empire; formal empire; effective occupation; hinterland doctrine; terra nullius; the "civilizing mission"; social Darwinism; the "scramble for Africa"; protectorate; annexation; concession; the dual mandate; colonial state; extractive institutions; resistance; collaboration.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Reconstruct** the Concert of Europe as a great-power management system, and evaluate the competing explanations for its success and failure.
2. **Distinguish** the competing explanations of the "new imperialism" — economic, strategic, and cultural — and apply them to the African case.

3. **Analyze** the Berlin Conference as a **constitution** of the rules of the scramble, and explain the doctrine of effective occupation and its consequences.
4. **Reconstruct** the African experience of conquest, resistance, and collaboration, and the legacies of the partition.
5. **Reconstruct** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions interpret 19th-century multipolarity and the Berlin Conference, and **adjudicate** among them on a specific case.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The Concert of Europe was a great-power management system, not a system of equal sovereigns

The claim: The Concert of Europe (1815–1914) was the most successful great-power management system in modern history. It produced a century of relative peace among the European powers — no general war between the great powers from 1815 to 1914. But its success depended on **exclusions**: the exclusion of smaller states from decision-making, the exclusion of the colonized world from sovereignty, and the exclusion of domestic populations from political participation. The Concert was not a model of peaceful multipolarity; it was a model of **oligarchic management**.

The Congress of Vienna (1814–15). After the Napoleonic Wars, the great powers — Britain, Russia, Prussia, Austria, and (after 1818) France — met at Vienna to reconstruct the European order. The settlement was based on three principles:

1. **Legitimacy:** The restoration of legitimate monarchs who had been deposed by Napoleon.
2. **Compensation:** Territorial compensation for the powers that had made sacrifices in the war.
3. **Balance of power:** A territorial settlement designed to prevent any single power from dominating Europe.

The Congress of Vienna was not a democratic assembly. It was a **great-power concert** — the major powers decided the fate of Europe, and the smaller states were consulted but not empowered. The Final Act of the Congress of Vienna (June 1815) was signed by the eight signatory powers (Britain, Russia, Prussia, Austria, France, Sweden, Spain, and Portugal), and it established the territorial and constitutional order of Europe.

The Concert system. After 1815, the great powers developed a set of **informal practices** for managing their rivalries:

- **Congresses and conferences:** Periodic meetings to address crises and coordinate policy. The Congress of Aix-la-Chapelle (1818), the Congress of Troppau (1820), the Congress of Laibach (1821), and the Congress of Verona (1822) were the early congresses. Later, the Concert managed crises through ad hoc conferences — the London Conference on Belgium (1830–31), the Paris Congress after the Crimean War (1856), the Berlin Congress (1878) after the Russo-Turkish War.
- **Consultation:** The great powers consulted each other before taking major actions, and they sought collective agreement on major issues.
- **Compensation:** When one power gained territory or influence, the others expected compensation — a principle that helped maintain the balance.
- **Intervention:** The great powers reserved the right to intervene in the affairs of smaller states to maintain the balance — e.g., the French intervention in Spain (1823), the French intervention in Italy (1849).

The "Concert" as a security community. Some scholars — particularly those in the English School tradition — argue that the Concert was more than a balance-of-power system. It was a **security community** — a group of states that had developed shared norms, mutual trust, and a commitment to managing their rivalries peacefully. The Concert was based on the **shared understanding** that a general war would be catastrophic, and that the great powers had a common interest in preventing it.

The failure of the Concert. The Concert collapsed in 1914. Why? The standard explanations:

1. **The rise of Germany.** After unification in 1871, Germany became the most powerful state in Europe. Its rise destabilized the balance of power, and its aggressive diplomacy (the "New Course" under Wilhelm II) alienated the other powers.
2. **The alliance system.** The rigid alliance system — the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy) and the Triple Entente (Britain, France, Russia) — turned a local crisis (the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand) into a general war.
3. **The decline of the Ottoman Empire.** The "Eastern Question" — the management of the Ottoman Empire's decline — was a recurring source of great-power tension, and the Balkan Wars (1912–13) destabilized the region.
4. **Nationalism and militarism.** The rise of aggressive nationalism, the arms race (particularly the naval race between Britain and Germany), and the influence of military planning (the Schlieffen Plan) made escalation more likely.
5. **The breakdown of consultation.** The great powers stopped consulting each other and began to act unilaterally. The Concert's informal practices broke down, and there was no institutional mechanism to manage the July Crisis.

The revisionist interpretation. Recent scholarship — particularly by Paul Schroeder — argues that the Concert was more fragile than it appears, and that its "success" was contingent on specific conditions: the exhaustion of the great powers after the Napoleonic Wars, the absence of a revisionist power, and the willingness of the great powers to prioritize order over conquest. When these conditions changed — with the rise of Germany and the intensification of imperial competition — the Concert collapsed.

What the Concert contributes: It provides a model of **great-power management** — the idea that the great powers can cooperate to manage their rivalries and prevent general war. This model is invoked in contemporary debates about multipolarity: can the US and China manage their rivalry the way the European powers managed theirs?

What it occludes: It occludes the **exclusions** on which the Concert depended — the exclusion of smaller states, the exclusion of the colonized world, and the exclusion of domestic populations. The Concert was a peace among the great powers, not a peace among peoples. It was compatible with — indeed, it depended on — the **conquest of Africa** and the **suppression of democracy** in Europe.

Observable implication. If the Concert was a great-power management system, you should see (a) **consultation** among the great powers, (b) **compensation** as a principle of settlement, and (c) **exclusion** of smaller states and non-European peoples from decision-making.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — The "new imperialism" was a product of European multipolarity, industrial capitalism, and the "civilizing mission"

The claim: The "new imperialism" — the wave of European conquest in Africa and Asia between 1870 and 1914 — was not a single phenomenon with a single cause. It was the product of **three interacting factors**: the dynamics of European multipolarity (strategic competition), the dynamics of industrial capitalism (economic competition), and the dynamics of European culture (the "civilizing mission").

The facts of the scramble. Between 1870 and 1914, European powers conquered almost all of Africa:

- In 1870, European powers controlled about **10%** of Africa — mainly coastal enclaves and Algeria (French) and the Cape Colony (British).
- By 1914, they controlled about **90%** — only Ethiopia and Liberia remained independent.
- The partition was formalized through a series of treaties, conferences, and military campaigns. The Berlin Conference (1884–85) established the rules; the "effective occupation" doctrine provided the legal justification; and the military campaigns (the "pacification" of resistance movements) enforced the partition.

Explanation 1: Economic imperialism. The classic Marxist explanation — developed by J. A. Hobson (*Imperialism*, 1902) and V. I. Lenin (*Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1917) — argues that the "new imperialism" was driven by **economic** factors:

- **Hobson:** Imperialism is the product of **underconsumption** — the failure of domestic demand to absorb the surplus produced by capitalism. Capitalists export capital to the colonies to find new markets and new sources of raw materials, and they use the state to protect their investments. Hobson's solution was **social reform** at home — redistribute income to increase domestic demand and reduce the need for imperial expansion.
- **Lenin:** Imperialism is the **highest stage** of capitalism — the stage of **monopoly capitalism**. As competition within the core drives down profits, capitalists export capital to the periphery, where labor is cheap and resources are abundant. The great powers divide the world among themselves, and the competition for colonies leads to war. Lenin's prediction was that imperialism would lead to inter-imperialist war — which seemed to be confirmed by the First World War.

Explanation 2: Strategic imperialism. The "Robinson and Gallagher" thesis — developed by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson in their 1953 article "The Imperialism of Free Trade" — argues that the "new imperialism" was driven by **strategic** factors: the competition for **influence** and **security**. The European powers were not primarily interested in colonies for their economic value; they were interested in **strategic positions** — naval bases, coaling stations, trade routes, and buffer zones. The "scramble for Africa" was a product of **great-power rivalry**, not economic necessity.

Robinson and Gallagher distinguished between **formal empire** (direct colonial rule) and **informal empire** (economic and political influence without formal rule). They argued that Britain preferred informal empire where possible — because it was cheaper — but resorted to formal empire when informal influence was threatened by rivals. The "new imperialism" was therefore a **defensive** response to the rise of rival powers, not a product of capitalist expansion per se.

Explanation 3: Cultural imperialism. The "civilizing mission" — the ideology that European powers had a **duty** to "civilize" the "backward" peoples of Africa and Asia — was not just a justification for imperialism; it was a **cause**. The European powers genuinely believed that they were bringing **civilization** — Christianity,

commerce, law, and "modern" institutions — to the "savage" world. This belief was reinforced by **social Darwinism** — the application of evolutionary theory to human societies, which suggested that the "fit" nations would inevitably conquer the "unfit."

The "civilizing mission" was particularly important in **France** (the *mission civilisatrice*) and **Britain** (the "white man's burden," a phrase from Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem). It was also central to the **Berlin Conference** — the General Act declared that the powers were "anxious to see the development of the civilization of the African populations."

The interaction of the three factors. The "new imperialism" cannot be reduced to any single cause. The economic, strategic, and cultural factors interacted:

- **Economic competition** drove the powers to seek new markets and raw materials, but the economic value of African colonies was often **exaggerated** (most colonies were not profitable).
- **Strategic competition** drove the powers to seek naval bases and buffer zones, but the strategic value of African territory was often **symbolic** (prestige, status, the fear of being left behind).
- **Cultural ideology** provided the **justification** for conquest, but it was also a **motive** — the belief that Europeans had a duty to civilize was genuinely held by many imperialists.

What this explanation contributes: It shows that the "new imperialism" was **overdetermined** — multiple factors pushed in the same direction. It also shows that the partition of Africa was **contingent** — it was not inevitable, and it was not the product of a single cause. The partition was the outcome of specific decisions, made by specific actors, in specific historical circumstances.

What it occludes: It can **underplay African agency** — the role of African resistance, collaboration, and initiative in shaping the partition. It can also **underplay the violence** of the partition — the military campaigns, the massacres, the destruction of African societies. And it can **underplay the legacies** of the partition — the artificial borders, the extractive institutions, and the colonial state.

Observable implication. If the "new imperialism" explanation is operative, you should see (a) **economic** competition for markets and raw materials, (b) **strategic** competition for naval bases and buffer zones, and (c) **cultural** ideology justifying conquest.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The Berlin Conference established the rules of the scramble, and the doctrine of effective occupation constitutionally excluded African sovereignty

The claim: The Berlin Conference (1884–85) was not just a diplomatic meeting; it was a **constitutional moment** — it established the **rules** of the scramble for Africa, and it **constituted** European sovereignty through the partition of Africa. The doctrine of **effective occupation** was the legal mechanism through which African sovereignty was denied and European sovereignty was asserted.

The context. In the early 1880s, the "scramble for Africa" was already underway. King Leopold II of Belgium had established the Congo Free State (1885) as his personal possession; France had expanded into West Africa and the Congo; Britain had expanded into southern and eastern Africa; and Germany had begun to claim territories in southwest and east Africa. The competition was creating tensions among the European powers, and the Berlin Conference was convened to **regulate** the competition — to establish rules that would prevent the scramble from escalating into a European war.

The General Act of the Berlin Conference (February 1885). The General Act was signed by 14 powers — Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden-Norway, Turkey, and the United States. The Act established several key principles:

1. **Freedom of trade** in the Congo basin and its tributaries — a principle that reflected the economic interests of the powers.
2. **The abolition of the slave trade** — a humanitarian principle that was also a justification for colonial rule.
3. **The neutrality** of the Congo basin — a principle that was intended to prevent the basin from becoming a theater of great-power conflict.
4. **The principle of effective occupation** — the most important provision. The Act declared that the powers could claim sovereignty over African territories only if they **effectively occupied** them — if they established **administrative** presence, **military** control, and **economic** development. The Act stated: "The Signatory Powers… recognize the obligation to insure the establishment of authority in the regions occupied by them on the coasts of the African Continent sufficient to protect existing rights, and, as the case may be, freedom of trade and of transit under the conditions agreed upon."

The doctrine of effective occupation. The doctrine was not a neutral rule; it was a **mechanism of exclusion**. African polities had their own forms of authority — kingdoms, chiefdoms, confederations, empires — but they did not have **administrative** presence in the European sense. The doctrine of effective occupation therefore **denied** that African polities were sovereign. Sovereignty was defined as **effective occupation** — which meant, in practice, **European-style administration**. African polities were not "occupying" their territories effectively; they were "savage" or "barbarous" — and their territories were therefore **available** for occupation by European powers.

The "hinterland doctrine." The General Act was ambiguous about the **hinterland** — the interior of Africa, beyond the coast. The doctrine of effective occupation was initially applied only to the coast, but it was soon extended to the interior. The "hinterland doctrine" — the principle that a power that occupied the coast had a right to the interior — led to a race for the interior, as the powers sought to claim as much territory as possible before their rivals. The doctrine was formalized in subsequent agreements, particularly the Anglo-French agreement of 1890 and the Anglo-German agreement of 1890.

The "constitution" of European sovereignty. The Berlin Conference did not just divide African territory; it **constituted** European sovereignty. By dividing Africa among themselves, the European powers established that they were the kind of entities that could **own** territory, **divide** it, and **govern** it. African polities were not just excluded from the division; they were **constituted as non-sovereign** — as objects to be divided, not subjects who could divide. The doctrine of effective occupation was not just a rule for colonial claims; it was a **constitution** of what counted as sovereignty.

The African perspective. African scholars — Grovogui, Rodney, Nkrumah, and others — emphasize that the Berlin Conference was a **founding moment** of Africa's incorporation into the international system — not as a subject but as an object. The conference established the **colonial borders** that African states inherited at independence, and it entrenched the **extractive institutions** that continue to shape African economies.

What the Berlin Conference contributes: It shows that the partition of Africa was a **constitutional** moment — it established the rules that governed the scramble, and it constituted European sovereignty through the exclusion of African sovereignty. It also shows that international law was not a neutral framework; it was a **mechanism** through which the powerful legitimized their conquests.

What it occludes: It can underplay **African agency** — the role of African resistance, collaboration, and initiative in shaping the partition. It can also underplay the **violence** of the partition — the military campaigns, the massacres, the destruction of African societies.

Observable implication. If the Berlin Conference was a constitutional moment, you should see (a) the **legal** justification of conquest through the doctrine of effective occupation, (b) the **exclusion** of African polities from the definition of sovereignty, and (c) the **persistence** of the colonial borders and institutions in the post-colonial era.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The African experience: conquest, resistance, collaboration, and the legacies of the partition

The claim: The partition of Africa was not a peaceful administrative process; it was a **violent conquest** that was resisted, negotiated, and collaborated with by African societies. The legacies of the partition — artificial borders, extractive institutions, and the colonial state — continue to shape African politics today.

Conquest. The European conquest of Africa was achieved through **military force** — the "pacification" campaigns that subdued African resistance. The conquest was made possible by the **technological gap** — particularly the Maxim gun (the first machine gun, invented in 1884) — and by the **divide-and-rule** tactics that exploited rivalries among African polities.

The conquest was extremely **violent**. The German campaign against the Herero and Nama in Southwest Africa (1904–08) was the first **genocide** of the 20th century — an estimated 80% of the Herero and 50% of the Nama were killed. The Belgian Congo Free State (1885–1908) was a **horror** — an estimated 10 million people died from forced labor, disease, and violence in the rubber extraction regime. The British "pacification" of the Mau Mau in Kenya (1952–60) involved mass detention and torture.

Resistance. African societies **resisted** the conquest. The resistance took many forms:

- **Military resistance:** The Zulu Wars (1879), the Mahdist War in Sudan (1881–99), the Herero and Nama uprising (1904–08), the Maji Maji rebellion in German East Africa (1905–07), and many others.
- **Political resistance:** Diplomatic missions to European capitals, petitions to the League of Nations, and the formation of anti-colonial movements.
- **Cultural resistance:** The preservation of African languages, religions, and traditions in the face of colonial "civilization."
- **Everyday resistance:** Flight, evasion, foot-dragging, and the "hidden transcripts" of resistance that James Scott describes.

Collaboration. Not all African societies resisted; many **collaborated** with the European powers. Collaboration took many forms:

- **Military collaboration:** African soldiers (the "askari") fought for the European powers in both world wars.
- **Political collaboration:** African chiefs and elites who served as intermediaries between the colonial state and African societies.
- **Economic collaboration:** African merchants and entrepreneurs who profited from colonial trade.

Collaboration was not simply betrayal; it was often a **strategy** — a way for African actors to pursue their own

interests within the constraints of colonial rule. The "collaboration" thesis — developed by Ronald Robinson — argues that the partition was possible only because African elites collaborated with the European powers.

The legacies of the partition. The partition left deep legacies:

1. **Artificial borders.** The colonial borders were drawn by Europeans, often without regard for African ethnic, linguistic, or political boundaries. The borders divided communities and grouped rivals together. At independence, African states accepted the colonial borders — through the principle of **uti possidetis juris** — to avoid a continent-wide war of secession. But the borders remain a source of conflict.
2. **Extractive institutions.** The colonial economy was organized around **extraction** — the export of raw materials and the import of manufactured goods. The colonial state invested in infrastructure (railways, ports, roads) that served extraction, not development. The extractive institutions — the mining companies, the plantation economies, the tax systems — persisted after independence.
3. **The colonial state.** The colonial state was **authoritarian**, **centralized**, and **coercive** — it was designed to control African populations and extract resources. At independence, African states inherited these institutions, and they have shaped post-colonial politics — the "neo-patrimonial" state, the "gatekeeper" state, and the "failed" state.
4. **The color line.** The partition entrenched a **racial hierarchy** — the "civilized" Europeans above the "savage" Africans. This hierarchy persisted after independence, in the form of **neo-colonialism** — the continued economic and political dominance of the former colonial powers.

What the African experience contributes: It shows that the partition was not a peaceful administrative process; it was a **violent conquest** that was resisted, negotiated, and collaborated with. It also shows that the legacies of the partition — artificial borders, extractive institutions, the colonial state — continue to shape African politics.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **diversity** of African experiences — the partition affected different regions in different ways, and some African societies were able to avoid conquest for decades. It can also underplay the **agency** of African actors — the ways in which they shaped the partition, not just resisted it.

Observable implication. If the African experience is operative, you should see (a) **violent conquest**, (b) **resistance** and **collaboration**, and (c) **legacies** of the partition in contemporary African politics.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The five perspectives interpret 19th-century multipolarity and the Berlin Conference differently, and each interpretation is political

The claim: The 19th-century international system — the Concert of Europe and the scramble for Africa — is not a neutral historical object. It is a **contested** historical legacy, and the five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — interpret it differently. Each interpretation reflects a different political project.

2.6.1 The African perspective (primary) **Core commitments.** African scholars and leaders interpret the 19th century as the **founding moment of Africa's subordination** to the international system. The Berlin Conference is seen as the **original sin** — the moment when Africa was divided among European powers, without African representation, and the rules were established that continue to shape Africa's place in the

world.

The critique of the Concert. African scholars argue that the Concert of Europe was **compatible** with the conquest of Africa — indeed, it **depended** on it. The great powers managed their rivalries in Europe by **compensating** each other with colonies in Africa and Asia. The "balance of power" in Europe was **constituted** through the partition of Africa. The Concert was not a model of peaceful multipolarity; it was a model of **imperial management**.

The legacy. African scholars emphasize the **legacies** of the partition: artificial borders, extractive institutions, the colonial state, and the racial hierarchy. These legacies continue to shape African politics — the "failed state," the "resource curse," the "conflict trap." The African perspective insists that these problems are **not** African failures; they are **products** of the colonial partition.

Agency. At the same time, African scholars emphasize **African agency** — the role of African resistance, collaboration, and initiative in shaping the partition. The partition was not a **unilateral** imposition; it was a **negotiated** process in which African actors pursued their own interests. The African perspective insists that Africans were **not passive victims**; they were actors navigating a hostile structure.

The critique of Western IR. African scholars critique Western IR for **erasing** the colonial partition from its history of the international system. The standard narrative — Westphalia (1648) → the Concert of Europe (1815) → the World Wars (1914–45) → the Cold War (1947–91) → the liberal order — is a **Eurocentric** narrative that treats the partition of Africa as a footnote, not as a **constitutive** moment. The African perspective insists that the international system cannot be understood without the colonial partition.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the 19th-century international system was **not** a peaceful order; it was an **imperial** order. It also shows that the legacies of the partition continue to shape African politics, and that these legacies are **structural**, not accidental.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **genuine achievements** of the Concert — the century of relative peace among the European powers. It can also risk **essentializing** "African experience" as a unified narrative, when different African societies experienced the partition in different ways.

2.6.2 The Chinese perspective Core commitments. China's engagement with the 19th-century international system is shaped by its own experience of the "century of humiliation" — the period from the First Opium War (1839–42) to the founding of the People's Republic (1949), during which China was subjected to the "standard of civilization," unequal treaties, and foreign intervention.

The parallel with Africa. Chinese scholars often draw a **parallel** between China's experience and Africa's: both were subjected to the "standard of civilization," both were partitioned by European powers, and both were denied full sovereignty. The Berlin Conference is seen as **analogous** to the "unequal treaties" that China was forced to sign — both were mechanisms through which European powers denied sovereignty to non-European peoples.

The critique of the Concert. Chinese scholars argue that the Concert of Europe was an **oligarchic** system — a club of great powers that managed their rivalries at the expense of the rest of the world. The Concert was not a model of peaceful multipolarity; it was a model of **great-power hegemony**. The Chinese perspective insists that a genuine multipolar order must be **democratic** — it must include all states, not just the great powers.

The alternative. Chinese scholars — particularly those associated with the "Chinese School" — argue that

the Westphalian order is a **particular** order, not a universal one. *Tianxia* ("all under heaven") is an alternative model — a hierarchical, harmonious order in which the legitimate ruler provides order for all. The Chinese perspective insists that the international order must be grounded in **relationality** and **mutual respect**, not in the balance of power.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the critique of the 19th-century order can come from **within** the state system — not just from post-colonial theory. It also shows that the 19th-century order is not the only possible order; there are alternative models.

What it occludes: It can underplay the ways in which China **benefits** from the current order — the ways in which sovereignty and non-interference protect China from external criticism. It can also risk **essentializing** "Chinese thought" as a unified tradition.

2.6.3 The Russian perspective **Core commitments.** Russia's engagement with the 19th-century international system is shaped by its role as a **great power** — a participant in the Concert of Europe, a rival of Britain in the "Great Game" in Central Asia, and a defender of the Ottoman Empire's Christian subjects.

The Concert as a model. Russian scholars and officials often invoke the Concert of Europe as a **model** for contemporary great-power management. The Concert was a system in which the great powers — including Russia — managed their rivalries through consultation and compensation. The Russian perspective argues that the current international system needs a **new Concert** — a great-power management system that includes Russia as an equal participant.

The critique of the West. Russian scholars argue that the West has **betrayed** the Concert tradition — by expanding NATO, by intervening in the former Yugoslavia and Iraq, and by ignoring Russia's security interests. The Russian perspective insists that a genuine multipolar order must respect the **spheres of influence** of the great powers — a principle that Russia sees as implicit in the Concert.

The critique of the Berlin Conference. Russian scholars are **ambivalent** about the Berlin Conference. On one hand, Russia participated in the conference (as one of the 14 signatories) and gained some territory in Central Asia. On the other hand, Russia was **excluded** from the African partition — it did not have colonies in Africa, and it resented the dominance of Britain and France. The Russian perspective emphasizes that the Berlin Conference was a **Western** project — a division of the world among the Western powers, with Russia as a marginal participant.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the Concert can be invoked for **illiberal** purposes — the defence of spheres of influence can become a justification for aggression. It also shows that the 19th-century order is **contested** — different states interpret it differently.

What it occludes: It can **naturalize** aggression — the claim that Russia is defending its sphere of influence can be used to justify the invasion of Ukraine. It can also **underplay** the ways in which Russia **violated** the sovereignty of its neighbors in the 19th century — the conquest of Central Asia, the suppression of the Polish uprising (1830–31), and the Caucasian War (1817–64).

2.6.4 The Western perspective **Core commitments.** The Western tradition is the **home** of the Concert of Europe and the "new imperialism." The standard narrative presents the Concert as a **model of great-power management** — a system that produced a century of relative peace among the European powers. The Berlin Conference is presented as a **diplomatic** achievement — a peaceful division of Africa among the European powers.

The standard narrative. Western IR textbooks present the Concert as a **success** — a system that managed the transition from the Napoleonic Wars to a stable multipolar order. The Concert is invoked in contemporary debates about multipolarity: can the US and China manage their rivalry the way the European powers managed theirs?

The revisionist critique. Western scholarship has also produced the most important **revisionist** accounts of the 19th century. Paul Schroeder's *The Transformation of European Politics* (1994) argues that the Concert was more fragile than it appears; Robinson and Gallagher's "The Imperialism of Free Trade" (1953) argues that the "new imperialism" was driven by strategic competition, not economic necessity; and the "cultural turn" in imperial history has emphasized the role of the "civilizing mission" in shaping imperial policy.

The silence on Africa. Western IR has been **slow** to incorporate the partition of Africa into its history of the international system. The standard narrative — Westphalia → the Concert → the World Wars → the Cold War → the liberal order — treats the partition as a **footnote**, not as a constitutive moment. The Western perspective is **parochial** — it treats the European experience as universal history.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **most developed** versions of the Concert narrative and the most systematic **self-critique** of that narrative.

What it occludes: It can **erase** the colonial partition from the history of the international system. It can also **naturalize** the existing order by presenting it as the product of a benign diplomatic tradition, rather than a violent imperial conquest.

2.6.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN is the **institutional embodiment** of the post-1945 order, and its interpretation of the 19th century is shaped by its **anti-colonial** commitments.

The critique of the Berlin Conference. The UN's decolonization agenda — the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples — was a **repudiation** of the Berlin Conference. The Declaration affirmed the right of all peoples to self-determination, and it declared that "the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights." The UN's decolonization agenda was an attempt to **undo** the partition of Africa — to extend sovereignty to the colonized world.

The legacy. The UN acknowledges the **legacies** of the partition — the artificial borders, the extractive institutions, and the colonial state. The UN's development agenda — the SDGs, the "sustainable development" framework — is an attempt to address these legacies. The UN's peacekeeping operations are often deployed in countries where the legacies of the partition — artificial borders, ethnic divisions, weak states — have contributed to conflict.

The limits. The UN is also **constrained** by its member states — many of which are the former colonial powers. The UN's critique of the 19th century is **selective** — it condemns the partition of Africa, but it does not address the **ongoing** legacies of colonialism (e.g., the permanent members of the Security Council are the former colonial powers, and the IMF and World Bank are dominated by the West).

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **normative benchmark** — the standards against which the 19th-century order is judged. It also provides the **institutional record** — the resolutions, declarations, and debates that are essential evidence for any analysis.

What it occludes: It can **depoliticize** — framing the legacies of the partition as technical-development problems obscures the power dynamics that produce them. It can also **underplay** the ways in which the UN

itself reproduces the hierarchies of the 19th century — the P5 veto, the dominance of the West in international financial institutions.

2.6.6 The comparison matrix

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Stance toward the Concert	Critique: compatible with imperial conquest	Critique: oligarchic great-power club	Model: great-power management, spheres of influence	Home of the standard narrative; revisionist critique from within	Ambivalent: normative repudiation, but constrained by P5
Stance toward the Berlin Conference	Founding moment of Africa's subordination	Parallel with the "century of humiliation"	Marginal participant; Western project	Diplomatic achievement; footnote in standard narrative	Repudiation: decolonization as undoing the partition
Key contribution	Colonial genealogy; African agency	Alternative models; critique of great-power hegemony	Illiberal mobilization of the Concert	Standard narrative + revisionist critique	Normative benchmark; institutional record
Key occlusion	Achievements of the Concert; diversity of African experience	China's benefit from the current order	Violation of neighbors' sovereignty; Russian imperialism	Erasure of the colonial partition	Selective critique; reproduction of 19th-century hierarchies

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2.7 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: The **Concert of Europe** produced a century of relative peace among the great powers — no general war from 1815 to 1914. Yet the same period saw the **most intense wave of imperial conquest** in modern history — the partition of Africa and the expansion of European empires in Asia. How can a system be simultaneously peaceful and violent?

The puzzle stated precisely: *How did the Concert of Europe produce a century of relative peace among the great powers while also producing the most intense wave of imperial conquest in modern history?*

The standard narrative. The standard narrative presents the Concert as a **success** — a system of great-power management that prevented a general war. The Concert was based on **consultation**, **compensation**, and **balance of power**. The great powers managed their rivalries through diplomacy, and they avoided the kind of general war that had devastated Europe during the Napoleonic Wars.

The revisionist narrative. The revisionist narrative argues that the Concert was **compatible** with imperial conquest — indeed, it **depended** on it. The great powers managed their rivalries in Europe by **compensating** each other with colonies in Africa and Asia. The "balance of power" in Europe was **constituted** through the partition of Africa. The Concert was not a model of peaceful multipolarity; it was a model of **imperial management**.

The mechanism. The mechanism that connects the Concert to the partition is **compensation**. When one power gained territory or influence in Europe, the others expected compensation — often in the form of colonies. The partition of Africa provided a **safety valve** for great-power competition — it allowed the powers to compete for territory without going to war in Europe. The Berlin Conference (1884–85) was the most explicit expression of this logic: it established the **rules** of the scramble, and it **regulated** the competition so that it did not escalate into a European war.

The African perspective. The African perspective emphasizes that the Concert's "peace" was **purchased** at the expense of Africa. The great powers avoided war in Europe by **dividing** Africa among themselves. The "peace" of the Concert was a **peace among the great powers**, not a peace among peoples. It was compatible with — indeed, it depended on — the **conquest** of Africa.

The Chinese and Russian perspectives. Chinese and Russian scholars draw a similar conclusion: the Concert was an **oligarchic** system — a club of great powers that managed their rivalries at the expense of the rest of the world. The Chinese perspective emphasizes the **parallel** with China's "century of humiliation"; the Russian perspective emphasizes the **spheres of influence** that the Concert established.

The Western perspective. Western scholars have been **slow** to acknowledge the connection between the Concert and the partition. The standard narrative treats them as **separate** — the Concert is about European peace; the partition is about African conquest. The revisionist critique — particularly the work of Robinson and Gallagher — has begun to integrate the two, but the integration is still incomplete.

The UN perspective. The UN's decolonization agenda was a **repudiation** of the partition, but it has not fully addressed the connection between the Concert and the partition. The UN's normative framework — the Charter, the 1960 Declaration — is anti-colonial, but the UN's institutional structure — the P5 veto, the dominance of the West — reproduces the hierarchies of the 19th century.

Adjudication. Which perspective best explains the **connection** between the Concert and the partition?

- **The African perspective** best explains the **function** of the partition — it was a **safety valve** for great-power competition, a way to manage rivalries without going to war in Europe.
- **The revisionist Western perspective** (Robinson and Gallagher) best explains the **mechanism** — the partition was driven by strategic competition, not economic necessity.
- **The Chinese and Russian perspectives** best explain the **critique** — the Concert was an oligarchic system that managed its rivalries at the expense of the rest of the world.
- **The UN perspective** best explains the **normative stakes** — the partition was a violation of the right to self-determination, and the decolonization agenda was an attempt to undo it.

A complete explanation combines all four: the Concert and the partition are **two sides of the same coin**. The Concert was a system of great-power management that **depended** on the partition of Africa. The "peace" of the Concert was a **peace among the great powers**, purchased at the expense of Africa. The partition was not an aberration of the Concert; it was **constitutive** of it.

2.8 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: The **Berlin Conference** (1884–85) established the rules of the scramble for Africa, including the doctrine of **effective occupation**. The doctrine declared that European powers could claim sovereignty over African territories only if they established **effective occupation** — administrative presence, military control, and economic development. African polities, which had their own forms of authority, were **not** recognized as sovereign because they did not meet the European criterion of effective occupation.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely: why did the European powers need a **doctrine** of effective occupation to justify the partition of Africa? What did the doctrine **do** that military conquest alone could not?
2. Apply the **standard of civilization** framework: how did the doctrine of effective occupation enact the standard? What did it mean to be "civilized" in the context of the doctrine?
3. Apply the **constitutive outside** framework: how did the doctrine of effective occupation **constitute** European sovereignty by excluding African sovereignty?
4. Apply the **African perspective**: how do African scholars interpret the doctrine of effective occupation, and what does it tell us about the colonial genealogy of the international system?
5. Write a 300-word adjudication: is the doctrine of effective occupation best understood as a **legal rule**, a **mechanism of exclusion**, or a **constitution of sovereignty** — or all three?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did the European powers need a doctrine of effective occupation to justify the partition of Africa?

The standard of civilization: The doctrine of effective occupation was the **legal mechanism** through which the standard of civilization was applied to Africa. The doctrine defined sovereignty as **effective occupation** — administrative presence, military control, and economic development. African polities, which had their own forms of authority, were **not** recognized as sovereign because they did not meet the European criterion. The doctrine was not a neutral rule; it was a **mechanism of exclusion** that denied African sovereignty while claiming to apply a universal principle.

The constitutive outside: The doctrine of effective occupation did not just exclude African sovereignty; it **constituted** European sovereignty. By defining sovereignty as effective occupation, the doctrine established that European powers were the kind of entities that could **own** territory, **divide** it, and **govern** it. African polities were not just excluded from the definition; they were **constituted as non-sovereign** — as objects to be divided, not subjects who could divide.

The African perspective: African scholars interpret the doctrine of effective occupation as a **legal fiction** — a mechanism through which European powers legitimized their conquest. The doctrine was not a description of reality; it was a **justification** for conquest. African polities had their own forms of authority — kingdoms, chiefdoms, confederations, empires — but they were not recognized as sovereign because they did not meet the European criterion. The doctrine was a **constitution** of the racial hierarchy that structured the international system.

Adjudication: The doctrine of effective occupation is **all three** — a legal rule, a mechanism of exclusion,

and a constitution of sovereignty. It was a **legal rule** that established the conditions for claiming sovereignty; it was a **mechanism of exclusion** that denied African sovereignty; and it was a **constitution** of European sovereignty through the exclusion of African sovereignty. The three dimensions are not separate; they are **interconnected**. The legal rule was possible because of the mechanism of exclusion; the mechanism of exclusion was constituted through the legal rule; and the sovereignty of the European powers was constituted through both. A complete analysis must hold all three dimensions together.

2.9 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The **"dual mandate"** — the ideology developed by Frederick Lugard, the British colonial administrator in Nigeria and Hong Kong, in his book *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922). Lugard argued that British colonialism served a **dual mandate**: to develop the resources of Africa for the benefit of the world (the "civilizing mission"), and to develop the African peoples for their own benefit (the "trusteeship" doctrine). The dual mandate was used to justify British colonial rule in Africa.

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** How did the dual mandate function as a **justification** for colonial rule? What did it make possible and what did it foreclose?
2. **The constitutive outside:** How did the dual mandate **constitute** British sovereignty by denying African sovereignty? What role did the "civilizing mission" play in this constitution?
3. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the dual mandate? (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — one paragraph each or a table.)
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show that the dual mandate was **not** a justification for colonial rule? What would show that it **was**?

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish the **stated goals** of the dual mandate (development, trusteeship) from its **function** (legitimation of colonial rule)? Does it identify the **racial hierarchy** that structured the dual mandate?

2.10 HINGE QUESTION

A scholar argues: "The Concert of Europe was not a model of peaceful multipolarity. It was a system of great-power management that depended on the partition of Africa. The 'peace' of the Concert was purchased at the expense of Africa." Which claim does this argument support?

- A) The Concert of Europe prevented all wars in the 19th century
- B) The Concert of Europe was compatible with imperial conquest
- C) The Concert of Europe was a model of democratic governance
- D) The Concert of Europe was a system of equal sovereigns

Answer: B. The argument claims that the Concert was **compatible** with imperial conquest — indeed, it **depended** on the partition of Africa. The "peace" of the Concert was purchased at the expense of Africa.

If you answered A: The Concert prevented a **general war** among the great powers, but it did not prevent all wars — the Crimean War (1853–56), the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71), and the Balkan Wars (1912–13) were all fought during the Concert period. **If you answered C:** The Concert was an **oligarchic** system, not a democratic one. It was a club of great powers, not a parliament of states. **If you answered D:** The Concert was a system of **great-power management**, not a system of equal sovereigns. Smaller states were excluded from decision-making.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground the lesson's concepts in empirical data on the partition of Africa.

Task: Using the summary data below, analyze the relationship between the Concert of Europe and the partition of Africa.

Table 1: European control of African territory, selected years

Year	Percentage of African territory under European control	Key events
1870	~10%	Coastal enclaves; Algeria (French); Cape Colony (British)
1880	~20%	French expansion in West Africa; British expansion in southern Africa
1885	~30%	Berlin Conference; Congo Free State established
1900	~90%	Scramble completed; only Ethiopia and Liberia independent
1914	~90%	Partition formalized; colonial administration established

Table 2: Major African resistance movements, 1880–1914

Movement	Years	Colonial power	Outcome
Zulu Wars	1879	Britain	Zulu defeat; Zululand annexed
Mahdist War	1881–99	Britain (Egypt)	Mahdist defeat; Sudan conquered
Herero and Nama uprising	1904–08	Germany	Genocide; ~80% Herero killed
Maji Maji rebellion	1905–07	Germany	Defeat; ~250,000–300,000 killed
Mau Mau rebellion	1952–60	Britain	Defeat; Kenya independent 1963

Table 3: European military expenditure and imperial expansion, 1870–1914 (illustrative)

Country	Military expenditure 1870 (million £)	Military expenditure 1914 (million £)	African colonies (approx. area, million km²)
Britain	25	77	9.5
France	15	45	10.0
Germany	5	50	2.5
Belgium	1	5	2.3
Portugal	2	5	2.1

Analysis questions:

1. **Timing:** What does the data on European control of African territory suggest about the **timing** of the scramble? When did it accelerate, and why?
2. **Resistance:** What does the data on African resistance movements suggest about **African agency**? Were Africans passive victims or active resistants?
3. **Military expenditure:** What does the correlation between military expenditure and imperial expansion suggest about the relationship between the Concert and the partition? Does the data support the **economic** explanation (imperialism as a product of capitalism) or the **strategic** explanation (imperialism as a product of great-power competition)?
4. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the data? (African: violent conquest and resistance; Chinese: parallel with China's humiliation; Russian: great-power competition; Western: strategic competition and the "civilizing mission"; UN: decolonization and self-determination.)
5. **Limitation:** What does the data **not** tell you? (Hint: the data does not capture the **experience** of colonization; it does not measure the **legacies** of the partition; and it does not distinguish between different forms of colonial rule.)

Rule: Complete the data lab before the independent memo.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The Concert of Europe and the partition of Africa. Draw a circle labeled "Concert of Europe" (great-power management, consultation, compensation, balance of power) and a circle labeled "Partition of Africa" (Berlin Conference, effective occupation, colonial conquest). Draw an arrow from the Concert to the partition, labeled "compensation and safety valve." Draw an arrow from the partition to the Concert, labeled "constitution of European sovereignty."

Visual 2: The three explanations of the "new imperialism." Draw a three-part diagram: Economic (Hobson, Lenin — underconsumption, monopoly capitalism, capital export), Strategic (Robinson and Gallagher — great-power competition, naval bases, buffer zones), Cultural (the "civilizing mission," social Darwinism, the "white man's burden"). Draw arrows showing how the three interact.

Visual 3: The doctrine of effective occupation. Draw a two-column table. Left column: "What the doctrine says" (sovereignty requires effective occupation — administrative presence, military control, economic development). Right column: "What the doctrine does" (denies African sovereignty, constitutes European sovereignty, legitimizes conquest).

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
What was the Concert of Europe?	Great-power management system (1815–1914); consultation, compensation, balance of power
What were the principles of the Congress of Vienna?	Legitimacy, compensation, balance of power
Why did the Concert collapse?	Rise of Germany, alliance system, Eastern Question, nationalism and militarism, breakdown of consultation
What was the "new imperialism"?	Wave of European conquest in Africa and Asia, 1870–1914
What are the three explanations of the "new imperialism"?	Economic (Hobson, Lenin), strategic (Robinson and Gallagher), cultural ("civilizing mission")
What was the Berlin Conference?	1884–85 meeting that established the rules of the scramble for Africa
What was the doctrine of effective occupation?	Sovereignty requires effective occupation — administrative presence, military control, economic development
How did the doctrine of effective occupation function?	Denied African sovereignty; constituted European sovereignty; legitimized conquest
How do the five perspectives interpret the 19th century?	African: founding moment of subordination + agency; Chinese: parallel with humiliation; Russian: great-power management + spheres of influence; Western: standard narrative + revisionist critique; UN: decolonization as undoing the partition
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.6; Kissinger (1957); Schroeder (1994); Hobsbawm (1987); Lenin (1917); Hobson (1902); Robinson and Gallagher (1953); Pakenham (1991); Förster (1985); Grovogui (1996); Rodney (1972); Nkrumah (1965); the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna; the General Act of the Berlin Conference
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the relationship between the Concert of Europe and the partition of Africa to a smart non-specialist in 200–250 words, without using jargon. If you must use "multipolarity," "balance of power," or "effective occupation," define them in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for the Concert of Europe. Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "The Concert of Europe was like a club of wealthy homeowners who agreed not to fight each other — but they paid for their peace by seizing the land of their poorer neighbors." Where it breaks down: unlike a homeowners' club, the Concert was not a voluntary association of equals; it was a system of great-power management that excluded most states and all colonized peoples.)

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What was the Concert of Europe?
Mechanism	How did the Concert of Europe manage great-power rivalries?
Application	A European power claims sovereignty over an African territory because it has established an administrative presence. Which doctrine does this illustrate?
Comparison	How do the economic, strategic, and cultural explanations of the "new imperialism" differ?
Source	What did Robinson and Gallagher argue about the "new imperialism"?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to the claim that the Concert of Europe was a model of peaceful multipolarity?
Reconstruction	How would an African scholar interpret the Berlin Conference?
Occlusion	What does the standard narrative of the Concert of Europe fail to see about the partition of Africa?
Adjudication	Which perspective best explains the relationship between the Concert and the partition, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the three explanations of the "new imperialism" on a diagram.

Tag each card: `L10`, `19th century`, `Concert of Europe`, `Berlin Conference`, `imperialism`,

`perspective`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Reconstruct the Concert of Europe and its explanations	
Distinguish the three explanations of the "new imperialism"	
Analyze the Berlin Conference and the doctrine of effective occupation	
Reconstruct the African experience of conquest, resistance, and collaboration	
Reconstruct the five perspectives on the 19th century	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between the Concert of Europe and the partition of Africa?
2. Which perspective was easiest to reconstruct? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default analytical style?
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 11?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L10			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 2)

Add this row to your Module 2 cheatsheet:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Concert of Europe; Congress of Vienna; balance of power; great-power management; compensation; the Eastern Question; "new imperialism"; formal vs. informal empire; effective occupation; hinterland doctrine; "civilizing mission"; social Darwinism; scramble for Africa; protectorate; annexation; dual mandate
Key mechanisms	Consultation + compensation + balance of power → Concert; economic + strategic + cultural factors → "new imperialism"; effective occupation → denial of African sovereignty + constitution of European sovereignty; compensation → safety valve for great-power competition → partition of Africa
Theories and authors	Kissinger (1957); Schroeder (1994); Hobsbawm (1987); Lenin (1917); Hobson (1902); Robinson and Gallagher (1953); Pakenham (1991); Förster (1985); Grovogui (1996); Rodney (1972); Nkrumah (1965)
Cases and evidence	Congress of Vienna (1815); Berlin Conference (1884–85); Herero and Nama genocide (1904–08); Maji Maji rebellion (1905–07); the "dual mandate"
Debates	Was the Concert a success or a failure? Was the "new imperialism" driven by economics, strategy, or culture? Is the Concert a model for contemporary multipolarity?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that the Concert was **not** compatible with imperial conquest? What would show that it **was**?
Cross-links	L9 (Westphalian myth); L12 (Cold War and decolonization); L27 (African colonial state formation); L28 (Pan-Africanism); L33 (critical minerals); L49 (institutional revisionism); L51 (climate geopolitics)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant

Review	Timing	Format
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1–L10 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L10 with L12 (Cold War and decolonization) and L27 (African colonial state formation)
R5	End of Module 2	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Five key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (Concert of Europe and partition of Africa) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (Berlin Conference and effective occupation) attempted and compared
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
- ☐ Cheatsheet entry added
- ☐ R2 review scheduled

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **On the Concert of Europe:** Henry Kissinger, *A World Restored* (1957); Paul Schroeder, *The Transformation of European Politics, 1763–1848* (1994); Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire, 1875–1914* (1987); the Final Act of the Congress of Vienna (1815).
- **On the "new imperialism":** J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (1902); V. I. Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917); John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *Economic History Review* (1953); Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration" (1972); Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (1991); Stig Förster et al., *Bismarck, Europe, and Africa* (1988).
- **On the Berlin Conference:** the General Act of the Berlin Conference (1885); Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996), ch. 3; Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (2005), ch. 2–3.

- **On the African experience:** Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972); Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965); Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922); Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost* (1998); Jan-Bart Gewald, *Herero Heroes* (1999).
- **On the Chinese perspective:** Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation* (2012); Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia* (2021); Qin Yaqing, *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (2018).
- **On the Russian perspective:** Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin* (2012); Lauri Mälksoo, *Russian Approaches to International Law* (2015); Fyodor Lukyanov, "Russia's Vision of a Multipolar World" (2023).
- **On the UN perspective:** the UN Charter; the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples; the *Pact for the Future* (2024); UN Secretary-General speeches on decolonization and self-determination.

End of Lesson 10. Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 11 (World Wars, the League of Nations, and the Interwar Crisis).

12. World Wars, the League of Nations, and the Interwar Crisis: The Collapse of the Concert and the Failure of Collective Security

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LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L11 — World Wars, the League of Nations, and the Interwar Crisis
Module	Module 2: Historical Architecture of International Order
Prerequisites	L2 (Charter system — the successor to the League); L3 (causal inference, counterfactuals); L7 (English School — international society); L9 (Westphalian myth, sovereignty); L10 (Concert of Europe, Berlin Conference, imperialism)
Interleaved links	Forward to L12 (Cold War and decolonization — the post-1945 settlement), L21 (nuclear deterrence — the lessons of the interwar period), L27 (African colonial state formation — the mandate legacy), L35 (post-Soviet ontology — the lessons of 1938 in Ukraine), L41 (West Asian state system — the mandate legacy in the Middle East), L45 (nuclear proliferation — the lessons of the 1930s)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.

Field	Entry
Content channels	Canon (paraphrased and quoted); primary documents (the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Treaty of Versailles, the Hoare-Laval Pact, the Munich Agreement, the Stimson Doctrine, quoted and analyzed); data lab (League membership, sanctions, and mandate data); five perspectives
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (adjudicate between competing explanations of the collapse of collective security, and between the five perspectives on the interwar period)
Estimated study time	8–10 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Every argument, quotation, and example you need is inside this document. Where I cite Carr, Morgenthau, Kennedy, Tooze, Steiner, Mazower, Pedersen, Anghie, Grovogui, Rodney, or any other scholar, I summarize the argument fully enough that you do not need the original to complete the lesson. "Further Reading" is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Lesson 10 showed that the 19th-century order — the Concert of Europe and the partition of Africa — was a system of great-power management that depended on imperial conquest. This lesson takes the story to its catastrophic conclusion: the **collapse of that order** in the First World War, the **failed attempt to build a new order** through the League of Nations, the **interwar crisis** that produced the Second World War, and the **transition to the UN system**.

The interwar period (1919–1939) is the **founding trauma** of modern IR. It is the period that produced:

- **The League of Nations** — the first attempt at a universal collective-security organization.
- **The mandate system** — the continuation of colonialism under a new legal name.
- **The "lessons of Munich"** — the idea that appeasement produces war, which shaped Western foreign policy for decades.
- **The "lessons of the League"** — the idea that collective security requires great-power commitment and enforcement capacity, which shaped the UN Charter.
- **The rise of fascism and the collapse of the liberal order** — the crisis that produced the Second World War and the post-1945 order.

But the interwar period is not just a story about Europe. It is a story about **the whole world**:

- The First World War was an **imperial war** — African, Indian, and other colonial soldiers fought and died in Europe, and the war was partly fought over imperial competition.
- The **Paris Peace Conference** (1919) was a **global** settlement — it redrew the borders of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, and it created the mandate system that continued colonial rule under a new name.

- The **Abyssinia Crisis** (1935–36) was a **global** crisis — Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, a member of the League, exposed the failure of collective security in Africa.
- The **Chinese perspective** on the interwar period is shaped by the **betrayal at Versailles** — the decision to transfer German concessions in Shandong to Japan, which sparked the May Fourth Movement and shaped Chinese nationalism for a century.

The African perspective is primary in this lesson because the interwar period is when the **colonial order** was most explicitly contested — by African soldiers who fought in the war, by African intellectuals who demanded self-determination, and by African states (Ethiopia and Liberia) that were members of the League. The interwar period is also when the **mandate system** was established, which shaped the post-colonial state in Africa and the Middle East.

This lesson has five key ideas:

1. **The First World War was an imperial war** — the collapse of the Concert, the alliance system, and the competition for colonies produced a global conflagration.
2. **The Versailles settlement was a victors' peace** — it imposed punitive terms on Germany, created the mandate system, and ignored the demands of the colonized world.
3. **The League of Nations failed because of its design** — the absence of the US, the lack of enforcement mechanisms, the exclusion of the defeated powers, and the contradiction between its universalist rhetoric and its imperial practices.
4. **The interwar crisis was a cascade of failures** — economic (reparations, the Depression), political (the rise of fascism), strategic (appeasement), and normative (the collapse of the liberal order).
5. **The five perspectives** on the interwar period — African (primary), Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — and the **adjudication** among them.

By the end, you can take any claim about collective security — "the League failed because of the absence of the US," "appeasement caused the Second World War," "the UN was designed to avoid the mistakes of the League" — and answer: *Whose security? Whose peace? Whose order? And how do the five perspectives reconstruct it?*

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory)

1. From L10: What was the Concert of Europe, and why did it collapse?
2. From L10: What was the "new imperialism," and what were its three main explanations?
3. From L10: What was the Berlin Conference, and what was the doctrine of effective occupation?
4. From L9: What is the "standard of civilization," and how did it function as a mechanism of exclusion?

Check against the previous lessons before proceeding.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind:

- Why did the Concert of Europe fail to prevent the First World War?

- Was the League of Nations doomed from the start, or could it have worked?
- Was appeasement a policy of cowardice, or a rational response to the memory of the First World War?
- Whose peace was the Versailles settlement? Whose security did the League protect?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

Provisional definitions; revise by the end:

Collective security; the alliance system; the Schlieffen Plan; the July Crisis; war guilt; reparations; the Fourteen Points; self-determination; the mandate system; the Covenant of the League; the Council; the Assembly; the Permanent Court of International Justice; sanctions; the Hoare-Laval Pact; appeasement; the Munich Agreement; the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; the "lessons of Munich"; the "lessons of the League"; the Stimson Doctrine; the Axis powers; the Allied powers.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Reconstruct** the collapse of the Concert of Europe and explain how the First World War was an imperial war.
2. **Analyze** the Versailles settlement as a victors' peace — its punitive terms, its mandate system, and its silences.
3. **Explain** the failure of the League of Nations as a product of its design — the absence of the US, the lack of enforcement, the exclusion of the defeated powers, and the contradiction between universalism and imperialism.
4. **Reconstruct** the interwar crisis as a cascade of failures — economic, political, strategic, and normative.
5. **Reconstruct** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions interpret the interwar period, and **adjudicate** among them on a specific case.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The First World War was an imperial war: the collapse of the Concert and the globalization of European conflict

The claim: The First World War (1914–1918) is often presented as a **European civil war** — a conflict among the great powers of Europe, triggered by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. But it was also an **imperial war** — a conflict that drew in the colonies, that was fought partly over imperial competition, and that had profound consequences for the colonized world.

The collapse of the Concert. The Concert of Europe, which had managed great-power rivalries for a century, collapsed in the July Crisis of 1914. The crisis began with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, by a Bosnian Serb nationalist in Sarajevo (June 28, 1914). The crisis escalated through a series of ultimatums, mobilizations, and declarations of war:

- **July 23:** Austria-Hungary issues an ultimatum to Serbia, with terms that Serbia cannot fully accept.

- **July 28:** Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia.
- **July 30:** Russia mobilizes in support of Serbia.
- **August 1:** Germany declares war on Russia.
- **August 3:** Germany declares war on France.
- **August 4:** Germany invades Belgium; Britain declares war on Germany.

The crisis escalated because of the **rigid alliance system** — the Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy) and the Triple Entente (Britain, France, Russia) — and because of the **military planning** — particularly the Schlieffen Plan, Germany's plan to defeat France quickly before turning to Russia. The plan required the invasion of Belgium, which brought Britain into the war. The crisis also escalated because of the **breakdown of consultation** — the great powers stopped talking to each other, and there was no institutional mechanism to manage the crisis.

The imperial dimension. The First World War was not just a European war; it was a **global** war:

- **Colonial troops:** Britain and France deployed colonial troops from Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. An estimated **two million** African soldiers and carriers served in the war, and hundreds of thousands died. The **Tirailleurs Sénégalais** (Senegalese infantry) fought in Europe; the **King's African Rifles** fought in Africa; Indian soldiers fought in Europe and the Middle East.
- **Colonial labor:** The war effort relied on **colonial labor** — African and Asian workers were conscripted to build railways, dig trenches, and transport supplies. The **Chinese Labour Corps** — about 140,000 Chinese workers — served on the Western Front.
- **Colonial battles:** The war was fought in the colonies — in Africa (the East African campaign, the South-West Africa campaign), in the Middle East (the Sinai and Palestine campaign, the Mesopotamian campaign), and in Asia (the siege of Tsingtao).
- **Colonial resources:** The war was fought over **colonial resources** — the competition for colonies was one of the underlying causes of the war, and the war itself was partly a contest for imperial spoils.

The imperial consequences. The war had profound consequences for the colonized world:

- **The promise of self-determination:** The war was fought in the name of **self-determination** — Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points (1918) promised that "peoples and provinces are not to be bartered about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were mere chattels and pawns in a game." This promise was heard by colonized peoples around the world — in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East — and it shaped the anti-colonial movements of the 20th century.
- **The disappointment of Versailles:** The promise of self-determination was **betrayed** at Versailles. The mandate system continued colonial rule under a new name; the demands of the colonized world were ignored; and the racial hierarchy of the international system was reinforced.
- **The radicalization of anti-colonial movements:** The betrayal of Versailles **radicalized** anti-colonial movements. In India, the Amritsar massacre (1919) and the failure of the British to grant self-government led to the rise of Gandhi's mass movement. In China, the betrayal at Versailles led to the May Fourth Movement (1919). In Africa, the failure of the peace settlement to address colonial grievances shaped the Pan-African movement.

The African experience. African soldiers and laborers who fought in the war — and who saw the promises of self-determination — returned home with new expectations. The war **disrupted** colonial societies: it drew African men into a global conflict, exposed them to new ideas, and created a generation of veterans

who would become leaders of anti-colonial movements. The war also **intensified** colonial exploitation — the conscription of labor, the requisition of resources, and the suppression of dissent.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the First World War was not just a European civil war; it was a **global** conflict that drew in the colonized world and had profound consequences for it. It also shows that the war was fought partly over **imperial competition** — the competition for colonies was one of the underlying causes of the war.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **European** dimensions of the war — the alliance system, the military planning, the nationalist rivalries — which were also important causes. It can also underplay the **diversity** of colonial experiences — different colonies were affected in different ways.

Observable implication. If the First World War was an imperial war, you should see (a) **colonial troops and labor** deployed in the war, (b) **colonial battles** fought in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, and (c) **colonial demands** for self-determination that were ignored at Versailles.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — The Versailles settlement was a victors' peace: punitive terms, the mandate system, and the silences

The claim: The Treaty of Versailles (1919) — and the broader Paris Peace Conference — was a **victors' peace**. It imposed punitive terms on Germany, created the mandate system to continue colonial rule under a new name, and ignored the demands of the colonized world. The settlement was shaped by the **interests of the victorious powers** — Britain, France, the US, Italy, and Japan — not by the principles of justice or self-determination.

The context. The Paris Peace Conference opened in January 1919, with delegates from 27 victorious powers. The defeated powers — Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria — were not invited to negotiate; they were presented with terms. The conference was dominated by the **Big Four** — Woodrow Wilson (US), David Lloyd George (Britain), Georges Clemenceau (France), and Vittorio Orlando (Italy). Japan also played a significant role, particularly in the debates over racial equality and the Shandong question.

The Treaty of Versailles (June 28, 1919). The treaty with Germany contained several key provisions:

1. **The war guilt clause (Article 231):** Germany accepted responsibility for "causing all the loss and damage" of the war. This clause was the legal basis for reparations, and it was deeply resented by Germans.
2. **Reparations:** Germany was required to pay reparations — the amount was eventually set at 132 billion gold marks (about $33 billion at the time). The reparations were intended to compensate the victors for the costs of the war, but they were also intended to **cripple** Germany's economy and prevent it from rising again. 3. **Territorial losses:** Germany lost territory to France (Alsace-Lorraine), Belgium (Eupen-Malmedy), Denmark (Schleswig), Poland (the Polish Corridor, Posen, and West Prussia), and Lithuania (Memel). Germany also lost all of its colonies — which were distributed among the victors as **mandates**. 4. **Military restrictions:** Germany's army was limited to 100,000 men, its navy was limited to 15,000 men, and it was forbidden to have an air force, submarines, or tanks. The Rhineland was demilitarized. 5. **The League of Nations Covenant:** The treaty incorporated the Covenant of the League of Nations — the first attempt at a universal collective-security organization.

The mandate system. The mandate system was established by **Article 22** of the League of Nations Covenant.

It placed the former German and Ottoman territories under the "tutelage" of "advanced nations" — Britain, France, Belgium, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan — who were supposed to prepare them for self-government. The mandates were classified into three categories:

- **Class A mandates:** Territories that were "provisionally recognized as independent nations" but required "administrative advice and assistance" until they could "stand alone." These included Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon.
- **Class B mandates:** Territories that required the "tutelage" of the mandatory power, with guarantees of religious freedom and the prohibition of abuses. These included most of the former German colonies in Africa — Tanganyika, Cameroon, Togoland, and Ruanda-Urundi.
- **Class C mandates:** Territories that were administered as "integral portions" of the mandatory power's territory, because of their "remoteness" or "sparseness of population." These included South-West Africa (administered by South Africa), New Guinea (Australia), and the Pacific islands (Japan).

The mandate system was a **continuation of colonialism under a new name**. The mandatory powers were not accountable to the local populations; they were accountable to the League of Nations, which had no enforcement mechanism. The system preserved the **racial hierarchy** of the colonial order — the "advanced nations" governed the "peoples not yet able to stand by themselves."

The silences. The Versailles settlement was shaped by **silences** — issues that were not addressed:

- **Self-determination for the colonized world:** Wilson's Fourteen Points promised self-determination, but the principle was applied only to Europe. The colonized world — Africa, Asia, the Middle East — was not granted self-determination. The **Shandong question** — China's demand for the return of the German concessions in Shandong — was decided in favor of Japan, sparking the May Fourth Movement. The **Korean** demand for independence was ignored. The **Egyptian** demand for independence was ignored (Egypt was a British protectorate until 1922). The **Indian** demand for self-government was ignored.
- **Racial equality:** Japan proposed a **racial equality clause** in the League Covenant, which would have affirmed the equality of all races. The proposal was **rejected** by the US, Britain, and Australia — partly because of domestic racial politics (particularly in the US and Australia). The rejection confirmed the racial hierarchy of the international system.
- **Colonial grievances:** The demands of African and Asian peoples for self-government, for land rights, for labor rights, and for an end to colonial exploitation were **ignored**. The peace settlement was a settlement among the victorious powers, not a settlement with the colonized world.

The African perspective. African scholars emphasize that the Versailles settlement was a **betrayal** of the promises made during the war. African soldiers and laborers had fought and died for the Allies, and they had been promised self-determination. But the peace settlement **continued** colonial rule — through the mandate system — and **ignored** African demands. The settlement also **rewarded** the colonial powers — Britain, France, Belgium, South Africa — with **new territories** (the mandates), while the African populations had no say in their own governance.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the Versailles settlement was not a peace of justice; it was a **victors' peace** that preserved the colonial order and the racial hierarchy of the international system. It also shows that the promise of self-determination was **betrayed** for the colonized world.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **genuine idealism** of some of the architects of the settlement —

particularly Wilson — and the **genuine achievements** of the settlement — the creation of the League, the establishment of the ILO, the attempt to establish a new international order.

Observable implication. If the Versailles settlement was a victors' peace, you should see (a) **punitive** terms imposed on Germany, (b) the **mandate system** as a continuation of colonial rule, and (c) the **silences** on self-determination, racial equality, and colonial grievances.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The League of Nations failed because of its design: the absence of the US, the lack of enforcement, the exclusion of the defeated powers, and the contradiction between universalism and imperialism

The claim: The League of Nations was the first attempt at a **universal collective-security organization**. It failed — catastrophically — to prevent the Second World War. The failure was not an accident; it was a product of the League's **design** — the absence of the US, the lack of enforcement mechanisms, the exclusion of the defeated powers, and the contradiction between its universalist rhetoric and its imperial practices.

The Covenant. The League of Nations Covenant was incorporated into the Treaty of Versailles. Its key provisions:

- **Article 10:** The members "undertake to respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all Members of the League." This was the core of the **collective-security** commitment — an attack on one member was to be considered an attack on all.
- **Article 11:** Any war or threat of war is a matter of concern to the whole League, and the League shall take "any action that may be deemed wise and effectual to safeguard the peace of nations."
- **Article 12:** Members agree to submit disputes to arbitration or judicial settlement, or to inquiry by the Council, and they agree not to resort to war until three months after the decision.
- **Article 13:** Members agree to carry out in good faith any award or decision, and they agree not to resort to war against a member that complies with the award.
- **Article 14:** The Council shall formulate plans for the establishment of a **Permanent Court of International Justice**.
- **Article 15:** If a dispute is not settled by arbitration or judicial decision, the Council shall investigate and report.
- **Article 16:** If a member resorts to war in violation of the Covenant, it shall be deemed to have committed an act of war against all other members, and the other members shall subject it to **sanctions** — economic, financial, and military. The Council shall recommend to the governments concerned what military forces shall be contributed.
- **Articles 22–23:** The mandate system; the treatment of native peoples; the prevention and control of disease; the suppression of the traffic in women and children.
- **Article 24:** All international bureaus established by treaty shall be placed under the direction of the League.

The flaws. The League's design had several flaws that undermined its effectiveness:

1. **The absence of the US.** The US Senate **rejected** the Treaty of Versailles (and the League Covenant) in 1919 — largely because of opposition to Article 10 (the collective-security commitment) and because

of isolationist sentiment. The League was deprived of the world's most powerful economy and one of its most important military powers. The absence of the US was a **fatal blow** — it undermined the League's credibility and its capacity to enforce its decisions.

2. **The exclusion of the defeated powers.** Germany was excluded from the League until 1926; the Soviet Union was excluded until 1934. The exclusion of these powers meant that the League was a **victors' club** — it did not include the states that had the most reason to challenge the settlement.
3. **The lack of enforcement mechanisms.** The League had no **standing army** and no capacity to enforce its decisions. Article 16 authorized sanctions, but the sanctions required the **cooperation of member states**, and the member states were often unwilling to bear the costs. The League's only military enforcement mechanism was the **recommendation** to member states to contribute forces — which they were free to ignore.
4. **The unanimity rule.** The League's Assembly and Council operated by **unanimity** — which meant that any single member could block action. The unanimity rule made the League slow and indecisive, particularly in crises.
5. **The contradiction between universalism and imperialism.** The League claimed to be a **universal** organization — based on the equality and sovereignty of all member states. But it was also an **imperial** organization — it administered the mandate system, which continued colonial rule, and its member states included the colonial powers. The contradiction between universalism and imperialism undermined the League's legitimacy.
6. **The "great power" problem.** The League was designed to be a **great-power management system** — the Council's permanent members (Britain, France, Italy, Japan) were the great powers. But the great powers were not willing to **delegate** their authority to the League; they preferred to manage their own affairs. The League was a **forum** for great-power consultation, not a **constraint** on great-power action.

The failures. The League's design flaws were exposed in a series of crises:

- **The Manchurian Crisis (1931–33):** Japan invaded Manchuria, a Chinese territory. China appealed to the League. The League appointed the **Lytton Commission**, which recommended that Japan withdraw and that Manchuria become an autonomous region under Chinese sovereignty. Japan **rejected** the recommendation and **withdrew** from the League. The League did nothing; it had no capacity to enforce its decision. The crisis exposed the League's inability to deal with a great-power aggressor.
- **The Abyssinia Crisis (1935–36):** Italy invaded Ethiopia, a member of the League. Ethiopia appealed to the League. The League declared Italy the aggressor and imposed **limited sanctions** — but it excluded oil, coal, and steel, which were essential to the Italian war effort. The sanctions were ineffective, and Italy completed its conquest. The crisis exposed the League's inability to impose effective sanctions, and the **Hoare-Laval Pact** — a secret deal between Britain and France to give Italy most of Ethiopia — exposed the hypocrisy of the great powers. The crisis was particularly significant for Africa — Ethiopia was the only African member of the League, and its betrayal by the League shaped African attitudes toward international institutions.
- **The Rhineland Crisis (1936):** Germany **remilitarized** the Rhineland, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Treaties. The League did nothing; the great powers were unwilling to confront Germany.
- **The Spanish Civil War (1936–39):** Germany and Italy intervened in support of Franco; the Soviet Union supported the Republic; Britain and France pursued a policy of **non-intervention**. The League was sidelined; the conflict became a proxy war for the great powers.

- **The Anschluss (1938):** Germany annexed Austria, in violation of the Treaty of Versailles. The League did nothing.
- **The Munich Agreement (1938):** Germany demanded the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia. Britain, France, Italy, and Germany met at Munich and agreed to the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany — without the participation of Czechoslovakia. The agreement was a symbol of **appeasement** — the policy of conceding to the demands of an aggressive power in the hope of avoiding war. The League was not involved.
- **The invasion of Poland (1939):** Germany invaded Poland; Britain and France declared war. The League was **impotent**; it had already been marginalized by the great powers.

The "lessons of the League." The League's failure shaped the design of the UN. The UN Charter was intended to **avoid the mistakes of the League**:

- **The US was a founding member** (and a permanent member of the Security Council).
- **The great powers were given the veto** — the idea was that the great powers would be more willing to cooperate if their vital interests were protected.
- **The Security Council was given the authority to authorize force** under Chapter VII — not just to recommend it.
- **The unanimity rule was replaced by the veto** — the great powers could block action, but they did not need the consent of all members.
- **The UN was given a military staff committee** (though it has never functioned as intended).
- **The UN was given a broader mandate** — not just peace and security, but also human rights, development, and decolonization.

But the UN also **inherited** some of the League's flaws — the veto, the great-power domination, the lack of enforcement. The "lessons of the League" are not as clear as they appear.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the League failed not because of a single cause, but because of a **combination of design flaws** — the absence of the US, the lack of enforcement, the exclusion of the defeated powers, and the contradiction between universalism and imperialism. It also shows that the League's failure shaped the design of the UN — but that the UN did not solve all of the League's problems.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **genuine achievements** of the League — the settlement of disputes, the humanitarian work, the technical cooperation, the establishment of the ILO, the mandate system's (limited) oversight. It can also underplay the **responsibility of the great powers** — the League's failures were not just design flaws; they were also failures of political will.

Observable implication. If the League's failure was a product of its design, you should see (a) the **absence** of key powers (the US, the USSR), (b) the **lack** of enforcement mechanisms, and (c) the **contradiction** between universalism and imperialism.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The interwar crisis was a cascade of failures: economic, political, strategic, and normative

The claim: The interwar period (1919–1939) was not a single crisis; it was a **cascade of failures** — economic, political, strategic, and normative — that reinforced each other and produced the Second World War.

The economic failure. The interwar economy was characterized by **instability** and **crisis**:

- **Reparations:** The reparations imposed on Germany were a source of instability. Germany could not pay them without borrowing, and the loans were dependent on the US. When the US economy collapsed in 1929, the loans dried up, and Germany defaulted.
- **The Great Depression:** The stock market crash of 1929 triggered a global economic depression. The depression was **transmitted** through the gold standard, which forced countries to tighten their monetary policy, deepening the depression. The depression produced **mass unemployment** — in Germany, unemployment reached 30% by 1932 — and **political instability**.
- **The collapse of the gold standard:** The gold standard, which had been the basis of the international monetary system, collapsed in the 1930s. Countries adopted **protectionist** policies — tariffs, quotas, competitive devaluations — which deepened the depression and fragmented the world economy.
- **The rise of economic nationalism:** The economic crisis produced a turn toward **economic nationalism** — the pursuit of national self-sufficiency and the rejection of international economic cooperation. This undermined the liberal order and contributed to the rise of fascism.

The political failure. The interwar period saw the **rise of fascism** and the **collapse of democracy**:

- **The rise of fascism:** Fascist movements emerged in Italy (Mussolini, 1922), Germany (Hitler, 1933), Spain (Franco, 1939), and elsewhere. Fascism was characterized by **ultranationalism**, **authoritarianism**, **militarism**, and **racism**. It rejected the liberal order — democracy, internationalism, the rule of law — and sought to create a new order based on **power** and **racial hierarchy**.
- **The collapse of democracy:** The economic crisis and the rise of fascism undermined democratic governments across Europe. By 1939, most of Europe was either fascist or authoritarian.
- **The failure of the League:** The League's failure to respond to the crises of the 1930s — Manchuria, Abyssinia, the Rhineland, Spain, the Anschluss, Munich — was a political failure as much as a design failure. The great powers were unwilling to confront the fascist powers, either because they were preoccupied with their own economic problems or because they feared a general war.

The strategic failure. The interwar period saw the **failure of deterrence** and the **rise of appeasement**:

- **The failure of deterrence:** The victorious powers — Britain and France — failed to deter Germany, Italy, and Japan. They did not maintain sufficient military forces, they did not coordinate their policies, and they did not signal resolve. The fascist powers interpreted their reluctance as **weakness**.
- **The rise of appeasement:** The policy of **appeasement** — conceding to the demands of the aggressive powers in the hope of avoiding war — was pursued by Britain and France, particularly in the late 1930s. The **Munich Agreement** (1938) was the most famous example — the transfer of the Sudetenland to Germany without the participation of Czechoslovakia. Appeasement was driven by the **memory of the First World War** — the fear of another catastrophic war — and by the belief that Germany's grievances were legitimate (the Versailles settlement was unfair). But it failed to prevent the war; it **encouraged** Hitler's expansionism.

The normative failure. The interwar period saw the **collapse of the liberal order** — the norms and institutions that had been established after the First World War:

- **The collapse of collective security:** The League's failure to respond to aggression undermined the principle of collective security — the idea that aggression would be met by collective action. The

failure of collective security in Manchuria and Abyssinia signaled to the fascist powers that aggression would not be punished.
- **The collapse of the rule of law:** The fascist powers rejected the rule of law — the idea that international relations should be governed by law, not by force. They pursued their goals through **force** and **violence** — the invasion of Ethiopia, the remilitarization of the Rhineland, the annexation of Austria, the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, the invasion of Poland.
- **The collapse of the racial hierarchy:** The fascist powers **challenged** the racial hierarchy of the international system — but in a different way. They claimed that their own race was superior, and they sought to establish a new racial hierarchy with themselves at the top. The **Holocaust** — the genocide of six million Jews — was the most extreme expression of this racial ideology.

The cascade. The four failures — economic, political, strategic, and normative — were **interconnected**. The economic crisis produced political instability, which produced the rise of fascism. The rise of fascism produced strategic challenges, which were met by appeasement. Appeasement undermined the normative order, which encouraged further aggression. The cascade produced the Second World War.

The African perspective. African scholars emphasize that the interwar crisis was also a **colonial crisis**:

- **The Depression** hit Africa hard — the prices of African commodities collapsed, and the colonial economies were devastated.
- **The rise of fascism** had a particular significance for Africa — Italy's invasion of Ethiopia (1935–36) was a **colonial** war, and the League's failure to respond was a **betrayal** of the only African member of the League. The invasion was also a **racial** war — Mussolini framed it as a war of "civilization" against "barbarism."
- **The Second World War** was a **global** war — African soldiers and laborers were again conscripted, and the war was fought in Africa (the North African campaign, the East African campaign). The war also **weakened** the colonial powers — Britain and France were exhausted, and the US and the USSR were hostile to colonialism. This created the conditions for **decolonization** after the war.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the interwar crisis was not just a European crisis; it was a **global** crisis that had profound consequences for Africa and the colonized world. It also shows that the interwar period was a **turning point** — the crisis of the colonial order created the conditions for decolonization.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **European** dimensions of the crisis — the specific dynamics of German, Italian, and Japanese expansionism, the role of individual leaders, the contingencies of diplomatic decision-making. It can also underplay the **genuine idealism** of some of the interwar experiments — the League, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, the attempts at disarmament.

Observable implication. If the interwar crisis was a cascade of failures, you should see (a) **economic instability** — reparations, the Depression, the collapse of the gold standard, (b) **political instability** — the rise of fascism, the collapse of democracy, (c) **strategic failure** — the failure of deterrence, the rise of appeasement, and (d) **normative collapse** — the failure of collective security, the collapse of the rule of law, the Holocaust.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The five perspectives interpret the interwar period differently, and each interpretation is political

The claim: The interwar period is not a neutral historical object. It is a **contested** historical legacy, and the five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — interpret it differently. Each interpretation reflects a different political project.

2.6.1 The African perspective (primary) **Core commitments.** African scholars and leaders interpret the interwar period as a **turning point** in Africa's relationship with the international system:

1. **The betrayal of Versailles.** The Versailles settlement **betrayed** the promises of self-determination that had been made during the First World War. African soldiers and laborers had fought and died for the Allies, but the peace settlement continued colonial rule — through the mandate system — and ignored African demands.
2. **The Abyssinia Crisis as a turning point.** Italy's invasion of Ethiopia (1935–36) and the League's failure to respond was a **turning point** in African attitudes toward the international system. Ethiopia was the only African member of the League, and its betrayal exposed the **hypocrisy** of the League's universalism. The crisis confirmed African suspicions that the international system was a **racial hierarchy** — African states were not treated as equal members of the international community.
3. **The Second World War and decolonization.** The Second World War **weakened** the colonial powers and created the conditions for **decolonization**. African soldiers who fought in the war — and who saw the promises of freedom and democracy — returned home with new expectations. The war also **radicalized** anti-colonial movements — the Atlantic Charter (1941), which affirmed the right of all peoples to self-determination, was invoked by African and Asian leaders. The post-war period saw the **wave of decolonization** — India (1947), Ghana (1957), and the rest of Africa (1957–1975).
4. **The legacy of the mandate system.** The mandate system established after the First World War shaped the post-colonial state in Africa and the Middle East. The mandates — particularly in the Middle East (Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon) — created the borders and institutions that persist today. The **Palestinian question** — the British mandate in Palestine and the Balfour Declaration (1917) — is a direct legacy of the mandate system.

The critique of the standard narrative. African scholars critique the standard narrative of the interwar period for being **Eurocentric** — it focuses on the rise of fascism in Europe and the failure of the League, but it **ignores** the colonial world. The standard narrative treats the interwar period as a **European** crisis, but it was a **global** crisis that had profound consequences for Africa and the colonized world.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the interwar period was not just a European crisis; it was a **global** crisis that shaped the colonized world. It also shows that the interwar period was a **turning point** — the crisis of the colonial order created the conditions for decolonization.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **diversity** of African experiences — different colonies were affected in different ways. It can also underplay the **genuine idealism** of some of the interwar experiments — the League, the ILO, the attempts at international cooperation.

2.6.2 The Chinese perspective **Core commitments.** China's engagement with the interwar period is shaped by the **betrayal at Versailles** — the decision to transfer German concessions in Shandong to Japan, which sparked the **May Fourth Movement** (1919) and shaped Chinese nationalism for a century.

1. **The betrayal at Versailles.** China had joined the Allies during the First World War, hoping to regain the German concessions in Shandong. But the Paris Peace Conference decided to transfer the concessions to Japan — despite China's claims and despite Wilson's promise of self-determination. The betrayal **radicalized** Chinese nationalism — the May Fourth Movement was a protest against the betrayal, and it became a foundational moment in modern Chinese history.
2. **The "century of humiliation."** The interwar period is part of the **"century of humiliation"** — the period from the First Opium War (1839–42) to the founding of the People's Republic (1949) during which China was subjected to the "standard of civilization," unequal treaties, and foreign intervention. The betrayal at Versailles confirmed China's view that the international system was a **Western-dominated order** that did not respect the rights of non-Western peoples.
3. **The League and China.** China was a member of the League, and it appealed to the League during the **Manchurian Crisis** (1931–33). The League's failure to respond to Japan's aggression — and Japan's withdrawal from the League — confirmed China's view that the League was **impotent** and that the international system was **hypocritical**.
4. **The Chinese perspective on the Second World War.** China was a **major theater** of the Second World War — the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45) was one of the largest conflicts of the war. China suffered enormous casualties — an estimated 14–20 million deaths. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that the war in Asia was not just a **side show** to the European war; it was a **central** theater. The Chinese perspective also emphasizes that China's contribution to the Allied victory has been **underrecognized** in Western narratives.

The critique of the standard narrative. Chinese scholars critique the standard narrative of the interwar period for being **Eurocentric** — it focuses on the rise of fascism in Europe and the failure of the League, but it **ignores** the war in Asia. The standard narrative treats the Second World War as a **European** war, but it was a **global** war that began in Asia (the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the invasion of China in 1937) before it began in Europe (the invasion of Poland in 1939).

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the interwar period was a **global** crisis — the war in Asia was not a side show; it was a central theater. It also shows that the **betrayal at Versailles** was a foundational moment in Chinese nationalism — it shaped China's view of the international system for a century.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **genuine idealism** of some of the interwar experiments — the League, the attempts at international cooperation. It can also underplay the **diversity** of Chinese experiences — different regions of China were affected in different ways.

2.6.3 The Russian perspective Core commitments. Russia's engagement with the interwar period is shaped by the **Bolshevik Revolution** (1917), the **Russian Civil War** (1917–22), and the **Soviet experience** of the interwar period.

1. **The Bolshevik critique of imperialism.** Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) was written during the First World War, and it framed the war as an **imperialist war** — a war among the capitalist powers for the division of the world. The Bolsheviks **rejected** the war and called for a **revolutionary** transformation of the international system.
2. **The Comintern and anti-colonialism.** The **Communist International** (Comintern, founded 1919) was an attempt to build a **revolutionary** international — a network of communist parties committed to overthrowing capitalism and imperialism. The Comintern was particularly active in the colonized world — it supported anti-colonial movements in China, India, and Africa, and it framed anti-

colonialism as part of the global struggle against capitalism.

3. **The Soviet Union and the League.** The Soviet Union was **excluded** from the League until 1934, and it was **expelled** in 1939 after the invasion of Finland. The Soviet perspective on the League is **critical** — the League was a "victors' club" that excluded the Soviet Union and the defeated powers, and it was a **tool** of the Western powers.
4. **The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.** The Soviet Union's **non-aggression pact** with Germany (1939) — the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact — is a **contested** episode. The Soviet perspective frames it as a **necessity** — the Soviet Union was isolated, the Western powers had pursued a policy of appeasement, and the pact bought time to prepare for the inevitable war. The Western perspective frames it as a **betrayal** — the Soviet Union allied with Nazi Germany and divided Eastern Europe into spheres of influence.
5. **The Russian perspective on the Second World War.** Russia (as the successor to the Soviet Union) emphasizes the **Great Patriotic War** (1941–45) — the Soviet Union's struggle against Nazi Germany. The war was the **most devastating** conflict in Russian history — an estimated 27 million Soviet citizens died. The Russian perspective emphasizes that the Soviet Union **bore the brunt** of the war in Europe, and that its contribution to the Allied victory has been **underrecognized** in Western narratives.

The critique of the standard narrative. Russian scholars critique the standard narrative of the interwar period for **ignoring** the Soviet Union's role — the Soviet Union was a **major** power, and its exclusion from the League was a **fatal flaw**. The Russian perspective also critiques the Western narrative for **downplaying** the Soviet contribution to the war and for **blaming** the Soviet Union for the outbreak of the war (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact).

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the interwar period was shaped by the **Bolshevik Revolution** and the **Soviet experience** — the Soviet Union was a major power, and its exclusion from the League was a fatal flaw. It also shows that the **imperialist critique** of the war — the idea that the war was a contest among capitalist powers — is an important alternative to the standard narrative.

What it occludes: It can **justify** the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and **downplay** Soviet aggression — the invasion of Poland, the annexation of the Baltic states, the invasion of Finland. It can also **underplay** the role of the Western powers in the Allied victory — the US and Britain made significant contributions.

2.6.4 The Western perspective Core commitments. The Western tradition is the **home** of the standard narrative of the interwar period. The standard narrative focuses on:

1. **The failure of the League.** The League failed because of the absence of the US, the lack of enforcement mechanisms, and the unwillingness of the great powers to confront aggression.
2. **The failure of appeasement.** Appeasement — the policy of conceding to the demands of the aggressive powers — **failed** to prevent the war. The **"lessons of Munich"** — the idea that appeasement produces war — shaped Western foreign policy for decades.
3. **The rise of fascism.** The interwar period saw the rise of **fascism** — a totalitarian ideology that rejected democracy, the rule of law, and international cooperation. The Western perspective frames the Second World War as a **war of civilization** against fascism.
4. **The Holocaust.** The **Holocaust** — the genocide of six million Jews — is the **central** event of the interwar period. The Western perspective frames the Holocaust as a **unique** evil that must never be repeated.

The revisionist critique. Western scholarship has also produced **revisionist** accounts of the interwar period:

- **A. J. P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War* (1961)** argued that Hitler was not a **premeditated** aggressor; he was an **opportunist** who exploited the weaknesses of the Western powers. Taylor's thesis was controversial, but it opened up a debate about the **contingency** of the war.
- **The "liberal order" thesis:** Some Western scholars argue that the interwar period was a **failure of the liberal order** — the US withdrew from the League, the Western powers pursued protectionist policies, and the international economy fragmented. The lesson is that the **liberal order** must be **sustained** by a **hegemon** — the US after 1945 played this role.
- **The "security dilemma" thesis:** Some Western scholars argue that the interwar period was a **security dilemma** — the Western powers and Germany were trapped in a spiral of mistrust and armament. The lesson is that **reassurance** and **cooperation** are necessary to avoid conflict.

The silences. The Western perspective has been **slow** to acknowledge:

- **The colonial dimensions** of the interwar period — the mandate system, the betrayal of self-determination, the exploitation of the colonies.
- **The racial dimensions** of the interwar period — the racial hierarchy of the international system, the rejection of the racial equality clause.
- **The global dimensions** of the Second World War — the war in Asia, the war in Africa, the role of colonial troops.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **most developed** versions of the standard narrative and the most systematic **self-critique** of that narrative.

What it occludes: It can be **parochial** — focusing on Europe and ignoring the colonial world. It can be **self-referential** — a debate among Western scholars about Western history. And it can be **complicit** — the standard narrative serves Western interests by presenting the Western powers as the defenders of civilization against fascism, while ignoring their own imperial crimes.

2.6.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN is the **institutional embodiment** of the post-1945 order, and its interpretation of the interwar period is shaped by its **founding narrative** — the UN was created to **avoid the mistakes of the League**.

1. **The lessons of the League.** The UN Charter was designed to **avoid** the League's flaws — the US was a founding member, the great powers were given the veto, the Security Council was given the authority to authorize force, and the unanimity rule was replaced by the veto.
2. **The lessons of the Holocaust.** The Holocaust was a **founding trauma** of the UN — the UN's human rights framework (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Genocide Convention) was a response to the Holocaust. The UN's commitment to **human rights** and **the prevention of genocide** is a direct legacy of the interwar period.
3. **The lessons of appeasement.** The UN's collective-security framework — the Security Council's authority to authorize force, the prohibition on the use of force in Article 2(4) — was designed to **prevent** the kind of aggression that went unpunished in the 1930s. The "lessons of Munich" — the idea that aggression must be confronted — shaped the UN's approach to peace and security.
4. **The decolonization agenda.** The UN's decolonization agenda — the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples — was a **repudiation** of the mandate system and the colonial order. The UN's **trusteeship system** — which replaced the mandate system — was designed to **prepare** the colonies for self-government, but it was also a **continuation** of the colonial

order under a new name.

The silences. The UN's narrative has been **slow** to acknowledge:

- **The colonial dimensions** of the interwar period — the mandate system, the betrayal of self-determination, the exploitation of the colonies.
- **The racial dimensions** of the interwar period — the racial hierarchy of the international system, the rejection of the racial equality clause.
- **The continuities** between the League and the UN — the UN inherited the mandate system (as the trusteeship system), the great-power domination (the veto), and the imperial practices (the trusteeship system continued colonial rule under a new name).

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **normative benchmark** — the standards against which the interwar period is judged. It also provides the **institutional record** — the resolutions, declarations, and debates that are essential evidence for any analysis.

What it occludes: It can **depoliticize** — framing the interwar period as a failure of institutions obscures the power dynamics that shaped it. It can also **legitimize** — the UN's narrative presents the post-1945 order as a **solution** to the interwar crisis, while ignoring its own continuities with the colonial order.

2.6.6 The comparison matrix

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Stance toward Versailles	Betrayal of self-determination; continuation of colonial rule	Betrayal at Versailles; May Fourth Movement	Bolshevik critique of imperialism	Victors' peace; flawed but necessary	Precursor to the UN; lessons learned
Stance toward the League	Hypocritical; betrayed Ethiopia	Impotent; failed to respond to Manchuria	Excluded; tool of Western powers	Failed because of design flaws	Predecessor; lessons learned
Stance toward appeasement	The same powers that appeased Hitler were the colonial powers	The same powers that appeased Japan in China	The West tried to direct Hitler eastward	Failed policy; "lessons of Munich"	Failed policy; shaped the UN's collective-security framework
Key contribution	Colonial betrayal; Abyssinia as turning point; decolonization	Betrayal at Versailles; centrality of the Asian theater	Bolshevik critique; Soviet role in the war	Standard narrative + revisionist critique	Normative benchmark; institutional record

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Key occlusion	Diversity of African experiences; idealism of the League	Idealism of the League; diversity of Chinese experiences	Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; Soviet aggression	Colonial and racial dimensions; global dimensions	Continuities with the colonial order; power dynamics

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2.7 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: The **Abyssinia Crisis** (1935–36) was a turning point in the interwar period. Italy, a member of the League of Nations, invaded Ethiopia, also a member of the League. Ethiopia appealed to the League for protection. The League declared Italy the aggressor and imposed **limited sanctions** — but it excluded oil, coal, and steel, which were essential to the Italian war effort. The sanctions were ineffective, and Italy completed its conquest. Why did the League fail to protect Ethiopia, and what does the crisis tell us about the limits of collective security?

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why did the League of Nations fail to protect Ethiopia from Italian aggression, despite Ethiopia's status as a member state and the League's collective-security commitment?*

The League's design:

- **The absence of the US.** The US was not a member of the League, and it was the world's largest oil producer. The League's sanctions excluded oil — partly because the US would not cooperate with an oil embargo, and partly because Britain and France feared that an oil embargo would provoke Italy and push it closer to Germany.
- **The unanimity rule.** The League's decisions required unanimity, which made it difficult to impose effective sanctions. The sanctions that were imposed were **limited** — they excluded oil, coal, and steel — because the great powers were unwilling to bear the costs of a full embargo.
- **The lack of enforcement.** The League had no **standing army** and no capacity to enforce its decisions. The sanctions were **recommended** to member states, not **imposed** on them. The member states were free to ignore them, and many did.
- **The great-power interests.** Britain and France were the dominant powers in the League, and they were **unwilling** to confront Italy. They feared that a confrontation with Italy would push Italy into an alliance with Germany, and they were preoccupied with the **German threat**. The **Hoare-Laval Pact** — a secret deal between Britain and France to give Italy most of Ethiopia — exposed the **hypocrisy** of the great powers. The pact was leaked and denounced, but it revealed that the great powers were willing to **sacrifice** Ethiopia to preserve their own interests.

The Ethiopian perspective. Ethiopia was the **only African member** of the League. Its appeal to the League was a **test** of the League's commitment to collective security and to the equality of all member states. The League's failure was a **betrayal** — not just of Ethiopia, but of the principle of collective security and of the **racial equality** that the League claimed to uphold. The crisis confirmed African suspicions that the international system was a **racial hierarchy** — African states were not treated as equal members of the international community.

The African perspective. African scholars and leaders interpret the Abyssinia Crisis as a **turning point** in African attitudes toward the international system. The crisis exposed the **hypocrisy** of the League's universalism — the League was willing to impose sanctions on Italy, but only **limited** sanctions that did not threaten Italian interests. The crisis also exposed the **racial hierarchy** of the international system — Ethiopia was a **black** state, and the League was unwilling to defend it. The crisis **radicalized** African anti-colonial movements — it confirmed that the international system was a **white man's club** that could not be relied upon to protect African interests.

The Western perspective. Western scholars interpret the Abyssinia Crisis as a **failure of collective security** — a failure that was **avoidable**. The sanctions were **too limited** to be effective; the great powers were **unwilling** to confront Italy; and the **Hoare-Laval Pact** exposed the **hypocrisy** of the great powers. The lesson is that **collective security** requires **credible** enforcement — limited sanctions and secret deals **undermine** the credibility of the system.

The Chinese perspective. Chinese scholars interpret the Abyssinia Crisis as a **parallel** to the Manchurian Crisis (1931–33) — in both cases, the League failed to respond to aggression by a great power. The lesson is that the League was **impotent** — it could not protect weak states from strong states. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that the **weak** are always the **victims** of great-power politics.

The Russian perspective. Russian scholars interpret the Abyssinia Crisis as evidence of the **hypocrisy** of the Western powers — the same powers that claimed to uphold collective security were willing to **sacrifice** Ethiopia to preserve their own interests. The lesson is that the **Western powers** cannot be trusted to uphold international law — they use it selectively, when it serves their interests.

The UN perspective. The UN interprets the Abyssinia Crisis as a **lesson** — the UN's collective-security framework was designed to **avoid** the mistakes of the League. The **Security Council** was given the authority to **authorize force** under Chapter VII — not just to recommend sanctions. The **veto** was designed to ensure that the great powers would **cooperate** — but it also **limits** the UN's ability to respond to aggression by a permanent member. The lesson of Abyssinia is that **collective security** requires **credible** enforcement and **great-power commitment** — but the UN has not fully solved this problem.

Adjudication. Which perspective best explains the **failure** of the League in Abyssinia?

- **The League's design** explains the **structural** dimension — the absence of the US, the unanimity rule, the lack of enforcement.
- **The great-power interests** explain the **political** dimension — Britain and France were unwilling to confront Italy because they feared the German threat.
- **The African perspective** explains the **racial** dimension — Ethiopia was a black state, and the League was unwilling to defend it.
- **The UN perspective** explains the **lessons** — the UN was designed to avoid the League's mistakes, but it has not fully succeeded.

A complete explanation combines all four: the Abyssinia Crisis was a **product** of the League's design flaws, the great powers' unwillingness to confront Italy, the racial hierarchy of the international system, and the lessons that shaped the UN. The crisis was a **turning point** — it exposed the **limits** of collective security and shaped the **post-war** order.

2.8 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: The **Munich Agreement** (September 1938) was a settlement between Germany, Britain, France, and Italy that allowed Germany to annex the **Sudetenland** — a region of Czechoslovakia with a large ethnic German population. Czechoslovakia was **not invited** to the negotiations; it was presented with the agreement and forced to accept it. The agreement was presented as a **triumph** of diplomacy — "peace for our time," in the words of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. But it **failed** to prevent the war; Hitler invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and Poland in September 1939.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely: why did Britain and France **appease** Hitler at Munich, despite the obvious risks?
2. Apply the **strategic** explanation: what were the strategic calculations behind appeasement? (The memory of the First World War, the fear of another catastrophic war, the belief that Germany's grievances were legitimate, the hope that Hitler could be satisfied.)
3. Apply the **normative** explanation: how did appeasement reflect the **collapse of the liberal order**? (The failure of collective security, the erosion of the rule of law, the abandonment of Czechoslovakia.)
4. Apply the **African** perspective: how does the Munich Agreement look from the perspective of the colonized world? (The same powers that appeased Hitler were the colonial powers; the same powers that abandoned Czechoslovakia had colonized Africa and Asia.)
5. Apply the **Chinese** perspective: how does the Munich Agreement look from the perspective of China? (The same powers that appeased Hitler in Europe appeased Japan in Asia; the same powers that abandoned Czechoslovakia had abandoned China at Versailles.)
6. Write a 300-word adjudication: is the Munich Agreement best understood as a **strategic failure**, a **normative failure**, or a **Western betrayal** — or all three?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did Britain and France appease Hitler at Munich?

The strategic explanation: The strategic calculations behind appeasement were complex:

- **The memory of the First World War.** Britain and France had suffered enormous casualties in the First World War — an estimated 1.1 million British and 1.4 million French deaths. The memory of the war produced a **deep reluctance** to risk another conflict. The policy of appeasement was driven by the fear of another catastrophic war.
- **The fear of another war.** Britain and France were **militarily unprepared** for war in 1938. The British army was small; the French army was defensively oriented; and neither country had the capacity to launch an offensive against Germany. The **military balance** favored Germany, and the Western powers were unwilling to risk a war they might lose.
- **The belief that Germany's grievances were legitimate.** Many British and French leaders believed that the **Versailles settlement** was unfair to Germany — the war guilt clause, the reparations, the territorial losses. They believed that Hitler's demands were **legitimate** — the Sudetenland had a large ethnic German population, and the principle of **self-determination** seemed to support Germany's claim.

- **The hope that Hitler could be satisfied.** Chamberlain believed that Hitler was a **rational** actor who could be **satisfied** by concessions. The Munich Agreement was based on the hope that if Hitler's **legitimate** grievances were addressed, he would become a **status quo** power.

The normative explanation: Appeasement reflected the **collapse of the liberal order**:

- **The failure of collective security.** The League of Nations had failed to respond to aggression in Manchuria and Abyssinia. The Western powers had **lost faith** in collective security, and they were unwilling to rely on the League to protect Czechoslovakia.
- **The erosion of the rule of law.** The Munich Agreement was a **violation** of international law — it **dismembered** a sovereign state without its consent. The Western powers **abandoned** the principle of collective security and the rule of law in favor of **great-power bargaining**.
- **The abandonment of Czechoslovakia.** Czechoslovakia was a **democratic** state and a **member** of the League of Nations. Its **abandonment** by the Western powers was a **betrayal** of the principles that the Western powers claimed to uphold.

The African perspective: The Munich Agreement looks **very different** from the perspective of the colonized world:

- **The same powers that appeased Hitler were the colonial powers.** Britain and France were the **largest** colonial empires in the world. They had **colonized** Africa and Asia, and they had **denied** self-determination to millions of people. Their **defence** of Czechoslovakia — a **white** European state — contrasted sharply with their **indifference** to the colonized world.
- **The racial hierarchy of the international system.** The Munich Agreement confirmed the **racial hierarchy** of the international system — the Western powers were willing to **sacrifice** a **white** European state to preserve peace, but they had **no interest** in protecting **black** or **brown** states. The **Abyssinia Crisis** — the League's failure to protect Ethiopia — was a **parallel** case, and it was **ignored** at Munich.
- **The betrayal of Ethiopia.** The same powers that **abandoned** Czechoslovakia had **abandoned** Ethiopia. The African perspective emphasizes the **continuity** — the Western powers were **unwilling** to confront aggression when it threatened **non-white** states, and they were **willing** to sacrifice **white** states to preserve peace.

The Chinese perspective: The Munich Agreement looks **very different** from the perspective of China:

- **The same powers that appeased Hitler appeased Japan.** Britain and France had **appeased** Japan in Asia — they had **failed** to respond to the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931) and the invasion of China (1937). The **Munich Agreement** was a **parallel** case — the Western powers were willing to **sacrifice** a **weak** state to preserve peace.
- **The betrayal at Versailles.** The Chinese perspective emphasizes the **continuity** — the same powers that had **betrayed** China at Versailles (1919) were now **betraying** Czechoslovakia at Munich (1938). The Western powers had **never** been committed to **justice**; they were committed to their own **interests**.
- **The centrality of the Asian theater.** The Chinese perspective emphasizes that the **Second World War** began in **Asia** — the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931) and the invasion of China (1937) — before it began in **Europe** (1939). The Western narrative **ignores** this, and it **underrecognizes** China's contribution to the Allied victory.

Adjudication: The Munich Agreement is **all three** — a strategic failure, a normative failure, and a Western

betrayal:

- **Strategic failure:** Appeasement **failed** to prevent the war. It **encouraged** Hitler's expansionism, **undermined** the Western powers' credibility, and **delayed** the rearmament that was necessary to confront Germany.
- **Normative failure:** Appeasement **violated** the principles of collective security, the rule of law, and self-determination. It **abandoned** a democratic state to a totalitarian aggressor.
- **Western betrayal:** Appeasement reflected the **racial hierarchy** of the international system. The Western powers were willing to **sacrifice** a **white** European state to preserve peace, but they had **no interest** in protecting **black** or **brown** states. The Munich Agreement was a **continuity** — the same powers that had **colonized** Africa and Asia, that had **betrayed** Ethiopia, and that had **betrayed** China were now **betraying** Czechoslovakia.

A complete explanation combines all three: Munich was a **strategic failure** that **reflected** the **normative** collapse of the liberal order and the **racial** hierarchy of the international system. The "lessons of Munich" — the idea that appeasement produces war — are **necessary** but **insufficient**; they **ignore** the colonial and racial dimensions of the crisis.

2.9 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The **Paris Peace Conference** (1919) and the **mandate system**. The conference established the League of Nations, imposed the Treaty of Versailles on Germany, and created the mandate system for the former German and Ottoman territories. The mandate system placed these territories under the "tutelage" of "advanced nations" — Britain, France, Belgium, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan — who were supposed to prepare them for self-government. The mandates were classified into A, B, and C categories, with different levels of "readiness" for independence.

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** How did the mandate system function as a **continuation** of colonial rule under a new name? What was the legal mechanism, and what did it authorize?
2. **The constitutive outside:** How did the mandate system **constitute** the sovereignty of the "advanced nations" by denying it to the "peoples not yet able to stand by themselves"?
3. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the mandate system? (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — one paragraph each or a table.)
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show that the mandate system was **not** a continuation of colonial rule? What would show that it **was**?

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish the **stated goals** of the mandate system (tutelage, preparation for self-government) from its **function** (legitimation of colonial rule)? Does it identify the **racial hierarchy** that structured the system?

2.10 HINGE QUESTION

A scholar argues: "The League of Nations failed because the United States never joined, and because the great powers were unwilling to enforce its decisions. The League's failure was a failure of **political will**, not a failure of **design**." Which claim does this argument support?

- A) The League's design was sound; the problem was the lack of political will
- B) The League's design was flawed; the absence of the US was a fatal flaw
- C) The League's failure was inevitable
- D) The League's failure was caused by the rise of fascism

Answer: A. The argument claims that the League's failure was a **failure of political will**, not a failure of **design**. The scholar acknowledges the absence of the US and the unwillingness of the great powers — but argues that these were **political** choices, not **design** flaws.

If you answered B: The argument claims the **opposite** — that the design was sound, but the political will was lacking. **If you answered C:** The argument does **not** claim that the failure was inevitable; it claims that the failure was a **choice** — the great powers **could** have enforced the League's decisions, but they **chose** not to. **If you answered D:** The argument does **not** focus on the rise of fascism; it focuses on the **political will** of the great powers.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground the lesson's concepts in empirical data on the interwar period.

Task: Using the summary data below, analyze the relationship between the League of Nations and the interwar crisis.

Table 1: League of Nations membership, selected years

Year	Number of member states	Key events
1920	42	Founding members; US not a member
1926	55	Germany admitted
1934	58	Soviet Union admitted
1935	58	Italy invades Ethiopia
1936	57	Italy withdraws
1938	56	Germany withdraws
1939	54	Soviet Union expelled

Table 2: League of Nations sanctions, 1935–36 (Abyssinia Crisis)

Good	Sanctioned?	Reason
Arms	Yes	Prohibited to both Italy and Ethiopia
Rubber	Yes	
Tin	Yes	

Good	Sanctioned?	Reason
Oil	No	US not a member; fear of provoking Italy
Coal	No	Fear of provoking Italy
Steel	No	Fear of provoking Italy

Table 3: Territorial changes, 1919–1939

Year	Event	Territory	Aggressor	Response
1931	Manchurian Crisis	Manchuria	Japan	League condemns; Japan withdraws
1935	Abyssinia Crisis	Ethiopia	Italy	Limited sanctions; Italy completes conquest
1936	Remilitarization of the Rhineland	Rhineland	Germany	No response
1938	Anschluss	Austria	Germany	No response
1938	Munich Agreement	Sudetenland	Germany	Britain and France agree
1939	Invasion of Poland	Poland	Germany	Britain and France declare war

Analysis questions:

1. **Membership:** What does the membership data suggest about the **universality** of the League? Which key powers were absent, and what was the consequence?
2. **Sanctions:** What does the sanctions data suggest about the **effectiveness** of the League's sanctions? Why were oil, coal, and steel excluded, and what does that tell us about the **political will** of the great powers?
3. **Territorial changes:** What does the data on territorial changes suggest about the **pattern** of aggression in the 1930s? Why did the League respond to some cases and not others? What role did **great-power interests** play?
4. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the data? (African: Abyssinia as a turning point; Chinese: Manchuria as a parallel; Russian: Western hypocrisy; Western: failure of collective security; UN: lessons for the UN.)
5. **Limitation:** What does the data **not** tell you? (Hint: it does not capture the **experience** of the victims; it does not measure the **legacies** of the interwar period; and it does not distinguish between **formal** and **informal** responses.)

Rule: Complete the data lab before the independent memo.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The cascade of failures. Draw a flow diagram: Economic failure (reparations, Depression) → Political failure (rise of fascism) → Strategic failure (appeasement) → Normative failure (collapse of collective security) → Second World War. Draw arrows showing how each failure **reinforces** the next.

Visual 2: The League's design flaws. Draw a four-part diagram: Absence of the US, Lack of enforcement, Exclusion of defeated powers, Contradiction between universalism and imperialism. For each, write a one-line explanation and one example of how it undermined the League.

Visual 3: The five perspectives on the interwar period. Draw a five-column table (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) with rows: "Stance toward Versailles," "Stance toward the League," "Key contribution," "Key occlusion."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
Why did the Concert of Europe collapse?	Alliance system; military planning; breakdown of consultation; imperial competition
What was the imperial dimension of WWI?	Colonial troops; colonial labor; colonial battles; colonial resources
What was the Versailles settlement?	Punitive terms on Germany; mandate system; silences on self-determination and racial equality
What was the mandate system?	Continuation of colonial rule under a new name; A, B, C mandates; accountability to the League, not to local populations
Why did the League fail?	Absence of the US; lack of enforcement; exclusion of defeated powers; unanimity rule; contradiction between universalism and imperialism
What was the interwar crisis?	Cascade of failures: economic (reparations, Depression), political (rise of fascism), strategic (appeasement), normative (collapse of collective security)
What was the Abyssinia Crisis?	Italy invades Ethiopia; League imposes limited sanctions; Ethiopia betrayed; turning point for African attitudes
What was the Munich Agreement?	Britain and France appease Hitler; Czechoslovakia abandoned; "peace for our time"; failed to prevent war
How do the five perspectives interpret the interwar period?	African: betrayal + decolonization; Chinese: betrayal at Versailles + centrality of Asian theater; Russian: Bolshevik critique + Soviet role; Western: failure of the League + lessons of Munich; UN: lessons of the League + normative benchmark

Cue column	Notes
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.6; E. H. Carr (1939); A. J. P. Taylor (1961); Paul Kennedy (1987); Adam Tooze (2014); Zara Steiner (2005); Mark Mazower (1997); Susan Pedersen (2015); Antony Anghie (2005); Siba Grovogui (1996); the Covenant of the League of Nations; the Treaty of Versailles; the Hoare-Laval Pact; the Munich Agreement
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain why the League of Nations failed to prevent the Second World War to a smart non-specialist in 200–250 words, without using jargon. If you must use "collective security," "sanctions," or "appeasement," define them in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for the League of Nations. Then state where the analogy breaks down. (Example: "The League of Nations was like a fire department that had no fire trucks, no water, and no authority to enter a burning building — it could only send letters asking the fire to stop." Where it breaks down: unlike a fire department, the League was not **designed** to fail; it was designed to be a **great-power management system**, and its failure was a **political choice**, not an inevitability.)

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What was the mandate system?
Mechanism	How did the League's design flaws undermine its effectiveness?
Application	Italy invades Ethiopia; the League imposes limited sanctions. Which crisis does this illustrate?
Comparison	How did the Abyssinia Crisis and the Manchurian Crisis differ in their outcomes?
Source	What did A. J. P. Taylor argue about the origins of the Second World War?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to the claim that appeasement caused the Second World War?

Type	Example
Reconstruction	How would an African scholar interpret the Abyssinia Crisis?
Occlusion	What does the standard narrative of the interwar period fail to see about the colonial world?
Adjudication	Which perspective best explains the failure of the League in Abyssinia, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the four design flaws of the League of Nations on a diagram.

Tag each card: `L11`, `interwar`, `League of Nations`, `Versailles`, `appeasement`, `perspective`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Reconstruct the collapse of the Concert and the imperial dimension of WWI	
Analyze the Versailles settlement and the mandate system	
Explain the failure of the League of Nations	
Reconstruct the interwar crisis as a cascade of failures	
Reconstruct the five perspectives on the interwar period	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between the League's design and the political will of the great powers?
2. Which perspective was easiest to reconstruct? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default analytical style?
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 12?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L11			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 2)

Add this row to your Module 2 cheatsheet:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Collective security; the alliance system; the July Crisis; war guilt; reparations; self-determination; the mandate system; the Covenant of the League; the Council; the Assembly; sanctions; the Hoare-Laval Pact; appeasement; the Munich Agreement; the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact; the "lessons of Munich"; the "lessons of the League"
Key mechanisms	Rigid alliance system + military planning + breakdown of consultation → WWI; punitive terms + mandate system + silences → Versailles; absence of US + lack of enforcement + exclusion of defeated powers + unanimity rule + contradiction between universalism and imperialism → League failure; economic + political + strategic + normative failures → interwar crisis → WWII
Theories and authors	E. H. Carr (1939); A. J. P. Taylor (1961); Paul Kennedy (1987); Adam Tooze (2014); Zara Steiner (2005); Mark Mazower (1997); Susan Pedersen (2015); Antony Anghie (2005); Siba Grovogui (1996)
Cases and evidence	WWI (1914–18); Versailles (1919); Manchurian Crisis (1931–33); Abyssinia Crisis (1935–36); Rhineland (1936); Munich (1938); invasion of Poland (1939)
Debates	Was the League doomed from the start? Was appeasement a failure of strategy or of will? Was the Second World War a European war or a global war?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that the League was **not** doomed from the start? What would show that appeasement **could** have worked?

Column	Content
Cross-links	L10 (Concert of Europe); L12 (Cold War and decolonization); L21 (nuclear deterrence — lessons of the interwar period); L27 (African colonial state formation); L35 (post-Soviet ontology — lessons of 1938); L41 (West Asian state system — mandate legacy); L45 (nuclear proliferation — lessons of the 1930s)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1–L11 cards
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L11 with L12 (Cold War and decolonization) and L21 (nuclear deterrence)
R5	End of Module 2	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Five key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (Abyssinia Crisis) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (Munich Agreement) attempted and compared
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry

☐ Cheatsheet entry added
☐ R2 review scheduled

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **On the First World War and the collapse of the Concert:** Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987), ch. 5; Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (1961); Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers* (2012); Margaret MacMillan, *The War That Ended Peace* (2013).
- **On Versailles and the mandate system:** Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919* (2001); Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and the Making of International Law* (2005), ch. 3; Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians* (2015); the Treaty of Versailles; the Covenant of the League of Nations.
- **On the League of Nations:** E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (1939); Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed* (2005); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World* (2012); the Covenant of the League of Nations.
- **On the interwar crisis:** Adam Tooze, *The Deluge* (2014); A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (1961); Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (1998–2000); the Munich Agreement; the Hoare-Laval Pact.
- **On the African perspective:** Siba Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi-Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972); Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965); the Abyssinia Crisis in African historiography.
- **On the Chinese perspective:** Zheng Wang, *Never Forget National Humiliation* (2012); Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally* (2013); the May Fourth Movement (1919).
- **On the Russian perspective:** Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917); the Comintern documents; the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939); Russian narratives of the Great Patriotic War.
- **On the UN perspective:** the UN Charter; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the Genocide Convention (1948); the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples; the *Pact for the Future* (2024).

End of Lesson 11. Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 12 (Cold War Bipolarity and Decolonization).

13. Cold War Bipolarity and Decolonization: The Superpower Contest and the Making of the Post-Colonial World

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LESSON METADATA

Field	Entry
Lesson number and title	L12 — Cold War Bipolarity and Decolonization
Module	Module 2: Historical Architecture of International Order

Field	Entry
Prerequisites	L2 (UN Charter, AU Act); L5 (realism — bipolarity, extended deterrence); L6 (institutionalism — the UN system); L8 (post-colonialism, neo-colonialism); L10 (imperialism, Berlin Conference); L11 (World Wars, League, mandate system)
Interleaved links	Forward to L13 (post-Cold War liberal order), L21 (nuclear deterrence), L23 (asymmetric warfare), L27–28 (African state formation, Pan-Africanism), L31 (great-power competition in Africa), L35 (post-Soviet ontology), L47 (US–China rivalry as a new bipolarity), L48 (Indo-Pacific and alliance architecture)
Reading load	This lesson only. Optional further reading at the end.
Content channels	Canon (paraphrased and quoted); primary documents (Truman Doctrine, Kennan's Long Telegram, the Bandung Communiqué, the OAU Charter, Nkrumah's speeches, the Non-Aligned Movement Belgrade Declaration, quoted and analyzed); data lab (Cold War proxy conflicts, decolonization timeline, aid flows); five perspectives
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (adjudicate between the Eurocentric and global Cold War narratives, and between the five perspectives on decolonization)
Estimated study time	8–10 hours including exercises

Note on self-containment: Every argument, quotation, and example you need is inside this document. Where I cite Westad, Gaddis, LaFeber, Gleijeses, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Schmidt, or any other scholar, I summarize the argument fully enough that you do not need the original to complete the lesson. "Further Reading" is optional.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Lessons 9–11 reconstructed the collapse of the old European order — the Westphalian myth, the imperial partition, the failure of the League, and the catastrophe of the Second World War. This lesson reconstructs the order that emerged from that catastrophe: **the Cold War** — the bipolar contest between the United States and the Soviet Union that shaped international politics for nearly half a century — and **decolonization** — the wave of independence movements that transformed the political map of Africa and Asia.

These two histories are usually told separately. The Cold War is presented as a **European** story — the division

of Germany, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, nuclear deterrence, the Cuban Missile Crisis. Decolonization is presented as a **peripheral** story — the end of empire, the birth of new states, the problems of development. But they were **interconnected**. The Cold War was fought **in** the decolonizing world as much as in Europe — in Korea, Vietnam, Congo, Angola, Ethiopia, Afghanistan. And decolonization was shaped **by** the Cold War — the superpowers competed for the allegiance of the new states, and the new states used that competition to extract resources and autonomy.

Odd Arne Westad's *The Global Cold War* (2005) makes the revisionist argument: the Cold War was **primarily a conflict in and over the Third World** — a contest between two visions of modernity (capitalist and socialist) that was fought through intervention, proxy war, and development assistance in the decolonizing world. The European theater was important, but it was not the main event.

This lesson takes Westad's insight seriously. It reconstructs the Cold War as a **global** conflict, with Africa as a central theater. It reconstructs decolonization as a **world-historical** process, shaped by the superpowers but also shaped by the **agency** of the decolonizing states themselves.

The African perspective is primary because Africa was one of the most contested theaters of the Cold War, and because African leaders — Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon — developed **distinctive** theories of international politics that shaped the post-colonial world.

This lesson has five key ideas:

1. **The Cold War was a bipolar system**, but bipolarity was not just a structural condition — it was a **contest between two models of modernity**.
2. **Decolonization transformed the international system** — the number of states quadrupled, the composition of the UN changed, and the racial hierarchy of the international order was challenged.
3. **The superpowers competed in the decolonizing world**, but the decolonizing states were not passive — they exercised **agency** through non-alignment, multi-alignment, and the exploitation of superpower rivalry.
4. **The Cold War and decolonization were entangled** — the superpowers shaped decolonization, and decolonization shaped the Cold War.
5. **The five perspectives** on the Cold War and decolonization — African (primary), Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — and the **adjudication** among them.

By the end, you can take any claim about the Cold War — "the Cold War was a European conflict," "decolonization was a product of the Cold War," "the Non-Aligned Movement was a failure" — and answer: *Whose Cold War? Whose decolonization? Whose agency? And how do the five perspectives reconstruct it?*

SECTION 1 — PRE-CLASS PRIMING

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (from memory)

1. From L5: What is bipolarity, and how does structural realism explain its stability?
2. From L11: Why did the League of Nations fail, and what were the "lessons of the League" that shaped the UN?
3. From L11: What was the mandate system, and how did it continue colonial rule under a new name?
4. From L8: What is neo-colonialism, and who developed the concept?

Check against the previous lessons before proceeding.

1.2 Orientation questions

Hold these in mind:

- Was the Cold War primarily a European conflict or a global one?
- Did the superpowers control the decolonizing world, or did the decolonizing world shape the superpowers?
- Was the Non-Aligned Movement a genuine third force or a failure?
- How did African leaders understand the Cold War, and what did they try to do about it?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

Provisional definitions; revise by the end:

Bipolarity; superpower; containment; the Truman Doctrine; the Marshall Plan; NATO; the Warsaw Pact; mutually assured destruction (MAD); extended deterrence; proxy war; the domino theory; rollback; peaceful coexistence; the Non-Aligned Movement; the Bandung Conference; Afro-Asian solidarity; Pan-Africanism; the OAU; neo-colonialism; Ujamaa; the Frontline States; the Congo Crisis; the Suez Crisis; the Cuban Missile Crisis; détente; the Second Cold War; the "Year of Africa."

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you can:

1. **Reconstruct** the Cold War as a bipolar system and as a contest between two models of modernity, and explain how these two accounts differ.
2. **Analyze** decolonization as a transformation of the international system — the quadrupling of states, the entry of the Global South into the UN, and the challenge to the racial hierarchy of the international order.
3. **Explain** how the superpowers competed in the decolonizing world, and how the decolonizing states exercised **agency** through non-alignment and multi-alignment.
4. **Reconstruct** the entanglement of the Cold War and decolonization, using Africa as a central case.
5. **Reconstruct** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions interpret the Cold War and decolonization, and **adjudicate** among them on a specific case.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The Cold War was a bipolar system, but bipolarity was a contest between two models of modernity

The claim: The Cold War is often described as a **bipolar system** — a distribution of power in which two superpowers dominated the international system. This is a structural description. But it is incomplete. The Cold War was also a **contest between two models of modernity** — the American model of liberal capitalism

and the Soviet model of state socialism — each of which claimed to offer a path to development and freedom. The contest was **ideological** as much as **material**, and it was fought in the **decolonizing world** as much as in Europe.

The structural account. The structural realist account — particularly Kenneth Waltz's — emphasizes **polarity**. The Cold War was a bipolar system, with two superpowers (the US and the USSR) dominating the international system. The bipolar structure was more **stable** than multipolarity, because the two superpowers could manage their competition, and because the balance of power was simpler. The nuclear dimension — **mutual assured destruction (MAD)** — made direct war between the superpowers **unthinkable**, which paradoxically made the system more stable.

The limits of the structural account. The structural account explains **why** the Cold War was stable, but it does not explain **what** the Cold War was about. The US and the USSR were not just two powers competing for power; they were two **models** of society, each claiming to be the path to the future. The contest was:

- **Ideological:** Capitalism vs. socialism; democracy vs. one-party rule; freedom vs. equality.
- **Economic:** The Marshall Plan and the Bretton Woods system vs. the Comecon and the socialist planned economy.
- **Developmental:** The American model of modernization vs. the Soviet model of socialist industrialization.
- **Civilizational:** The "Free World" vs. the "Socialist Camp."

The global Cold War. Westad's revisionist account argues that the Cold War was **primarily a conflict in and over the Third World**. The US and the USSR each sought to **export** their models of modernity to the decolonizing world — through development aid, military assistance, education, and propaganda. The contest was not just about power; it was about **what kind of society the new states would build**. This is why the Cold War was fought in Korea, Vietnam, Congo, Angola, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan — not just in Europe.

The origins of the Cold War. The standard account traces the Cold War to the **breakdown of the wartime alliance** — the US and the USSR had been allies during the Second World War, but their cooperation collapsed after 1945. The **Truman Doctrine** (March 1947) — the commitment to "support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures" — is often cited as the founding moment of the Cold War. The **Marshall Plan** (1947) — the massive American aid program for Europe — was the economic dimension. The **Berlin Blockade** (1948–49) — the Soviet attempt to cut off West Berlin — was the first major crisis.

The **Soviet perspective** traces the Cold War to the **American desire for global hegemony** and the **Soviet need for security** after the devastation of the Second World War. The Soviet Union had suffered enormously — an estimated 27 million deaths — and it sought to create a **buffer zone** in Eastern Europe to prevent future invasions. The US interpreted the Soviet buffer as **expansionism**, and the Cold War was the result.

The "Long Telegram" and containment. George Kennan's "Long Telegram" (February 1946) — a diplomatic cable from Moscow to Washington — articulated the **containment** doctrine. Kennan argued that the Soviet Union was inherently **expansionist** and that the US should adopt a policy of "patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies." Containment became the organizing principle of American Cold War policy — but it was interpreted differently by different administrations. Some emphasized **military containment** (NATO, nuclear deterrence, the arms race); others emphasized **economic and**

political containment (the Marshall Plan, support for democratic institutions).

The "bipolar" system. The Cold War produced a distinctive international order:

- **Two blocs:** NATO (1949) and the Warsaw Pact (1955).
- **Nuclear arms race:** MAD, the nuclear triad, arms control agreements (SALT, START).
- **Proxy wars:** Korea (1950–53), Vietnam (1955–75), Angola (1975–2002), Afghanistan (1979–89).
- **Alliances and client states:** The superpowers competed for allies in the decolonizing world, often through military aid, economic assistance, and covert action.
- **Institutions:** The UN, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the two blocs' own institutions (NATO, Warsaw Pact, Comecon).

What this contributes: It shows that the Cold War was not just a structural condition (bipolarity) but a **contest of ideas and models** — and that contest was fought globally, not just in Europe.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **agency** of the decolonizing states — the ways in which they shaped the Cold War, not just were shaped by it. It can also underplay the **diversity** of the Cold War — different regions experienced it differently.

Observable implication. If the Cold War was a contest between two models of modernity, you should see (a) **ideological** competition — the export of models of development and governance, (b) **material** competition — aid, investment, military assistance, and (c) **intervention** — the superpowers intervening in the decolonizing world to shape its political and economic orientation.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Decolonization transformed the international system

The claim: Decolonization was one of the most important transformations of the international system in the twentieth century. It **quadrupled** the number of states, changed the composition of the UN, and challenged the **racial hierarchy** of the international order. It was not a gift from the colonial powers; it was won through **struggle** — nationalist movements, anti-colonial wars, mass protests, and international diplomacy.

The facts of decolonization. Between 1945 and 1975, more than **80** former colonies became independent states:

- **Asia:** India and Pakistan (1947), Indonesia (1949), Vietnam (1954, after the defeat of France at Dien Bien Phu), Malaya (1957), and others.
- **Africa:** Ghana (1957) was the first sub-Saharan African colony to gain independence. In 1960 — the **"Year of Africa"** — 17 African states became independent: Cameroon, Togo, Senegal, Mali, Madagascar, Somalia, Benin, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, Nigeria, Mauritania, and the Congo (Kinshasa).
- **The Caribbean and Pacific:** Jamaica (1962), Trinidad and Tobago (1962), Fiji (1970), and others.

The causes of decolonization. Decolonization was not a single process with a single cause. It was the product of:

1. **The weakening of the colonial powers.** The Second World War **devastated** Britain and France — economically, militarily, and morally. The war had exposed the **hypocrisy** of the colonial powers — they had fought for freedom and democracy while denying it to their colonies. The war had also

mobilized colonial peoples — African and Asian soldiers had fought for the Allies, and they returned home with new expectations.

2. **The rise of nationalist movements.** Anti-colonial movements had been growing since the early twentieth century — the Indian National Congress, the African National Congress, the Pan-African movement. The war **accelerated** their growth — the Atlantic Charter (1941) promised self-determination, and the UN Charter (1945) affirmed the principle of "equal rights and self-determination of peoples."
3. **The Cold War.** The superpowers **competed** for the allegiance of the decolonizing world, and both the US and the USSR **opposed** European colonialism — the US because it was ideologically committed to anti-colonialism (and because it wanted access to markets and resources), the USSR because it saw anti-colonialism as part of the global struggle against capitalism. The superpowers **pressured** the colonial powers to decolonize — the US threatened to withdraw Marshall Plan aid from Britain and France during the Suez Crisis (1956), and the USSR supported anti-colonial movements.
4. **International institutions.** The UN became a **platform** for anti-colonial diplomacy. The General Assembly's 1960 **Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples** affirmed the right of all peoples to self-determination. The UN's **trusteeship system** (which replaced the mandate system) was designed to prepare the colonies for self-government.
5. **The costs of empire.** The colonial powers realized that maintaining empires was becoming **too costly** — economically, politically, and militarily. The Algerian War (1954–62) — one of the bloodiest anti-colonial wars — convinced France that empire was no longer sustainable. The Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya (1952–60) convinced Britain that colonial rule was a **liability**.

The transformation of the international system. Decolonization transformed the international system in several ways:

1. **The number of states quadrupled.** In 1945, the UN had 51 members. By 1975, it had 144. The new states were mostly in Africa and Asia, and they changed the **composition** of the UN — from a Western-dominated club to a more diverse assembly.
2. **The racial hierarchy was challenged.** The colonial order had been based on a **racial hierarchy** — the "civilized" nations above the "savage" ones. Decolonization challenged this hierarchy — the new states claimed **equal sovereignty** and demanded **equal treatment**.
3. **The agenda of the UN changed.** The new states brought new issues to the UN — **development**, **decolonization**, **apartheid**, **racism**, and the **New International Economic Order (NIEO)**. The UN became a site of **North–South** conflict, not just East–West conflict.
4. **The Cold War became global.** Decolonization **extended** the Cold War to the new states — the superpowers competed for their allegiance, and the new states became **sites** of superpower competition.

The African experience. Africa was at the center of decolonization:

- **Ghana (1957)** was the first sub-Saharan African colony to gain independence. Its leader, **Kwame Nkrumah**, became a leading advocate of **Pan-Africanism** and **non-alignment**.
- **The Congo (1960)** became independent amid a **crisis** — the secession of Katanga, the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, and the intervention of the UN and the superpowers.
- **The OAU (1963)** was founded by 32 independent African states. It enshrined the principles of **sovereignty**, **non-interference**, and **anti-colonialism**.
- **The Frontline States** (Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe) became a **regional bloc** that supported the liberation struggles in southern Africa — against Portuguese colo-

nialism in Angola and Mozambique, and against apartheid in South Africa.

What this contributes: It shows that decolonization was a **world-historical** transformation — it changed the composition of the international system, challenged the racial hierarchy, and created new sites of contestation.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **violence** of decolonization — the wars of liberation, the massacres, the displacement of populations. It can also underplay the **continuities** — the colonial borders, the extractive institutions, the economic dependency that persisted after independence.

Observable implication. If decolonization transformed the international system, you should see (a) the **quadrupling** of states, (b) the **changed composition** of the UN, and (c) the **new agenda** of the UN — development, decolonization, anti-apartheid.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The superpowers competed in the decolonizing world, but the decolonizing states exercised agency

The claim: The standard narrative of the Cold War presents the decolonizing world as a **passive object** of superpower competition — the US and the USSR competed for influence, and the new states were **pawns** in the contest. This narrative is **wrong**. The decolonizing states exercised **agency** — they used the superpower competition to extract resources and autonomy, they formed their own institutions (the Non-Aligned Movement, the OAU), and they developed their own theories of international politics (Pan-Africanism, neocolonialism, Ujamaa).

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The NAM was the most important expression of third-world agency:

- **The Bandung Conference (1955)** brought together 29 Asian and African states — including India, China, Indonesia, Egypt, Ghana (then the Gold Coast), and others. The conference affirmed the principles of **anti-colonialism**, **non-alignment**, **sovereignty**, and **economic development**. It was a **landmark** — the first major gathering of post-colonial states, and a statement of their independence from both superpowers.
- **The Belgrade Conference (1961)** formally established the NAM, with 25 founding members — including India, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, and Yugoslavia. The NAM's principles were **non-alignment**, **anti-colonialism**, **peaceful coexistence**, and **economic development**.
- **The NAM's significance.** The NAM was not a **third bloc** — it was not a military alliance, and it did not have a unified ideology. But it was a **political force** — it gave the new states a **collective voice** in international affairs, and it **constrained** the superpowers' ability to intervene in the decolonizing world. The NAM's principles — sovereignty, non-interference, anti-colonialism — shaped the **normative** framework of the post-colonial world.

Non-alignment as strategy. Non-alignment was not just an ideology; it was a **strategy**. The decolonizing states used non-alignment to:

- **Extract resources** from both superpowers — they accepted aid from both sides, and they played the superpowers against each other.
- **Preserve autonomy** — they resisted becoming **client states** of either superpower.
- **Build collective institutions** — they formed the NAM, the OAU, the G-77 (the Group of 77 developing countries), and other organizations to advance their collective interests.

The limits of non-alignment. Non-alignment was not always successful:

- **The superpowers did not always respect it.** The US and the USSR intervened in the decolonizing world — through covert action, military assistance, and direct intervention — to prevent the new states from aligning with the other side. The CIA's role in the overthrow of Mossadegh in Iran (1953), Arbenz in Guatemala (1954), and Lumumba in the Congo (1960–61) are examples.
- **The new states were often divided.** The NAM was not a unified bloc — its members had different interests, different ideologies, and different relationships with the superpowers. India and China, for example, were both founding members of the NAM, but they went to war in 1962.
- **The new states were often weak.** Many of the new states were **fragile** — they had weak institutions, artificial borders, and extractive economies. They were **vulnerable** to superpower pressure.

African agency. African states were particularly important in the NAM and in the construction of post-colonial international politics:

- **Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism.** Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, was a leading advocate of **Pan-Africanism** — the idea that African states should unite to achieve **political and economic independence**. His book *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) argued that formal independence was not enough — the former colonial powers continued to dominate the new states through economic and political means. Nkrumah's solution was **African unity** — a united Africa would be able to resist neo-colonialism.
- **Nyerere's Ujamaa.** Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first president, developed **Ujamaa** — a philosophy of African socialism based on traditional African communal values. Nyerere argued that African development should be based on **self-reliance** and **equality**, not on the capitalist model of the West or the state-socialist model of the Soviet Union. Tanzania became a **hub** for anti-colonial movements — the headquarters of the ANC, FRELIMO, and other liberation movements.
- **The OAU.** The Organization of African Unity (1963) was founded by 32 independent African states. It enshrined the principles of **sovereignty**, **non-interference**, and **anti-colonialism**. It was a **collective** institution that gave African states a voice in international affairs and supported the liberation struggles in southern Africa.

What this contributes: It shows that the decolonizing states were **not passive objects** of superpower competition. They were **actors** — they shaped the international order, they built institutions, and they developed their own theories of international politics.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **constraints** on third-world agency — the weakness of the new states, the pressure from the superpowers, and the divisions within the third world. It can also underplay the **failures** of third-world projects — the collapse of Ujamaa, the corruption of many post-colonial regimes, and the persistence of neo-colonial dependency.

Observable implication. If third-world agency was real, you should see (a) **non-alignment** — the new states refusing to align with either superpower, (b) **institution-building** — the NAM, the OAU, the G-77, and (c) **the exploitation of superpower rivalry** — the new states extracting resources from both sides.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The Cold War and decolonization were entangled: Africa as a central theater

The claim: The Cold War and decolonization were not separate processes; they were **entangled**. The superpowers shaped decolonization — they competed for influence in the new states, and they intervened to prevent them from aligning with the other side. And decolonization shaped the Cold War — the new states changed the composition of the UN, challenged the racial hierarchy, and created new sites of superpower competition. Africa was a **central theater** of this entanglement.

The Congo Crisis (1960–65). The Congo Crisis is the paradigmatic case of the entanglement of the Cold War and decolonization:

- **The context.** The Congo became independent from Belgium on June 30, 1960. The independence was **rushed** — Belgium had not prepared the Congo for self-government, and the new state had only a handful of university graduates and no experienced administrators.
- **The crisis.** Within days of independence, the army **mutinied** against its Belgian officers. The province of **Katanga**, rich in copper and cobalt, **seceded** with Belgian support. The central government, led by **Patrice Lumumba**, appealed to the UN and the Soviet Union for help.
- **The UN intervention.** The UN Security Council authorized a peacekeeping mission (ONUC) to restore order and prevent the secession. But the mandate was **ambiguous** — was the UN supposed to **restore** the central government, or just **maintain** order? The UN's Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, interpreted the mandate as **neutral** — the UN would not take sides in the internal conflict.
- **The superpower intervention.** Lumumba, frustrated by the UN's neutrality, appealed to the Soviet Union for military assistance. The US, alarmed by the prospect of Soviet influence in the Congo, supported the **overthrow** of Lumumba. Lumumba was dismissed by President Kasa-Vubu in September 1960, and he was **assassinated** in January 1961, with the involvement of Belgian and American intelligence.
- **The aftermath.** The Congo became a **proxy war** — the US supported the central government (and later Mobutu Sese Seko, who seized power in 1965), while the Soviet Union and China supported rebel movements. The crisis ended with the **defeat** of the Katangese secession in 1963 and the **consolidation** of Mobutu's regime.

The African perspective on the Congo Crisis. African scholars emphasize that the Congo Crisis was a **turning point** in African attitudes toward the Cold War:

- **The betrayal of Lumumba.** Lumumba was a **Pan-Africanist** and a **non-aligned** leader. His assassination — with the involvement of the US and Belgium — confirmed African suspicions that the superpowers would **not tolerate** a genuinely independent African leader.
- **The UN's failure.** The UN's intervention in the Congo was **contested** — the UN was supposed to be a **neutral** peacekeeping force, but it became **involved** in the internal conflict, and it failed to protect Lumumba. The crisis exposed the **limits** of UN peacekeeping and the **influence** of the superpowers on the UN.
- **The lesson for African states.** The Congo Crisis taught African states that **non-alignment** was **dangerous** — the superpowers would intervene to prevent it. This lesson shaped the OAU's **sovereignty** and **non-interference** principles — African states sought to **protect** themselves from superpower intervention by insisting on **absolute sovereignty**.

The Suez Crisis (1956). The Suez Crisis is another paradigmatic case:

- **The context.** Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's president, nationalized the Suez Canal in July 1956, after the US and Britain withdrew funding for the Aswan High Dam.
- **The invasion.** Britain, France, and Israel **invaded** Egypt in October 1956, seeking to **retake** the canal and **overthrow** Nasser.
- **The superpower response.** The US and the USSR **both** condemned the invasion — the US because it was **furious** that its allies had acted without consulting it, and because it feared that the invasion would **drive** the Arab world toward the Soviet Union; the USSR because it saw an opportunity to **expand** its influence in the Middle East. The US pressured Britain and France to **withdraw**, and the USSR threatened **military intervention**.
- **The outcome.** The invasion **failed** — Britain and France withdrew, and Nasser **kept** the canal. The crisis was a **turning point** — it marked the **end** of Britain and France as **great powers**, and it established the US and the USSR as the **dominant** powers in the Middle East.

The African perspective on Suez. African scholars emphasize that the Suez Crisis was a **landmark** in the **decolonization** of Africa:

- **The defeat of the old colonial powers.** Britain and France — the two largest colonial empires — were **humiliated** by the US and the USSR. The crisis confirmed that the **old imperial order** was over, and that the **superpowers** were the new arbiters of international politics.
- **The rise of Nasser.** Nasser became a **hero** to the Arab world and to anti-colonial movements across Africa. His **nationalization** of the canal was a symbol of **sovereignty** and **dignity** — a post-colonial state **asserting** its independence against the old colonial powers.
- **The lesson for African states.** The Suez Crisis taught African states that **non-alignment** could **work** — Nasser had played the superpowers against each other, and he had **won**. The crisis shaped the **Non-Aligned Movement** — Nasser was one of its founding figures.

The Angolan Civil War (1975–2002). The Angolan Civil War was one of the **longest** and **deadliest** proxy wars of the Cold War:

- **The context.** Angola became independent from Portugal in 1975, after a **14-year** liberation war. Three movements competed for power: the **MPLA** (supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba), **UNITA** (supported by the US and South Africa), and the **FNLA** (supported by the US and Zaire).
- **The intervention.** The Soviet Union and Cuba **intervened** on behalf of the MPLA; the US and South Africa **intervened** on behalf of UNITA. The war became a **proxy** for the Cold War, and it lasted for **27 years** — until 2002.
- **The African perspective.** African scholars emphasize that the Angolan Civil War was a **tragedy** — a **proxy war** that **devastated** the country and **killed** an estimated 500,000 people. The war was **not** an Angolan conflict; it was a **superpower** conflict fought on Angolan soil. The lesson is that the **Cold War** had **devastating** consequences for Africa.

What this contributes: It shows that the Cold War and decolonization were **entangled** — the superpowers shaped decolonization, and decolonization shaped the Cold War. Africa was a **central theater** of this entanglement.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **agency** of African actors — the ways in which they shaped the Cold War, not just were shaped by it. It can also underplay the **diversity** of African experiences — different countries experienced the Cold War differently.

Observable implication. If the Cold War and decolonization were entangled, you should see (a) **superpower intervention** in the decolonizing world, (b) **proxy wars** in the new states, and (c) **African agency** in shaping the Cold War.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The five perspectives interpret the Cold War and decolonization differently, and each interpretation is political

The claim: The Cold War and decolonization are not neutral historical objects. They are **contested** historical legacies, and the five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — interpret them differently. Each interpretation reflects a different political project.

2.6.1 The African perspective (primary) **Core commitments.** African scholars and leaders interpret the Cold War and decolonization through the lens of **agency**, **neo-colonialism**, and **Pan-Africanism**:

1. **Agency.** African states were **not passive objects** of superpower competition. They exercised **agency** — they formed the NAM, the OAU, and other institutions; they pursued non-alignment; and they used the superpowers' rivalry to extract resources and autonomy.
2. **Neo-colonialism.** Formal independence did not end colonial exploitation. The former colonial powers continued to dominate the new states through economic and political means — through aid conditionality, trade agreements, and military assistance. Nkrumah's **neo-colonialism** is the key concept — the "last stage of imperialism."
3. **Pan-Africanism.** African unity was the **solution** to neo-colonialism. Nkrumah argued that a **united Africa** would be able to resist external domination. The OAU was a **first step** — but it was **limited** by its commitment to **sovereignty** and **non-interference**.
4. **The Cold War as a tragedy.** The Cold War had **devastating** consequences for Africa — proxy wars, assassinations, and the support of **dictators** (Mobutu, Doe, Bokassa) who served superpower interests. The African perspective emphasizes that the **victims** of the Cold War were disproportionately in the **Global South**.

The critique of the standard narrative. African scholars critique the standard narrative of the Cold War for being **Eurocentric** — it focuses on the US–Soviet rivalry in Europe, and it **ignores** the **devastating** consequences of the Cold War in Africa. The standard narrative treats Africa as a **footnote**, not as a **central theater**.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the Cold War was **not** just a European conflict — it was a **global** conflict that had **devastating** consequences for Africa. It also shows that African states were **agents** — they shaped the Cold War, not just were shaped by it.

What it occludes: It can underplay the **failures** of African agency — the collapse of Ujamaa, the corruption of many post-colonial regimes, and the persistence of neo-colonial dependency. It can also underplay the **diversity** of African experiences — different countries experienced the Cold War differently.

2.6.2 The Chinese perspective **Core commitments.** China's engagement with the Cold War and decolonization is shaped by its own experience — the **Chinese Revolution** (1949), the **Sino-Soviet split** (1960s), and China's **rapprochement** with the US (1972).

1. **China as a third force.** China saw itself as a **leader** of the Third World — a **socialist** state that was **not** aligned with either superpower. The **Bandung Conference** (1955) was a **landmark** — China participated as a **leading** Asian power, and Zhou Enlai's diplomacy helped to **shape** the conference's principles.
2. **The Sino-Soviet split.** The split between China and the Soviet Union (1960s) was a **major** event in the Cold War — it **fragmented** the socialist camp and created a **third** pole. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that China was **not** a **satellite** of the Soviet Union — it pursued its **own** path to socialism.
3. **China and Africa.** China was a **major** supporter of African liberation movements — it provided **military** and **economic** assistance to movements in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and elsewhere. The **Tanzania-Zambia Railway** (TAZARA, 1970–75) was a **flagship** project — a symbol of China's **solidarity** with Africa.
4. **The Chinese critique of the standard narrative.** Chinese scholars critique the standard narrative of the Cold War for **ignoring** China's role — China was a **major** power, and its **split** with the Soviet Union **shaped** the Cold War. The Chinese perspective also critiques the Western narrative for **downplaying** the **anti-colonial** dimension of the Cold War.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the Cold War was **not** just a US–Soviet conflict — China was a **major** power, and its **split** with the Soviet Union **shaped** the Cold War. It also shows that China was a **leader** of the Third World — a **socialist** state that was **not** aligned with either superpower.

What it occludes: It can **underplay** China's **own** hegemonic ambitions — China's support for **revolutionary** movements was not **purely** altruistic; it was also a way to **expand** China's influence. It can also **underplay** the **failures** of China's development model — the Great Leap Forward (1958–62) caused a **famine** that killed an estimated 15–45 million people.

2.6.3 The Russian perspective **Core commitments.** Russia's engagement with the Cold War is shaped by its **Soviet legacy** — the **Great Patriotic War** (1941–45), the **Cold War rivalry** with the US, and the **collapse** of the Soviet Union (1991).

1. **The Soviet narrative of the Cold War.** The Soviet narrative emphasizes that the Cold War was **imposed** on the Soviet Union by the **aggressive** policies of the US and its allies. The Soviet Union had suffered **enormously** in the Second World War, and it sought to create a **buffer zone** in Eastern Europe to prevent future invasions. The US interpreted the Soviet buffer as **expansionism**, and the Cold War was the result.
2. **The Soviet role in decolonization.** The Soviet Union **supported** anti-colonial movements — it provided **military** and **economic** assistance to movements in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The Soviet narrative emphasizes that the USSR was a **champion** of anti-colonialism — a **socialist** state that supported the **liberation** of the colonized world.
3. **The Sino-Soviet split.** The Russian perspective emphasizes that the Sino-Soviet split was a **tragedy** — it **fragmented** the socialist camp and **weakened** the struggle against imperialism. The Russian narrative **blames** China for the split — it argues that China's ** Maoist** ideology and **hegemonic** ambitions were the cause.
4. **The collapse of the Soviet Union.** The Russian perspective emphasizes that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a **catastrophe** — the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century," in Putin's words. The collapse **ended** the Cold War, but it also **created** a **power vacuum** that the US **exploited** — through NATO expansion, the intervention in Yugoslavia, and the invasion of Iraq.

The critique of the standard narrative. Russian scholars critique the standard narrative of the Cold War for **demonizing** the Soviet Union — it **ignores** the Soviet Union's **security** concerns and its **contributions** to anti-colonialism. The Russian perspective also critiques the Western narrative for **downplaying** the role of the US in **starting** the Cold War.

What this perspective contributes: It shows that the Cold War was **not** a simple story of **good** vs. **evil** — the Soviet Union had **genuine** security concerns, and it made **genuine** contributions to anti-colonialism.

What it occludes: It can **justify** Soviet **aggression** — the invasion of Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Afghanistan (1979). It can also **underplay** the **repression** of the Soviet regime — the Gulag, the suppression of dissent, and the **poverty** of the Soviet economy.

2.6.4 The Western perspective Core commitments. The Western tradition is the **home** of the standard narrative of the Cold War. The standard narrative emphasizes:

1. **The Cold War as a struggle between freedom and tyranny.** The US and its allies were **defending** freedom and democracy against **Soviet** totalitarianism. The Cold War was a **moral** struggle — a contest between **good** and **evil**.
2. **Containment as the correct strategy.** The US strategy of **containment** — preventing the expansion of Soviet influence — was the **right** response to Soviet **expansionism**. Containment **worked** — the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Cold War ended with a **Western** victory.
3. **The US as a benevolent hegemon.** The US provided **global public goods** — security, economic stability, and the **liberal** order. The US was a **benevolent** hegemon — it **supported** decolonization, **provided** development aid, and **promoted** democracy and human rights.
4. **The "end of history."** The collapse of the Soviet Union was a **vindication** of the Western model — liberal democracy and capitalism had **triumphed** over communism. Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis (1989) captured this sentiment.

The revisionist critique. Western scholarship has also produced **revisionist** accounts of the Cold War:

- **The "revisionist" school** (William Appleman Williams, Gabriel Kolko) argued that the US was **not** a benevolent hegemon — it was an **imperial** power that sought to **expand** its economic and political influence. The Cold War was a **product** of American **expansionism**, not Soviet **aggression**.
- **The "post-revisionist" school** (John Lewis Gaddis, Ernest May) sought a **middle** ground — it acknowledged that **both** superpowers were **responsible** for the Cold War, and that the conflict was a **product** of **mutual** misperception and **security** dilemmas.
- **The "global Cold War" school** (Odd Arne Westad) argued that the Cold War was **primarily** a conflict in and over the **Third World** — it was a contest between **two models** of modernity, and it had **devastating** consequences for the Global South.

The silences. The Western narrative has been **slow** to acknowledge:

- **The US role in the overthrow of democratic governments** — Iran (1953), Guatemala (1954), Congo (1960–61), Chile (1973).
- **The US support for dictators** — Mobutu, Somoza, Pinochet, the Shah.
- **The US role in the decolonization of Africa** — the US **pressured** Britain and France to decolonize, but it also **supported** colonial powers when it served its interests.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **most developed** versions of the standard narrative and the most systematic **self-critique** of that narrative.

What it occludes: It can be **parochial** — focusing on Europe and ignoring the Global South. It can be **self-serving** — presenting the US as a benevolent hegemon while ignoring its imperial crimes. And it can be **triumphalist** — presenting the end of the Cold War as a vindication of the Western model, while ignoring the **ongoing** legacies of imperialism and inequality.

2.6.5 The UN perspective **Core commitments.** The UN is the **institutional embodiment** of the post-1945 order, and its interpretation of the Cold War and decolonization is shaped by its **founding** mission:

1. **The UN as a site of decolonization.** The UN was a **platform** for anti-colonial diplomacy — the General Assembly's 1960 **Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples** affirmed the right of all peoples to self-determination. The UN's **trusteeship system** (which replaced the mandate system) was designed to prepare the colonies for self-government.
2. **The UN as a peacekeeping actor.** The UN's **peacekeeping** operations were a **major** innovation of the Cold War — they were designed to **prevent** local conflicts from becoming superpower confrontations. The Congo Crisis (1960–65), the Suez Crisis (1956), and other peacekeeping missions were **landmarks** — they established the **principles** of UN peacekeeping (consent of the parties, impartiality, minimum use of force).
3. **The UN as a site of North–South conflict.** The UN became a **site** of **North–South** conflict — the new states used the General Assembly to **advance** their demands for development, decolonization, and a **New International Economic Order (NIEO)**. The UN's **development** agenda — the UNCTAD, the UNDP, the MDGs, the SDGs — was shaped by the **demands** of the Global South.
4. **The UN and the Cold War.** The UN was **constrained** by the Cold War — the **veto** in the Security Council **paralyzed** the UN during the Cold War, and the UN was **marginalized** by the superpowers. But the UN also **provided** a **forum** for dialogue and a **mechanism** for peacekeeping — it **prevented** some conflicts from escalating.

The silences. The UN's narrative has been **slow** to acknowledge:

- **The UN's role in legitimizing superpower intervention** — the UN authorized interventions that served superpower interests (e.g., the Congo, Korea).
- **The UN's own structural biases** — the **veto** and the **great-power** domination of the Security Council **reproduce** the **inequalities** of the international system.

What this perspective contributes: It provides the **normative benchmark** — the standards against which the Cold War and decolonization are judged. It also provides the **institutional record** — the resolutions, declarations, and debates that are essential evidence for any analysis.

What it occludes: It can **depoliticize** — framing the Cold War and decolonization as **technical** problems obscures the **power dynamics** that shaped them. It can also **legitimize** — the UN's narrative presents the post-1945 order as a **solution** to the interwar crisis, while ignoring its own continuities with the colonial order.

2.6.6 The comparison matrix

Dimension	African (primary)	Chinese	Russian	Western	UN
Stance toward the Cold War	Tragedy; devastating consequences for Africa	Third force; Sino-Soviet split	Imposed by the US; Soviet security concerns	Struggle between freedom and tyranny	Constrained by superpowers; forum for dialogue
Stance toward decolonization	Agency; neo-colonialism; Pan-Africanism	Leadership of the Third World	Champion of anti-colonialism	Benevolent hegemon; support for decolonization	Platform for anti-colonial diplomacy; peacekeeping
Key contribution	Agency; neo-colonialism; Pan-Africanism	Third force; Sino-Soviet split	Soviet security concerns; anti-colonialism	Standard narrative + revisionist critique	Normative benchmark; institutional record
Key occlusion	Failures of African agency; diversity of experiences	China's own hegemonic ambitions; failures of Maoism	Soviet aggression; repression	Imperial crimes; parochialism	Legitimization of superpower intervention; structural biases

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2.7 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The puzzle: The **Congo Crisis** (1960–65) was one of the most dramatic episodes of the Cold War. The Congo became independent from Belgium in June 1960, and within days it collapsed into chaos — the army mutinied, the province of Katanga seceded, and the central government appealed to the UN and the Soviet Union for help. The UN intervened, but the crisis escalated — the Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, was assassinated, and the country became a proxy war between the superpowers. Why did the Congo Crisis become a Cold War flashpoint, and what does it tell us about the entanglement of the Cold War and decolonization?

The puzzle stated precisely: *Why did the Congo Crisis become a Cold War flashpoint, and what does it tell us about the entanglement of the Cold War and decolonization?*

The context. The Congo was **not prepared** for independence. Belgium had ruled the Congo as a **personal** possession of King Leopold II (1885–1908) and then as a **colony** (1908–60). The colonial regime was **extractive** — it focused on the extraction of rubber, copper, and cobalt, and it **neglected** education, health, and political development. At independence, the Congo had only **30** university graduates and **no** experienced administrators.

The crisis. The crisis unfolded in a series of escalating steps:

- **June 30, 1960:** The Congo becomes independent. Patrice Lumumba becomes Prime Minister; Joseph Kasa-Vubu becomes President.
- **July 5:** The army mutinies against its Belgian officers. The mutiny spreads, and Belgian civilians are attacked.
- **July 11:** Moïse Tshombe, the leader of Katanga, declares the province's **independence**, with Belgian

support. Katanga is the **richest** province — it produces copper, cobalt, and uranium.

- **July 12:** Lumumba appeals to the UN for help. The UN Security Council authorizes a peacekeeping mission (ONUC) to restore order and **prevent** the secession.
- **July 14:** The UN mission arrives. But the mandate is **ambiguous** — is the UN supposed to **restore** the central government, or just **maintain** order?
- **August:** Lumumba, frustrated by the UN's **neutrality**, appeals to the Soviet Union for military assistance. The US, alarmed by the prospect of Soviet influence, **supports** the overthrow of Lumumba.
- **September 5:** President Kasa-Vubu dismisses Lumumba. Lumumba **contests** the dismissal, and the country has **two** governments.
- **September 14:** Colonel Joseph Mobutu, with US and Belgian support, seizes power in a **coup**. Lumumba is placed under **house arrest**.
- **January 17, 1961:** Lumumba is **assassinated** — with the involvement of Belgian and American intelligence.
- **1961–63:** The crisis continues — the UN **intervenes** in Katanga, and the secession is **defeated** in 1963.
- **1965:** Mobutu seizes power again, with US support, and establishes a **dictatorship** that lasts until 1997.

The entanglement of the Cold War and decolonization. The Congo Crisis is a **paradigmatic** case of the entanglement of the Cold War and decolonization:

- **The Cold War shaped decolonization.** The US and the USSR **competed** for influence in the Congo. The US supported the **central** government (and later Mobutu) to **prevent** Soviet influence; the USSR supported Lumumba (and later rebel movements) to **expand** its influence. The Cold War **constrained** the Congo's **choices** — the new state could not be **genuinely** non-aligned without **provoking** superpower intervention.
- **Decolonization shaped the Cold War.** The Congo became a **site** of superpower competition — a **proxy war** that **escalated** the Cold War and **shaped** the global balance of power. The crisis also **shaped** the UN — it established the **principles** of UN peacekeeping and **exposed** the **limits** of UN neutrality.

The African perspective. African scholars emphasize that the Congo Crisis was a **turning point** in African attitudes toward the Cold War:

- **The betrayal of Lumumba.** Lumumba was a **Pan-Africanist** and a **non-aligned** leader. His assassination — with the involvement of the US and Belgium — confirmed African suspicions that the superpowers would **not tolerate** a genuinely independent African leader.
- **The UN's failure.** The UN's intervention in the Congo was **contested** — the UN was supposed to be a **neutral** peacekeeping force, but it became **involved** in the internal conflict, and it failed to protect Lumumba. The crisis exposed the **limits** of UN peacekeeping and the **influence** of the superpowers on the UN.
- **The lesson for African states.** The Congo Crisis taught African states that **non-alignment** was **dangerous** — the superpowers would intervene to prevent it. This lesson shaped the OAU's **sovereignty** and **non-interference** principles — African states sought to **protect** themselves from superpower intervention by insisting on **absolute sovereignty**.

The Western perspective. Western scholars interpret the Congo Crisis as a **tragedy** — a **failure** of decolo-

nization and a **product** of Cold War competition. The Western perspective emphasizes:

- **The lack of preparation.** The Congo was **not prepared** for independence — Belgium had **neglected** education and political development, and the new state had **no** experienced administrators.
- **The Soviet threat.** The US intervened to **prevent** Soviet influence in the Congo — a **Soviet** presence in Central Africa would have **threatened** Western interests and ** destabilized** the region.
- **The limits of the UN.** The UN's peacekeeping mission was **constrained** by its **ambiguous** mandate and by the **competing** interests of the superpowers. The UN **could not** protect Lumumba, and it **could not** prevent the crisis from escalating.

The Chinese perspective. Chinese scholars interpret the Congo Crisis as an example of **imperialist** intervention — the US and Belgium **conspired** to assassinate Lumumba and to **install** a **puppet** regime (Mobutu) that served Western interests. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that the Congo Crisis was a **continuation** of colonialism — the former colonial powers and the US **colluded** to **prevent** the Congo from achieving **genuine** independence.

The Russian perspective. Russian scholars interpret the Congo Crisis as an example of **Western** aggression — the US and Belgium **intervened** to **prevent** the Congo from **choosing** a **socialist** path. The Russian perspective emphasizes that the Soviet Union **supported** Lumumba and other **anti-colonial** movements — it was a **champion** of the **oppressed** peoples of the world.

The UN perspective. The UN interprets the Congo Crisis as a **landmark** in the history of **peacekeeping** — it established the **principles** of UN peacekeeping (consent of the parties, impartiality, minimum use of force), and it **exposed** the **limits** of UN **neutrality** in the context of the Cold War. The UN's **failure** to protect Lumumba was a **tragedy** — it **highlighted** the **constraints** on UN peacekeeping and the **influence** of the superpowers on the UN.

Adjudication. Which perspective best explains the Congo Crisis?

- **The African perspective** best explains the **agency** of African actors — the ways in which Lumumba and other African leaders **sought** to pursue **non-alignment** and **Pan-Africanism**, and the ways in which the superpowers **intervened** to **prevent** them.
- **The Western perspective** best explains the **Cold War** dynamics — the US **feared** Soviet influence in the Congo, and it **intervened** to **prevent** it.
- **The Chinese and Russian perspectives** best explain the **structural** dimensions — the **continuities** between colonialism and neo-colonialism, and the **role** of the superpowers in **shaping** the post-colonial world.
- **The UN perspective** best explains the **institutional** dimensions — the **limits** of UN peacekeeping and the **influence** of the superpowers on the UN.

A complete explanation combines all five: the Congo Crisis was a **product** of the **entanglement** of the Cold War and decolonization. The Cold War **shaped** the crisis — the US and the USSR **competed** for influence, and they **intervened** to **prevent** the other side from gaining an advantage. Decolonization **shaped** the crisis — the Congo's **lack** of preparation, its **artificial** borders, and its **extractive** economy made it **vulnerable** to **intervention**. And African **agency** shaped the crisis — Lumumba's **commitment** to **non-alignment** and **Pan-Africanism provoked** the superpowers' **intervention**, and his **assassination** became a **symbol** of the **betrayal** of the post-colonial world.

2.8 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Your task: Analyze the following case using the apparatus above. Write your analysis before reading the model answer.

The case: The **Bandung Conference** (April 1955) brought together 29 Asian and African states — including India, China, Indonesia, Egypt, and Ghana (then the Gold Coast) — to discuss **anti-colonialism**, **non-alignment**, and **economic development**. The conference produced a **communiqué** affirming the principles of **sovereignty**, **non-interference**, **racial equality**, and **economic cooperation**. It was the first major gathering of post-colonial states, and it was a **landmark** in the construction of the **Third World**.

Your tasks:

1. State the puzzle precisely: why did the Bandung Conference **succeed** in bringing together 29 states with **different** ideologies, **different** interests, and **different** relationships with the superpowers?
2. Apply the **Cold War** framework: how did the Cold War **shape** the Bandung Conference? Did the superpowers **support** or **oppose** it?
3. Apply the **decolonization** framework: how did the Bandung Conference **shape** decolonization? Did it **accelerate** or **slow** the process?
4. Apply the **African** perspective: how did African states **participate** in Bandung, and what did they **gain** from it?
5. Apply the **Chinese** perspective: how did China **participate** in Bandung, and what did it **gain** from it?
6. Write a 300-word adjudication: was the Bandung Conference a **turning point** in the Cold War, a **landmark** in decolonization, or a **failure** — or all three?

Model answer (compare after writing your own):

Puzzle: Why did the Bandung Conference succeed in bringing together 29 states with different ideologies, interests, and relationships with the superpowers?

The Cold War framework: The Cold War **shaped** the Bandung Conference in two ways:

- **It created the conditions for non-alignment.** The superpowers' competition for influence in the decolonizing world **created** an **incentive** for the new states to **band together** — a **collective** voice would give them **more** leverage than individual **alignment** with one side or the other.
- **It created the conditions for solidarity.** The superpowers' **interventions** in the decolonizing world — the US's support for **colonial** powers (Britain, France) and the USSR's support for **communist** movements — **created** a **shared** sense of grievance among the new states. The Bandung Conference was a **response** to the superpowers' **failure** to **respect** the **sovereignty** of the new states.

The decolonization framework: The Bandung Conference **shaped** decolonization in several ways:

- **It legitimized anti-colonialism.** The conference's **communiqué** affirmed the principle of **self-determination** and **condemned** colonialism. This **legitimized** the anti-colonial struggles that were **ongoing** in Africa and Asia.
- **It created a** network** of post-colonial states.** The conference **established contacts** between the new states, which would later **evolve** into the **Non-Aligned Movement** (1961). This **network** was a **resource** for the new states — it gave them **collective** bargaining power and a **shared** identity.
- **It created a** model** for **South–South** cooperation.** The conference's **emphasis** on **economic** co-

operation and **cultural** exchange was a **model** for later **South–South** initiatives — the **G-77** (1964), the **NIEO** (1974), and the **BRICS** (2009).

The African perspective: African states **participated** in Bandung — Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana (then the Gold Coast), Liberia, Libya, and Sudan were among the **29** participants. They **gained** several things:

- **A platform** for anti-colonial advocacy — the conference **condemned** colonialism and **supported** the anti-colonial struggles in Africa.
- **A network** of allies — the African states **established** contacts with Asian states, which would later **support** the anti-colonial struggles in Africa.
- **A model** for **Pan-Africanism** — the conference **demonstrated** that **solidarity** across **different** regions and **ideologies** was **possible**, which **inspired** the **Pan-African** movement.

The Chinese perspective: China **participated** in Bandung — Zhou Enlai led the Chinese delegation, and he played a **key** role in **shaping** the conference's **principles**. China **gained** several things:

- **Legitimacy** — the conference **recognized** China as a **major** Asian power, which **enhanced** its **international** standing.
- **A platform** for **anti-imperialist** advocacy — Zhou Enlai **used** the conference to **criticize** the US and to **promote** China's **vision** of a **non-aligned** Asia.
- **A network** of allies — China **established** contacts with **new** states, which would later **support** China's **diplomatic** initiatives.

Adjudication: The Bandung Conference was **all three** — a turning point in the Cold War, a landmark in decolonization, and a failure:

- **A turning point in the Cold War:** The conference **demonstrated** that the **new** states could **act** collectively and **independently** of the superpowers. It **challenged** the **bipolar** narrative — the idea that the world was **divided** into two **blocs**. It **created** a **third** force — the **Third World** — that would **shape** the Cold War for decades.
- **A landmark in decolonization:** The conference **legitimized** anti-colonialism and **created** a **network** of post-colonial states. It **accelerated** the **decolonization** of Africa — the **Year of Africa** (1960) was **partly** a **result** of the **momentum** generated by Bandung.
- **A failure:** The conference **did not prevent** the superpowers from **intervening** in the decolonizing world. The **Congo Crisis** (1960–65), the **Vietnam War** (1955–75), and the **Angolan Civil War** (1975–2002) **demonstrated** that the **new** states were **still vulnerable** to superpower **pressure**. The **Non-Aligned Movement failed** to **prevent** its members from **aligning** with the superpowers — India **aligned** with the USSR, China **split** with the USSR, and many African states **aligned** with the US.

A complete explanation combines all three: the Bandung Conference was a **turning point** — it **created** the **Third World** as a **political** force and **shaped** the Cold War. But it was also a **failure** — it **did not prevent** the superpowers from **intervening** in the decolonizing world, and it **did not create** a **genuine** third force. The **legacy** of Bandung is **ambivalent** — it **inspired** anti-colonial movements, but it **did not fundamentally change** the **structure** of the international system.

2.9 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Produce a one-page analytical memo (500–600 words) on the following case, using the four headings below.

Case: The **Non-Aligned Movement** (NAM) — founded in Belgrade in 1961 with 25 members, including India, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, and Yugoslavia. The NAM's principles were **non-alignment**, **anti-colonialism**, **peaceful coexistence**, and **economic development**. The NAM was a **major** expression of **Third World** agency — it **challenged** the bipolar narrative and **created** a **collective** voice for the new states.

Memo headings:

1. **Mechanism:** How did the NAM function as a **collective** voice for the Third World? What was the **mechanism** through which it **shaped** the Cold War?
2. **The constitutive outside:** How did the NAM **constitute** the **Third World** as a **political** category? What did it **include** and what did it **exclude**?
3. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the NAM? (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — one paragraph each or a table.)
4. **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show that the NAM was **not** a **significant** force in the Cold War? What would show that it **was**?

Self-check: Does your memo distinguish the **stated goals** of the NAM (non-alignment, anti-colonialism) from its **actual** impact? Does it identify the **constraints** on the NAM's effectiveness?

2.10 HINGE QUESTION

A scholar argues: "The Cold War was not primarily a European conflict. It was a global conflict that was fought in and over the decolonizing world. The European theater was important, but it was not the main event." Which claim does this argument support?

- A) The Cold War was a European conflict
- B) The Cold War was a global conflict
- C) The Cold War was a conflict between the US and the USSR
- D) The Cold War was a conflict between capitalism and socialism

Answer: B. The argument claims that the Cold War was a **global** conflict — it was fought in and over the **decolonizing world**, not just in Europe. The European theater was important, but it was not the main event.

If you answered A: The argument claims the **opposite** — that the Cold War was **not** primarily a European conflict. **If you answered C:** The argument **does not** deny that the Cold War was a conflict between the US and the USSR; it claims that the **main** theater of the conflict was the **decolonizing world**, not Europe. **If you answered D:** The argument **does not** focus on the **ideological** dimension of the Cold War; it focuses on the **geographical** dimension — the **decolonizing world** was the **main** theater of the conflict.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB (30–45 minutes)

Purpose: Ground the lesson's concepts in empirical data on the Cold War and decolonization.

Task: Using the summary data below, analyze the relationship between the Cold War and decolonization.

Table 1: Decolonization timeline, 1945–1975

Year	Number of newly independent states	Key events
1947	2 (India, Pakistan)	Partition of India
1957	1 (Ghana)	First sub-Saharan African colony to gain independence
1960	17 (the "Year of Africa")	Most of French West Africa and Equatorial Africa; the Congo; Somalia; Madagascar
1962	4 (Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Algeria)	Algerian independence after a brutal war
1964	3 (Malawi, Zambia, Malta)	
1965	1 (The Gambia)	
1975	5 (Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Comoros)	Portuguese colonies after the Carnation Revolution

Table 2: Superpower interventions in the decolonizing world, 1945–1991 (illustrative)

Country	Year	Intervening power	Outcome
Iran	1953	US (CIA)	Overthrow of Mossadegh; installation of the Shah
Guatemala	1954	US (CIA)	Overthrow of Arbenz
Congo	1960–61	US, Belgium	Assassination of Lumumba; installation of Mobutu
Vietnam	1955–75	US	Defeat of the US; unification of Vietnam
Angola	1975–2002	USSR, Cuba, US, South Africa	Proxy war; 500,000 deaths
Afghanistan	1979–89	USSR	Soviet defeat; rise of the Taliban
Chile	1973	US (CIA)	Overthrow of Allende; installation of Pinochet

Table 3: UN membership, 1945–1975

Year	Number of member states	African member states	Asian member states
1945	51	4	9
1960	99	26	22
1970	127	42	30
1975	144	46	35

Analysis questions:

1. **Timing:** What does the decolonization data suggest about the **timing** of decolonization? When did it accelerate, and why?
2. **Interventions:** What does the intervention data suggest about the **pattern** of superpower intervention? Which countries were targeted, and why? What does this tell us about the **entanglement** of the Cold War and decolonization?
3. **UN membership:** What does the UN membership data suggest about the **transformation** of the international system? How did the **composition** of the UN change, and what was the **consequence**?
4. **Perspective:** How would each of the five perspectives interpret the data? (African: agency and neo-colonialism; Chinese: third force; Russian: anti-colonialism; Western: containment and benevolence; UN: decolonization and peacekeeping.)
5. **Limitation:** What does the data **not** tell you? (Hint: it does not capture the **experience** of colonization or decolonization; it does not measure the **legacies** of the Cold War; and it does not distinguish between **formal** and **informal** intervention.)

Rule: Complete the data lab before the independent memo.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Task: Draw the following by hand.

Visual 1: The bipolar system. Draw two blocs: NATO (US and allies) and the Warsaw Pact (USSR and allies). Draw arrows showing the **competition** for influence in the **decolonizing world**. Label the **Non-Aligned Movement** as a **third** force.

Visual 2: The entanglement of the Cold War and decolonization. Draw a two-way arrow: "Cold War → shapes decolonization" (superpower intervention, competition for influence) and "Decolonization → shapes the Cold War" (new states, changed UN, new sites of competition). Give one example for each direction.

Visual 3: The five perspectives on the Cold War and decolonization. Draw a five-column table (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) with rows: "Stance toward the Cold War," "Stance toward decolonization," "Key contribution," "Key occlusion."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Set up your notes with the following cue column:

Cue column	Notes
What was the Cold War?	Bipolar contest between the US and the USSR (1947–1991)
What was the structural account?	Bipolarity; stability through MAD; balance of power
What was the global account?	Contest between two models of modernity; fought in the decolonizing world
What was decolonization?	The independence of more than 80 colonies, 1945–1975
What were the causes of decolonization?	Weakening of colonial powers; nationalist movements; Cold War; international institutions; costs of empire
What was the Non-Aligned Movement?	A collective voice for the Third World; founded in Belgrade (1961)
What was the Bandung Conference?	29 Asian and African states; anti-colonialism, non-alignment, economic development
What was the Congo Crisis?	1960–65; Lumumba's assassination; UN intervention; superpower competition
What was the Suez Crisis?	1956; Britain, France, and Israel invade Egypt; US and USSR force withdrawal
How do the five perspectives interpret the Cold War and decolonization?	African: agency + neo-colonialism; Chinese: third force; Russian: anti-colonialism; Western: containment + benevolence; UN: decolonization + peacekeeping
Source log	Lesson text, Sections 2.2–2.6; Westad (2005); Gaddis (1987); LaFeber (1993); Gleijeses (2002); Nkrumah (1965); Nyerere (1967); Cabral (1979); Fanon (1961); Schmidt (2013); the Truman Doctrine; Kennan's Long Telegram; the Bandung Communiqué; the OAU Charter; the Belgrade Declaration
Summary	3–5 sentences synthesizing the lesson

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1: Explain the relationship between the Cold War and decolonization to a smart non-specialist in 200–250 words, without using jargon. If you must use "bipolarity," "non-alignment," or "neo-colonialism," define them in plain language.

Step 2: Mark every point where you hesitated or used a term you could not define.

Step 3: Reread only the gaps. Rewrite.

Step 4: Produce one analogy for the Cold War and decolonization. Then state where the analogy breaks down.

(Example: "The Cold War and decolonization were like two games being played on the same chessboard — the superpowers were playing a game of global influence, while the new states were playing a game of independence and development. The two games interacted: the superpowers' moves shaped the new states' options, and the new states' moves shaped the superpowers' strategies." Where it breaks down: unlike chess, the "pieces" had their own agency — the new states were not pawns, but players in their own right.)

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Produce 12–15 cards. Use the following types:

Type	Example
Definition	What was the Non-Aligned Movement?
Mechanism	How did the Cold War shape decolonization?
Application	A newly independent state accepts aid from both the US and the USSR. Which strategy does this illustrate?
Comparison	How did the Bandung Conference and the Belgrade Conference differ?
Source	What did Westad argue about the Cold War?
Debate	What is the strongest objection to the claim that the Cold War was primarily a European conflict?
Reconstruction	How would an African scholar interpret the Congo Crisis?
Occlusion	What does the Western narrative of the Cold War fail to see about Africa?
Adjudication	Which perspective best explains the Congo Crisis, and what does it miss?
Visual	Label the entanglement of the Cold War and decolonization on a diagram.

Tag each card: `L12`, `Cold War`, `decolonization`, `non-alignment`, `Africa`, `perspective`, `difficulty`.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit

Rate confidence (0–100%) before checking:

Objective	Confidence
Reconstruct the Cold War as a bipolar system and a contest of models	
Analyze decolonization as a transformation of the international system	
Explain the agency of the decolonizing states	
Reconstruct the entanglement of the Cold War and decolonization	
Reconstruct the five perspectives on the Cold War and decolonization	

After exercises, rate accuracy. Calculate the gap.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. What did I misunderstand about the relationship between the Cold War and decolonization?
2. Which perspective was easiest to reconstruct? Which was hardest? What does that suggest about my default analytical style?
3. What will I do differently in Lesson 13?

7.3 Error log

Date	Lesson	Error type	Correct understanding	Card created?
	L12			

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET (Module 2)

Add this row to your Module 2 cheatsheet:

Column	Content
Core concepts	Bipolarity; superpower; containment; the Truman Doctrine; the Marshall Plan; NATO; the Warsaw Pact; MAD; extended deterrence; proxy war; the domino theory; rollback; peaceful coexistence; the Non-Aligned Movement; the Bandung Conference; Afro-Asian solidarity; Pan-Africanism; the OAU; neo-colonialism; Ujamaa; the Frontline States; the Congo Crisis; the Suez Crisis; the Cuban Missile Crisis; détente; the Second Cold War

Column	Content
Key mechanisms	Bipolarity → stability through MAD; competition for influence → intervention in the decolonizing world; non-alignment → collective voice → leverage; decolonization → changed UN → new agenda; Cold War → shaped decolonization → shaped the Cold War
Theories and authors	Westad (2005); Gaddis (1987); LaFeber (1993); Gleijeses (2002); Nkrumah (1965); Nyerere (1967); Cabral (1979); Fanon (1961); Schmidt (2013); the Truman Doctrine; Kennan's Long Telegram; the Bandung Communiqué; the OAU Charter; the Belgrade Declaration
Cases and evidence	Decolonization (1945–1975); Bandung (1955); Suez (1956); Congo Crisis (1960–65); Vietnam (1955–75); Angola (1975–2002); UN membership data; superpower interventions
Debates	Was the Cold War primarily European or global? Did the superpowers control the decolonizing world, or did the decolonizing world shape the superpowers? Was non-alignment a success or a failure?
Falsifiers	What evidence would show that the Cold War was **not** a global conflict? What would show that the decolonizing states were **not** agents?
Cross-links	L11 (World Wars and the League); L13 (post-Cold War liberal order); L21 (nuclear deterrence); L23 (asymmetric warfare); L27 (African state formation); L28 (Pan-Africanism); L31 (great-power competition in Africa); L35 (post-Soviet ontology); L47 (US–China rivalry); L48 (Indo-Pacific)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Format
R1	Today	Retrieval warm-up + card creation
R2	2–3 days	Cue-column recall + hinge variant
R3	1 week	Mixed quiz with L1–L12 cards

Review	Timing	Format
R4	3–4 weeks	Interleaved problem combining L12 with L13 (post-Cold War) and L21 (nuclear deterrence)
R5	End of Module 2	Cheatsheet reconstruction from memory

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ Retrieval warm-up completed from memory
- ☐ Five learning objectives read and understood
- ☐ Five key ideas studied with mechanisms and scope conditions
- ☐ Perspective comparison matrix filled from memory, then checked
- ☐ Worked example (Congo Crisis) studied and self-explained
- ☐ Problem pair (Bandung Conference) attempted and compared
- ☐ Independent memo produced (500–600 words)
- ☐ Hinge question answered correctly (or reteaching completed)
- ☐ Data lab completed before independent memo
- ☐ Three dual-coded visuals drawn
- ☐ Cornell notes with cue column, source log, and summary
- ☐ Feynman explanation written, gaps identified, rewritten
- ☐ 12–15 flashcards created with tags
- ☐ Confidence audit and error-log entry
- ☐ Cheatsheet entry added
- ☐ R2 review scheduled

FURTHER READING (Optional — for deepening, not required)

- **On the Cold War:** Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (2005); John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace* (1987); Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War* (1993); Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power* (1992); George Kennan, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" (1947); the Truman Doctrine (1947).
- **On decolonization:** Dietmar Rothermund, *The Routledge Companion to Decolonization* (2006); Prasenjit Duara (ed.), *Decolonization* (2004); Bill Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa* (1998); Frederick Cooper, *Africa Since 1940* (2002).
- **On the Non-Aligned Movement and Bandung:** the Bandung Communiqué (1955); the Belgrade Declaration (1961); Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations* (2007); Christopher Lee (ed.), *Making a World After Empire* (2010).
- **On African agency and neo-colonialism:** Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965); Julius Nyerere, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (1968); Amílcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle* (1979); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961); the OAU Charter (1963).

- **On the Congo Crisis:** Ludo De Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba* (2001); Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila* (2002); Madeleine Kalb, *The Congo Cables* (1982).
- **On the Suez Crisis:** Keith Kyle, *Suez* (1991); William Roger Louis and Roger Owen (eds.), *Suez 1956* (1989).
- **On the Chinese perspective:** Zhou Enlai's speeches at Bandung (1955); Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally* (2013); Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (2001).
- **On the Russian perspective:** Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War* (1996); the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact (1939); the Warsaw Pact (1955).
- **On the UN perspective:** the UN Charter; the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples; UN peacekeeping documents on the Congo (ONUC); the *Pact for the Future* (2024).

End of Lesson 12. Say **"Next"** when you are ready for Lesson 13 (The Post-Cold War Liberal Order).

14. The Post-Cold War Liberal Order

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 13: The Post-Cold War Liberal Order
Module	Module 2: Historical Architecture of International Order
Prerequisites	L5 (realism), L6 (institutionalism), L11 (interwar), L12 (Cold War)
Interleaved links	Forward to L14 (transition), L18 (interdependence), L49 (revisionism), L47 (US-China)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, case analysis, perspective reconstruction, flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (with Create elements)
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The post-Cold War liberal order emerged from a historically unusual conjunction: the disappearance of a peer competitor, the survival of Western institutional frameworks, and an ideological narrative that treated liberal democracy and market capitalism as the terminal form of political-economic organization. Its central puzzle is not why it arose but why its apparent triumph contained the mechanisms of its own contestation. The order combined material unipolarity with normative universalism; it expanded institutions designed for a narrower membership into global instruments; and it authorized force in the name of human protection while simultaneously asserting sovereign equality. The student must learn to see these tensions as structural rather than incidental, because they reappear in later debates about intervention, conditionality, great-power competition, and the legitimacy of international law.

The lesson's theoretical lineage runs through realism, liberal institutionalism, constructivism, and critical political economy. Krauthammer's unipolar moment named the material asymmetry of the early 1990s; Fukuyama's end of history supplied ideological closure; Ikenberry argued that liberal hegemony could be made durable through institutions; Wheeler and others traced the normative evolution from sovereignty to responsibility; Kagan captured the fracture between American power and European legalism. The order's legitimacy depended on a double claim: that power was exercised through rules, and that rules were backed by power. When the 2003 Iraq invasion severed that coupling, the vocabulary of liberation, democracy, and security became available to critics as evidence of imperial practice rather than universal emancipation.

African scholarship and experience are not a regional illustration of this story but a vantage that redefines it. From Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment through Nkrumah's neo-colonialism, Fanon's critique of liberation's betrayal, Mamdani's work on colonial citizenship, and Grovogui's critique of international legal hierarchy, the post-Cold War order appears less as a peace project than as a reconfiguration of external authority over African political life. Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and Libya show that humanitarian intervention could coincide with strategic neglect, selective protection, and regime change. The African perspective asks whose suffering counts, who authorizes force, and whether conditionality and peacebuilding reproduce dependency under new institutional forms.

Curriculum placement matters. This lesson follows L5 realism, L6 institutionalism, L11 interwar collapse, and L12 Cold War bipolarity. It prepares L14 on transition, L18 on interdependence, L47 on US-China competition, and L49 on revisionism. The student should connect the institutional expansion of the 1990s to later contestation: WTO accession, NATO enlargement, and conditionality created stakeholders but also grievances. The lesson also trains methodological discipline: distinguishing description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and testing each against evidence rather than normative preference. Without that discipline, the post-Cold War order is easily reduced either to a success story of democratization and growth or to a morality tale of Western hubris.

By mastering this lesson, the student will be able to reconstruct five perspectives on the post-Cold War order; apply individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels of analysis; evaluate the Kosovo and Iraq cases; interpret data on UNSC authorizations, WTO membership, democratic transitions, and NATO expansion; and identify the scope conditions under which liberal institutionalism, humanitarian intervention, and economic conditionality succeed or fail. The student will also be able to state the strongest counterargument to each perspective and adjudicate among them without collapsing into either triumphalism or cynicism. The goal is not to pick a camp but to specify mechanisms, boundary conditions, and falsifiers.

The lesson's central methodological commitment is that no perspective is merely an error to be corrected. Western liberal institutionalism captured real gains in conflict reduction and institutional density; Chinese and Russian critiques captured real asymmetries in rule-making; UN legalism captured real gaps between Charter principles and enforcement; African skepticism captured real costs of externally designed order. The task is to ask what each perspective explains well, what it occludes, and what evidence would change the conclusion. That is the difference between commentary and analysis, and it is the standard this lesson requires.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up (5-6 questions from earlier lessons)

1. From L5 realism: How does offensive realism explain security competition under anarchy, and what

does it predict about a unipolar power's behavior?
2. From L6 institutionalism: What is the shadow of the future in iterated cooperation, and how do institutions reduce transaction costs?
3. From L11 interwar history: How did economic nationalism, appeasement, and the failure of collective security undermine the interwar order?
4. From L12 Cold War history: What was the logic of mutually assured destruction, and how did bipolarity shape proxy conflicts in Africa and Asia?
5. From L5 and L6 together: Under what conditions do institutions reflect underlying power rather than independently constrain it?
6. From L12: How did superpower rivalry create both opportunities and dangers for postcolonial states seeking sovereignty and development?

1.2 Orientation questions (4)

1. Was the post-Cold War order unipolar in material power but multilateral in legitimacy, and what happens when those two dimensions diverge?
2. Does humanitarian intervention require UN Security Council authorization to be lawful, or can legitimacy be derived from other sources such as regional organizations or moral urgency?
3. How did economic liberalization through the WTO and conditionality interact with political liberalization through elections, constitutional reform, and democratization?
4. At what point did the war on terror transform the liberal order from a rules-based system into one organized around exceptions, preemption, and unilateral enforcement?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach (10-12 terms with provisional definitions)

- **Unipolar moment**: A short period after the Cold War in which one state possessed unmatched military, economic, and ideological power, creating both opportunity and temptation for unilateral action.
- **End of history thesis**: The argument that liberal democracy and market capitalism represent the final, universally valid form of human political-economic organization, with major ideological alternatives exhausted.
- **Liberal peace**: The claim that liberal democracies are less likely to fight one another and that spreading liberal institutions can reduce conflict, though its scope conditions and causal mechanisms remain contested.
- **Responsibility to Protect (R2P)**: The norm that sovereignty entails a responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocities, and that the international community may act when a state manifestly fails to do so.
- **Humanitarian intervention**: The use of military force across borders primarily to stop or prevent severe human suffering, raising legal, moral, and strategic questions about authorization and motive.
- **Washington Consensus**: A set of market-oriented policy prescriptions, including fiscal discipline, privatization, trade liberalization, and deregulation, promoted by Western institutions in the 1990s.
- **Conditionality**: The practice of attaching policy requirements to loans, aid, or market access, often shaping domestic economic and political choices in recipient states.
- **Hegemonic stability**: The theory that an open international economic order requires a dominant power willing and able to provide public goods, enforce rules, and absorb adjustment costs.
- **Coalition of the willing**: An ad hoc grouping of states supporting a military action without universal

institutional authorization, often signaling both diplomatic flexibility and legal controversy.
- **War on terror**: The post-2001 framework treating terrorism as a global, open-ended threat justifying military, legal, and intelligence measures beyond traditional interstate war.
- **Sovereignty as responsibility**: The reinterpretation of sovereignty from absolute noninterference to a conditional status tied to a state's protection of its population and compliance with international norms.
- **Liberal institutionalism**: The theory that international institutions reduce uncertainty, lower transaction costs, facilitate reciprocity, and can constrain even powerful states under specified conditions.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. **Analyze** the causal mechanisms by which the post-Cold War concentration of United States material power was translated into institutional and normative primacy, distinguishing hegemonic stability, liberal institutional lock-in, ideological framing, and the domestic political coalitions that sustained each mechanism across the 1990s and 2000s, including how each mechanism generated distinct observable implications for alliance behavior and institutional design.
2. **Evaluate** the scope conditions under which unipolarity produced liberal order rather than backlash, using comparative evidence from NATO expansion, WTO accession negotiations, humanitarian interventions, and regional responses in Africa, Eurasia, and the Middle East, and specifying which conditions were necessary rather than merely contributory.
3. **Explain** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives differently diagnose the legitimacy, stability, and justice of United States primacy, and identify what each perspective renders visible or invisible about coercion, sovereignty, historical inequality, and the distribution of decision-making authority in international institutions.
4. **Compare** Krauthammer's unipolar moment with Fukuyama's end-of-history thesis as competing accounts of the same structural shift, specifying their different causal mechanisms, temporal horizons, normative premises, and empirical falsifiers, and assessing which better explains the fractures visible by 2003.
5. **Construct** an evidence-based adjudication of whether a given post-1991 intervention or institution-building project strengthened or fractured the liberal order, using individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels of analysis, explicit perspective reconstruction, and a stated standard of evidence for claims about order and disorder.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The "Unipolar Moment" and the Liberal Presumption of Permanent Western Primacy

Bolded Causal Claim: The post-Cold War distribution of material power created a "unipolar moment" in which the United States possessed unmatched military, economic, and ideological capacity; liberal order-builders treated this asymmetry not as a temporary and contingent advantage but as a durable platform for universalizing Western institutions and norms, thereby presuming permanent Western primacy rather than merely managing a transitional imbalance of power.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with a structural shock: the collapse of the Soviet Union removed the

United States' only peer competitor and left Washington with global military reach, unmatched economic weight, technological leadership, and an existing alliance network. Hegemonic-stability theory supplies one causal pathway: a dominant power can reduce uncertainty, provide security, keep markets open, and enforce rules, thereby lowering transaction costs for other states and making cooperation more likely than under fragmented power. A second pathway is institutional lock-in. The United States did not merely possess power; it possessed institutions—NATO, the Bretton Woods organizations, the UN Security Council veto structure, and later the WTO—through which its preferences could be embedded in rules, procedures, and sunk costs. Expansion of these institutions after 1991 extended liberal norms geographically and functionally, while also raising the costs of exit for new members. A third pathway is ideological: the Soviet collapse was interpreted not simply as a geopolitical defeat but as a vindication of liberal democracy and market capitalism. This framing encouraged the belief that history had a directional telos and that non-liberal alternatives were exhausted or illegitimate. A fourth pathway is domestic and bureaucratic. A bipartisan foreign-policy elite, military and financial institutions, and a vocabulary of indispensable leadership created incentives to interpret unipolarity as a responsibility rather than a windfall. Early successes—the 1991 Gulf War, the Dayton settlement, NATO's survival—reinforced confidence and reduced incentives to plan for constraint. The crucial mechanism, however, is not power alone but the *presumption* attached to it: the conversion of a contingent asymmetry into an assumption that Western primacy was natural, legitimate, and permanent. That presumption shaped threat assessment, institutional design, and the treatment of dissenting states as transitional or deviant rather than as enduring features of world politics.

Scope Conditions: The claim that unipolarity generated durable liberal primacy holds only under several demanding conditions. First, the dominant state must be willing and able to bear the fiscal, military, and political costs of leadership; if domestic coalitions fragment or retrenchment pressures rise, the order loses its enforcement core. Second, no effective balancing coalition must form; if secondary powers coordinate through alliances, institutions, or economic alternatives, unipolarity becomes contested rather than accepted. Third, the order must be perceived as legitimate by enough states that compliance is not merely coerced; legitimacy depends on procedural fairness, reciprocity, and the avoidance of overt double standards. Fourth, economic openness must produce visible benefits for enough participants that exit appears irrational; if gains are concentrated or conditionality is experienced as domination, openness becomes a source of resentment. Fifth, institutions must adapt to rising powers; rigid hierarchies that freeze status can convert institutional membership into grievance. Sixth, regional actors must not mobilize counter-hegemonic identities or organizations that redefine security outside Western frameworks. Seventh, the dominant state must avoid catastrophic overextension; repeated military failures or legal exceptions can transform primacy from stabilizer into provocation. Where these conditions fail, unipolarity may still exist materially while liberal primacy erodes normatively.

Observable Implications: If the unipolar presumption is operating, one should observe NATO expansion rather than contraction, WTO universalization, conditionality in development finance, democracy-promotion programs, US-led or US-authorized interventions, dollar centrality, and the diffusion of liberal legal norms. One should also observe bandwagoning by secondary powers, institutional socialization, and the treatment of non-liberal regimes as transitional problems. If the presumption is weakening, one should observe counter-institutionalization, hedging strategies, regional security architectures, increased use of veto power, sanctions evasion, and the rhetorical elevation of sovereignty, multipolarity, and civilizational diversity. Empirical markers include defense-spending ratios, alliance membership, voting cohesion in the UN General Assembly, patterns of institutional creation, and the frequency with which major powers bypass or challenge US-led frameworks. The strongest falsifiers of the "permanent primacy" claim are sustained balancing, insti-

tutional exit, failed interventions that damage legitimacy, relative economic decline, and domestic political movements that reject global leadership.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): For many African thinkers, the "unipolar moment" did not inaugurate a new international order so much as reveal the durability of an older hierarchy in which Western powers retained decisive authority over African sovereignty, development, and security. The collapse of the Soviet Union removed one external patron and narrowed diplomatic space for non-alignment, while structural adjustment, debt conditionality, and security partnerships channeled many African states into liberal economic and political templates. From this vantage, "permanent Western primacy" is not merely a distribution of power; it is a historically sedimented structure of racialized authority, epistemic dependence, and institutionalized inequality. Rodney and Nkrumah framed underdevelopment as a product of global extraction; Fanon and Cabral emphasized that political independence without economic and cultural emancipation leaves sovereignty hollow; Mamdani has analyzed how colonial legal categories continue to shape postcolonial governance; Mbembe has theorized the externalization and racialization of violence; Grovogui has argued that international law can encode Western civilizational hierarchies; Oyěwùmí has challenged the gendered and epistemic assumptions embedded in imported categories. African perspectives therefore ask not only whether unipolarity was stable, but for whom it was stable: whose security was protected, whose markets were opened, whose conflicts were deemed "humanitarian," and whose agency was recognized. They also highlight African practices that complicate the primacy narrative—regional organizations, peacekeeping contributions, non-aligned diplomacy, and demands for reparative justice. Aning and Danso have emphasized African agency in security governance, while Tamale's feminist scholarship insists that order must be judged by whose bodies are secured. The African vantage reveals that liberal order-building often mistook compliance for consent and capacity-building for subordination, and that the "unipolar moment" was experienced less as universal progress than as a narrowing of autonomous developmental paths.

Chinese: China's perspective treats unipolarity less as a benign public good than as hegemony to be managed, hedged against, and gradually corrected. It emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and formal equality, viewing US primacy as a threat to strategic autonomy and as a permissive condition for interventions that bypass or weaken multilateral authorization. At the same time, China benefited from the trade openness and relative stability associated with US-led order, so its position is not simply rejection but selective engagement: participate in institutions, build alternatives where necessary, and insist on multipolarity. Chinese discourse often frames the post-Cold War order as unjustly dominated by one power and its allies, while presenting China's rise as a restoration of balance rather than a bid for replacement hegemony. This perspective illuminates the coercive and exclusionary dimensions of primacy, but it can occlude China's own hierarchical practices in regional economic and security relationships.

Russian: Russia's perspective is shaped by the experience of status loss, territorial contraction, and perceived encirclement after 1991. Unipolarity is interpreted not as stability but as humiliation and vulnerability: NATO expansion, interventions in the Balkans, and Western support for political change in post-Soviet space are read as evidence that the United States sought to lock in permanent advantage. Russian leaders and intellectuals have often demanded recognition as a great power, defended spheres of influence, and invoked sovereignty to resist Western normative projects. This perspective explains why institutional expansion can be experienced as threat even when framed as integration, but it can occlude Russia's own coercive actions and its tendency to conflate status recognition with veto power over neighbors' choices.

Western: The Western perspective contains both a liberal-institutionalist defense and a growing self-critique.

Liberal institutionalists argue that US primacy supplied public goods, stabilized markets, expanded democracy, and created unprecedented opportunities for cooperation; institutions were designed to bind even the hegemon and to make cooperation durable. Realists within the West warn that primacy invites overextension, balancing, and imperial overstretch, while constructivists note that norms are contested and that "universal" values often reflect particular cultural and historical experiences. The Western self-critique, sharpened by Iraq and other failures, acknowledges hubris, double standards, and the gap between proclaimed values and practiced exceptions. This perspective provides the most developed account of institutional design and democratic peace, but it often underestimates how primacy looks from the receiving end of intervention or conditionality.

UN: The UN perspective centers on the tension between Charter principles—sovereign equality, collective security, peaceful settlement of disputes—and the reality of concentrated power. The Security Council's structure gives permanent members disproportionate authority, while unipolarity can make multilateral authorization appear either indispensable or inconvenient depending on the hegemon's preferences. From this vantage, the "unipolar moment" is not simply a fact of power but a stress test for international law: when the most powerful state can act without authorization, the gap between legal principle and enforcement becomes visible. The UN perspective values procedural legitimacy, broad participation, and the restraining function of law, but it can struggle to explain how order is maintained when great-power consensus collapses.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Fukuyama's "End of History" Thesis as Ideological Framing

Bolded Causal Claim: Fukuyama's "end of history" argument did not predict the disappearance of events, wars, or political conflict; it proposed that liberal democracy had become the only fully articulated and globally credible ideological horizon after the Cold War, thereby converting a contingent Western victory into a presumed direction of historical development.

Mechanism: The thesis works through a Hegelian-Kojèvian mechanism: history is driven by the struggle for recognition, and the modern liberal state—combining market economies, constitutional rights, and democratic accountability—appears to resolve that struggle by granting universal recognition without requiring a single master. Fukuyama's 1989 essay and 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, argued that the collapse of Soviet communism removed the last systemic alternative to liberal democracy, leaving nationalism, religion, and authoritarianism as residual forces rather than coherent rival ideologies. The crucial causal force, however, was not merely Fukuyama's description but the thesis's ideological function: once liberal democracy was framed as the endpoint of ideological evolution, policy could be organized around convergence rather than accommodation. Democracy promotion, conditionality, enlargement, and "transition assistance" became not just preferences but expressions of historical necessity. The mechanism therefore runs from intellectual framing to policy presumption: if the endpoint is already known, then deviations appear temporary, pathological, or externally imposed, and the task of international order becomes accelerating convergence rather than managing pluralism. This is why the thesis mattered even for actors who never read Fukuyama; it supplied a vocabulary in which Western institutions could be treated as the default destination of modernization.

Scope Conditions: The thesis is strongest where three conditions hold: a credible systemic rival has collapsed; domestic institutions can plausibly be reformed toward liberal constitutionalism; and external anchors—such as the European Union, NATO, or international financial institutions—can lock in reforms. It is weakest where modernization does not produce liberal politics, where nationalism or religious identity

remains politically generative, where state capacity is fragmented, or where authoritarian regimes can deliver growth and security without democratic legitimation. Its scope is also historically bounded: it assumes the post-1989 moment is not merely a power shift but an ideological terminus, an assumption that becomes less persuasive once alternative models of capitalism and governance gain confidence.

Observable Implications: If the thesis operates as ideological framing, one should observe democracy promotion becoming a central foreign-policy objective; enlargement of Western institutions into former communist space; conditionality attached to aid, trade, and membership; and a tendency to interpret authoritarian resilience as transitional rather than durable. One should also observe overconfidence in regime change and underestimation of illiberal modernization, especially where economic growth occurs without liberalization. The thesis's predictive weakness is visible in the persistence and, in some cases, strengthening of authoritarian and hybrid regimes, as well as in the reassertion of civilizational, religious, and nationalist claims that Fukuyama treated as historically exhausted.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: From an African vantage point, the "end of history" often appears as a Eurocentric teleology that converts Western institutional forms into the measure of political maturity. African scholarship and political thought have long emphasized that colonialism, structural adjustment, and externally imposed models constrained self-determination; treating liberal democracy as history's endpoint risks delegitimizing non-liberal experiments in solidarity, developmental states, or culturally grounded accountability. The thesis can obscure continuities of dependency by recoding them as "transition" problems, and it may underestimate African agency by assuming that the relevant question is how quickly African states converge on Western templates rather than how they construct legitimate orders under conditions of historical inequality.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats Fukuyama's claim as an ideological assertion of Western hegemony rather than an empirical law. It emphasizes that modernization need not produce liberal democracy, that state capacity and party-led development can be alternative routes to prosperity and stability, and that the "end of history" functions to delegitimize non-Western political models. The thesis is read less as philosophy than as a justification for pressure, conditionality, and normative hierarchy.

Russian: In Russian discourse, the thesis is frequently experienced as triumphalist and humiliating, especially in the context of Soviet collapse and subsequent NATO enlargement. It suggests that Russia's historical trajectory was judged deficient and that its security concerns could be dismissed as backward resistance to an already determined future. This perception contributes to a narrative of Western disregard for Russian status and to suspicion that liberal universalism masks geopolitical expansion.

Western: Western liberal institutionalism has both embraced and revised the thesis. Its defenders see the spread of democratic norms and institutions as evidence of a genuine normative shift, while its critics acknowledge that the thesis encouraged hubris, underestimated nationalism and religion, and conflated the collapse of communism with the vindication of all Western practices. The self-critical Western position treats Fukuyama's argument as a powerful but dangerous simplification: useful for explaining ideological exhaustion, but misleading when turned into policy teleology.

UN: The UN perspective is more cautious about regime-type universalism. The Charter centers sovereign equality, self-determination, and peaceful settlement rather than a prescribed governmental form. From this vantage, the "end of history" can appear as an overreach of normative ambition: international law may accommodate democratic norms, but it does not establish liberal democracy as the sole legitimate endpoint of political development, and conflating the two risks weakening the procedural legitimacy on which multilat-

eral order depends.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Humanitarian Intervention, R2P, and the "Liberal Peace" Project

Bolded Causal Claim: The post-Cold War liberal order transformed human rights and democratic governance into justifications for coercive intervention, making sovereignty conditional and producing a contested "liberal peace" whose uneven application exposed the order's normative double standards.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with a normative redefinition of sovereignty. In the post-Cold War period, mass atrocities in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo made non-intervention appear morally untenable, while unipolar military capacity made intervention feasible. The resulting doctrine of humanitarian intervention holds that sovereignty entails responsibility: when a state fails to protect its population from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity, external actors may assume that responsibility. This idea was later codified as the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), articulated by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty in 2001 and endorsed at the 2005 World Summit. The mechanism is not only legal but operational: it links normative claims to military capacity, peacebuilding, and transitional administration. The "liberal peace" project extends this logic beyond stopping violence to reconstructing states through democratization, marketization, rule of law, and human-rights institutions. Intervention becomes the first phase of a broader social-engineering project in which external actors attempt to remake political order. The causal chain runs from atrocity → normative shock → authorization or legitimation → military action → peacebuilding → contested legitimacy. The chain is strongest when great powers agree on the threat and weakest when intervention is perceived as regime change, resource extraction, or civilizational imposition. Kosovo in 1999 illustrated intervention without Security Council authorization; Sierra Leone in 2000 illustrated external stabilization in support of a beleaguered government and UN peacekeeping; Libya in 2011 illustrated how an R2P-authorized mandate to protect civilians could be interpreted as license for regime change, with lasting damage to the doctrine's credibility.

Scope Conditions: Humanitarian intervention and R2P are most plausible under four conditions: the abuses cross a threshold of mass atrocity; peaceful means have been exhausted or are implausible; the intervention has a reasonable prospect of success without causing greater harm; and the intervening coalition possesses both capacity and some form of multilateral legitimacy. The liberal peace project additionally requires local institutional receptivity, sustained resources, and tolerance for long-term external involvement. The doctrine is least credible where strategic interests are absent, where rival powers oppose action, where the target state retains substantial capacity, or where the intervention's mandate is ambiguous enough to slide from protection to regime change. It is also weakened by selectivity: the same powers that invoke R2P in some crises remain silent in others, suggesting that humanitarian language is filtered through geopolitical interest.

Observable Implications: If this key idea is operative, one should observe NATO and other coalitions acting "out of area"; more robust peacekeeping mandates; transitional administrations and state-building missions; and the vocabulary of "protection" displacing older language of non-intervention. One should also observe backlash: Russian and Chinese resistance to R2P, African suspicion of Western humanitarianism, and declining willingness to authorize force after Libya. The liberal peace project should produce mixed outcomes—some stabilization and institutional reform, but also resentment, dependency, and, in cases such as Libya, state fragmentation. The observable signature is therefore not simply more intervention but a widening gap between humanitarian justification and political outcome.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: The African perspective is shaped by a dual memory: the failure to prevent genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the suspicion that "humanitarian" intervention can become a vehicle for Western power. African scholars and policymakers have often supported norms against mass atrocities while insisting that intervention be genuinely multilateral, regionally anchored, and attentive to African agency. Sierra Leone and Libya illustrate the ambivalence: external action may stop violence or remove a threatening regime, but it can also bypass African institutions, produce dependency, or leave fragmented states. From this vantage, R2P is valuable only if it is not selectively applied and if African voices help define the threshold, mandate, and exit strategy. The African critique is not simply anti-interventionist; it is a demand that humanitarianism be decoupled from paternalism and that sovereignty be understood as a responsibility to citizens rather than a license for external tutelage.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats humanitarian intervention with deep suspicion, viewing it as a potential instrument of Western hegemony and regime change. Beijing emphasizes sovereignty, non-intervention, and the dangers of mandate creep, particularly after Libya. China does not necessarily reject all protection of civilians, but it insists that force be authorized by the Security Council, limited in scope, and not used to overthrow governments. The Chinese position reflects both principled commitment to sovereign equality and strategic concern that intervention norms can be turned against states that challenge Western preferences.

Russian: The Russian perspective combines legal formalism with geopolitical grievance. Moscow emphasizes Security Council authorization, opposes unilateral or NATO-led intervention, and treats Kosovo and Libya as precedents in which humanitarian language concealed strategic expansion. Russia's experience of post-Cold War weakness and NATO enlargement informs its insistence that intervention norms be tightly constrained. From this vantage, R2P is acceptable only in narrow, Council-authorized form; broader interpretations are seen as threats to sovereignty and to Russia's own security environment.

Western: The Western perspective is internally divided. Liberal institutionalists and human-rights advocates argue that sovereignty cannot shield mass atrocities and that the international community has a duty to protect vulnerable populations. Realists and skeptics counter that intervention is often ineffective, costly, and prone to mission creep, and that humanitarian language can obscure strategic interests. The Western self-critical position acknowledges that Kosovo, Sierra Leone, and Libya produced both genuine protection and serious overreach, and that the credibility of R2P depends on consistency, restraint, and honest accounting of consequences.

UN: The UN perspective centers the tension between Charter principles and enforcement. The Charter prohibits the use of force except in self-defense or with Security Council authorization, yet mass atrocities create pressure to act outside that framework. The UN values procedural legitimacy, broad participation, and the restraining function of law, but it also recognizes that paralysis in the face of atrocity undermines the organization's moral authority. From this vantage, R2P is an attempt to bridge principle and practice, but its legitimacy depends on Council authorization, clear mandates, and fidelity to the original protective purpose rather than to regime change.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Bretton Woods expansion: WTO (1995), Washington Consensus, and conditionality

Bolded Causal Claim: The post-Cold War expansion of the Bretton Woods order did not merely lower trade barriers; it restructured the relationship between sovereignty and market access by making domestic policy

conditional on externally validated economic orthodoxy, thereby converting development into a governance project administered through international institutions.

Mechanism: The original Bretton Woods compromise, often described as "embedded liberalism," allowed states to pursue domestic welfare and industrial policy while committing to multilateral trade liberalization. The post-Cold War expansion shifted the center of gravity from shallow integration—tariff reduction at the border—to deep integration, which reaches inside the state to regulate services, intellectual property, investment, competition policy, and regulatory standards. The World Trade Organization, established in 1995, institutionalized this shift through a legalized dispute-settlement system that made compliance less a matter of diplomatic bargaining and more a matter of adjudicated obligation. Accession protocols, especially for late entrants, often required extensive legislative and administrative reform before membership was granted. In parallel, the Washington Consensus—associated with John Williamson's 1990 formulation and later diffused through the IMF and World Bank—translated a particular model of market liberalization into loan conditionality: fiscal austerity, privatization, trade opening, deregulation, and, increasingly, "good governance" benchmarks. The mechanism is not simply coercion by a single hegemon, although US and European preferences mattered; it is a recursive process in which financing needs, debt overhang, credit ratings, and market access create incentives for governments to adopt reforms that they might not otherwise choose. Conditionality also works through epistemic authority: international financial institutions define what counts as sound policy, and their technical assessments become gatekeeping devices for capital. Ikenberry's institutionalist argument that great powers can lock in cooperation through rules is relevant here, but critical political economy—drawing on Cox's neo-Gramscian analysis and African dependency scholarship—suggests that the same institutions can discipline states and social groups in ways that reflect hegemonic class and geopolitical interests. The African concept of extraversion, developed by Bayart, is especially useful: external resources become a source of domestic political power, so African elites may align national policy with donor priorities not only because they are forced to, but because conditionality provides rents, legitimacy, and instruments of rule. In this sense, Bretton Woods expansion operated as both an economic and a political technology, reshaping the state's relationship to its own citizens by privileging externally certified reform over domestically negotiated development strategy.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism is strongest where states are heavily indebted, export-dependent, aid-reliant, or facing balance-of-payments crises, and where domestic coalitions for alternative development strategies are weak or fragmented. It is weaker where states possess large domestic markets, strategic leverage, diversified production, or sufficient fiscal autonomy to resist conditionality. China's accession to the WTO in 2001 illustrates selective integration: Beijing accepted rules that facilitated export-led growth while retaining state capacity, industrial policy, and capital controls in ways that many developing countries could not. The mechanism also depends on the credibility and functionality of enforcement institutions; when the WTO Appellate Body is paralyzed or when geopolitical rivalry overrides trade law, conditionality becomes more bilateral and less rules-based. In Africa, scope conditions include commodity dependence, colonial institutional inheritances, fragmented regional markets, and the historical weakness of industrial policy. The mechanism further assumes that conditionality can be implemented administratively; where state capacity is low, reforms may produce formal compliance without substantive transformation, a pattern sometimes described as isomorphic mimicry. Finally, the Washington Consensus is not uniformly harmful or beneficial: macroeconomic stabilization can restore fiscal sustainability, but the same package can be destructive where social safety nets are absent, public investment is cut, or liberalization exposes infant industries to premature competition. Rodrik's argument that there is no single recipe for growth, and Chang's claim that today's rich countries historically used protection and industrial policy, place important scope limits on the

universal applicability of the model.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, one should observe tariff and quota reductions, expanded WTO membership, structural adjustment programs, privatization of state enterprises, reduced public spending in social sectors, and the incorporation of trade-related intellectual property and services rules into domestic law. One should also observe political reactions: protests against trade liberalization, as in Seattle in 1999; the Doha Round's prolonged deadlock over agricultural subsidies and special and differential treatment; and the rise of regional and plurilateral alternatives, including African continental integration efforts. The mechanism implies that countries with high exposure to conditionality will show reduced policy autonomy in macroeconomic and regulatory domains, while countries with geopolitical leverage will retain greater space. It also implies distributional consequences: export-oriented sectors and financial capital may gain, while smallholders, informal workers, and public-sector employees may bear adjustment costs. If the mechanism is overstated, one should instead observe substantial variation in compliance, successful industrial policy despite WTO rules, and conditionality that is negotiated, waived, or reversed when political costs rise. The African Continental Free Trade Area, for example, can be read both as an attempt to overcome externally imposed fragmentation and as a new layer of liberalization whose effects will depend on implementation capacity and distributional safeguards.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): African scholarship and policy experience treat Bretton Woods expansion not as neutral development but as a continuation of unequal exchange and extraversion. Rodney's underdevelopment thesis and Nkrumah's neo-colonialism frame conditionality as sovereignty erosion disguised as technical assistance. Structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s cut public services, increased poverty, and undermined state capacity; African critics argue that "good governance" conditionality shifted blame for structural inequality onto African states. The African vantage highlights that liberalization without industrial policy, social protection, and historical redress reproduces dependency. Yet African policymakers have also used WTO accession, aid negotiations, and regional integration strategically, showing agency within constraint rather than passive subordination. Chinese: China's WTO accession is understood as strategic integration into rules while retaining state-led development; Beijing critiques the Washington Consensus as one-size-fits-all and promotes infrastructure finance and "developmental state" alternatives, but it also benefits from market access and uses rules to constrain competitors. Russian: Post-Soviet shock therapy and conditionality are remembered as humiliation and economic collapse; Moscow views the liberal economic order as a Western political project and seeks sovereignty, state capitalism, and alternative institutions such as the Eurasian Economic Union and BRICS. Western: Liberal institutionalism sees the WTO and conditionality as welfare-enhancing, reducing protectionism and locking in reforms; self-critique acknowledges overreach, ignored distributional costs, and double standards, especially agricultural subsidies. UN: The UN development perspective emphasizes policy space, the right to development, and coherence between trade, human rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals; conditionality should not undermine social protection or the capacity of states to pursue equitable development.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — 9/11 and the fracture of the liberal consensus: unilateralism, the 'war on terror', and the limits of international law

Bolded Causal Claim: The post-9/11 "war on terror" fractured the liberal order not simply by producing unilateral force, but by converting a legal and institutional framework designed for interstate war and criminal justice into an open-ended, geographically unbounded security paradigm that normalized exceptional powers and eroded the distinction between law and war.

Mechanism: The attacks of September 11, 2001, created a shock that reclassified terrorism from a criminal and policing problem into an act of war, thereby activating war powers, military doctrines, and emergency authorities that had been designed for interstate conflict. The Authorization for Use of Military Force of 2001 provided a broad legal basis for operations against al-Qaeda and associated forces, while the 2002 National Security Strategy articulated a doctrine of preventive war that stretched the traditional legal categories of self-defense and imminence. The mechanism of fracture operates through several channels. First, legal category collapse: detainees were placed in a status that was neither prisoner of war nor ordinary criminal suspect, producing Guantanamo, military commissions, and "enhanced interrogation." Second, geographic unboundedness: operations extended to states not directly responsible for 9/11, most notably Iraq in 2003, and later to targeted killing in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia. Third, alliance management: NATO's Article 5 invocation initially produced solidarity, but the Iraq invasion divided allies and weakened the perception that US power was embedded in collective decision-making. Fourth, legitimacy erosion: the liberal order's authority depends on the claim that power is constrained by law and procedure; when the hegemon asserts exceptions, it weakens the normative constraints that it asks others to accept. Kagan's 2003 argument that Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus captures a transatlantic divergence over the use of force, but the deeper issue is that the war on terror made the United States both the enforcer and the exception within the same order. The mechanism also works through imitation and backlash: other states can invoke counterterrorism to justify repression, surveillance, or cross-border force, while targeted populations and rival powers frame US actions as proof that liberal norms are instrumental. International law did not disappear; rather, its limits were exposed. The UN Charter permits force in self-defense or with Security Council authorization, but the war on terror created pressure to reinterpret self-defense to include preventive action against non-state actors in states deemed "unwilling or unable." This reinterpretation may have been intended to close a legal gap, but it also weakened the restraining function of the Charter and made the boundary between lawful and unlawful force more contested.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism is strongest when threat perception is high, executive power is concentrated, legislative oversight is weak, and allies are either supportive or unable to constrain the hegemon. It is weaker where domestic courts, legislatures, civil society, or allied governments impose procedural limits, as occurred in some European responses to rendition and surveillance. The mechanism also depends on the nature of the threat: non-state terrorism does not fit neatly into territorial sovereignty, making legal categories genuinely difficult, but that difficulty can be exploited to expand authority. It is more likely where the hegemon possesses global military reach and where international institutions lack enforcement capacity against powerful states. Conversely, it is less likely where the threat is localized, where multilateral frameworks are robust, or where the hegemon's relative power is declining and it must rely more on consent. The scope conditions include not only US domestic politics but also the prior credibility of the liberal order: if institutions are seen as legitimate, exceptions are more damaging; if they are already viewed as instruments of power, the fracture may be less a rupture than a revelation.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, one should observe military operations without Security Council authorization, the expansion of detention and surveillance powers, targeted killing programs, allied criticism and non-cooperation, and the invocation of counterterrorism by other states to justify repression or intervention. One should also observe legal debates over the "unwilling or unable" doctrine, the status of non-state actors under the laws of war, and the relationship between human rights law and international humanitarian law. The mechanism implies that the liberal order's legitimacy becomes more contested, that multilateral cooperation becomes more transactional, and that the distinction between law and security policy becomes blurred. If the mechanism is overstated, one should instead observe institutional adaptation:

stronger oversight, revised detention policies, alliance repair, and renewed commitment to multilateral counterterrorism frameworks. The mechanism does not imply that international law became irrelevant; rather, it implies that the gap between legal aspiration and political practice widened, and that this gap became a site of contestation rather than a settled hierarchy.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): African states and scholars view the war on terror as a securitization project that recasts African conflicts as terrorism, justifies foreign military presence, and sidelines development, governance, and human security. US Africa Command, drone bases, and counterterrorism partnerships are often seen as sovereignty infringements and as the militarization of aid; African critics note selective application, in which state violence is ignored while non-state violence is elevated. The African vantage also reveals complicity: some African governments leverage counterterrorism frameworks for regime security, external funding, and the suppression of dissent, reproducing extraversion under a new vocabulary. This does not negate the reality of terrorist threats in the Sahel, Horn of Africa, or elsewhere, but it insists that security responses be evaluated by their effects on civilian protection, state legitimacy, and regional ownership. Chinese: Beijing opposes unilateral force and regime change, stresses sovereignty and non-interference, and uses the war on terror to justify its own security policies; it also positions itself as a defender of the UN Charter and multipolarity, while benefiting from US overreach that weakens Western legitimacy. Russian: Moscow initially cooperated against terrorism but frames NATO expansion and US unilateralism as encirclement; it invokes counterterrorism precedents for its own interventions while criticizing Western double standards, and it treats the war on terror as evidence that liberal norms are subordinate to power. Western: Liberal self-critique, including human rights advocacy and institutionalist analysis, condemns torture, detention without trial, and preventive war; Kagan's 2003 transatlantic framing highlights divergent attitudes toward force, while Wheeler's work on humanitarian intervention reminds readers that liberal powers have long struggled to reconcile values with rules. UN: The UN perspective centers the Charter's limits on force, international humanitarian law, and human rights; Security Council authorization remains the preferred source of legitimacy, and UN counterterrorism frameworks attempt to balance security with due process, even though enforcement against powerful states remains weak.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on the post-Cold War liberal order begins from a historical experience in which sovereignty was not granted but seized, and in which the language of universal progress often appeared as a reorganization of external authority rather than its abolition. From this standpoint, the five developments examined in this lesson—the unipolar moment, the end-of-history thesis, humanitarian intervention and the liberal peace project, Bretton Woods expansion, and the post-9/11 fracture—are not separate episodes but facets of one problem: the persistence of hierarchical power beneath universalist language. Siba N. Grovogui's argument that African states occupy a condition of quasi-sovereignty is central to this reading. Formal independence coexists with external control over security, finance, and normative legitimacy, so that the post-Cold War order is experienced not as the triumph of self-determination but as a new modality of tutelage. Krauthammer's unipolar moment, read from this position, is not merely a description of American primacy; it is an institutional environment in which African governments must seek recognition, resources, and security guarantees from a single center of power. The liberal presumption of permanent Western primacy therefore naturalizes an asymmetry that African political thought has long identified as colonial in

structure, even when it is exercised through multilateral institutions, donor conferences, or technical assistance.

Fukuyama's end-of-history thesis is received with particular suspicion. Walter Rodney's underdevelopment thesis and Kwame Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism suggest that capitalist modernity and liberal democracy are not neutral endpoints but systems that have historically extracted surplus, constrained autonomous development, and subordinated African economies to external markets. Achille Mbembe's work on the postcolony emphasizes that African states are not failed versions of Western modernity but sites of complex, often violent, political creativity; to measure them against an "end of history" is to misread their trajectories through a teleology that privileges Western experience. Mahmood Mamdani's analysis of citizen and subject highlights how colonial legal categories produced bifurcated states in which rural populations were governed through customary authority while urban elites accessed modern rights; post-Cold War liberal reforms often reinforced technocratic governance, elections, and donor conditionality rather than democratic citizenship rooted in social equality. Thus democratic transitions celebrated in Freedom House data may be read as externally calibrated openings whose durability depends on donor priorities, security partnerships, and commodity prices. The African perspective does not deny the value of rights, elections, or constitutionalism; it questions whether liberal democracy as endpoint exhausts political possibility. Amílcar Cabral and Frantz Fanon insist that liberation is not the transfer of power to a Western model but the creation of new social relations; Julius Nyerere's ujamaa, whatever its economic failures, exemplified an attempt to theorize development from African social realities rather than from imported blueprints. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's critique of gendered epistemologies reminds us that the "universal" liberal subject is historically gendered and Western; applying it uncritically risks reproducing exclusions that African feminist scholarship has long identified. The contribution here is epistemic: the African perspective refuses the assumption that Western institutional forms are the natural terminus of political development.

Humanitarian intervention produces the sharpest African skepticism, but that skepticism is not indifference to suffering. It arises from experience of selective protection. Rwanda in 1994 demonstrated the catastrophic failure of the international community to act; Sierra Leone in 2000 showed that intervention can restore order and protect civilians; Libya in 2011 showed that protection can slide into regime change and state collapse. The African perspective asks a question that liberal theory often evades: who decides when sovereignty yields, and whose suffering counts? The responsibility to protect, as articulated in the 2005 World Summit Outcome, has three pillars—state responsibility, international assistance, and timely response—but implementation has been geopolitically uneven. African scholars and policymakers often support protection in principle while fearing the precedent of great-power intervention, especially when the intervening powers are also the architects of the economic order that constrains African states. The African Union's principle of non-indifference, adopted in the 2000 Constitutive Act, is an African attempt to claim regional authority over intervention rather than reject intervention altogether; yet capacity and finance gaps leave the continent dependent on external actors. Nicholas J. Wheeler's analysis of saving strangers captures the liberal dilemma of reconciling values with rules; the African perspective adds that strangers are not saved equally, and that "humanitarian" language can obscure strategic interests, racial hierarchies, and the political economy of intervention. Mamdani's analyses of political violence warn against moralized narratives that simplify complex conflicts into good and evil, thereby enabling intervention without understanding local power structures. African feminist and security scholarship, including work associated with Sylvia Tamale and others, highlights that interventions often ignore gendered harms, local women's agency, and the long-term social costs of militarized protection. The African contribution is therefore not a simple defense of sovereignty but a demand that protection be accountable to affected populations rather than only to Western publics, and that

sovereignty—however abused by postcolonial elites—remain a shield against arbitrary external power.

Bretton Woods expansion is read through the lens of material constraint. Rodney and Nkrumah frame conditionality as neo-colonialism: formal political independence with economic dependence. Structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s constrained industrial policy, privatized public services, and prioritized debt repayment; WTO accession and agreements such as TRIPS locked in rules that favored capital-exporting states and intellectual-property holders. Jean-François Bayart's analysis of the politics of the belly shows that African elites could instrumentalize external resources, but structural constraints on policy space remain. The Washington Consensus treated market liberalization, privatization, and fiscal austerity as technical necessities rather than political choices; African economists and policymakers have contested this, arguing for policy space, infant-industry protection, regional integration, and development-oriented trade rules. The African perspective contributes a materialist critique: the liberal order's legitimacy depends not only on rights and procedures but on development outcomes, and conditionality can undermine democratic accountability by shifting consequential policy decisions to creditors, rating agencies, and international financial institutions. It also insists that the WTO is not a neutral arbiter but a site of asymmetric bargaining in which African states, often fragmented and dependent on commodity exports, face structural disadvantages. This perspective can occlude the agency of African elites, the role of domestic corruption, and cases in which external conditionality produced macroeconomic stabilization; but it correctly identifies the asymmetry of global economic governance and the way in which sovereignty is hollowed out not only by coups but by debt, trade rules, and aid dependence.

The post-9/11 fracture is experienced in Africa as a securitization of the continent. The war on terror redirected development and security agendas, militarized borders, and strengthened partnerships with authoritarian regimes willing to cooperate against terrorism. The establishment of AFRICOM in 2007 institutionalized a US military presence that many African scholars and civil-society actors viewed with suspicion, not because security cooperation is illegitimate but because it risked subordinating African priorities to external threat perceptions. The discourse of "ungoverned spaces" reproduced colonial tropes and justified external intervention in the Sahel and Horn of Africa. The African perspective reveals that the liberal consensus fractured not only in Western capitals but in African experience: human rights rhetoric coexisted with rendition, drone strikes, and support for repressive regimes. African security scholarship, including work by Kwesi Aning and others, emphasizes that African security governance is shaped by external securitization as much as by local conflict dynamics. The result is a distinctive African critique: the liberal order's crisis is not merely normative hypocrisy but structural, because a system that predicates rights on security cooperation will subordinate rights wherever security interests dominate. The African vantage point thus contributes what the other four perspectives often miss: a view from the receiving end of order, where universalism is tested by material outcomes, selective protection, and the lived experience of conditional sovereignty.

The African perspective also has occlusions that must be acknowledged if it is to be steel-manned rather than romanticized. It can romanticize sovereignty and understate cases in which external intervention, conditionality, or international norms produced genuine protection or reform. It may not fully theorize how to reconcile noninterference with the protection of civilians in mass-atrocity situations, a dilemma that African regional institutions themselves confront. It can risk treating all Western action as imperial, thereby obscuring genuine normative commitments among Western publics, diplomats, and scholars. Yet its central corrective remains indispensable: it prevents the liberal order from being evaluated only by its intentions and forces attention to the distribution of power, voice, and vulnerability within that order.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on the post-Cold War liberal order is anchored in a historical narrative of national humiliation, sovereignty recovery, and developmental catch-up. From this standpoint, the unipolar moment is not a benign hegemony but a condition of strategic vulnerability: Krauthammer's presumption of permanent Western primacy appears as an ideological justification for American dominance in a world that China believes should be multipolar. The end-of-history thesis is read as a form of ideological closure, a claim that liberal democracy and market capitalism are the final stage of political development and therefore a license to pressure states that organize their political economies differently. Chinese international-relations scholarship and official discourse typically insist that development paths are plural and that the right to choose one's own model is itself a core norm of international order. This is not merely rhetorical; it reflects the Chinese experience of reform and opening, in which integration into global markets was pursued without abandoning state-led development or party-state authority.

On humanitarian intervention, the Chinese perspective is shaped by Kosovo in 1999 and Libya in 2011. Kosovo, undertaken without Security Council authorization, is treated as a dangerous precedent: it suggests that powerful states can redefine the limits of force by invoking moral urgency. China's abstention on Resolution 1973 in 2011, followed by sharp criticism of NATO's expansion of the mandate into regime change, reinforced the view that responsibility to protect can be instrumentalized. The Chinese position is not necessarily opposition to civilian protection; it is insistence that protection must be authorized by the Security Council, constrained by mandate, and not converted into a vehicle for regime change. This reflects a broader Chinese commitment to sovereignty and noninterference, often associated with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, and to the view that the Charter's limits on force are the primary safeguard against great-power abuse. The contribution of this perspective is to expose the selectivity of humanitarian intervention and to defend procedural legitimacy; its occlusion is that sovereignty can become a shield for state violence, and that noninterference may protect governments rather than populations.

Bretton Woods expansion is evaluated pragmatically. China's accession to the WTO in 2001 is treated as a strategic success: integration on terms that allowed export-led growth, industrial upgrading, and state capacity. At the same time, Chinese discourse criticizes the Washington Consensus as an overreach of market ideology and emphasizes the legitimacy of state intervention, industrial policy, and gradual reform. The Chinese perspective thus accepts global economic integration while rejecting the premise that liberalization is universally optimal. It contributes a developmental critique of conditionality and a demonstration that alternative paths to growth exist; it occludes, however, the coercive aspects of China's own economic statecraft and the ways in which its rise creates new dependencies.

After 9/11, China cooperated with counterterrorism frameworks but opposed the 2003 invasion of Iraq, viewing it as unilateralism that fractured the liberal consensus and damaged the authority of the Security Council. The Chinese perspective treats the war on terror as evidence that liberal norms are subordinate to power when core security interests are invoked. Its strength is a consistent defense of multilateral authorization and a warning against the politicization of human rights; its weakness is a tendency to treat sovereignty as an absolute that can obscure accountability for mass violence. Overall, the Chinese view contributes a necessary counterweight to Western normative universalism, but it risks replacing one form of hierarchy with another.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective is shaped by the experience of Soviet collapse, economic dislocation, and the perceived humiliation of the 1990s. From this vantage point, the unipolar moment is not an opportunity for liberal construction but a period of Western triumphalism in which Russia was treated as a defeated power rather than an equal. Fukuyama's end-of-history thesis is read as ideological closure that delegitimized Rus-

sian political and economic alternatives and justified external interference in post-Soviet space. The liberal order, in this reading, was never genuinely universal; it was a Western order that demanded conformity while denying Russia the status of a great power with legitimate security interests.

Humanitarian intervention is central to Russian grievance. Kosovo in 1999, conducted without Security Council authorization, is treated as a precedent that undermined the Charter's limits on force and demonstrated that Western powers would bypass the UN when convenient. Libya in 2011 reinforced this view: Russia's abstention on Resolution 1973 was followed by criticism that NATO exceeded the mandate and pursued regime change. The Russian perspective insists that Security Council authorization is not a procedural formality but the core of international legitimacy, and that humanitarian language can mask geopolitical expansion. NATO enlargement eastward is interpreted through this lens as encirclement, a security dilemma in which Western institutional expansion is experienced as threat rather than liberation. The contribution here is a realist reminder that order depends on the consent of major powers and that normative universalism can provoke backlash; the occlusion is that Russian security claims are often used to justify coercion against neighbors and to deny their agency.

Bretton Woods expansion is associated in Russian memory with the shock therapy of the 1990s, economic collapse, and the loss of state capacity. WTO accession, achieved only in 2012, came after a long period of skepticism about whether liberal economic rules served Russian interests. The Russian perspective tends to view conditionality and market liberalization as instruments of Western influence, and it favors state control over strategic sectors. Its contribution is to highlight the political costs of rapid liberalization and the importance of economic sovereignty; its occlusion is a tendency to attribute domestic failures primarily to external manipulation.

After 9/11, Russia initially cooperated with the United States against terrorism, but the 2003 Iraq invasion fractured that cooperation and reinforced the view that the liberal consensus was subordinate to American unilateralism. The war on terror is read as a framework that legitimized exceptional measures, preventive war, and the erosion of international law. The Russian perspective thus treats the post-Cold War liberal order as a Western project whose universalist claims were always constrained by power, and whose crisis was inevitable once American primacy encountered resistance. Its strength is attention to great-power security dilemmas and institutional legitimacy; its weakness is a selective invocation of sovereignty and international law that does not consistently constrain Russian behavior.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on the post-Cold War liberal order is internally divided between liberal institutionalism and liberal self-critique, but it shares a common premise: that the order was a genuine, if imperfect, attempt to generalize norms of democracy, human rights, and market openness. Krauthammer's unipolar moment is read not only as a description of power but as a responsibility: American primacy could be used to build institutions that would outlast unipolarity. Ikenberry's argument in After Victory is central here—the United States, as a hegemon, had an interest in binding itself and others through institutions, thereby converting raw power into durable order. Fukuyama's end of history provided an ideological horizon, suggesting that the collapse of communism had removed the principal alternative to liberal democracy and that the task of politics was now institutional consolidation rather than ideological contestation.

Humanitarian intervention is a defining Western dilemma. Wheeler's analysis of saving strangers captures the tension between sovereignty and human rights, while Kosovo in 1999 is often defended as a necessary, if legally contested, response to mass atrocities. The liberal peace project—combining democratization, mar-

ket reform, and international administration in post-conflict settings—reflects a confidence that institutions can be transplanted and that peace can be built. Yet Western self-critique is equally important: the Iraq war, Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and extraordinary rendition are treated by many Western scholars, jurists, and civil-society actors as betrayals of liberal values. Kagan's transatlantic framing in Of Paradise and Power highlights divergent attitudes toward force, with Europeans often emphasizing law and Americans emphasizing power, but both operate within a shared liberal vocabulary. The Western perspective contributes normative innovation, institutional design, and a capacity for self-criticism; its occlusion is a tendency to treat Western experience as universal, to underestimate the coercive dimensions of liberal peacebuilding, and to apply standards selectively.

Bretton Woods expansion is defended as a framework for growth and integration. The WTO, the Washington Consensus, and conditionality are seen as mechanisms for reducing trade barriers, stabilizing economies, and encouraging reform. Western institutionalists acknowledge that conditionality could be intrusive and that the Washington Consensus was later revised, but they argue that rules-based economic governance is preferable to discretionary power. The Western perspective contributes a belief in institutional solutions and the possibility of reform; it occludes the asymmetries of bargaining power and the ways in which rules can lock in advantages for capital-exporting states.

After 9/11, the Western consensus fractured. The war on terror produced preventive war, detention without trial, and torture, all of which generated intense internal critique. Liberal self-critique condemns these practices as violations of the very norms the order claims to uphold. The Western perspective therefore contains both the defense of liberal order and the most searching critique of its abuses. Its strength is normative reflexivity; its weakness is that self-critique often arrives after damage has been done and may not alter structural power.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective centers the Charter's principles, the Security Council's authority, and the gap between normative aspiration and enforcement. From this standpoint, the post-Cold War liberal order is not identical with Western power; it is a contested arena in which universal principles are negotiated among member states. The unipolar moment poses a problem for the UN because American primacy can bypass or instrumentalize the organization, yet the UN remains the principal source of international legitimacy. The end-of-history thesis is not an official UN doctrine; rather, the UN's universal membership implies that no single ideology can be imposed as the terminus of political development. The organization's role is to mediate among diverse systems, not to certify one as final.

Humanitarian intervention is the UN's central dilemma. The Brahimi Report of 2000, responding to failures in Rwanda and Srebrenica, called for more robust peacekeeping, clearer mandates, and better resources. The responsibility to protect, endorsed at the 2005 World Summit, represents an attempt to reconcile sovereignty with protection, but the UN perspective insists that force must be authorized by the Security Council. Kosovo in 1999, undertaken without authorization, is a stress case: it protected civilians but weakened the Charter's procedural constraints. Libya in 2011 showed both the possibility and the danger of Council-authorized protection, as mandate interpretation became contested. The UN perspective contributes a procedural and legal framework for legitimacy; its occlusion is that Security Council authorization reflects the power of the permanent five, not necessarily global consensus.

Bretton Woods expansion creates tension within the UN system. The WTO and international financial institutions operate with different mandates and governance structures, often emphasizing market liberalization

and conditionality, while UN development agencies emphasize human development, social protection, and the right to development. The UN perspective highlights the incoherence of global governance: economic rules can undermine social and human-rights goals. It contributes a holistic view of development and a reminder that economic policy is not technocratically neutral; it occludes the difficulty of reconciling diverse member-state interests and the weakness of UN enforcement.

After 9/11, the UN developed counterterrorism frameworks, including resolutions requiring states to criminalize terrorist financing and cooperate in law enforcement. The UN perspective seeks to balance security with due process, human rights, and the rule of law. It insists that counterterrorism must not become a pretext for arbitrary detention, torture, or the erosion of civil liberties. Yet enforcement against powerful states remains weak, and the Security Council's counterterrorism architecture can be politicized. The UN perspective's strength is its commitment to universal principles and procedural legitimacy; its weakness is dependence on the very powers it seeks to constrain. Overall, it reveals the post-Cold War liberal order as a system in which norms are stronger than enforcement, and in which the gap between Charter principles and practice is not an anomaly but a structural feature.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Exposes the postcolonial asymmetry of "humanitarian" war: Kosovo was legible as a crisis requiring force while Rwanda was not, and intervention without African consent risks neo-imperial protection.	Can understate Serbian atrocities and Kosovar Albanian agency; may treat sovereignty as more protective than it was for civilians inside Serbia/Yugoslavia.	Conditional sovereignty and anti-imperial non-intervention, with growing support for African-led protection after Rwanda and Sierra Leone.	OAU/AU non-intervention norms; Rwanda inaction; ECOWAS/UK role in Sierra Leone; later Libya fallout.	Western: sovereignty cannot be a shield for ethnic cleansing; inaction is also a political choice with moral costs.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Defends Charter legality and UNSC authority; warns that bypassing the Council turns humanitarian language into hegemonic practice.	Can instrumentalize sovereignty to protect allied or strategically useful regimes; often subordinates human-rights claims to order.	State sovereignty, territorial integrity, and multipolar legality under the UN Charter.	Opposition to Kosovo; later Libya and Syria vetoes; emphasis on non-interference in internal affairs.	African/Western: absolute sovereignty can enable mass atrocities and leave victims without protection.
Russian	Highlights precedent, encirclement, and the dangers of NATO acting as a self-authorized global police force.	Geopolitical self-interest is often presented as legal principle; later interventions undermine its own legalism.	Great-power prerogatives, multipolar balance, and UNSC-centered authorization.	Opposition to Kosovo; NATO expansion grievances; later use of humanitar-ian/security rhetoric in Georgia and Crimea.	Western: Russia's own uses of force show that its legalism is selectively enforced.
Western	Supplies moral urgency, institutional capacity, and a self-critical vocabulary for judging intervention.	Universalizes Western norms and can obscure power asymmetry, civilian harm, and the imperial residue of "saving strangers."	Liberal interna-tionalism: human rights, democratic governance, and institution-alized cooperation.	NATO Kosovo campaign; R2P debates; post-intervention administration and war-crimes accountability.	African: selective humanity and intervention without consent reproduce imperial hierarchies.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Provides the Charter framework, procedural legitimacy, and a compromise language (R2P) between sovereignty and protection.	Enforcement depends on the same powers it seeks to constrain; Council paralysis is structural, not accidental.	Collective security, rule of law, and the gap-closing ambition of R2P.	UNSC deadlock over Kosovo; post-Kosovo R2P debates; peacekeeping and transitional administration.	Western: proceduralism can legitimate inaction while atrocities continue.

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Levels of analysis. At the **individual** level, the Kosovo crisis turns on the agency of Slobodan Milošević, who gambled that NATO would not bomb and then that Serbia could outlast air power; on NATO leaders such as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, who framed the campaign as a moral necessity; and on Kosovar Albanian leaders and civilians whose displacement and testimony made the crisis visible. At the **state** level, Serbia/Yugoslavia defended territorial integrity and regime survival, while NATO states weighed alliance credibility, domestic opinion, and post-Cold War European order; Russia, though weakened, asserted great-power status through diplomatic opposition. At the **systemic** level, the intervention occurred in the "unipolar moment": the United States enjoyed unmatched military primacy, NATO was expanding eastward, and the Security Council was paralyzed by the prospect of Russian and Chinese vetoes. At the **transnational** level, refugee flows, diaspora mobilization, human-rights reporting, media images of atrocity, and the emerging norm of humanitarian intervention all shaped what states felt compelled to do and how they justified it.

Mechanism section. The mechanism was not simply "human rights caused war." Rather, coercive diplomacy at Rambouillet failed because the proposed settlement threatened Serbian sovereignty and Milošević calculated that NATO lacked resolve; NATO then substituted an air campaign for ground invasion, relying on military asymmetry and the expectation that Serbian elites would bear costs they could not sustain. The bombing's coercive effect worked through infrastructure destruction, elite pressure, and the credible threat of escalation, while Serbian forces simultaneously accelerated ethnic cleansing, producing the very humanitarian catastrophe the intervention claimed to stop. The outcome—Serbian withdrawal, UN administration, and eventual Kosovo independence—depended on the interaction of NATO military pressure, Russian diplomatic mediation, and the absence of a viable Serbian alternative. The mechanism therefore combined normative framing, alliance cohesion, military coercion, and adversary cost-benefit calculation; it did not operate as an automatic enforcement of human rights.

Perspective reconstruction. The **African** perspective, which must be read first and at greatest length, begins from the postcolonial suspicion that "humanitarian" force is never distributed evenly across the globe: Kosovo became an urgent moral emergency in Western capitals while Rwanda, only five years earlier, produced inaction, and this asymmetry reveals how the category of "humanity" is politically constructed rather than universally applied. From this vantage, NATO's bypassing of the Security Council was not a technical

legal defect but a reassertion of imperial prerogative, in which powerful states decide whose suffering counts and whose sovereignty may be overridden, while weaker states—especially in Africa—remain exposed to arbitrary intervention. African scholarship and diplomacy have long treated sovereignty as a hard-won shield against external domination, not as an abstract legalism, and the Kosovo precedent therefore looked less like liberation than like a license for selective force. Yet the African perspective is not merely anti-interventionist: the failures in Rwanda and the ECOWAS/UK experience in Sierra Leone showed that non-intervention can also be lethal, producing an African ambivalence that later shaped the African Union's "non-indifference" doctrine. Thus Kosovo is read as a warning that protection without consent, accountability, and equal application risks becoming neo-imperialism wearing humanitarian clothes. The **Chinese** perspective treats Kosovo as a case of Western hegemony overriding Charter legality: NATO acted without Security Council authorization, established a precedent for intervention in internal affairs, and demonstrated that "humanitarian" language could be used to bypass the UN's collective-security machinery. The **Russian** perspective adds the experience of humiliation and encirclement: Kosovo occurred alongside NATO expansion, weakened Russia's diplomatic weight, and created a precedent that Moscow later cited and also exploited, revealing how great-power grievance and legal objection became intertwined. The **Western** perspective, especially in its liberal-internationalist form, defended the intervention as morally necessary and "illegal but legitimate," arguing that NATO prevented further ethnic cleansing and upheld a community of democratic values; its self-critical wing, however, acknowledges civilian casualties, the absence of UN authorization, and the dangerous precedent later invoked for Iraq. The **UN** perspective centers the gap between Charter principles and enforcement: Kosovo exposed the Security Council's inability to act when permanent members disagree, and it pushed the organization toward R2P as an attempt to reconcile sovereignty with protection, while leaving enforcement dependent on the very powers the Charter was meant to constrain.

Explicit adjudication. The Western perspective best explains why NATO leaders believed they had to act and why the campaign was politically sustainable, but it underexplains why the same moral vocabulary was not applied in Rwanda and why the intervention's legitimacy remained contested. The African perspective best explains that contestation: it captures the postcolonial asymmetry, the fear of selective force, and the way Kosovo became a precedent for later interventions, though it can understate the scale of Serbian atrocities and the agency of Kosovar Albanians. The Chinese and Russian perspectives correctly identify the legal breach and great-power stakes, yet they risk reducing humanitarian concern to geopolitics and can shield abusive sovereignty. The UN perspective best explains the institutional dilemma—how to protect civilians without destroying Charter legality—but it cannot resolve the enforcement gap on its own. Overall, the case is best explained by combining the systemic perspective (unipolar primacy and Council paralysis made NATO action possible) with the African perspective (the intervention's legitimacy was permanently damaged by asymmetry and the absence of consent), while recognizing that neither fully accounts for Serbian decision-making or the mixed humanitarian outcome.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. **Mechanism.** Explain how the 2003 Iraq invasion was justified through a combination of WMD claims, regime-change language, democracy promotion, and humanitarian framing. Distinguish descriptive claims (what was asserted about Iraq) from explanatory mechanisms (why the invasion became possible and attractive to decision-makers).

2. **Perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on the invasion and the "coalition of the willing." For each, identify one contribution and one occlusion.

3. **Legal comparison.** Compare Iraq 2003 with Kosovo 1999 on three dimensions: UN Security Council authorization, claims of self-defense, and the legitimacy of coalition action outside formal UN command.

4. **Falsifiers.** Specify what evidence would weaken (a) the threat-based explanation that Iraq posed an imminent danger requiring preventive war, and (b) the hegemony-based explanation that the invasion expressed unipolar liberal primacy.

5. **Consequences.** Trace how the invasion affected NATO cohesion, UN authority, international law, the responsibility-to-protect agenda, and liberal institutionalist claims about rules-based order.

6. **Historical analogue.** Propose one historical analogue for the 2003 invasion and state clearly why the analogy is partial rather than exact.

MODEL ANSWER

The 2003 invasion of Iraq is best explained as the collision of three mechanisms rather than as the simple execution of a single doctrine. First, the unipolar moment described by Krauthammer created a structural condition in which the United States possessed both the military capability and the political confidence to act without universal consent. Second, the post-9/11 securitization of threat transformed preventive war from an exceptional measure into a normalized instrument of counterterrorism, collapsing the distinction between imminent attack and latent capability. Third, the liberal order's own normative vocabulary—human rights, democracy, rogue states, weapons of mass destruction, and regime change—provided a public justification that made unilateral action appear as the enforcement of universal values rather than as the assertion of national interest. In this sense, the invasion was not merely a deviation from liberal internationalism; it was a deformation produced by liberal internationalism's confidence that Western primacy and normative universalism were aligned.

The descriptive claims about Iraq—active WMD programs, links to terrorism, and imminent threat—were later undermined by the failure to find stockpiles and by the weakness of the intelligence case. But the explanatory mechanism does not depend on those claims being true. The mechanism depends on how decision-makers interpreted uncertainty, how coalition politics rewarded resolve, and how the absence of a balancing great-power coalition lowered the expected cost of action. The "coalition of the willing" mattered not only because it supplied troops and legitimacy, but because it demonstrated that the United States could assemble a usable coalition outside the UN Security Council when formal authorization was blocked. That practice exposed a central tension in the post-Cold War order: institutions could constrain power only when powerful states accepted constraint.

From an African perspective, the invasion reinforced skepticism that "humanitarian" or "security" language could be separated from imperial practice. African states and scholars, drawing on experiences from Sierra Leone to Libya, often read the coalition as an assertion of Western prerogative over sovereignty, with oil, regional dominance, and regime change operating beneath the language of liberation. The occlusion in this

reading is that it can understate the genuine fear of WMD proliferation and the internal brutality of the Iraqi regime, reducing all intervention to domination. From a Chinese perspective, the invasion illustrated the dangers of unipolar hegemony and the need for multipolarity, sovereignty, and non-interference; China's critique of humanitarian intervention as Western hegemony gained force, though it risked treating sovereignty as an absolute shield against accountability. From a Russian perspective, the war confirmed humiliation and encirclement, accelerating the view that NATO and US power were not merely defensive but expansionary; yet this reading could obscure Russia's own authoritarian consolidation and its selective use of sovereignty norms. From a Western perspective, liberal institutionalism offered both justification and self-critique: the war was defended as enforcement of international norms, but its aftermath—insurgency, Abu Ghraib, and institutional fracture—became evidence that power without legitimacy erodes the very order it claims to protect. The UN perspective highlighted the gap between Charter principles and enforcement: Resolution 1441 did not explicitly authorize force, yet the invasion proceeded, revealing that the Security Council's authority depends on the willingness of its most powerful members to be bound.

Compared with Kosovo 1999, Iraq 2003 was less legally ambiguous in one sense and more damaging in another. Kosovo lacked explicit Security Council authorization but was framed as an exceptional humanitarian response to atrocities and ethnic cleansing; Iraq was framed through WMD and terrorism, with regime change becoming an explicit objective. Kosovo strained NATO and international law but did not destroy the presumption that force required some multilateral justification; Iraq made the "coalition of the willing" a template for bypassing the UN when authorization was unavailable. The falsifiers are therefore clear. The threat-based explanation would be weakened by evidence that intelligence was knowingly distorted, that diplomatic alternatives were not exhausted, or that postwar planning was subordinated to ideological assumptions. The hegemony-based explanation would be weakened by evidence that the invasion was driven primarily by genuine threat assessment, that coalition partners exercised independent influence, or that the United States accepted binding multilateral constraints afterward. In fact, the weak postwar planning and the absence of WMD discovery strengthened the hegemony critique, while the continued reliance on UN resolutions and coalition diplomacy complicated any purely imperial reading.

The consequences extended well beyond Iraq. NATO cohesion suffered as France and Germany opposed the invasion, while the UN's authority was damaged by the spectacle of a major war launched without clear Council authorization. International law was strained by the normalization of preventive war and by debates over occupation, torture, and targeted killing. The responsibility-to-protect agenda, already fragile after Rwanda and Kosovo, became more contested because critics could associate humanitarian language with regime change. Liberal institutionalism did not collapse, but its claim that rules constrain power was exposed as conditional: rules bind most reliably when they serve the interests of the powerful. The central lesson is that the liberal order's normative vocabulary can be mobilized to justify both multilateral restraint and unilateral coercion, and that the difference between the two is determined less by language than by whether power accepts institutional limits.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In March 2011, a coalition led by France, the United Kingdom, and the United States intervened militarily in Libya after the UN Security Council authorized "all necessary measures" to protect civilians under Resolution 1973. The intervention occurred amid the Arab Spring, with Muammar Qaddafi's forces advancing on Benghazi and Western governments invoking the responsibility to protect. NATO subsequently assumed command, Qaddafi was overthrown and killed, and Libya descended into prolonged

fragmentation, militia rule, and competing governments. The case is often cited as the moment when R2P moved from principle to practice—and then became deeply contested.

(b) Required memo headings (prompts).
Mechanism: Explain the causal chain linking the Arab Spring, civilian-protection claims, Security Council authorization, NATO command, regime change, and state collapse. Distinguish what happened from why it happened.
Perspective reconstruction: Reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of the intervention, noting each perspective's contribution and occlusion.
Historical analogue: Compare Libya 2011 with one earlier case (for example, Kosovo 1999 or Iraq 2003) and state the limits of the analogy.
Falsifiers: Identify evidence that would weaken your explanation of why the intervention produced state collapse rather than protection.

(c) Self-check. Before submitting, ask whether your memo clearly distinguishes description (what occurred in Libya), explanation (why the outcome occurred), prediction (what your mechanism implies for future interventions), and prescription (what actors should do differently).

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question. Which option best captures the mechanism by which the 2003 Iraq invasion fractured the post-Cold War liberal consensus?

A. The invasion failed because the UN Security Council lacked the military capacity to enforce its resolutions, proving that international institutions are epiphenomenal.
B. The invasion showed that the liberal order's normative vocabulary could be used to justify unilateral action, while the absence of WMD and weak postwar planning exposed the gap between universalist claims and coercive practice.
C. The invasion was caused primarily by Iraqi aggression against Kuwait in 1990, making 2003 a delayed enforcement of Resolution 678.
D. The invasion succeeded in establishing a stable democratic Iraq, demonstrating that liberal interventionism is self-correcting.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnosis.
- **A** is wrong because it confuses institutional weakness with institutional irrelevance; the fracture occurred partly because institutions were invoked and then bypassed, not because they lacked capacity alone.
- **C** is wrong because it collapses 1990 and 2003 into a single causal chain; the 2003 decision involved distinct claims about WMD, terrorism, and regime change rather than mere delayed enforcement.
- **D** is wrong because it misstates the outcome and ignores the insurgency, state collapse, and normative backlash that made Iraq a central case of liberal-order fracture.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

2A.1 Summary Tables

Table 1 — UNSC Authorizations of Force, 1990–2003 (selected major operations)

Year	Crisis / Operation	Key Resolution(s)	Chapter VII Authorization?	Outcome by 2003
1990–91	Iraq / Kuwait (Desert Storm)	678	Yes	Authorized coalition; Iraqi defeat
1992–93	Somalia (UNITAF / UNOSOM II)	794, 837	Yes	Authorized; mission ended 1995
1993–95	Bosnia (safe areas)	836, 844	Yes (limited mandate)	Authorized but ineffective; Dayton 1995
1994	Haiti	940	Yes	Authorized; Aristide restored
1999	Kosovo	None (draft vetoed by Russia and China)	No	NATO acted without authorization; UNMIK established post hoc
2001	Afghanistan	1368, 1373 (self-defense, Art. 51)	Disputed framing	Authorized in principle; ISAF later authorized
2003	Iraq	1441 (no explicit force authorization)	Disputed	US/UK claimed implied authorization; France and Russia disagreed

Table 2 — Institutional Expansion, 1990–2003 (approximate figures)

Institution / Indicator	1990	1995	2000	2003
WTO members (GATT contracting parties pre-1995)	~100 (GATT)	~128	~140	~146
NATO members	16	16	19	19
Countries rated "Free" (Freedom House)	~65	~79	~86	~89
UN peacekeeping personnel deployed (thousands)	~11	~75	~38	~45

Table 3 — Democratic Transitions and Interventions, 1989–2003 (selected)

Case	Year	Type of Action	UNSC Authorization?	Outcome by 2003
Panama	1989	Regime change (US)	No	Democratic transition; Noriega removed
Haiti	1994	Restoration of elected government	Yes (940)	Fragile democracy; Aristide restored
Bosnia	1995	Dayton peace implementation	Yes (IFOR/SFOR)	Frozen peace; ethnic partition
Kosovo	1999	Humanitarian intervention	No	UNMIK protectorate; final status unresolved
Sierra Leone	2000	British intervention + UNAMSIL	Yes (ECOMOG/UNAMSIL)	Stabilized; RUF defeated
Afghanistan	2001	Regime change (US-led)	Yes (1386 ISAF)	Fragile state; Taliban regrouping
Iraq	2003	Regime change (US-led)	Disputed	Occupation; insurgency emerging

Note: Figures are approximate and drawn from publicly available institutional records (WTO, NATO, Freedom House, UN Department of Peace Operations). They are presented as illustrative benchmarks, not as precise statistical series.

2A.2 Analysis Questions

1. Trend. Describe the trend in UNSC authorizations of force between 1990 and 2003. What changed around 1999, and what does the 2003 Iraq case add?

Between 1990 and 1995, the Security Council authorized force in every major crisis where it was invoked: Iraq/Kuwait, Somalia, Bosnia (in limited form), and Haiti. This period represents the high-water mark of post-Cold War collective security, when the permanent members' convergence after the Soviet collapse made Chapter VII action feasible. The trend breaks around 1999. Kosovo was the first major post-Cold War use of force by a Western coalition without UNSC authorization, after Russia and China signaled vetoes. The 2001 Afghanistan case partially restored the pattern—Resolution 1386 authorized ISAF—but the legal framing rested on Article 51 self-defense rather than a clean Chapter VII mandate for regime change. The 2003 Iraq case then shattered whatever remained of the consensus: Resolution 1441 demanded Iraqi compliance but did not explicitly authorize force, and the US and UK claimed implied authorization while France, Russia, and most of the Council disagreed. The trend, therefore, is not a simple decline but a bifurcation: authorization remained available for cases where the permanent members agreed (Sierra Leone, Afghanistan)

but became impossible where they disagreed (Kosovo, Iraq), with the latter cases proceeding unilaterally or through coalitions of the willing. The 2003 case adds the critical observation that the fracture was not merely procedural but normative: the same vocabulary of "threats to peace" and "material breach" was deployed to justify opposite conclusions by different Council members.

2. Level of analysis. At which level—individual, state, systemic, or transnational—is the expansion of NATO membership best explained? Justify your answer.

The expansion of NATO from 16 members in 1990 to 19 by 1999 (and 26 by 2004) is best explained at the **systemic level**, though with important state-level and transnational modifiers. At the systemic level, the collapse of the Soviet Union removed the structural constraint that had frozen European security architecture for four decades; the unipolar moment (Krauthammer 1990) created a permissive environment in which the dominant power could reshape institutions. The systemic logic is visible in the timing: expansion accelerated only after the Soviet collapse, and the 1999 round (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic) coincided with the Kosovo crisis, suggesting that NATO expansion was partly a response to the perceived need to stabilize the post-communist space. At the state level, individual Central and Eastern European governments actively lobbied for membership, driven by security fears of Russian resurgence—a state-level preference that the systemic environment made satisfiable. At the transnational level, normative convergence around liberal democracy and market economics (the "democratic peace" thesis) provided an ideological justification for expansion, framing it as the extension of a zone of peace rather than as geopolitical aggrandizement. The individual level is least explanatory: while particular leaders (Clinton, Albright, Kohl) mattered, the structural opportunity and the demand from applicant states would likely have produced expansion under different leadership. The systemic level dominates because it explains both the possibility and the direction of change; state and transnational factors explain the speed and the legitimation.

3. Perspective reconstruction. How would each of the five perspectives interpret the gap between WTO membership growth (Table 2) and the absence of UNSC authorization for Kosovo (Table 1)?

The **African perspective** would read the gap as evidence that the liberal order's economic and security tracks operated on different logics: WTO expansion delivered formal equality of membership while security decisions remained monopolized by the permanent members. From this vantage, Kosovo's lack of authorization was not an anomaly but a revelation of who actually governs. African scholars such as Grovogui and Aning would note that the same Council that could not agree on Kosovo had, a decade earlier, authorized interventions in Africa (Somalia, Rwanda's non-intervention) with devastating consequences, suggesting that the authorization gap is less about rules than about whose suffering counts.

The **Chinese perspective** would interpret the gap as proof that economic multilateralism (WTO) is tolerated by the West because it serves Western commercial interests, while security multilateralism (UNSC) is bypassed when it obstructs Western strategic preferences. The Chinese critique, articulated in Beijing's opposition to Kosovo and its later positions on Libya and Syria, treats humanitarian intervention as a Trojan horse for regime change, with WTO membership growth as the carrot and UNSC bypass as the stick.

The **Russian perspective** would see the gap as the core of post-Cold War humiliation: Russia was admitted to the G8 and the WTO track but excluded from security decision-making when its interests were directly affected (Kosovo, a traditional Russian sphere). The Russian reading treats the gap not as institutional dysfunction but as deliberate marginalization, with NATO expansion and Kosovo as twin evidence that the liberal order was a vehicle for Western, not universal, security.

The **Western perspective** would explain the gap through the lens of institutionalism and its limits: WTO

expansion represented successful multilateralism because trade interests converged, while Kosovo's authorization failure reflected the Council's structural flaw (veto power) in the face of mass atrocity. Western self-critique, visible in Ikenberry's work, would acknowledge that the gap exposed the tension between sovereignty and human rights that the Charter never resolved.

The **UN perspective** would treat the gap as the central institutional pathology of the post-Cold War order: the Charter's principles (sovereign equality, collective security) were honored in the economic sphere but subverted in the security sphere, producing a legitimacy deficit that the Brahimi Report (2000) and later the Responsibility to Protect (2005) attempted, imperfectly, to address.

4. Interpretation. Does the data support the claim that the post-Cold War liberal order was "rules-based"? What evidence cuts both ways?

The data offer partial support, and the answer depends on which rules and which domain. Evidence for the "rules-based" claim: WTO membership grew from ~128 to ~146 between 1995 and 2003, suggesting that states voluntarily bound themselves to a multilateral trade regime with dispute settlement; NATO expansion proceeded through formal accession protocols; Freedom House recorded a net increase in "Free" countries from ~65 to ~89; and the UN authorized force in multiple cases (Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan). Evidence against: Kosovo (1999) and Iraq (2003) were major uses of force without clear UNSC authorization; the WTO's rules were criticized as asymmetric (Washington Consensus conditionality imposed on developing countries); and the "Free" country count, while rising, masked democratic backsliding and the fragility of transitions (Haiti, Afghanistan). The most defensible interpretation is that the order was rules-based in the economic domain and in cases where great-power interests converged, but that the rules were selectively enforced and structurally subordinate to power in the security domain. The "rules-based" label, in other words, describes a tendency, not a system: it captures the aspiration and the partial reality, but occludes the unilateral exceptions that became more frequent after 1999.

5. Limitation. What are the principal limitations of using UNSC authorization counts as a proxy for the health of the liberal order?

First, **authorization counts conflate legality with legitimacy**: a Council vote may be legally valid but politically coerced (as critics argued regarding Resolution 1441), or legally absent but morally defended (as Kosovo's supporters argued). Second, **the metric ignores non-UNSC mechanisms of order**: regional organizations (ECOWAS in Sierra Leone, NATO in Kosovo), bilateral arrangements, and informal coalitions also structured international behavior, and their exclusion from the count understates the complexity of order. Third, **authorization counts are sensitive to the veto structure**, not to underlying consensus: a single permanent member's opposition can produce a "no authorization" outcome even when a majority of states and global public opinion favor action, as in Kosovo. Fourth, **the metric is binary and misses quality**: authorized missions (Somalia, Bosnia) often failed, while unauthorized ones (Kosovo) sometimes achieved their immediate objectives, so authorization status is a poor predictor of effectiveness. Fifth, **the count is endogenous to power**: the US and its allies could choose to seek or bypass authorization based on expected outcomes, making the metric a measure of strategic calculation as much as of institutional health. Finally, **the data are incomplete and contested**: the legal status of Resolution 1441, for example, remains disputed among international lawyers, so any count that codes it as "not authorized" or "authorized" embeds a legal judgment that the data alone cannot settle.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1: Timeline of the Post-Cold War Liberal Order, 1989–2003

What to draw. A horizontal timeline running left to right across the page, divided into three bands. The top band is labeled "Institutional Expansion"; the middle band "Security Crises and Interventions"; the bottom band "Ideological Framing." Draw a vertical dashed line at 1999 labeled "Kosovo: the fracture point."

Labels to place. Top band: 1991 (Gulf War, UNSC authorized), 1995 (WTO established, Dayton), 1999 (NATO +3 members), 2001 (China joins WTO), 2003 (Iraq). Middle band: 1992–93 (Somalia), 1994 (Rwanda, Haiti), 1995 (Bosnia), 1999 (Kosovo, no UNSC auth), 2000 (Sierra Leone), 2001 (Afghanistan), 2003 (Iraq, disputed auth). Bottom band: 1989 (Fukuyama, "end of history"), 1990 (Krauthammer, "unipolar moment"), 1992 (Fukuyama book), 2000 (Brahimi Report), 2003 (Kagan, "Of Paradise and Power").

Perspective overlay. Annotate the timeline with five colored arrows or margin notes: African (red) marks 1994 Rwanda and 2000 Sierra Leone with the note "whose suffering counts?"; Chinese (blue) marks 1999 Kosovo with "hegemony"; Russian (green) marks 1999 and 2003 with "encirclement"; Western (orange) marks 1995 and 2001 with "rules-based order"; UN (purple) marks 2000 Brahimi with "legitimacy gap." The 1999 dashed line should be the visual center of gravity, with the post-1999 period shaded slightly darker to indicate fracture.

Visual 2: Levels-of-Analysis Diagram for the Kosovo Intervention (1999)

What to draw. Four concentric circles (or nested boxes) labeled from innermost to outermost: Individual, State, Systemic, Transnational. Place Kosovo at the center as the case. Draw arrows from each level pointing inward toward the case, and annotate each arrow with a causal claim.

Labels to place. Individual level: "Clinton/Blair moral conviction; Albright's 'indispensable nation' rhetoric; Milosevic's ethnic cleansing as trigger." State level: "US hegemonic capacity; UK alliance; Russian opposition; Serbian state sovereignty claim." Systemic level: "Unipolar moment; NATO as regional hegemon; UNSC veto paralysis; absence of Soviet counterweight." Transnational level: "Human rights norms; R2P precursor discourse; NGO advocacy; media coverage of atrocities; liberal peace ideology."

Perspective overlay. Draw a small legend in the corner with five colored dots: African (red) notes that the diagram's "human rights" transnational level omits African precedents (Rwanda 1994); Chinese (blue) notes that the systemic level's "unipolar moment" is precisely the problem; Russian (green) notes that the state level's "Russian opposition" was overridden; Western (orange) notes that the individual level's moral conviction is the engine; UN (purple) notes that the diagram's center should be the Charter, not the intervention. The overlay should make visible that each perspective selects a different level as primary.

Visual 3: Perspective Wheel on the Liberal Order as a Whole

What to draw. A circle divided into five sectors, one per perspective, arranged clockwise: African (top, largest sector, ~40% of circle), Chinese, Russian, Western, UN. In the center, place a smaller circle labeled "Post-Cold War Liberal Order (1989–2003)." Draw spokes from center to each sector boundary. Along each spoke, write the perspective's core verdict on the liberal order.

Labels to place. African sector: "Skeptical: humanitarian intervention as selective sovereignty; Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Libya as evidence." Chinese sector: "Critical: humanitarian intervention as Western hegemony; sovereignty as shield." Russian sector: "Resentful: humiliation, encirclement, marginalization from

security decisions." Western sector: "Ambivalent: liberal institutionalism plus self-critique; rules-based but power-laden." UN sector: "Aspirational: gap between Charter principles and enforcement; legitimacy deficit."

Perspective overlay. Annotate the African sector with a thicker border and a note: "Primary perspective—reveals what the other four occlude: the racialized and geographic selectivity of 'humanitarian' action." Add a small inset box titled "Occlusion map" listing, for each perspective, what it cannot see: African (cannot fully account for great-power security dilemmas); Chinese (cannot account for genuine normative commitment); Russian (cannot account for institutional learning); Western (cannot account for its own power); UN (cannot account for enforcement without power). The visual should make the African sector visually dominant, consistent with the lesson's framing.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue Column | Notes Column

Cue	Notes
Unipolar moment	Krauthammer (1990): US as sole superpower; presumption of permanent Western primacy. Scope: 1991–2003, arguably ended by Iraq. Mechanism: absence of counterweight permits institutional reshaping.
End of history	Fukuyama (1989, 1992): liberal democracy as final form of government; ideological convergence. Critique: premature; ignored illiberal alternatives (China, Russia, Islamism).
Humanitarian intervention	Kosovo 1999 (no UNSC auth); Sierra Leone 2000 (UK + UNAMSIL); Libya 2011 (R2P). Tension: sovereignty vs. human rights. Wheeler (2000): "saving strangers."
R2P	Responsibility to Protect (2005, but roots in 1990s). Three pillars: prevent, react, rebuild. Controversy: Libya 2011 seen as regime change, not protection.
Liberal peace	Project of exporting democracy + markets + rights. Mechanism: conditionality (Washington Consensus). Critique: cultural imperialism; state-building failures.
Bretton Woods expansion	WTO 1995; IMF/World Bank conditionality. Washington Consensus: privatization, deregulation, fiscal discipline. Critique: asymmetric rules; "market fundamentalism."
Conditionality	Loans contingent on policy reform. Mechanism: leverage over developing states. African critique: sovereignty erosion; "structural adjustment" harms.

Cue	Notes
9/11 fracture	Unilateralism; "war on terror"; limits of international law. Kagan (2003): US as Mars, Europe as Venus. Mechanism: security imperative overrides multilateralism.
Kosovo case	1999 NATO bombing without UNSC auth. Justification: humanitarian emergency. Critique: precedent for unilateralism; Russian/Chinese opposition.
Brahimi Report	2000: UN peacekeeping reform; rapid deployment; clear mandates. Response to Rwanda/Srebrenica failures.
Five perspectives	African (primary): skepticism; Chinese: hegemony critique; Russian: humiliation; Western: institutionalism + self-critique; UN: Charter-enforcement gap.
Levels of analysis	Individual (leaders), state (interests), systemic (unipolarity), transnational (norms). Kosovo: all four operative.

Source log. Krauthammer (1990), "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs*; Fukuyama (1989), "The End of History?," *The National Interest*; Fukuyama (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*; Ikenberry (2001), *After Victory*; Wheeler (2000), *Saving Strangers*; Kagan (2003), *Of Paradise and Power*; Brahimi Report (2000), *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*; Grovogui (1996), *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*; Mbembe (2001), *On the Postcolony*; Mamdani (2009), *Saviors and Survivors*; Bayart (2009), *The State in Africa*; Rodney (1972), *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; Nkrumah (1965), *Neo-Colonialism*; Nyerere (1968), *Freedom and Socialism*; Cabral (1973), *Return to the Source*; Fanon (1961), *The Wretched of the Earth*; Aning (2009), "Unintended Consequences"; Danso (2010), "Ghana and the Responsibility to Protect"; Tamale (2011), "Nudity, Protest and the Law"; Oyěwùmí (1997), *The Invention of Women*.

Summary (3–5 sentences). The post-Cold War liberal order rested on a unipolar presumption (Krauthammer 1990) and an ideological conviction that liberal democracy was the endpoint of political development (Fukuyama 1989/1992). Its institutional expression—WTO expansion, NATO enlargement, and the humanitarian intervention agenda—delivered genuine multilateral gains but also generated the conditions for its own fracture, visible in Kosovo (1999) and Iraq (2003). The African perspective reveals that the order's "humanitarian" vocabulary was selectively applied, with African cases (Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Libya) exposing the gap between universalist claims and geopolitical practice. By 2003, the consensus had fractured into competing visions of order, setting the stage for the multipolar contestation that defines the contemporary era.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Imagine a world where one country is so powerful that no other country can challenge it. That country believes its way of life—democracy, free markets, human rights—is the best way for everyone. So it builds institutions (like the WTO and NATO) and sometimes uses force (like in Kosovo) to spread or protect that way of life. For a while, this works: more countries join the institutions, more become democracies. But then two things happen. First, the powerful country starts breaking its own rules when they get in the way—bombing without UN permission, invading Iraq on disputed grounds. Second, other countries (China, Russia, and many in Africa) notice that the rules are applied unevenly: interventions happen where the powerful country has interests, not where suffering is greatest. The result is that by 2003, the "liberal order" is still standing but badly cracked, and the world is moving toward a competition among several powers rather than one.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. (a) I have not yet explained *why* the US chose unilateralism in Iraq specifically—was it ideology, threat perception, or domestic politics? (b) I have not distinguished clearly between the "liberal peace" as a normative project and the "liberal order" as an institutional structure; they overlap but are not identical. (c) I have not addressed whether the African critique (selective intervention) is better explained by racism, by geopolitical interest, or by institutional incapacity. (d) I have not specified the mechanism by which WTO conditionality translated into political outcomes in developing countries. (e) I have not explained why Russia and China, despite opposing Kosovo, did not block the post-hoc UNMIK arrangement.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading the source material confirms the following corrections: Krauthammer's "unipolar moment" was explicitly framed as temporary, not permanent—my Step 1 overstates the "permanent" claim and should be revised to "presumed durable." Fukuyama's thesis was about ideological convergence, not US power per se; the two are often conflated but are analytically distinct. The Brahimi Report (2000) was a response to peacekeeping failures (Rwanda, Srebrenica), not to Kosovo specifically, though Kosovo informed its urgency. Wheeler's (2000) "saving strangers" provides the normative vocabulary for humanitarian intervention but does not resolve the authorization problem. Ikenberry (2001) argues that the liberal order is "sticky" and self-reinforcing even after unipolarity fades—a claim that my Step 1's "badly cracked" framing understates. Kagan (2003) captures the transatlantic split but should not be read as predicting permanent US-European estrangement.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. The post-Cold War liberal order is like a homeowner's association (HOA) in a neighborhood where one homeowner is vastly wealthier than the others. The wealthy homeowner writes the bylaws (WTO rules, NATO standards), enforces them selectively (intervening in Kosovo but not Rwanda), and occasionally ignores them entirely (Iraq 2003). The other homeowners (China, Russia, African states) chafe at the rules but also benefit from the property-value stability the HOA provides. The analogy captures the asymmetry of power and the selective enforcement of rules, but it breaks down in three ways: (i) states are not homeowners—they can exit, form rival associations, or use violence; (ii) the "wealthy homeowner" is not a single actor but a coalition (US + Europe + Japan) with internal disagreements; and (iii) the HOA metaphor implies a voluntary contract, whereas the liberal order was partly imposed through conditionality and military force.

Step 5 — Rewrite. The post-Cold War liberal order (1989–2003) was a historically specific configuration in which unipolar power (Krauthammer 1990) combined with ideological conviction (Fukuyama 1989/1992) to produce an institutional project: expanding the WTO, NATO, and the democratic-peace zone while developing a humanitarian-intervention doctrine (Kosovo 1999, Sierra Leone 2000). This project delivered measurable gains—more democracies, more trade integration, more authorized interventions—but also gen-

erated its own contradictions: selective application of rules, bypassing of the UNSC when inconvenient, and conditionality that eroded sovereignty in the developing world. The African perspective reveals that the order's "humanitarian" vocabulary was geographically and racially selective, with African suffering (Rwanda 1994) receiving less urgent response than European suffering (Kosovo 1999). By 2003, the fracture was visible: the US invaded Iraq on disputed legal grounds, China and Russia opposed the war, and the UN's legitimacy deficit (Brahimi 2000) remained unresolved. The order did not collapse—it was, as Ikenberry (2001) argued, "sticky"—but it lost its claim to universality, and the world entered a period of contested multipolarity in which the liberal order became one order among several rather than the order.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L13	definition	What is the "unipolar moment"?	Krauthammer's 1990 term for the brief post-Cold War interval in which the United States stood as the sole superpower with no peer competitor, creating both opportunity and temptation to act unilaterally. It presumes that primacy is temporary unless institutionalized.	Western framing treats it as opportunity; African and Russian readings treat it as the license for unilateral intervention.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L13	mechanism	How did the "unipolar moment" translate into policy?	The absence of a peer competitor lowered the perceived cost of military action and shifted US strategy toward shaping the international environment rather than merely balancing against threats. This mechanism operated through NATO expansion, humanitarian interventions, and regime-change wars.	Chinese and Russian perspectives read the same mechanism as hegemonic expansion disguised as order-building.
L13	source	What did Krauthammer (1990) actually argue?	Krauthammer argued that unipolarity was a fleeting condition requiring active consolidation through alliances and institutions before rivals emerged; he warned against both isolationism and overreach. The essay is often misread as triumphalist when it was partly cautionary.	The cautionary half is usually dropped in Western policy discourse, which African critics cite as evidence of bad faith.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L13	definition	What is Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis?	Fukuyama's 1989/1992 argument that liberal democracy had proven itself the final form of human government, ending ideological competition and leaving only technical adjustment. It was a claim about the exhaustion of alternatives, not about the end of events.	African scholars such as Mamdani read it as a foreclosure of political imagination that delegitimized non-liberal paths to development.
L13	mechanism	How did "end of history" function as ideology?	By declaring the contest over, it reframed all resistance to liberal norms as backwardness or pathology, lowering the threshold for intervention and conditionality. The mechanism is discursive: it converts a contingent political victory into a universal telos.	This is the core of the African critique: the thesis erased the legitimacy of alternative modernities.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L13	application	What happened in Kosovo 1999?	NATO bombed Yugoslavia without UN Security Council authorization to halt atrocities against Kosovar Albanians, producing a contested precedent for humanitarian intervention outside Charter procedures. It split the international community over legality versus legitimacy.	African states were divided: some saw protection of civilians; others saw precedent for great-power override of sovereignty.
L13	mechanism	What is R2P and how does it work?	The Responsibility to Protect (2005 World Summit) holds that sovereignty entails responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocities, and that the international community must act when states fail. Its mechanism runs from prevention to reaction to rebuilding, with Security Council authorization as the legal gate.	The African Union's Ezulwini Consensus accepts R2P in principle but insists on Security Council reform and regional consent.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L13	comparison	How does humanitarian intervention differ from UN Charter use of force?	Charter Article 2(4) prohibits force; Article 51 permits self-defense; Chapter VII permits Security Council-authorized action. Humanitarian intervention claims a moral exception to this legal architecture, creating tension between legality and legitimacy.	UN perspective centers this gap; Western perspective often privileges legitimacy over strict legality.
L13	source	What did the Brahimi Report (2000) recommend?	The Brahimi Report called for more robust UN peacekeeping, clearer mandates, better intelligence, and adequate resources, while warning against overreach. It sought to professionalize peace operations after Rwanda and Srebrenica.	African troop-contributing countries cite Brahimi to demand equitable burden-sharing and command voice.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L13	mechanism	How did Washington Consensus conditionality operate?	The Washington Consensus prescribed fiscal discipline, privatization, and trade liberalization as conditions for IMF/World Bank lending, embedding policy prescriptions in financial leverage. The mechanism is conditionality: access to capital contingent on structural reform.	African critics (Rodney, Nkrumah lineage) read it as neo-colonial economic control; Chinese critics read it as Western institutional capture.
L13	application	What did WTO accession (1995) change?	The WTO created a binding dispute-settlement system and expanded trade rules into services, IP, and agriculture, locking in liberalization. For developing states it meant market access in exchange for policy constraints.	African states gained formal voice but often lacked capacity to use dispute settlement; Chinese accession (2001) later reshaped the system.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L13	debate	How did 9/11 fracture the liberal consensus?	The "war on terror" shifted US strategy toward preventive war, unilateralism, and coercive regime change, straining alliances and international law. The fracture was between liberal institutionalism and security-first unilateralism.	Russian and Chinese perspectives saw confirmation of US hegemony; African states faced new counterterrorism conditionality.
L13	reconstruction	How does the African perspective read the liberal order?	From within African scholarship, the liberal order appears as a project that promised development and protection but delivered conditionality, selective intervention, and sovereignty erosion, while African agency was marginalized in its design.	This is the primary lens of the lesson: the order's gaps are visible only from its periphery.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L13	occlusion	What does the Chinese perspective occlude?	The Chinese critique of Western hegemony occludes China's own growing economic leverage and its selective use of sovereignty norms, especially in Africa and in maritime disputes. It also understates internal repression.	Recognizing occlusion does not invalidate the critique; it bounds its applicability.
L13	adjudication	How should one adjudicate the 2003 Iraq invasion?	The invasion combined liberal vocabulary (democracy promotion) with unilateral force absent UN authorization, producing a legitimacy crisis. Adjudication requires separating the normative claim from the procedural violation and weighing both.	African, Russian, and Chinese perspectives converge on procedural illegality; Western self-critique converges on strategic failure.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit (score 0–100)

Competency	Self-score (0–100)	Calibration note
Defining the "unipolar moment" and its policy effects		
Explaining Fukuyama's thesis and its ideological function		
Reconstructing the Kosovo 1999 case and its legal controversy		
Explaining R2P's three pillars and the Ezulwini Consensus		
Tracing Washington Consensus conditionality mechanisms		
Analyzing WTO expansion and developing-state capacity gaps		
Explaining the 9/11 fracture and unilateralism		

Competency	Self-score (0–100)	Calibration note
Reconstructing all five perspectives without caricature		
Adjudicating between competing explanations of a case		

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to steel-man, and what evidence would change your view?
2. Where did you conflate description of the liberal order with prescription for it?
3. Which mechanism (unipolarity, ideology, intervention, conditionality, fracture) do you understand least well, and what is your plan to repair it?

7.3 Error-log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"End of history" meant no more wars or events.	It meant the exhaustion of ideological alternatives to liberal democracy, not the end of conflict.	Fukuyama (1992) explicitly distinguished events from ideological evolution.
Humanitarian intervention is always illegal under the UN Charter.	It is legally contested: Charter Article 2(4) prohibits force, but R2P and state practice create a legitimacy-based exception without clear legal codification.	Kosovo 1999 and the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document.
The Washington Consensus was a conspiracy against the Global South.	It was a set of policy prescriptions embedded in financial conditionality; its effects were contested and varied by country.	Ikenberry (2001) on institutional lock-in; African critical scholarship on structural adjustment.
NATO expansion was purely defensive.	It was read by Russia as encirclement; the same policy has competing security interpretations.	Russian perspective in Section 2.7.3.
R2P authorizes automatic military intervention.	R2P requires Security Council authorization for coercive action; its first pillars are prevention and state responsibility.	Brahimi Report (2000); 2005 World Summit Outcome.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Unipolar moment; end of history; humanitarian intervention; R2P; liberal peace; Washington Consensus; conditionality; unilateralism; fracture of consensus	Absence of peer competitor lowers cost of force; ideology converts victory into telos; intervention overrides sovereignty; conditionality leverages capital; 9/11 shifts to security-first unilateralism	Krauthammer (1990); Fukuyama (1992); Ikenberry (2001); Wheeler (2000); Kagan (2003); Brahimi Report (2000)	Kosovo 1999; Sierra Leone 2000; Libya 2011; WTO 1995; 9/11; Iraq 2003; NATO expansion	Legality vs. legitimacy of intervention; universalism vs. sovereignty; institutionalism vs. unilateralism; African agency vs. conditionality	A peer competitor emerging before 2000; R2P used without UNSC authorization repeatedly; conditionality producing convergence rather than backlash	L5 realism; L6 institutionalism; L11 interwar; L12 Cold War; L14 transition; L18 interdependence; L47 US-China; L49 revisionism

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 20 min):** Re-read Section 2.2 and 2.3; recite the unipolar-moment and end-of-history mechanisms aloud; check against flashcards.
- **R2 (Day 3, 30 min):** Reconstruct the Kosovo case at all four levels of analysis; write one paragraph per perspective.
- **R3 (Day 7, 45 min):** Complete the independent memo for Iraq 2003; compare against the model answer; log errors.
- **R4 (Day 14, 60 min):** Re-derive the comparison matrix from memory; verify against Section 2.7.6; focus on African and Chinese perspectives.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 min):** Full timed reconstruction of all five key ideas plus adjudication of a novel case; update error log.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define the "unipolar moment" and explain its policy mechanism.
☐ I can state Fukuyama's thesis and distinguish it from "no more events."
☐ I can reconstruct Kosovo 1999 with levels of analysis and all five perspectives.
☐ I can explain R2P's three pillars and the Ezulwini Consensus.
☐ I can trace Washington Consensus conditionality and its African critique.
☐ I can describe WTO expansion and developing-state capacity gaps.
☐ I can explain the 9/11 fracture and unilateralism.
☐ I can steel-man all five perspectives without caricature.

☐ I can identify what each perspective occludes.
☐ I can adjudicate between competing explanations using evidence.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit honestly.
☐ I have logged at least three errors in the error log.
☐ I have drawn or described the three visuals.
☐ I have written the independent memo.
☐ I have answered the hinge question correctly.
☐ I can link this lesson to L5, L6, L11, L12, L14, L18, L47, L49.
☐ I can state one falsifier for each key idea.
☐ I can explain why the African perspective is primary in this lesson.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Unipolarity and primacy - Krauthammer (1990), "The Unipolar Moment." - Ikenberry (2001), *After Victory*.

Ideology and the end of history - Fukuyama (1992), *The End of History and the Last Man*.

Humanitarian intervention and R2P - Wheeler (2000), *Saving Strangers*. - Brahimi Report (2000), *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*.

Unilateralism and the war on terror - Kagan (2003), "Power and Weakness."

African and critical perspectives - Mamdani, M. (2009), *Saviors and Survivors* (on Darfur and intervention). - Rodney, W. (1972), *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (on structural conditionality lineage).

Chinese and Russian perspectives - General realist and sovereignty-focused scholarship on humanitarian intervention (consult course bibliography).

End of Lesson 13. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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15. Contemporary Transition and Competing Visions of World Order

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 14 — Contemporary Transition and Competing Visions of World Order
Module	Module 2: Historical Architecture of International Order
Prerequisites	L9 (Westphalia), L11 (interwar), L12 (Cold War), L13 (liberal order)
Interleaved links	Forward to L15–19 (IPE), L20–26 (warfare), L47–51 (systemic rivalry), L52–57 (techno-geopolitics)
Reading load	7-9 hours

Field	Value
Content channels	Text core, data lab, dual-coded visual anchor, Cornell notes, flashcards, worked example, problem pair, independent memo
Bloom ceiling	Analyze–Evaluate–Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple to state and extraordinarily difficult to resolve: the unipolar moment that followed the Cold War is ending, but what is replacing it is not a single, coherent order. It is a contest among at least five distinct projects for organizing world politics, each carrying its own account of legitimacy, its own institutional preferences, and its own reading of history. The student who masters this lesson will be able to stop treating "the decline of the West" or "the rise of the rest" as slogans and instead diagnose them as competing, testable claims about power, rules, and recognition. The transition under study is not merely a redistribution of material capabilities; it is a struggle over the vocabulary in which world order is described, the institutions through which it is administered, and the actors who are entitled to speak in its name. That struggle is the subject of the entire module's closing movement, and it sets the stage for everything that follows in the curriculum, from international political economy to systemic rivalry and techno-geopolitics.

To place the lesson in the curriculum: Lessons 9 through 13 traced the historical architecture of international order from the Westphalian settlement through the interwar collapse, the Cold War's bipolar stability, and the post-1945 liberal institutional order. Lesson 14 asks the question that those lessons make unavoidable—what happens when the hegemonic power that underwrote that architecture can no longer sustain it alone, and when the actors who were incorporated into it on subordinate terms begin to demand revision? The answer is not a clean succession, as in a relay race, but a layered, contested, and often incoherent transition in which old institutions persist while new ones are built alongside them, and in which the same event—say, a war in Europe or an expansion of a club of emerging economies—can be read as evidence of decline, of resilience, of fragmentation, or of renewal depending on the vantage point adopted. The lesson therefore trains the student to hold multiple, genuinely incompatible readings of the same evidence in suspension and to adjudicate among them on the basis of mechanism and scope conditions rather than ideological affinity.

The first thing the student will be able to do after mastering this lesson is to decompose the empirical debate about unipolar decline into its component claims and to see that "decline" is not a single variable but a bundle of distinct propositions about military preponderance, economic weight, institutional centrality, normative authority, and alliance cohesion. Scholars such as Schweller, Mearsheimer, and Acharya do not disagree merely about facts; they disagree about which facts matter and about the causal mechanisms that connect material shifts to order-level outcomes. The student will learn to ask, of any claim about decline: decline of what, measured how, over what horizon, and with what predicted consequence for the behavior of other actors? This is the difference between commentary and analysis, and it is the skill the lesson is built to cultivate.

The second capability is perspective reconstruction. The lesson presents five competing order-projects—

African strategic autonomy, Chinese relational-Tianxia, Russian multipolarity, Western liberal institutionalism, and UN Charter multilateralism—and requires the student to reconstruct each from within, showing what it contributes and what it occludes. This is not a matter of listing positions; it is a matter of identifying the historical grievance, the normative premise, the institutional preference, and the theory of change that animate each project, and of seeing how the same empirical developments are recruited into different narratives. The African perspective is treated as primary throughout, not as a regional case study, because the African vantage point reveals something the other four systematically miss: that the contemporary transition is not only a great-power contest but a demand for the right to define the terms of participation in world order, a demand rooted in the experience of colonial subordination, structural adjustment, and the unfinished business of sovereignty. Without that vantage, the other four perspectives appear more coherent than they are.

The third capability is critical engagement with the phrase "rules-based international order," which has become one of the most contested pieces of political vocabulary in contemporary diplomacy. The student will learn to treat it not as a description but as a claim, and to ask the three questions that expose its politics: who wrote the rules, who enforces them, and who is bound by them. The answers differ sharply depending on whether one adopts a Western, Chinese, Russian, African, or UN perspective, and the lesson shows that the phrase functions simultaneously as a genuine normative commitment, as a legitimating device for asymmetric power, and as a rallying point for actors who seek to hold the powerful to standards they themselves often evade. The student will be able to evaluate when the phrase illuminates and when it obscures.

The fourth capability is institutional analysis. The lesson examines the fracturing of the Bretton Woods system through the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank, and BRICS payment-system initiatives, and it asks whether these are genuine alternatives to Western-led institutions or parallel structures that reproduce similar hierarchies under new management. The student will learn to distinguish institutional revisionism from institutional exit, to assess the gap between announced ambition and operational capacity, and to see how institutional competition itself becomes a arena of order-making. This connects directly to the forward-linked lessons on international political economy and on techno-geopolitics, where the material and infrastructural dimensions of order will be developed further.

The fifth capability is evidence-based adjudication. The worked example takes the 2022 Ukraine war and the global response—sanctions, UN voting, African and Global South abstentions, and the Chinese peace plan—and shows how the five perspectives reconstruct the same events differently, and how a careful analyst can weigh those reconstructions against evidence rather than simply choosing the one that feels most congenial. The problem pair does the same for the 2023 BRICS+ expansion, asking whether it is a genuine challenge to Western order or a forum of convenience. The data lab supplies UNGA voting patterns, BRICS+ GDP shares, and AIIB lending figures as the empirical ground on which these adjudications must rest. Throughout, the student is trained to separate description from explanation, prediction from prescription, and to recognize that the same data can support different inferences depending on the mechanism invoked.

A final word on method. This lesson is not a survey of current events, and it is not a scorecard of which power is winning. It is an exercise in structural reasoning about order: about how orders are constituted, contested, and transformed; about the relationship between material power and normative authority; and about the conditions under which a transition produces a new stable order rather than prolonged fragmentation. The student should leave the lesson with a set of analytical tools—levels of analysis, mechanism identification, scope conditions, perspective reconstruction, falsifier specification—that can be applied to cases not covered here, including those that will arise after this text is written. That transferability, not the mastery of any

particular headline, is the measure of success.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer each question from memory before consulting notes. These draw on Lessons 9, 11, 12, and 13.

1. **Westphalian sovereignty (L9).** State the two core principles of the 1648 settlement that are most often cited in contemporary debates about non-intervention, and identify one way in which each principle has been qualified or eroded in practice since 1945.

2. **Interwar collapse (L11).** What were the three institutional or normative failures that the interwar period is conventionally said to have exposed, and which of them is most directly echoed in contemporary debates about the "rules-based international order"?

3. **Cold War bipolarity (L12).** Explain the stability-instability paradox and give one example of how it shaped superpower behavior in a regional conflict. Why does the paradox not straightforwardly apply to a multipolar transition?

4. **Liberal order (L13).** Distinguish "embedded liberalism" from "neoliberalism" as models of economic order, and identify one institutional expression of each. Which of the two is more vulnerable to the charge of having been imposed asymmetrically?

5. **Hegemonic stability (L13).** State the core claim of hegemonic stability theory and name its two most common critiques from the perspective of smaller or weaker states. How does the theory's predictive power change when hegemony is in relative decline rather than absolute collapse?

6. **Levels of analysis (L1).** List the four levels of analysis used throughout this curriculum (individual, state, systemic, transnational) and give one example of a claim about world-order transition that is best analyzed at each level.

1.2 Orientation Questions These questions frame the lesson's central puzzle and should be revisited after completing the core sections.

1. If material power is shifting toward the Global South but institutional power remains concentrated in Western-led bodies, is the contemporary transition better described as a change in the distribution of capabilities or as a change in the legitimacy of the order? What evidence would distinguish the two readings?

2. The phrase "rules-based international order" is used by Western governments as a term of praise and by several non-Western governments as a term of critique. What does each side mean by it, and is there a shared referent underneath the disagreement, or are the two sides talking about different things entirely?

3. Does the expansion of BRICS+ in 2023 represent a structural challenge to Western order, or does it reproduce the very hierarchies it claims to oppose? What would have to be true for it to be the former rather than the latter?

4. From an African vantage point, what is the difference between "multipolarity" as a description of power distribution and "strategic autonomy" as a political project? Why might an actor prefer the second to the first even if the first is empirically accurate?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach The following terms are used throughout the lesson. Provisional definitions are given; refine them as you read.

1. **Unipolarity** — a systemic distribution of power in which one state possesses a preponderance of material capabilities across military, economic, and institutional dimensions, with no peer competitor. Provisional; the lesson will show that unipolarity is a matter of degree and domain, not a binary condition.
2. **Multipolarity** — a distribution in which three or more states possess sufficient capabilities to act as independent centers of power. Provisional; the lesson distinguishes multipolarity as an empirical description from multipolarity as a normative project.
3. **Poly-order** — a condition in which multiple, partially overlapping orders coexist, each with its own rules, institutions, and membership, rather than a single hierarchy with one set of rules. Provisional; contrast with both unipolarity and classical multipolarity.
4. **Strategic autonomy** — the capacity of a state or region to make independent decisions on security, economic, and diplomatic questions without subordination to an external power. Provisional; in the African context it is tied to Agenda 2063 and to the rejection of conditionality.
5. **Relational Tianxia** — a Chinese ordering concept emphasizing harmony through relationship, mutual benefit, and the absence of a single hegemon, often contrasted with Western contractual and rules-based models. Provisional; the lesson treats it as a political project with internal tensions, not as a transparent description of Chinese practice.
6. **Sovereign democracy** — a Russian concept holding that democracy must be adapted to national civilizational and historical conditions and that external promotion of universal democratic standards is illegitimate interference. Provisional; the lesson examines its use in justifying non-interference and multipolarity.
7. **Civilizational state** — a state understood not merely as a political unit but as the bearer of a distinct civilization with its own historical trajectory and normative claims, used to resist universalist standards. Provisional; applied to Russia and China in particular.
8. **Rules-based international order (RBIO)** — the network of treaties, institutions, and norms that govern interstate behavior, especially as invoked by Western governments since the 1990s. Provisional; the lesson treats this as a contested phrase whose meaning depends on who speaks it.
9. **Institutional revisionism** — efforts by dissatisfied actors to modify the rules, voting weights, or mandates of existing institutions, or to create parallel institutions, without necessarily exiting the system. Provisional; distinguished from revolutionary exit.
10. **BRICS+** — the expanded grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa plus new members admitted in 2023–2024, presented by participants as a platform for multipolarity and by critics as a heterogeneous forum of convenience. Provisional; the lesson adjudicates between these readings.

11. **Multi-alignment** — a strategy of maintaining cooperative relationships with multiple major powers simultaneously rather than aligning exclusively with one. Provisional; distinguished from non-alignment by its active, transactional character.
12. **Global South** — a political category denoting states that share a history of colonial subordination and a present-day demand for greater voice in global governance, not merely a geographic designation. Provisional; the lesson examines its construction and its limits as an analytical category.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the empirical debate over unipolar decline and multipolar emergence by comparing Schweller's realist acceptance of multipolarity, Mearsheimer's tragic great-power logic, and Acharya's "multiplex" alternative, specifying the evidence each privileges (relative GDP and military shares, institutional creation, voting blocs) and the evidence each discounts (nuclear deterrence, economic interdependence, regional agency).

2. **Evaluate** the five competing order-projects—African strategic autonomy, Chinese relational-Tianxia, Russian multipolarity, Western liberal institutionalism, and UN Charter multilateralism—by reconstructing each from within, identifying its core normative claim, its mechanism of order-production, and its characteristic occlusion.

3. **Synthesize** the "Global South" as an emergent political category by tracing its genealogy through the NAM and G-77, its reactivation through BRICS+, and its internal heterogeneity, distinguishing descriptive, explanatory, and prescriptive uses of the term.

4. **Critique** the phrase "rules-based international order" by interrogating who authored the rules, who enforces them, who is bound by them, and how the phrase functions as both a normative claim and a political weapon in contemporary contestation.

5. **Create** an evidence-based assessment of institutional revisionism—using AIIB, NDB, and BRICS payment-system initiatives—by specifying falsifiers that would distinguish a genuine challenge to Bretton Woods from a forum of convenience, and by adjudicating between competing interpretations on the basis of lending volumes, governance structures, and member behavior.

These objectives are assessable through the worked example (2022 Ukraine war), the problem pair (2023 BRICS+ expansion), and the independent memo, each of which requires the student to move between description, explanation, prediction, and prescription without conflating them.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Decline of unipolarity and return of multipolarity: the empirical debate

Bolded Causal Claim: The unipolar moment that followed the Soviet collapse has ended; the international system is transitioning toward multipolarity, but whether this transition yields a stable balance of power, a contested hegemonic rivalry, or a "multiplex" order of overlapping authorities remains theoretically and empirically disputed among realists, liberals, and constructivists.

Mechanism: The mechanism is relative power diffusion operating through four channels. First, economic convergence: the share of global GDP (PPP) held by the United States has declined from roughly two-fifths in the early postwar decades to roughly one-quarter today, while China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, and Nigeria have expanded their productive capacity, creating a broader distribution of material capabilities. Second, military-technological diffusion: precision munitions, cyber capabilities, space assets, and nuclear second-strike forces have proliferated, eroding the monopoly on force that underwrote unipolar primacy and raising the cost of coercive intervention. Third, institutional entrepreneurship: rising and middle powers have created parallel institutions—the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the New Development Bank (NDB), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and an expanded BRICS—that both reflect and accelerate the redistribution of authority. Fourth, ideational delegitimation: the 2003 Iraq War, the 2008 financial crisis, and the uneven COVID-19 response weakened the claim that the United States and its allies possessed a universally valid model of governance, opening space for alternative narratives of order. Schweller (2018) reads these trends as the natural exhaustion of unipolarity: hegemons face free-riding, overextension, and domestic fatigue, and multipolarity is not a pathology to be resisted but a condition to be managed. Mearsheimer (2019) reads the same trends through offensive realism: the liberal international order was "bound to fail" because great powers cannot tolerate peer competitors in their regions, and the United States' attempt to remake the world in its image provoked the very balancing that now constrains it. Acharya (2018) rejects the binary of unipolarity-versus-multipolarity altogether, arguing that power is diffusing not only to states but to regional organizations, multinational corporations, civil-society networks, and normative communities, producing a "multiplex" world order in which multiple, overlapping, and sometimes contradictory principles of legitimacy coexist. The mechanism is therefore not a single causal chain but a contested interpretation of the same structural shifts: relative decline, institutional proliferation, and ideational fragmentation.

Scope Conditions: The unipolar-decline claim holds under conditions of sustained relative decline of the hegemon and the rise of at least two peer competitors with global reach; it weakens if the United States retains a decisive technological and military edge, if rising powers remain regionally contained or internally constrained, or if economic interdependence creates "complex interdependence" that dampens conflict. The claim also assumes that power is fungible across domains—military, economic, institutional, ideational—which constructivists dispute. Acharya's multiplex alternative applies most strongly where regional organizations and non-state actors have acquired genuine authority, as in the African Union's peace-and-security architecture or ASEAN's centrality in East Asian diplomacy; it applies weakly where hard security remains dominated by great-power bilateralism. Nuclear deterrence is a scope condition for all three accounts: it prevents systemic war and thus slows any transition, but it does not prevent the erosion of unipolar authority in non-military domains. Finally, the claim is time-horizon sensitive: short-term shocks (wars, financial crises) can accelerate or retard perceived transitions without altering underlying capability distributions.

Observable Implications: If the transition is genuine, one should observe (a) declining G7 share and rising BRICS+ share of global GDP at PPP; (b) narrowing but still substantial US military-spending dominance alongside Chinese and, to a lesser extent, Russian modernization; (c) proliferation of non-Western institutions

with real lending and decision-making capacity; (d) increased hedging and multi-alignment among middle powers, visible in abstentions on UN resolutions and in diversified security partnerships; (e) weaponization of interdependence—sanctions, export controls, payment-system fragmentation; (f) regional security orders that operate with decreasing reference to Washington; and (g) a growing gap between Western normative vocabulary ("rules-based order") and the practices of much of the Global South. If, conversely, unipolarity is merely "stretched" rather than ended, one should observe continued US centrality in crisis management, alliance cohesion under pressure, and the failure of parallel institutions to achieve scale. The 2022–2024 period offers mixed evidence: sanctions against Russia demonstrated Western financial power, while abstentions by African, Asian, and Latin American states on Ukraine resolutions demonstrated the limits of that power's normative reach.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African scholarship reads the transition not as a simple return to great-power multipolarity but as a reconfiguration of constraints and opportunities whose meaning depends on whether African agency can be exercised within it. Nkrumah's neo-colonialism thesis warns that formal multipolarity may reproduce extraction through new patrons rather than end it; Rodney's underdevelopment analysis suggests that power diffusion among Northern centers does not automatically benefit the periphery; and Mamdani's citizen/subject distinction highlights how international order is experienced through domestic authoritarian bargains that great-power competition often reinforces. Conversely, Nyerere's non-alignment and ujamaa, Cabral's "return to the source," and Fanon's call for a new humanism frame multipolarity as an opening for strategic autonomy and multi-alignment—African states engaging China, Russia, the West, the Gulf, and India simultaneously without exclusive alignment. Grovogui's critique of "the gaze" and Bayart's "politics of the belly" remind that African agency is exercised within structures of extraversion that predate and outlast any single hegemon. Tamale and Oyěwùmí gender the analysis: multipolar competition frequently bypasses women's security and reproduces patriarchal bargains. Aning and Danso emphasize African institutional agency through the AU, AfCFTA, and regional economic communities. The African vantage reveals what the Western great-power debate misses: for Africa, multipolarity is not new—colonialism itself was a multipolar competition among empires—and the decisive question is not which state is hegemon but whether any order permits autonomous development. Multi-alignment is therefore a strategy of survival and advancement, not a default or a failure of commitment.

Chinese: China frames the transition as the end of unipolar hegemony and the rise of a "community of shared future for mankind," opposing "Cold War mentality," "bloc confrontation," and "hegemonism." Multipolarity is normatively desirable; the "Global South" is a partner in democratizing international relations. Tianxia (all-under-heaven) relational ontology, articulated by Zhao Tingyang, posits harmony through relational networks rather than Westphalian sovereignty, while Qin Yaqing's relational theory and Yan Xuetong's moral realism debate how China should exercise rising power. In practice, China operates within the Westphalian state system while promoting "win-win" cooperation and non-interference. The occlusion is significant: the framing downplays asymmetries in Belt and Road financing, debt-sustainability concerns, and the coercive dimensions of economic statecraft, and it presents Chinese interests as universal interests.

Russian: Russia's 2023 Foreign Policy Concept declares a "new era" of multipolarity and civilizational diversity, rejecting Western universalism and "neocolonial" practices. "Sovereign democracy" and civilizational-state framing—drawing on Eurasianist traditions from Danilevsky through Dugin—justify resistance to liberal normative hegemony and position Russia as a pole defending state sovereignty and traditional values. The occlusion is equally significant: the framing masks Russia's power asymmetry with China, its economic

dependence, and its own coercive use of force in Ukraine, which undermines the sovereignty principle it claims to defend.

Western: The Western debate splits between primacists, who argue the United States must maintain leadership and defend the liberal order, and restrainers, who favor offshore balancing and acceptance of multipolarity. Mearsheimer's offensive realism predicts tragic competition; Schweller sees multipolarity as natural and urges adaptation; liberal institutionalists such as Ikenberry argue the liberal order can be reformed and is resilient due to institutional lock-in and shared interests. The occlusion is the tendency to treat Western preferences as universal norms, to underestimate non-Western agency, and to frame multipolarity as a threat rather than a legitimate aspiration.

UN: Charter multilateralism treats multipolarity as compatible with sovereign equality and collective security, but the crisis of Security Council representativeness and the veto power undermine institutional legitimacy. The UN perspective emphasizes rules, procedures, universal membership, and development goals. Its occlusion is that power politics constrains institutional reform, so the UN often reflects rather than transcends great-power competition, and its universalist claims are tested by selective enforcement.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Five competing order-projects

Bolded Causal Claim: The contemporary transition in world order is best understood not as a simple redistribution of material power but as a contest among five competing order-projects—African strategic autonomy, Chinese relational Tianxia, Russian multipolarity, Western liberal institutionalism, and UN Charter multilateralism—each of which proposes a different answer to the question of how authority, obligation, and community should be organized beyond the state.

Mechanism: Each order-project operates through three interlocking channels: a material channel that builds or captures institutions, finance, and security guarantees; a normative channel that defines legitimacy, rights, development, and sovereignty; and a coalition channel that mobilizes states through summits, voting blocs, regional organizations, and diplomatic language. The contest is not a zero-sum replacement of one hegemon by another; it is a layered struggle over which vocabulary will govern which issue area. African strategic autonomy, as articulated in the African Union's Agenda 2063 and in the practice of multi-alignment, treats order as an arena for collective self-determination and development rather than as a hierarchy of patrons. It seeks the capacity to choose partners, to set continental agendas, and to avoid new dependencies, drawing on Pan-Africanist traditions associated with Nkrumah and Nyerere and on critical scholarship that stresses African agency, extraversion, and the historical construction of sovereignty. Chinese relational Tianxia, expressed through the "community of shared future for mankind," Belt and Road connectivity, and the Global Development, Global Security, and Global Civilization Initiatives, treats order as a network of relationships in which development, non-interference, and multipolarity are privileged over liberal conditionality. Russian multipolarity, restated in the 2023 Foreign Policy Concept, treats order as a concert of civilizational states and sovereign democracies in which Western hegemony is the principal threat and the UN Charter is invoked as a shield against intervention. Western liberal institutionalism treats order as a rules-based system of markets, alliances, human rights, and institutionalized cooperation, with legitimacy anchored in democratic governance and economic openness. UN Charter multilateralism treats order as a legal framework of sovereign equality, collective security, and universal membership, with legitimacy anchored in procedure, development goals, and the aspiration to transcend power politics. The mechanism of contestation is normative entrepreneurship combined with institutional creation: when a project cannot dominate existing

institutions, it builds parallel or complementary ones, seeks recognition through summit declarations, and reframes the meaning of shared terms such as sovereignty, development, and rules. The BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration of 2023 is one such performative moment, not because it creates a new order, but because it publicly stages an alternative vocabulary of multipolarity, development finance, and institutional reform. The result is not a single successor order but a plural and overlapping order in which different projects are hegemonic in different domains—finance, security, trade, climate, and digital governance.

Scope Conditions: This five-project contest becomes visible under four conditions: first, the erosion of unipolar capacity to enforce preferences without prohibitive cost; second, the availability of alternative patrons, financiers, and security providers; third, domestic political demand within rising and middle powers for sovereignty, development, and recognition; and fourth, institutional veto points in the existing order that allow challengers to block or dilute Western initiatives. It is weakened where one power retains overwhelming dominance, where local elites are fully aligned with an external patron, or where regional rivalries prevent coalition formation. It is also conditioned by communicative infrastructure: summits, media, think tanks, and academic discourse are necessary to sustain each project as a recognizable vision rather than a mere tactical position. The contest is therefore not automatic; it requires entrepreneurs who can translate material grievances into normative claims.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is operating, one should observe the proliferation of summit diplomacy and declarations with competing vocabularies; the creation or expansion of parallel institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank, and African Union peace and security structures; voting divergence in the UN General Assembly on Ukraine, Gaza, and sanctions; explicit naming of order visions in national policy documents; multi-alignment behavior by states that refuse exclusive bloc membership; and contestation over the meaning of the phrase "rules-based international order." One should also observe borrowing across projects: African strategic autonomy may use liberal institutional language while rejecting conditionality; Chinese relationalism may invoke UN Charter sovereignty while adding hierarchical relational obligations; Russian multipolarity may invoke Charter principles while contesting Western interpretations; Western liberal institutionalism may invoke universalism while practicing exclusion; and UN Charter multilateralism may provide a common grammar while lacking enforcement. These borrowings are not incoherence; they are the mechanism by which competing projects seek legitimacy within the same discursive field.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* The African perspective is the longest and most theoretically generative here because it treats order not as an abstract systemic condition but as a lived field of sovereignty, development, and historical repair. From within African scholarship—Grovogui on the construction of sovereignty and quasi-sovereignty, Mbembe on necropolitics and the postcolony, Bayart on extraversion, Mamdani on the colonial state and citizen-subject distinction, Rodney on underdevelopment, and Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, and Fanon on liberation and Pan-Africanism—strategic autonomy appears as a project of collective self-determination rather than mere non-alignment. The African vantage point reveals that Western liberal institutionalism often universalizes historically particular arrangements, that Chinese relationalism can reproduce dependency through infrastructure and debt, that Russian multipolarity can instrumentalize anti-Western rhetoric while pursuing its own sphere of influence, and that UN Charter multilateralism can be procedurally inclusive yet materially constrained by Security Council privilege. African strategic autonomy is therefore not neutrality between great powers; it is an attempt to convert multi-alignment into agenda-setting capacity, as seen in Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and the African Union's peace and security architecture. Its contribution is to show that order is experienced through development, recognition, and the capacity to refuse. Its occlusion is that elite extraversion,

internal governance deficits, and uneven continental integration can make autonomy more rhetorical than material, and that "African" agency is itself heterogeneous across states, classes, and regions. *Chinese:* The Chinese perspective contributes a relational and development-first critique of Western universalism, emphasizing connectivity, non-interference, and multipolarity; it occludes the asymmetries embedded in bilateral relationships and the political costs of economic dependence. *Russian:* The Russian perspective contributes a sharp critique of unipolar dominance and a defense of sovereign equality; it occludes the coercive dimensions of its own regional policy and the contradiction between Charter rhetoric and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine. *Western:* The Western perspective contributes institutional predictability, market integration, and rights-based legitimacy; it occludes the tendency to treat Western preferences as universal norms and to underestimate non-Western agency. *UN:* The UN perspective contributes universal membership, legal procedure, and development frameworks; it occludes the fact that power politics constrains institutional reform and that the organization often reflects rather than transcends great-power competition.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The "Global South" as emergent political category

Bolded Causal Claim: The "Global South" has become a politically consequential category not because it denotes a coherent geography, economy, or ideology, but because it aggregates heterogeneous grievances against hierarchical global governance into a usable diplomatic identity that can be mobilized in crises such as Ukraine, Gaza, and debt distress.

Mechanism: The category is built through historical layering and political construction. The Non-Aligned Movement, founded at Belgrade in 1961, and the Group of 77, established in 1964, created institutional habits of Southern solidarity around decolonization, development, and sovereignty. These habits did not disappear after the Cold War; they were archived in UN caucuses, summit routines, and diplomatic vocabularies. The category was revived and rebranded as "Global South" after the 2008 financial crisis, when Western economic management lost credibility; it was reinforced by COVID-19 vaccine inequity, by the spillover effects of sanctions after the 2022 Ukraine war, and by recurring debt and climate injustices. The mechanism has four parts. First, grievance aggregation: diverse states experience conditionality, unequal representation, technology gaps, and climate vulnerability as common injuries, even when their material interests differ. Second, identity construction: "Global South" functions as strategic essentialism, allowing heterogeneous states to claim moral and political weight without requiring ideological uniformity. Third, institutional coordination: the G77 plus China in UN forums, BRICS+ summits, African Union positions, and regional blocs provide platforms for collective bargaining and statement-making. Fourth, crisis mobilization: events such as Ukraine, Gaza, or sovereign debt distress activate the category by making Western double standards or exclusion visible. The BRICS+ expansion of 2023—adding Saudi Arabia, Iran, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Argentina—illustrates the mechanism: it is not a coherent bloc but a variable-geometry coalition that uses the language of the Global South to demand representation, development finance, and multipolarity. The category is therefore less a sociological fact than a diplomatic technology. It enables middle powers to bargain collectively while preserving bilateral flexibility, but it also creates expectations of solidarity that may be disappointed by intra-South rivalries, such as India-China tensions, Saudi-Iran competition, or Nile disputes between Egypt and Ethiopia. Its power lies in its capacity to convert dispersed grievances into a recognizable political subject.

Scope Conditions: The Global South category becomes politically consequential under five conditions: first, a perceived crisis of Western legitimacy, whether through financial instability, military intervention, vaccine inequity, or selective enforcement of international law; second, sufficient economic weight among Southern

states to make coordination meaningful rather than merely symbolic; third, institutional forums that allow collective voice, including the UN General Assembly, BRICS+, and regional organizations; fourth, rhetorical entrepreneurs—state leaders, diplomats, and intellectuals—who can name and sustain the category; and fifth, crises that highlight inequality or double standards. The category weakens when internal rivalries dominate, when economic interests diverge sharply, as between energy exporters and importers, or when Southern states prefer bilateral deals with great powers over collective bargaining. It is also vulnerable to external imposition: Western analysts, Chinese diplomacy, and Russian propaganda may each use "Global South" to serve their own strategic narratives, sometimes flattening African, Latin American, and Asian specificities into a single geopolitical bloc.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is operating, one should observe clustering in UN General Assembly voting on Ukraine resolutions, Gaza, and sanctions; the expansion and institutionalization of BRICS+; G77 statements that frame development, climate finance, and institutional reform as Southern demands; abstentions or alternative resolutions by African, Asian, and Latin American states in crises involving great powers; demands for Security Council reform and greater voice in the IMF and World Bank; and the increasing use of "Global South" in policy documents, media, and academic discourse. One should also observe limits: the category does not predict uniform behavior, and abstention should not be mistaken for alignment with Russia or China. Abstention may express sovereignty, non-alignment, grievance against Western double standards, or simple risk management. The Data Lab focus on UNGA voting by region, BRICS+ GDP share relative to the G7, and AIIB versus World Bank lending is designed to test whether the category corresponds to measurable institutional and economic shifts or remains primarily rhetorical.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* The African perspective is the longest and most critical here because African states and scholars have both contributed to and been partially submerged by the Global South category. From within African thought—Grovogui on sovereignty and quasi-sovereignty, Mbembe on the postcolony and necropolitics, Bayart on extraversion, Mamdani on the bifurcated state, Rodney on underdevelopment, and Fanon, Cabral, Nkrumah, and Nyerere on liberation—the Global South can appear as a continuation of Bandung and non-alignment, but also as a category that risks obscuring African specificity. African strategic autonomy may conflict with the leadership claims of BRICS+ members, especially where China or Russia seeks to define the Southern agenda. The African vantage point reveals that the Global South is not a natural community but a political construction whose benefits depend on whether it amplifies African agency or subordinates it to larger powers. It contributes the insight that Southern solidarity must be evaluated by its effects on continental integration, development finance, and sovereignty, not merely by its opposition to the West. Its occlusion is that African states themselves are divided by regime type, economic structure, and regional rivalry, and that elite invocations of the Global South may serve domestic legitimation as much as international bargaining. *Chinese:* The Chinese perspective contributes a powerful use of the Global South category to legitimize multipolarity, development finance, and non-interference; it occludes the power asymmetries within BRICS+ and the possibility that Southern solidarity may be instrumentalized for Chinese strategic goals. *Russian:* The Russian perspective contributes anti-hegemonic rhetoric and a challenge to Western dominance; it occludes the fact that its own actions in Ukraine have tested the credibility of its claims to defend sovereignty and Charter principles. *Western:* The Western perspective often treats the Global South as a set of swing states, development partners, or governance problems; it contributes aid, trade, and institutional access; it occludes structural inequality and the historical production of hierarchy. *UN:* The UN perspective contributes universal development frameworks, multilateral forums, and the language of sovereign equality; it occludes the gap between universalist claims and the enforcement power of the Security Council, and the tendency for Southern demands to be diluted in

bureaucratic process.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The "Rules-Based International Order" as a Contested Phrase

Bolded Causal Claim: The phrase "rules-based international order" is not a neutral description of an agreed legal regime but a political claim that naturalizes a historically specific, Western-authored hierarchy; contestation over who writes the rules, who enforces them, and who is bound by them is therefore constitutive of contemporary order politics rather than a deviation from it.

Mechanism: The mechanism is semantic capture combined with asymmetric enforcement. First, the phrase conflates three analytically distinct things: (a) the UN Charter and treaty-based international law; (b) institutional regimes such as trade, finance, and arms control; and (c) politically asserted norms such as freedom of navigation, market openness, human-rights conditionality, and alliance solidarity. By collapsing these layers into one vocabulary, powerful states can present preferences as rules and dissent as rule-breaking. Second, authorship is historically concentrated: the post-1945 order was drafted by victorious powers, embedded Western legal categories, and carried forward the "standard of civilization" logic that African and post-colonial scholars have long identified as a technology of hierarchy (Grovogui; Mamdani; Rodney). Third, enforcement capacity is unevenly distributed: sanctions, financial exclusion, conditionality, military alliances, and control over key currencies allow some actors to enforce rules while others experience rules as constraints. Fourth, bindingness is stratified: great powers reserve exceptions through vetoes, non-ratification, targeted sanctions, and claims of self-defense, while weaker states face compliance costs. Fifth, contestation is not simply rejection of rules but competing constitutionalism: African, Chinese, Russian, and other actors invoke "rules" too, but redefine their content around sovereignty, non-intervention, development rights, and procedural equality. Acharya's (2018) idea of a "multiplex" order is useful here because it suggests that order is no longer organized around a single rule-maker; rather, multiple actors generate partially overlapping rules, and legitimacy becomes the central battlefield. The mechanism therefore runs from discursive conflation to hierarchical authorship, then to selective enforcement, and finally to counter-claims that seek to pluralize the meaning of order.

Scope Conditions: The phrase is most effective where hegemonic power, alliance discipline, and financial interdependence make compliance cheaper than defiance. It works best when rules are codified in institutions that powerful states control and when violations can be framed as threats to collective security or market stability. It weakens when rules conflict with core sovereignty, when enforcement is visibly selective, or when historical memory of unequal treaties and colonial legal regimes makes "universal" language suspect. It also weakens when the same actors who invoke rules are seen to exempt themselves, because the phrase then loses performative legitimacy. The scope condition is therefore not merely power but perceived impartiality: rules bind most effectively when enforcement appears reciprocal, and they become contested when enforcement appears to track geopolitical alignment.

Observable Implications: One implication is voting behavior in multilateral forums. Broad condemnation of territorial aggression can coexist with significant abstentions when enforcement is perceived as selective; this pattern suggests that many states accept the substantive rule while questioning the legitimacy of the enforcement coalition. Another implication is the selective use of sanctions: extensive coercive measures against some violators alongside limited accountability for others produce a credibility gap that non-Western actors routinely cite. A third implication is institutional demand: calls for UN Security Council reform, equitable representation in financial institutions, and "reformed multilateralism" are not rejections of order but

demands to renegotiate authorship. A fourth implication is rhetorical convergence: China's "true multilateralism," Russia's critique of "rules-based order," and African demands for strategic autonomy all use the language of rules while contesting their content. A fifth implication is that the phrase itself has become a diagnostic indicator: when diplomats invoke "rules-based order," they are often signaling alignment rather than describing a settled legal consensus.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* The African vantage point begins from the historical experience that international rules have often functioned as instruments of subordination: colonial legal regimes, unequal treaties, externally imposed economic conditionality, and racialized standards of sovereignty. African scholarship—Rodney on underdevelopment, Nkrumah on neo-colonialism, Mamdani on the bifurcated state, Grovogui on international legal universalism—treats sovereignty not as an abstract given but as a historically contested achievement against hierarchy. From this perspective, the "rules-based order" is not self-evidently legitimate; its legitimacy depends on who authored the rules, whether enforcement is impartial, and whether rules protect developmental space rather than merely discipline weaker states. African multi-alignment and abstentions are therefore better understood as strategic autonomy than as neutrality: they refuse conscription into enforcement regimes whose application is uneven. AU Agenda 2063 frames continental integration, industrialization, and self-reliance as forms of rule-making capacity, not mere compliance. The contribution of this perspective is to expose the historical production of legal hierarchy and to insist that equality of sovereignty must be substantive, not rhetorical. Its occlusion is that it can understate instances in which rules—especially territorial integrity and non-aggression—protect weaker states from predation, and it can be weakened when internal governance deficits make external claims to equal sovereignty less persuasive. *Chinese:* China presents itself as a defender of the UN Charter and "true multilateralism," opposing "small circles," bloc confrontation, and the unilateral rewriting of rules. It argues that rules must evolve through inclusive consultation and reflect multipolar realities, and it links order to development, connectivity, and the "community of shared future." Its contribution is to challenge Western monopoly over legitimacy and to demand procedural inclusion; its occlusion is that it can obscure coercive practices in its own region, ambiguity over maritime claims, and the gap between universalist rhetoric and power-political competition. *Russian:* Russia frames the "rules-based order" as ideological cover for Western hegemony, NATO expansion, and selective enforcement, while invoking sovereign equality, civilizational diversity, and the UN Charter. Its contribution is to expose double standards and the asymmetry between rule-makers and rule-takers; its occlusion is that its own use of force against Ukraine has severely tested the credibility of its claims to defend Charter principles. *Western:* The Western perspective treats the rules-based order as a liberal peace project: human rights, open markets, collective security, and institutionalized cooperation. It sees enforcement as defense of norms against revisionist challengers. Its contribution is the creation of durable legal and institutional frameworks; its occlusion is the historical production of hierarchy, selective enforcement, and the tendency to conflate US or allied preferences with universal rules. *UN:* The UN perspective anchors order in the Charter: sovereign equality, non-use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, and development. Its contribution is universalist language and inclusive forums; its occlusion is the enforcement gap created by Security Council privilege, the tendency for Southern demands to be diluted in bureaucratic process, and the difficulty of reconciling universal norms with great-power politics.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Institutional Revisionism and the Fracturing of Bretton Woods: AIIB, NDB, and BRICS Payment Systems

Bolded Causal Claim: The creation of parallel financial institutions and payment infrastructures by BRICS and China does not simply duplicate Bretton Woods institutions but constitutes institutional revisionism

that fragments global financial governance, producing overlapping authority and competing standards while remaining partially dependent on the dollar-centered system.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with a voice deficit. The Bretton Woods institutions were created in 1944 with governance structures reflecting mid-century power; over time, economic weight shifted faster than voting shares, conditionality practices, and leadership conventions, producing grievances among emerging economies. Institutional revisionism then operates through the simultaneous use of voice and exit: dissatisfied states demand reform of existing institutions while creating alternatives that embody their preferences. Hirschman's (1970) framework is useful here because it captures why actors do not simply leave the system; they build parallel institutions to increase bargaining leverage, signal dissatisfaction, and create fallback options. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), launched with Chinese leadership, and the New Development Bank (NDB), created by BRICS, are the clearest examples: they provide development finance with governance arrangements that give emerging economies greater ownership, emphasize infrastructure and "Southern" priorities, and challenge the monopoly of the World Bank and regional development banks. Their revisionism is not only material but normative: they promote non-interference, country ownership, and development-first lending, in contrast to the conditionality and policy reform traditions of Bretton Woods institutions. Payment-system initiatives—CIPS, BRICS payment mechanisms, local-currency settlement, and projects such as mBridge—extend revisionism into the monetary domain by seeking to reduce dependence on SWIFT, lower sanctions exposure, and create channels for trade settlement outside the dollar. Yet the mechanism is constrained by network effects: the dollar's liquidity, the depth of US Treasury markets, convertibility, legal predictability, and the fact that many new institutions still co-finance with, benchmark against, or operate alongside Bretton Woods institutions. The result is not replacement but layering: overlapping institutions, forum shopping, competing standards, and a gradual pluralization of financial governance.

Scope Conditions: Institutional revisionism succeeds where three conditions align: large infrastructure gaps, dissatisfaction with existing conditionality, and the availability of capital from a major state willing to underwrite new institutions. It is strongest in regions where Western finance is scarce or politically conditional and where borrowers value speed and fewer policy conditions. It is weaker where new institutions lack scale, credit history, or operational capacity, and where member states have conflicting interests—such as India-China rivalry or Saudi-Iranian tensions—that limit collective action. It is also constrained by the dollar system: alternatives can reduce transaction dependence at the margins, but they cannot quickly replicate the liquidity, trust, and legal infrastructure that sustain dollar dominance. Sanctions can accelerate demand for alternatives, but secondary sanctions and compliance risk can deter adoption. The scope condition is therefore not merely institutional creation but sustained convergence between grievance, capacity, and member-state cohesion.

Observable Implications: One implication is institutional proliferation: AIIB membership has expanded well beyond Asia, and NDB lending has grown, including local-currency operations, while co-financing with established institutions shows that new banks are embedded in rather than fully separate from the existing system. Another implication is governance contestation: debates over quota reform, leadership selection, and conditionality in the IMF and World Bank persist, indicating that voice deficits remain unresolved. A third implication is financial fragmentation: bilateral local-currency trade, alternative payment rails, and BRICS discussions of settlement mechanisms indicate incremental diversification, but not a systemic displacement of the dollar. A fourth implication is metric asymmetry: BRICS+ accounts for a larger share of global GDP at purchasing-power parity than the G7, yet the G7 retains greater nominal GDP, financial-market depth, and institutional control. This gap between economic weight and financial power is precisely what revisionist institutions seek to narrow. A fifth implication is that the BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration

(2023) explicitly calls for reform of Bretton Woods institutions and greater use of local currencies, signaling that institutional revisionism is now an organized diplomatic project rather than a set of isolated initiatives.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* African states view AIIB and NDB as potential sources of infrastructure finance aligned with AU Agenda 2063, offering alternatives to Western conditionality and expanding the menu of development partners. The contribution of this perspective is to insist on African agency: financing should support continental priorities such as transport corridors, energy, and industrialization, and African governments should have voice in institutional design rather than merely borrowing from externally governed banks. African scholarship on extraversion and dependency—Bayart on the "politics of the belly," Nkrumah on neo-colonialism, Rodney on underdevelopment—warns that institutional alternatives can reproduce dependency if they are not governed by African priorities and if debt sustainability is ignored. Multi-alignment means engaging all institutions while demanding transparency, local benefit, and African representation. The occlusion is that this perspective can understate the risks of opacity, debt distress, and asymmetric creditor power in new institutions, and it can be weakened when African governments lack the capacity to negotiate as a bloc. *Chinese:* China frames the AIIB as high-standard multilateralism and a contribution to the "community of shared future," emphasizing development, connectivity, and non-interference. Its contribution is capital, infrastructure, and an institutional platform that elevates emerging-economy ownership; its occlusion is that it can obscure geopolitical competition, debt concerns, and asymmetry in decision-making within China-led institutions. *Russian:* Russia supports a multipolar financial architecture and de-dollarization as ways to reduce sanctions vulnerability and Western financial hegemony. Its contribution is to challenge the political use of financial infrastructure; its occlusion is that alternatives remain shallow, uptake is uneven, and Russian advocacy is shaped by its own exposure to sanctions. *Western:* The Western perspective acknowledges development needs but worries about standards, transparency, debt sustainability, and strategic fragmentation. Its contribution is the scale, safeguards, and creditworthiness of existing institutions; its occlusion is the history of conditionality, underrepresentation, and the tendency to treat Western governance norms as universal. *UN:* The UN perspective supports development finance, infrastructure, and the Sustainable Development Goals, while invoking universal norms of accountability and inclusion. Its contribution is a legitimizing framework for multilateral development; its occlusion is that it can mask power asymmetries in new institutions and the gap between universalist claims and the actual distribution of voice and resources.

SECTION 2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective on the contemporary transition is best understood not as a regional variant of multipolarity but as a distinct epistemic and political standpoint produced by the long experience of being governed within an international order that was built, in large part, through colonial conquest, racialized sovereignty, and extractive political economy. African international-relations scholarship has repeatedly insisted that the discipline's core categories—sovereignty, anarchy, order, development, security—were not discovered as neutral descriptions but were forged in the context of European imperial expansion and its afterlives. Grovogui's critique of the "sovereigns, quasi sovereigns, and Africans" structure of international law, Mbembe's analysis of necropolitics and the planetary entanglement of violence and resource extraction, Bayart's concept of extraversion, Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject, Rodney's account of how Europe underdeveloped Africa, and Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and its psychological and institutional

residues all converge on a single claim: the contemporary "rules-based international order" cannot be evaluated as if it were a neutral framework whose only problem is recent strain. From this vantage point, the transition away from unipolarity is not merely a redistribution of power among great powers; it is a reopening of questions about who counts as a sovereign, whose development model is legitimate, and whose suffering is visible in global governance. Acharya (2018) argues that the emerging order is multiplex rather than merely multipolar; the African perspective pushes this argument further by asking whether multiplexity can be meaningful if the hierarchies of recognition produced by colonialism remain intact.

This standpoint also reframes the familiar language of multipolarity. For many African thinkers and policymakers, multipolarity is not an abstract systemic condition but a practical opportunity to reduce dependence on any single external patron. Nkrumah's pan-Africanism, Nyerere's emphasis on self-reliance and nonalignment, and Cabral's insistence that liberation must be rooted in the material realities of the people rather than imported slogans all provide a lineage for what is now called strategic autonomy or multi-alignment. The African Union's Agenda 2063, with its aspirations for continental integration, industrialization, peace and security architecture, and financial independence, is the institutional expression of this lineage. It does not reject international cooperation; rather, it seeks to make cooperation conditional on African agency, African priorities, and African ownership. In this sense, African strategic autonomy is not neutrality in the Cold War sense of standing aside from great-power competition. It is an active, selective, and issue-specific practice: aligning with different partners on different questions, resisting external imposition, and using the competition among major powers to expand room for maneuver. The abstentions of many African states on United Nations General Assembly resolutions concerning Ukraine in 2022–2024 are intelligible through this lens. They were not simply endorsements of Russian aggression, nor were they merely expressions of indifference. They reflected a cluster of concerns: the defense of sovereignty as a universal principle, opposition to selective sanctions that harm food and energy security, resentment at the prioritization of European crises over African ones, and a refusal to be conscripted into a binary alignment that would reproduce Cold War patterns. To read these abstentions as "pro-Russian" is to impose a bipolar interpretive grid that the African perspective explicitly rejects.

The African vantage point contributes something the other four perspectives cannot fully supply: a theory of order as hierarchy of recognition. Western liberal institutionalism tends to treat the post-1945 order as a set of rules and institutions that, however imperfect, created a framework for cooperation and development. Chinese and Russian perspectives tend to treat the same order as a vehicle for Western hegemony and to propose multipolarity as its corrective. The UN perspective treats the Charter as a universal legal framework whose crisis is one of compliance and reform. The African perspective, by contrast, asks a prior question: who was recognized as a full sovereign subject when the rules were written, and whose sovereignty remains conditional in practice? This question is not merely historical. It shapes contemporary debates over debt sustainability, climate finance, vaccine equity, migration, and the allocation of Security Council seats. Mamdani's analysis of the colonial state's bifurcated structure, in which "citizens" and "subjects" were governed differently, has an international analogue: some states are treated as rule-makers and others as rule-takers, some as security providers and others as security problems. Mbembe's work on the "becoming-black of the world" and the planetary distribution of vulnerability suggests that the contemporary transition is not only about the rise of China or the return of Russia but about whether the global order can accommodate forms of life and knowledge that were historically excluded from its design. Oyěwùmí's critique of the gendered and epistemic assumptions embedded in Western social theory, and Tamale's feminist insistence on centering African women's agency, further show that even emancipatory discourses of multipolarity can reproduce hierarchies if they remain state-centric and elite-driven. The African perspective therefore does not simply

add "Africa" to a list of regions; it challenges the ontological premises of international-relations theory itself.

At the same time, this perspective has scope conditions and blind spots that must be acknowledged. It can risk romanticizing non-alignment or strategic autonomy by understating the material constraints that shape African states' choices: debt dependence, aid dependence, commodity export structures, security partnerships, and the limited fiscal capacity of regional institutions. Bayart's concept of extraversion is double-edged: African elites have historically used external resources to maintain domestic power, which means that "strategic autonomy" can be as much a rhetorical resource as a material condition. The African Union's consensus-based decision-making and its dependence on external funding can limit its ability to act collectively, even when its normative commitments are clear. Moreover, an overemphasis on sovereignty and non-intervention can occlude internal authoritarianism, gendered violence, and the rights of minorities, particularly when sovereignty is invoked by governments rather than by peoples. Aning and Danso's work on African agency in security governance reminds us that agency is not automatically emancipatory; it can be exercised by states, elites, insurgents, or communities in ways that conflict with one another. The African perspective is strongest when it treats sovereignty not as an absolute shield but as a contested and relational achievement, and when it connects external autonomy to internal democratization. Its contribution to the study of world order is therefore not a finished alternative model but a set of critical questions: who is included in "the international," whose knowledge counts, whose development is prioritized, and whose security is purchased at whose expense?

In the context of the five key ideas of this lesson, the African perspective illuminates each of them differently. The decline of unipolarity is not merely a shift from one hegemon to several; it is a moment in which the historical monopoly of Western powers over the definition of legitimate order is weakened, creating space for alternative claims. The five competing order-projects are not equal alternatives from an African standpoint: liberal institutionalism is judged by its colonial and conditional legacies; Chinese relationalism by its development promise and its potential for new dependencies; Russian multipolarity by its anti-hegemonic rhetoric and its imperial practice; UN multilateralism by its universalist language and its unequal structure. The "Global South" is not a natural geographic category but a political project shaped by shared experiences of marginalization and by the attempt to convert that experience into collective bargaining power. The phrase "rules-based international order" is exposed as a contested slogan whose rules were not universally authored and whose enforcement is uneven. Finally, institutional revisionism—AIIB, NDB, BRICS payment systems—is read not as a simple challenge to Western dominance but as a field in which African states must navigate between new opportunities and new forms of dependence. The African perspective thus frames the lesson's central puzzle: the contemporary transition is not only about who leads the international system, but about whether the system can be reconstituted on terms that recognize the full sovereignty, equality, and agency of those who were historically treated as objects of order rather than authors of it.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on the contemporary transition is organized around the claim that the post-Cold War unipolar order is neither legitimate nor sustainable, and that the movement toward multipolarity represents not disorder but the democratization of international relations. From within this viewpoint, the central problem of world order is hegemony: the concentration of military, financial, technological, and normative power in a single state and its alliance system. The Chinese narrative draws on a long historical memory of the "century of humiliation," on the experience of exclusion from the post-1945 order, and on the more recent success of state-led development. It presents China's rise not as a bid for hegemony but as the restoration of a more plural and equitable distribution of power. The vocabulary of "community of shared future

for mankind," "win-win cooperation," and "multipolarity" is not merely diplomatic rhetoric; it expresses a relational ontology in which order is achieved through mutual benefit, sovereign equality, and the avoidance of zero-sum competition. The concept of Tianxia, often invoked in Chinese political discourse, can be steel-manned not as a claim to imperial universalism but as an aspiration to a world in which differences are managed through reciprocity rather than domination. In this reading, the Westphalian state system is not rejected but supplemented by a thicker ethic of relational responsibility.

This perspective contributes a powerful critique of the "rules-based international order" as a phrase that obscures the question of who wrote the rules and who is bound by them. Chinese officials and scholars frequently argue that the United States invokes rules when they serve its interests and bypasses them when they do not, citing interventions, sanctions, and the selective application of international law. The Chinese position holds that legitimate rules must be negotiated multilaterally, must reflect the interests of developing countries, and must not be used as instruments of coercion. It also reframes development as a right rather than a reward for compliance with Western governance standards. Institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank, and the Belt and Road Initiative are presented as responses to a genuine deficit in infrastructure finance and as alternatives to institutions whose conditionality and governance structures are seen as unrepresentative. The BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023) echoes this critique by calling for greater representation of developing countries and reform of global governance. The BRICS+ expansion is interpreted as evidence that a growing number of states seek a more multipolar and less Western-centric system. China's peace proposals, including its position on the Ukraine war, are framed as efforts to promote dialogue, sovereignty, and a security architecture that does not rely on military blocs. From this standpoint, the UN Charter's principles of sovereignty and non-interference are not obstacles to order but its foundation, and the crisis of multilateralism is caused by the instrumentalization of universal norms for geopolitical ends.

The Chinese perspective's strength lies in its capacity to articulate the grievances of states that feel excluded from global governance and to mobilize material resources for development. It offers a coherent alternative to the assumption that Western liberal democracy is the only legitimate endpoint of political development. It also forces a necessary debate about double standards in the application of international law. Yet its occlusions are significant. The emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference can shield authoritarian practices and can be invoked selectively, particularly in relation to China's own territorial claims and its treatment of minorities. The language of "win-win" cooperation can obscure asymmetries of power between China and its partners, especially in debt, resource extraction, and technology dependence. The Belt and Road Initiative has generated legitimate concerns about transparency, environmental standards, and debt sustainability, even if these concerns are sometimes exaggerated by geopolitical rivals. Moreover, the Chinese perspective tends to conflate opposition to Western hegemony with support for China's own strategic interests, making it difficult to distinguish between multipolarity as a global public good and multipolarity as a vehicle for Chinese influence. Its vision of a "community of shared future" remains under-specified in institutional terms: it is not yet clear how a relational order would resolve disputes over territory, human rights, or security without recourse to power. The perspective is therefore most persuasive as a critique of unipolarity and as a demand for greater voice for the Global South, and least persuasive when it presents China's own rise as automatically benign or when it treats sovereignty as an absolute that overrides all other norms.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on the contemporary transition is rooted in a rejection of the post-Cold War unipolar order and in the assertion that Russia is a distinct civilization with legitimate great-power interests that cannot

be subordinated to Western norms. The 2023 Russian Foreign Policy Concept frames the international system as undergoing a "profound transformation" toward multipolarity, in which the dominance of the "collective West" is giving way to a more just and polycentric world. From within this viewpoint, the central problem is not Russian revisionism but Western overreach: the expansion of NATO, the promotion of liberal democratic norms as universal, the use of sanctions and financial power as weapons, and the disregard for Russia's security concerns. The concept of "sovereign democracy" holds that political legitimacy derives from a state's own historical and cultural traditions rather than from external standards, and that no single model of governance can be imposed on all societies. The "civilizational state" framing goes further, presenting Russia not merely as a nation-state but as a distinct civilization with its own values, historical mission, and sphere of legitimate influence. This perspective draws on a deep sense of historical grievance, including the collapse of the Soviet Union, the perceived broken promises regarding NATO expansion, the Kosovo precedent, and the experience of economic shock therapy in the 1990s.

The Russian contribution to the debate over world order is its insistence that security is indivisible and that the expansion of military alliances to the borders of a major power creates a security dilemma that cannot be dismissed as mere paranoia. It also highlights the hypocrisy of a "rules-based order" that, in its view, applies international law selectively: Western states invoke sovereignty when it suits them and override it when they deem it necessary. The Russian perspective supports multipolarity not only as a distribution of power but as a pluralism of political and cultural models. It argues that the UN Charter's principles of sovereignty and non-intervention should be the supreme framework for international relations, and that attempts to enforce liberal norms through intervention or sanctions undermine the very order they claim to defend. In the context of institutional revisionism, Russia supports alternative financial and political arrangements that reduce dependence on Western-controlled institutions, including BRICS and the Eurasian Economic Union. Its narrative of anti-colonialism and anti-hegemony resonates with many states in the Global South, particularly those that have experienced sanctions, intervention, or conditional lending.

The occlusions of the Russian perspective are, however, severe and cannot be treated as incidental. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine is a direct violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity principles that the perspective claims to uphold. The gap between Russia's defense of Westphalian sovereignty in the abstract and its denial of Ukrainian sovereignty in practice is not a minor inconsistency; it is a fundamental contradiction that undermines the credibility of its normative claims. The "civilizational state" rhetoric can function as an imperial ideology, justifying domination over neighboring peoples and the suppression of dissent at home. The concept of "sovereign democracy" has been used to legitimize authoritarian consolidation, the restriction of political competition, and the manipulation of elections. Moreover, Russia's use of energy, information, and military force as instruments of coercion demonstrates that its opposition to Western hegemony does not necessarily imply a commitment to a more equitable or peaceful order. The perspective is strongest when it identifies genuine tensions in liberal internationalism—such as the tension between universal norms and great-power security, or between intervention and sovereignty—and weakest when it presents Russia's own actions as defensive necessities while denying agency to its neighbors. A steel-man of the Russian position must therefore separate its valid critique of unipolarity and double standards from its attempt to legitimize aggression and imperial control. Its contribution to the contemporary transition is real but bounded: it has helped to expose the fragility of Western normative dominance, but it has not offered a credible alternative order that can command broad legitimacy beyond a narrow circle of aligned states.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on the contemporary transition is best described as liberal institutionalism under

strain. From within this viewpoint, the post-1945 order, however imperfect, created an unprecedented framework for cooperation, prosperity, and the gradual expansion of human rights and democratic governance. The central problem of the current transition is not that the order was illegitimate but that it is being challenged by authoritarian powers, undermined by populist nationalism, and strained by its own overreach. The Western narrative emphasizes the role of alliances, institutions, trade, and norms in preventing great-power war, promoting development, and managing global problems such as climate change, pandemics, and financial crises. It treats the "rules-based international order" as a genuine, if incomplete, achievement: a body of treaties, institutions, and practices that, however unevenly, constrain arbitrary power and provide mechanisms for dispute resolution. The decline of unipolarity is acknowledged, but it is interpreted as a dangerous moment in which the guardrails of order are weakening, not as a welcome correction to Western dominance.

This perspective contributes a powerful account of institutional capacity and normative aspiration. The scale and creditworthiness of the Bretton Woods institutions, the security guarantees provided by NATO, the humanitarian and development work of UN agencies, and the legal frameworks governing trade, human rights, and the law of the sea represent real achievements that are not easily replicated by newer institutions. Western scholars and policymakers argue that the problem is not the absence of rules but the failure of some states to comply with them, and that the appropriate response is reform and reinforcement rather than abandonment. The Western perspective also insists that certain norms—prohibition of aggression, human rights, non-proliferation—are not merely Western preferences but universal commitments embedded in the UN Charter and international law. From this standpoint, the rise of China and the assertiveness of Russia are not simply expressions of multipolarity but challenges to a legal and normative framework that has benefited the world as a whole. The Western response to the Ukraine war—sanctions, military assistance, diplomatic mobilization, and UN resolutions—is presented as a defense of the Charter order against aggression, not as a defense of Western hegemony.

The occlusions of the Western perspective are equally important. Its tendency to treat Western governance norms as universal can obscure the historical specificity of liberal democracy and the diversity of legitimate political arrangements. Its record of intervention, regime change, and conditional lending has generated deep resentment in many parts of the Global South, and its failure to reform international institutions to reflect contemporary power distributions has undermined its credibility. The Western perspective often underestimates the extent to which the "rules-based order" is perceived as a Western order, and it can treat legitimate grievances about underrepresentation, debt, and historical injustice as mere propaganda. It also faces an internal contradiction: it champions a rules-based order while sometimes exempting itself from the rules, whether through the use of force without Security Council authorization, the maintenance of unequal voting structures, or the application of sanctions that harm third parties. Mearsheimer's critique of liberal hegemony, though controversial, captures an important internal Western debate: the attempt to spread liberal democracy by force may have produced backlash and instability rather than order. Schweller's analysis of unipolarity's end suggests that the transition is not simply a matter of defending the old order but of adapting to a world in which power is more diffuse. The Western perspective is therefore most convincing when it defends specific, widely shared norms and institutional capacities, and least convincing when it conflates those norms with Western strategic interests or treats the existing order as self-evidently legitimate. Its challenge in the contemporary transition is to distinguish between defending universal principles and defending a historically unequal distribution of power.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on the contemporary transition is that of Charter multilateralism in crisis. From within

this viewpoint, the international system is not merely an arena of competing powers but a legal and institutional order whose legitimacy derives from the UN Charter and the universal principles it enshrines: sovereign equality, territorial integrity, non-intervention, peaceful settlement of disputes, and collective security. The UN perspective does not deny the reality of power politics, but it insists that power must be exercised within a framework of law and that the legitimacy of order depends on the consent and participation of all states. The central problem of the transition is therefore not the decline of any single power but the erosion of multilateral norms, the paralysis of the Security Council, and the gap between the universalist claims of the Charter and the unequal distribution of voice and resources in the system. The UN perspective is distinct from the Western perspective in that it does not identify the "rules-based order" with any particular alliance or regional bloc; it identifies it with the Charter itself, which is formally universal and which includes states with radically different political systems and interests.

This perspective contributes a legitimizing framework for global governance and a set of norms that remain indispensable even in a multipolar world. The UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the various conventions on climate, trade, and security provide a common language and a set of benchmarks against which state behavior can be judged. The UN system also provides forums in which weaker states can amplify their voices, as seen in the General Assembly's role in expressing global opinion on the Ukraine war and in the long-standing demands for Security Council reform. The UN perspective supports development finance, infrastructure, and the SDGs, while invoking universal norms of accountability and inclusion. It can accommodate the grievances of the Global South by framing them as demands for the fulfillment of Charter promises rather than as rejections of multilateralism. In this sense, the UN perspective offers a possible bridge between competing order-projects: it can validate African demands for sovereignty and development, Chinese demands for multipolarity and non-interference, Russian demands for sovereign equality, and Western demands for normative constraints, provided that all are subordinated to a genuinely universal framework.

The occlusions of the UN perspective are structural rather than merely rhetorical. The Security Council's veto power concentrates authority in five states, three of which are Western or Western-aligned, and this concentration undermines the claim that the system is based on sovereign equality. The UN's dependence on member-state contributions and on the political will of powerful states means that its capacity to enforce norms is uneven and often selective. The UN perspective can mask power asymmetries in new institutions by invoking universalist language that does not correspond to the actual distribution of voice and resources. It can also treat the Charter as a static text rather than as a living framework that must be reinterpreted in light of decolonization, climate change, and technological transformation. The gap between the UN's normative aspirations and its operational capacity is particularly visible in crises such as Ukraine, where the Security Council is paralyzed by the veto of a permanent member that is itself a party to the conflict. The UN perspective is therefore most credible when it acknowledges its own institutional limitations and supports reform, and least credible when it presents the existing system as already legitimate. Its contribution to the contemporary transition is to remind all competing projects that order without law is merely power, and that law without power is merely aspiration. The challenge is to find institutional forms that can reconcile these two truths in a world where no single power can impose its will and no universal consensus yet exists on the terms of coexistence.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reveals multi-alignment and strategic autonomy as rational, agentic responses to great-power competition; shows that Global South abstentions are active non-alignment rather than neutrality; centers the agency of states historically excluded from rule-making	May understate the material costs of non-alignment for small states; risks romanticizing sovereignty without addressing internal governance deficits and elite capture	Equitable multipolarity with African agency; reform of global governance to reflect demographic and economic weight; Agenda 2063 as normative horizon	AU Agenda 2063; African abstentions on UNGA Ukraine resolutions (2022–2024); BRICS+ expansion including Egypt and Ethiopia; AU admission to G20 (2023)	**Western:** Non-alignment in the face of aggression undermines the collective security norms that ultimately protect small states; abstention is complicity by another name

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Offers relational ontology (Tianxia) as a genuine alternative to Westphalian sovereignty; demonstrates that economic interdependence can be leveraged for political influence; provides institutional alternatives (AIIB, BRI, NDB) that diversify global governance	Understates coercive dimensions of economic statecraft; obscures asymmetries in bilateral relationships; presents self-interest as universalism; conflates development finance with political alignment	Community of shared future for mankind; multipolarity with Chinese characteristics; development-first ordering; relational harmony over contractual individualism	AIIB membership exceeding 100 countries; BRI infrastructure investments across 150+ states; Chinese peace plan for Ukraine (February 2023); Global Development Initiative	**African:** Relational hierarchy may reproduce dependency under new management; "shared future" rhetoric can mask asymmetric power in bilateral deals

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Articulates civilizational pluralism and sovereign democracy as a critique of liberal universalism; exposes double standards in Western application of international law; names the security dilemma that Western narratives ignore	Legitimizes aggression as anti-hegemony; conflates regime security with state sovereignty; ignores agency of neighboring states; presents imperial restoration as multipolarity	Multipolarity as anti-unipolarity; civilizational states as legitimate actors; rejection of liberal normative monopoly; sovereign equality without conditionality	Russian Foreign Policy Concept (2023); UNGA voting patterns; sanctions resilience; BRICS expansion advocacy	**UN:** Sovereignty claims cannot override Charter prohibition on use of force; "civilizational state" rhetoric is a license for domination
Western	Provides institutional framework (NATO, EU, Bretton Woods) that delivered unprecedented prosperity and security; articulates human rights and democracy as universal norms; mobilized unprecedented sanctions coalition	Treats contingent historical arrangements as natural; underestimates resentment generated by asymmetric application of rules; conflates order with US hegemony; presents "rules-based order" as if rules were self-evident	Liberal international order; rules-based system; democracy promotion; human rights universalism; institutional-ized cooperation	Sanctions coalition on Russia (2022); NATO expansion and cohesion; G7 coordination; World Bank/IMF lending volumes	**Russian/African:** "Rules-based order" is a post-hoc justification for power asymmetry; rules are written by and for the powerful

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Provides universal legal framework (Charter); legitimizes collective action; offers forum for Global South voice; humanitarian operations; normative anchor for all competing projects	Institutional paralysis (veto); gap between normative aspiration and enforcement; Western dominance of Secretariat and funding; presents existing system as already legitimate	Charter multi-lateralism; sovereign equality; collective security; rule of law; human rights	UNGA resolutions on Ukraine (2022–2024); ICJ rulings; humanitarian operations; peacekeeping missions	**All perspectives:** The system is structurally incapable of enforcing its own norms against great powers; law without power is aspiration

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2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2022 Ukraine War and the Global Response

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is the most consequential test of the contemporary international order since the end of the Cold War. It is not merely a regional war; it is a prism through which every competing vision of world order refracts. The case is analytically productive precisely because no single perspective adequately explains the full pattern of responses — the sanctions coalition, the UN voting record, the African and Global South abstentions, the Chinese peace plan, and the BRICS expansion that followed. The task is to disaggregate the causal mechanisms at work and to adjudicate among the five perspectives.

Levels of Analysis

At the *individual* level, the decision to invade was shaped by Vladimir Putin's assessment of NATO expansion, his reading of Western resolve following the Afghanistan withdrawal, and his historical narrative of Russian-Ukrainian unity. Volodymyr Zelensky's decision to remain in Kyiv and mobilize national resistance transformed what Moscow expected to be a three-day operation into a protracted war. Joe Biden's decision to declassify intelligence and build a sanctions coalition before the invasion, rather than after, altered the diplomatic landscape. These individual choices were not epiphenomenal; they shaped the trajectory of the conflict and the global response.

At the *state* level, Russia's invasion reflected a security dilemma: Moscow perceived NATO enlargement as an existential threat, while NATO members perceived Russian aggression as confirming the need for enlargement. Ukraine's statehood — its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and right to self-determination —

became the contested object. African states faced a different state-level calculus: many had historical ties to Russia (Soviet-era support for liberation movements), economic dependencies (wheat, fertilizer, energy), and a principled commitment to non-alignment rooted in the Bandung and Non-Aligned Movement traditions. The abstention of 17 African states on the March 2022 UNGA resolution condemning Russia was not a single decision but 17 distinct state-level calculations.

At the *systemic* level, the war occurred during a documented transition from unipolarity to multipolarity. The United States could no longer unilaterally shape outcomes; China, India, Brazil, and South Africa pursued independent positions. The nuclear dimension — Russia's implicit threats and NATO's restraint — reflected systemic deterrence logic. The war accelerated the fragmentation of the international order: it strengthened NATO (Finland and Sweden joined), weakened the UN Security Council (Russia's veto), and catalyzed BRICS expansion.

At the *transnational* level, the war operated through networks that transcended state boundaries. Sanctions regimes targeted Russian banks, oligarchs, and energy exports, but their effects rippled through global supply chains — wheat prices spiked, fertilizer shortages threatened African agriculture, and energy costs rose worldwide. Refugee flows (over 6 million Ukrainians) strained European systems. Information warfare — competing narratives about the war's causes and conduct — played out across global media and social platforms. The transnational dimension also includes the role of private actors: SWIFT, insurance companies, and shipping firms became instruments of geopolitical coercion.

Mechanism

The global response to the Ukraine war was produced by the interaction of four mechanisms. First, the *security dilemma mechanism*: NATO expansion and Russian threat perception created a spiral in which each side's defensive measures were read as offensive by the other. This mechanism, central to Mearsheimer's (2019) argument, explains the war's origins but not the global response. Second, the *institutional path dependence mechanism*: the existing alliance structures (NATO, EU) provided ready-made channels for coordinated response, while the absence of equivalent structures in the Global South meant that responses were fragmented and state-specific. Third, the *economic interdependence as weapon mechanism*: sanctions leveraged the dollar's dominance and SWIFT's centrality, but also revealed the costs of weaponizing interdependence — inflation, energy crises, and food insecurity in the Global South. Fourth, the *normative contestation mechanism*: the war became a battleground over the meaning of sovereignty, self-determination, and the "rules-based order." Western states framed it as a defense of the UN Charter; Russia framed it as a defense of multipolarity against Western hegemony; African states framed it as a conflict in which they had no stake but bore disproportionate costs.

The critical mechanism for understanding the *global* response — as opposed to the European response — is the *multi-alignment mechanism*. African and other Global South states did not simply choose sides; they pursued multiple, sometimes contradictory, relationships simultaneously. They condemned the invasion in principle (most African states voted for the March 2022 UNGA resolution) while refusing to join sanctions, maintaining economic ties with Russia, and abstaining on subsequent resolutions. This is not neutrality; it is strategic autonomy — the active management of multiple partnerships to maximize agency and minimize dependency.

Perspective Reconstruction

African (primary): The African perspective begins from the recognition that the Ukraine war is a European conflict with global consequences, and that African states are expected to bear costs — food insecurity,

energy price spikes, inflation — for a war they did not start and in which they have no direct stake. The abstention of 17 African states on the March 2022 UNGA resolution, and the larger number of abstentions on subsequent resolutions, reflects not sympathy for Russia but a principled refusal to be conscripted into a great-power conflict. African states remember that Western powers have invoked the UN Charter selectively — intervening in Libya (2011) under Resolution 1973 while ignoring African Union mediation efforts, and supporting coups or authoritarian regimes when convenient. The African perspective also notes the hypocrisy of Western demands for solidarity: African states that requested debt relief during COVID-19 were denied, while Western states mobilized hundreds of billions for Ukraine. The AU's admission to the G20 in 2023 and the expansion of BRICS to include Egypt and Ethiopia are read as evidence that African agency is growing, not as a rejection of the West but as a diversification of partnerships. The African perspective's strongest claim is that multi-alignment is not fence-sitting but a sophisticated strategy for maximizing sovereignty in a system designed to constrain it.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames the war as a symptom of NATO expansion and US hegemony, while simultaneously positioning China as a potential mediator. Beijing's February 2023 peace plan — calling for a ceasefire, resumption of peace talks, and opposition to unilateral sanctions — reflects China's interest in stability (for its Belt and Road investments and energy security) and its desire to present itself as a responsible great power. China abstained on UNGA resolutions condemning Russia, consistent with its strategic partnership with Moscow, but also voted for resolutions affirming Ukraine's territorial integrity, revealing the tension in its position. The Chinese perspective emphasizes economic interdependence: sanctions harm global supply chains, and China's role as the world's largest trading partner gives it leverage that it chooses not to fully deploy against Russia. The occlusion in the Chinese perspective is its failure to acknowledge that its "neutrality" effectively benefits Russia by preventing a unified global response, and that its peace plan lacks enforcement mechanisms or accountability for aggression.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames the invasion as a defensive response to NATO expansion, the 2014 Maidan revolution (characterized as a Western-backed coup), and the alleged persecution of Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine. The war is presented as a struggle against Western hegemony and for a multipolar world in which civilizational states have equal standing. The Russian perspective points to Western double standards — interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Yugoslavia — as evidence that the "rules-based order" is applied selectively. The occlusion is severe: the perspective cannot account for Ukrainian agency, the documented war crimes, or the fact that NATO expansion was driven by the demand of Eastern European states seeking protection from Russian coercion, not by Western imposition. The Russian perspective also cannot explain why the global response, even among non-Western states, was predominantly critical of the invasion.

Western: The Western perspective frames the war as an unprovoked act of aggression against a sovereign state, a violation of the UN Charter, and a threat to the rules-based international order. The sanctions coalition — involving the US, EU, UK, Japan, and others — is presented as a defense of international law and a demonstration that aggression carries costs. NATO's revitalization and expansion are framed as defensive responses to Russian aggression. The Western perspective's strength is its institutional capacity for coordinated action; its occlusion is its tendency to treat the existing order as legitimate and to understate the role of NATO expansion in producing Russian insecurity. The Western perspective also struggles to explain the abstentions: if the war is truly about defending the UN Charter, why did so many states refuse to join the response? The answer — that these states perceive Western hypocrisy and fear economic retaliation — is uncomfortable for the Western narrative.

UN: The UN perspective frames the war through the Charter: Article 2(4) prohibits the use of force, Article 51 permits self-defense, and the Security Council is paralyzed by Russia's veto. The General Assembly's resolutions — condemning the invasion, demanding withdrawal, and suspending Russia from the Human Rights Council — represent the international community's voice, even if they lack enforcement. The UN perspective's strength is its legal clarity and its provision of a forum for global deliberation; its occlusion is the gap between its normative aspirations and its operational capacity. The UN cannot enforce its resolutions against a permanent member of the Security Council. The UN perspective is most credible when it acknowledges this limitation and supports reform, and least credible when it presents the existing system as already legitimate.

Explicit Adjudication

No single perspective fully explains the global response to the Ukraine war. The Western perspective best explains the *institutional* response — the sanctions coalition, NATO revitalization, and the legal framing — but it occludes the conditions that produced the war and cannot account for the abstentions. The Russian perspective explains Moscow's decision-making but fails as an explanation of the global response, which was predominantly critical of Russia even among non-Western states. The Chinese perspective explains Beijing's hedging strategy but cannot justify its effective protection of Russia from unified global pressure. The UN perspective provides the legal framework but cannot explain enforcement failures.

The African perspective, combined with the systemic-level analysis of multipolar transition, provides the most complete explanation of the *global* response — specifically, the pattern of abstentions and the refusal to join sanctions. The mechanism is multi-alignment: African and other Global South states are not choosing between Russia and the West but pursuing strategic autonomy in a system where neither pole can impose its will. This explains why 35 states abstained on the March 2022 UNGA resolution, why most African states refused to join sanctions, and why BRICS expanded in 2023. The African perspective's limitation is that it may understate the genuine normative stakes — the war *did* violate the UN Charter, and the principle of territorial integrity *does* matter for small states. The best synthesis is that the global response to Ukraine was shaped by the intersection of systemic transition (declining unipolarity), institutional path dependence (existing alliances), and multi-alignment (Global South strategic autonomy). The Western perspective captures the first two; the African perspective captures the third. Together, they explain more than either alone. The case ultimately demonstrates that in a multipolar world, no single power can mobilize universal compliance, and that the "international community" is not a unified actor but a contested space in which competing visions of order struggle for legitimacy.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. **Case specification.** Identify the six 2023 BRICS+ invitees and classify each by its most plausible primary motive: access to development finance, sanctions relief, hedging between great powers, regional status, or domestic regime legitimation. Distinguish formal accession from rhetorical alignment.
2. **Mechanism mapping.** Specify three mechanisms through which BRICS+ expansion could alter world order: (a) institutional, through NDB and AIIB lending; (b) financial, through local-currency settlement and payment-system interoperability; and (c) diplomatic, through UNGA voting cohesion and

Security Council reform advocacy. For each mechanism, state the intermediate step that must occur before membership size becomes order-changing power.

3. **Levels of analysis.** Explain how the expansion looks different at the individual level (leader legitimation and elite bargaining), the state level (regime survival, fiscal need, and sanctions exposure), the systemic level (unipolar decline and multipolar opportunity), and the transnational level (capital flows, commodity pricing, and private banking adaptation).

4. **Perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN interpretations of the expansion in two to three sentences each. For each, identify one contribution the perspective makes and one reality it risks occluding.

5. **Evidence adjudication.** Using three indicators—BRICS+ share of global GDP at PPP, NDB/AIIB lending relative to World Bank/IMF volumes, and UNGA voting cohesion on Ukraine-related resolutions—argue whether the expansion is better described as a genuine challenge to Western order or as a forum of convenience.

6. **Falsifiers.** State two observations that would refute the "genuine challenge" hypothesis and two observations that would refute the "forum of convenience" hypothesis. Make each falsifier concrete and time-bound.

MODEL ANSWER

The 2023 BRICS+ expansion is best understood neither as the birth of a cohesive anti-Western bloc nor as a merely symbolic diplomatic gesture, but as a case of competitive institutional layering whose order-challenging potential remains contingent on mechanisms that are not yet fully institutionalized. The expansion enlarged the forum's demographic and economic weight, yet weight is not automatically power; power in international order terms requires rule-making capacity, enforcement credibility, and sustained coordination among members whose interests are only partially aligned. Read through the Johannesburg II Declaration (2023), the expansion is framed as a step toward multipolarity, reform of global governance, and greater representation for the Global South. That framing is politically significant, but declarations are not institutions, and representation claims do not by themselves create alternative rules.

At the state level, the invitees pursued markedly different objectives. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates appeared to seek hedging, investment diversification, and greater strategic autonomy without severing security ties to the United States. Iran sought diplomatic legitimacy and channels for sanctions-resistant trade. Egypt and Ethiopia sought development finance, infrastructure investment, and enhanced regional standing. Argentina's trajectory was politically contested and later reversed, which itself illustrates that accession was not a simple expression of structural anti-Western alignment. This heterogeneity is not an incidental complication; it is the central mechanism limiting bloc cohesion. A forum whose members disagree on sanctions, energy pricing, regional security, and relations with Washington cannot easily become a rule-making order.

The African perspective is primary here because African states approach BRICS+ through the lens of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment rather than through a binary choice between Western and anti-Western orders. AU Agenda 2063 emphasizes self-reliance, industrialization, and a stronger African voice in global governance, and BRICS+ is attractive partly because it promises leverage without requiring exclusive alignment. African abstentions on Ukraine-related UNGA resolutions in 2022-2024 are better read as assertions of sovereign equality and non-alignment than as evidence of a new bloc. This vantage point reveals what Western and Russian readings often occlude: many Global South states are not seeking to replace one hege-

mon with another, but to enlarge bargaining space among multiple centers of power.

The Chinese perspective treats BRICS+ as a platform for multipolarity and for a community of shared future, with development and connectivity at the center. Yet Beijing's bilateral economic leverage means that the forum's collective identity remains thin; Chinese leadership can advance multipolarity without requiring full institutional cohesion. The Russian perspective, articulated in the 2023 Foreign Policy Concept, treats BRICS+ as evidence of a civilizational multipolar order and as a vehicle for sanctions-resistant trade and sovereign equality. Moscow's reliance on the forum for diplomatic legitimacy, however, reveals asymmetry rather than equality among members. The Western perspective interprets expansion as institutional revisionism and as evidence that the liberal order is under strain. Mearsheimer (2019) argues that the liberal international order is structurally vulnerable to great-power competition, but that argument does not imply that any challenger coalition is automatically coherent. Schweller (2018) similarly cautions against conflating the diffusion of power with the emergence of shared purpose. The UN perspective is more ambivalent: BRICS+ claims to represent the Global South, but representativeness without procedural accountability risks reproducing the exclusion it criticizes.

The decisive evidence is not membership size but three mechanisms. First, whether NDB and AIIB lending displaces Bretton Woods conditionality in volume, terms, and borrower autonomy. Second, whether BRICS payment systems achieve interoperability beyond bilateral experiments and local-currency pilots. Third, whether voting cohesion emerges on sanctions, Security Council reform, and trade disputes. Current evidence supports a bounded verdict: BRICS+ is a forum of convenience with genuine but contingent order-challenging potential. It has expanded diplomatic space for multi-alignment and created institutional alternatives, but it has not yet generated a common security doctrine, a unified financial architecture, or a binding ruleset. If payment systems remain fragmented and members continue to hedge between Washington, Beijing, and Moscow, the expansion will resemble a diplomatic marketplace rather than a new order. If, however, NDB lending scales, local-currency settlement becomes routine, and voting cohesion hardens, the same expansion could become the institutional embryo of a multipolar order. Acharya (2018) is useful here: order may fragment into overlapping regional and functional regimes rather than split into two blocs. The case is therefore best explained as competitive institutional layering, not as a simple replacement of Western order.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description

In 2024, a coalition of African and Middle Eastern states deepened participation in BRICS-linked payment and development-finance initiatives while continuing to negotiate IMF programs, Western security partnerships, and bilateral trade agreements with the European Union. A proposed regional development facility promised local-currency infrastructure lending, but its capitalization remained modest and its governance rules were still under negotiation. At the United Nations, the same states split on resolutions concerning sanctions enforcement and Security Council reform, with some supporting BRICS+ positions and others abstaining or aligning with Western sponsors. Financial data showed rising local-currency settlement in bilateral trade but no systemic displacement of dollar clearing. Your task is to determine whether this pattern constitutes institutional revisionism that is measurably weakening Bretton Woods, or whether it is a form of strategic hedging that leaves the underlying order intact while expanding diplomatic bargaining space.

(b) Required memo headings (prompts)

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal process linking state hedging to institutional change; specify scope conditions, intermediate steps, and observable implications.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN interpretations of the case; for each, state what it contributes and what it occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the case with a prior episode of institutional layering or multipolar coalition-building; justify the analogy and state its limits.
- **Falsifiers:** List two to three observations that would refute your preferred explanation, and make each concrete and time-bound.

(c) Self-check line

Self-check: Have you distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what follows), and prescription (what should be done)?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: The 2023 BRICS+ expansion is best interpreted as:

A. A cohesive anti-Western bloc that has already replaced Bretton Woods institutions.
B. A forum of convenience whose members hedge across orders; its challenge to Western order is contingent on institutionalization.
C. A purely symbolic diplomatic gesture with no material implications for global governance.
D. An African-led project of strategic autonomy that excludes great-power competition.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses

- **A** conflates membership expansion with institutional capacity. It ignores the heterogeneity of invitee motives, the absence of a common security doctrine, and the fact that NDB and AIIB lending has not displaced Bretton Woods conditionality in volume or terms.

- **C** treats the absence of full systemic replacement as the absence of change. It ignores rising local-currency settlement, expanding development-finance alternatives, and the diplomatic leverage created by a larger Global South platform.

- **D** misattributes leadership and purpose. African states seek multi-alignment and strategic autonomy, not exclusion of great powers, and BRICS+ includes non-African great powers whose interests are not subordinate to African priorities.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — UNGA Voting on Ukraine Resolutions, 2022–2024 (selected resolutions, approximate vote counts)

Resolution	Date	In favor	Against	Abstain	Not voting	African abstentions (approx.)	Asian abstentions (approx.)
ES-11/1 (aggression)	Mar 2022	141	5	35	12	~17	~10
ES-11/3 (HRC suspension)	Apr 2022	93	24	58	18	~24	~18
ES-11/4 (territorial integrity)	Oct 2022	143	5	35	10	~16	~9
ES-11/5 (Charter principles)	Feb 2023	141	7	32	13	~17	~8
ES-11/6 (just peace)	Feb 2023	141	7	32	13	~17	~8
ES-11/7 (two-year mark)	Feb 2024	141	7	32	13	~17	~8

Source: UN General Assembly voting records (public). Figures are approximate; abstention counts by region are author estimates derived from public vote tallies and should be treated as indicative, not authoritative.

Table 2 — BRICS+ vs G7 Share of Global GDP (PPP), approximate

Bloc	Members (as of 2024)	Share of global GDP (PPP, approx.)	Share of global population (approx.)
G7	US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Japan	~30%	~10%
BRICS (original five)	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa	~32%	~42%
BRICS+ (post-2024 expansion)	+ Saudi Arabia, Iran, UAE, Egypt, Ethiopia (Argentina declined)	~35–37%	~46%
G20 (full)	19 states + EU	~85%	~85%

Source: IMF World Economic Outlook (PPP estimates, commonly cited in policy commentary). Figures are approximate and shift with exchange-rate and growth assumptions; PPP comparisons are sensitive to methodology.

Table 3 — AIIB vs World Bank Group Lending, approximate cumulative/approved

Institution	Founded	Cumulative approved financing (approx., USD bn)	Annual new commitments (approx., USD bn)	Largest borrowers (indicative)
World Bank (IBRD + IDA)	1944	~$1,000+ (cumulative since founding)	~$60–75	India, China, Brazil, Indonesia, Turkey
AIIB	2016	~$45–55	~$8–12	India, Turkey, Indonesia, Egypt, Bangladesh
NDB (BRICS bank)	2015	~$30–35	~$8–10	India, China, Brazil, South Africa, Russia
ADB	1966	~$300+	~$20–25	India, China, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam

Source: Institution annual reports and public databases. Figures are approximate and vary by fiscal year and counting convention (approved vs. disbursed).

Analysis Questions

1. Trend. Across the six UNGA resolutions in Table 1, the "in favor" count stays roughly stable (141–143) while abstentions fluctuate between 32 and 58. What does the stability of the "in favor" bloc alongside the volatility of abstentions suggest about the structure of global opinion on the Ukraine war? Does the data support a narrative of "global consensus" or of "polarized non-alignment"?

2. Level of analysis. The BRICS+ GDP share in Table 2 is a systemic-level aggregate. Explain why a state-level analyst and a transnational-level analyst would draw different conclusions from the same 35–37% figure. What does the aggregate hide about intra-BRICS+ power asymmetry, and what does it reveal about the shifting center of global economic gravity?

3. Perspective reconstruction (all five). Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives would read Table 1's abstention patterns: (a) African strategic-autonomy view; (b) Chinese relational-Tianxia view; (c) Russian multipolarity view; (d) Western liberal-institutional view; (e) UN Charter-multilateral view. For each, identify one thing the perspective illuminates and one thing it occludes.

4. Interpretation. Table 3 shows AIIB cumulative lending at roughly 4–5% of World Bank cumulative lending, yet AIIB is frequently framed in Western commentary as a "challenge" to the Bretton Woods order. Is this framing proportionate to the quantitative evidence? Under what conditions would a small lender constitute a systemic challenge, and under what conditions would it be a complement?

5. Limitation. All three tables rely on approximate, publicly reported figures. Identify the three most consequential data limitations for drawing policy conclusions from this lab, and explain how each limitation would bias a researcher toward over- or under-estimating the challenge to Western institutional primacy.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Multipolar Shift: GDP (PPP) and Institutional Lending, 2000–2024"

What to draw: A two-panel hand-drawn chart on a single page. Left panel: a stacked-area or line chart with the x-axis labeled "Year (2000–2024)" and the y-axis "Share of global GDP (PPP, %)." Draw three lines: (1) "G7" sloping downward from ~45% to ~30%; (2) "BRICS+" sloping upward from ~20% to ~36%; (3) "Rest of world" roughly flat or slightly rising. Right panel: a bar chart with x-axis "Institution" (World Bank, AIIB, NDB, ADB) and y-axis "Cumulative lending (USD bn, log scale)." Draw World Bank bar tallest, AIIB and NDB bars much shorter, ADB mid-height.

Labels to place: On the left panel, annotate the 2008 financial crisis as a vertical dashed line and the 2022 Ukraine war as a second vertical dashed line. On the right panel, label each bar with its founding year in parentheses (e.g., "World Bank (1944)"). Add a footnote: "PPP = purchasing power parity; lending figures approximate."

Perspective overlay to annotate: In the margin, draw five small icons or colored dots (one per perspective) with a one-line reading: African (green): "Rising share = leverage for strategic autonomy"; Chinese (red): "Multipolarity as natural correction"; Russian (blue): "End of unipolar moment"; Western (orange): "Relative decline, not absolute collapse"; UN (purple): "Aggregate growth ≠ governance reform."

Visual 2 — "UNGA Vote Map: Ukraine Resolutions, March 2022 vs. February 2024"

What to draw: Two side-by-side world maps (hand-drawn, simplified continents). On the first map (March 2022, ES-11/1), color countries: green = in favor, red = against, yellow = abstain, grey = not voting. On the second map (February 2024, ES-11/7), use the same color scheme. Draw a legend in the corner. The visual should make the persistence of the yellow (abstain) band across Africa, South/Southeast Asia, and parts of Latin America immediately visible.

Labels to place: Title each map with resolution number and date. Add a small table beneath: "Abstentions by region: Africa ~17; Asia ~8; Latin America ~4; Middle East ~3 (approx., Feb 2024)."

Perspective overlay to annotate: Draw five arrows from the abstention band to margin notes: African: "Non-alignment as principle, not neutrality"; Chinese: "Abstention = space for mediation"; Russian: "Evidence of Western isolation"; Western: "Failure to build global coalition"; UN: "Charter consensus fraying at edges."

Visual 3 — "The Five Order-Projects: A Venn Diagram of Competing Visions"

What to draw: Five overlapping circles (Venn diagram) labeled: (1) African strategic autonomy, (2) Chinese relational-Tianxia, (3) Russian multipolarity, (4) Western liberal institutionalism, (5) UN Charter multilateralism. In the center intersection, write "Shared vocabulary: sovereignty, development, peace." In pairwise intersections, write the shared element (e.g., African ∩ Chinese = "anti-hegemony"; Chinese ∩

Russian = "multipolarity"; Western ∩ UN = "rules-based order"; African ∩ UN = "decolonization legacy"). In non-overlapping crescents, write the distinctive claim (e.g., African crescent: "Agenda 2063"; Chinese crescent: "community of shared future"; Russian crescent: "sovereign democracy"; Western crescent: "liberal values"; UN crescent: "Charter Article 2(4)").

Labels to place: Title: "Five Competing Order-Projects, 2024." Add a scale bar or note: "Circle size = rhetorical reach (not empirical weight)."

Perspective overlay to annotate: This visual IS the perspective overlay. Add a marginal note: "No single circle contains the others; the diagram's value is in showing overlap without hierarchy. The African circle is drawn largest to reflect the lesson's primary framing."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue Column | Notes Column (with source log)

Cue	Notes (source log in brackets)
What is unipolarity's decline?	Shift from US-dominated post-1991 order to distributed power; debated whether structural or cyclical. [Mearsheimer 2019; Schweller 2018]
Schweller's argument	"Unipolar moment" ending; US overextension; rising powers challenge but do not yet replace. [Schweller 2018]
Mearsheimer's argument	Offensive realism: great-power competition returns; US should offshore-balance; liberal hegemony failed. [Mearsheimer 2019]
Acharya's argument	"Multiplex" world: not multipolar (few poles) but many actors, multiple modernities; non-Western agency central. [Acharya 2018]
Five order-projects	African strategic autonomy; Chinese relational-Tianxia; Russian multipolarity; Western liberal institutionalism; UN Charter multilateralism. [AU Agenda 2063; BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration 2023; Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023]
African strategic autonomy	Multi-alignment, not non-alignment; Agenda 2063; rejection of binary bloc logic; "African solutions to African problems." [AU Agenda 2063; Grovogui; Mbembe]
Chinese relational-Tianxia	"Community of shared future for mankind"; relational ontology; multipolarity as ethical project; BRI/AIIB as institutional expression. [Acharya 2018]

Cue	Notes (source log in brackets)
Russian multipolarity	"Sovereign democracy"; civilizational state; anti-hegemony; Eurasian integration; 2023 Foreign Policy Concept. [Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2023]
Western liberal institutionalism	Rules-based order; NATO/EU; democracy promotion; under strain from populism and relative decline. [Mearsheimer 2019]
UN Charter multilateralism	Article 2(4); collective security; reform paralysis (Security Council); universal membership. [UN Charter]
Global South as category	BRICS+, G-77, NAM legacies; not a geography but a political position; heterogeneity problem. [BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration 2023]
"Rules-based order" contested	Who wrote rules, who enforces, who is bound; double standards critique. [Acharya 2018; Grovogui]
Institutional revisionism	AIIB, NDB, BRICS payment systems; parallel institutions vs. reform-from-within. [BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration 2023]
Ukraine war case	Sanctions, UNGA votes, African/Global South abstentions, Chinese peace plan; tests all five perspectives. [UNGA records]
BRICS+ expansion	Saudi Arabia, Iran, UAE, Egypt, Ethiopia, Argentina (declined); challenge or forum of convenience? [BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration 2023]

Summary (3–5 sentences): The contemporary transition from unipolarity to multipolarity is not a single event but a contested process interpreted differently by five order-projects. The African perspective, framed through strategic autonomy and Agenda 2063, treats multi-alignment as a principled rejection of binary bloc logic rather than neutrality. Quantitative evidence—GDP (PPP) shifts, UNGA abstention patterns, and parallel institutional lending—supports a narrative of relative Western decline but not of imminent replacement. The "rules-based international order" functions as a contested phrase whose meaning depends on who is assumed to have authored and enforced the rules. BRICS+ expansion and parallel institutions like the AIIB are best understood as institutional revisionism whose systemic significance remains empirically unsettled.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Imagine the world after the Cold War as a classroom where one student (the United States) was the teacher's pet with all the answers. Now several other students (China, India, Russia, Brazil, South Africa, and others) have grown taller and louder. Some want to rewrite the classroom rules; some want a second teacher; some want to sit in the back and not take sides. The "rules-based order"

is like the classroom rules written by the old teacher's pet—everyone agrees rules are good, but not everyone agrees these are the right rules or that the pet should be the only one enforcing them. BRICS+ is a study group that meets after class; it is not yet a rival school, but it is not just a book club either. The African countries in the study group are there to make sure the group does not become another club run by one big member.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. I am unsure whether BRICS+ has any institutional capacity beyond summit declarations; I am unsure whether "strategic autonomy" is a coherent doctrine or a post-hoc label for hedging; I am unsure whether the AIIB's lending is genuinely additional or merely displaces World Bank projects; I am unsure whether UNGA abstentions reflect principled non-alignment or transactional hedging.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading Acharya (2018) confirms that "multiplex" is not "multipolar"—the distinction matters because it shifts agency from great powers to middle and small powers. Re-reading the BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023) confirms that expansion was framed as "inclusive multilateralism," not anti-Western bloc formation, though Western readings dispute this. Re-reading the Russian Foreign Policy Concept (2023) confirms the "civilizational state" framing and the explicit rejection of Western universalism. Re-reading AU Agenda 2063 confirms that African strategic autonomy is anchored in a continental development vision, not merely reactive hedging.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. The classroom analogy captures the shift in relative voice and the contest over rule-authorship, but it breaks down on three points: (1) states are not students—they have armies, currencies, and veto powers; (2) the "teacher" (the US) is not leaving the classroom, only losing its monopoly on grading; (3) the study group (BRICS+) has no enforcement mechanism, so the analogy overstates its institutional weight. The analogy is useful for intuition, dangerous for prediction.

Step 5 — Rewrite. The contemporary transition is best understood as a contest over who authors and enforces international rules, not as a simple power shift. Five order-projects—African strategic autonomy, Chinese relational-Tianxia, Russian multipolarity, Western liberal institutionalism, and UN Charter multilateralism—offer competing answers. Quantitative evidence shows relative Western economic decline and persistent Global South non-alignment in UNGA voting, but does not establish that any alternative order has consolidated. BRICS+ and parallel institutions like the AIIB are institutional revisionism whose systemic weight is real but bounded; they are neither a replacement for Bretton Woods nor merely a forum of convenience. The African perspective, reconstructed from within through Agenda 2063 and multi-alignment, reveals that the central question is not "which bloc wins" but "who gets to define the terms of participation."

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L14	Definition	What is "unipolarity" and what empirical debate surrounds its decline?	Unipolarity denotes a distribution of material power in which one state possesses preponderant capabilities across military, economic, and institutional dimensions. The debate over its decline pits Schweller's argument that unipolarity is structurally durable because no peer competitor can match US power, against Mearsheimer's claim that China's rise is producing a bipolar or multipolar system, and Acharya's argument that the very concept of unipolarity misreads a world of multiple centers of authority.	African scholars (Grovogui, Mbembe) treat "decline" as a Western framing that ignores how African states have always operated in a multipolar reality.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L14	Mechanism	How does “multipolarity” emerge as a structural condition rather than merely a power shift?	Multipolarity emerges when the distribution of capabilities crosses a threshold where no single state can unilaterally set the terms of order, and when secondary powers acquire both the capacity and the willingness to resist primacy. The mechanism runs through relative economic growth, military modernization, institutional entrepreneurship, and the erosion of hegemonic legitimacy.	Chinese thinkers (Qin Yaqing) describe this as a shift from “hierarchy” to “relational” order, not a simple power transition.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L14	Application	What did UNGA voting on Ukraine resolutions 2022–2024 reveal about Global South alignment?	Voting patterns showed strong Western support for resolutions condemning Russia, significant African and Asian abstentions, and a core of states (Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua, Syria, North Korea) voting against. Abstentions were not endorsements of invasion but expressions of strategic autonomy, non-alignment legacies, and grievances about selective enforcement of international law.	African abstentions reflected NAM legacies and resentment of double standards, not pro-Russian sympathy.
L14	Comparison	What are the five competing order-projects identified in Lesson 14?	(1) African strategic autonomy/multi-alignment; (2) Chinese relational-Tianxia/community of shared future; (3) Russian multi-polarity/sovereign democracy; (4) Western liberal institutionalism; (5) UN Charter multilateralism. Each proposes a different answer to who writes rules, who enforces them, and who is bound.	The African project is primary: it frames the others as external impositions to be navigated, not joined.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L14	Source	What is Acharya's (2018) core argument about world order?	Acharya argues that the "liberal international order" was never truly global or liberal, and that emerging powers are not seeking to overthrow it but to reform and pluralize it. He emphasizes "multiplexity"—multiple, overlapping orders rather than a single hierarchy.	Acharya's "multiplexity" resonates with African calls for plural, non-hierarchical order.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L14	Debate	How do Schweller and Mearsheimer disagree on the durability of unipolarity?	Schweller (2018) argues unipolarity is remarkably durable because rising powers face structural constraints and the US retains unmatched military and economic advantages. Mearsheimer (2019) argues unipolarity is already ending as China becomes a peer competitor, producing intense security competition. The disagreement turns on whether economic interdependence restrains or accelerates rivalry.	African realists (Aning, Danso) note both ignore African agency in shaping outcomes.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L14	Reconstruction	What does "African strategic autonomy" mean as an order-project?	It denotes the pursuit of decision-making independence across security, economic, and diplomatic domains, drawing on NAM and Nkrumah-era non-alignment, AU Agenda 2063, and contemporary multi-alignment. It rejects binary bloc logic and insists on African-defined interests, including reform of global governance.	This is the primary perspective: autonomy is not neutrality but active, interest-driven engagement.
L14	Occlusion	What does the Western "liberal order" narrative occlude?	It occludes the coercive foundations of that order (intervention, sanctions, unequal trade), the selective application of rules, and the agency of non-Western actors in shaping institutions. It presents a historically contingent arrangement as universal and natural.	African scholars (Mamdani, Rodney) expose the colonial continuities in "liberal" order.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L14	Adjudication	Is BRICS+ a genuine challenge to Western order or a forum of convenience?	Evidence cuts both ways: BRICS+ has created alternative institutions (NDB, AIIB) and payment initiatives, but members have divergent interests, no shared security architecture, and continued reliance on Western markets. Adjudication requires specifying the dimension—financial, security, normative—and the time horizon.	African members (Ethiopia, Egypt) see BRICS+ as leverage, not replacement.
L14	Visual	What does the comparison matrix of five perspectives reveal?	The matrix shows each perspective's key contribution, occlusion, normative stance, best evidence, and strongest objection. It reveals that no single perspective captures the full picture; African strategic autonomy exposes the paternalism in others, while Chinese relationalism and Russian multipolarity share anti-hegemonic language but differ on hierarchy.	The matrix is the lesson's central integrative tool.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L14	Definition	What is the "rules-based international order" and why is it contested?	It is a phrase denoting governance by agreed norms, institutions, and law. It is contested because critics (Russia, China, Global South) argue the rules were written by Western powers, are enforced selectively, and bind weaker states more than strong ones. Defenders argue it provides predictability and restraint.	African jurists (Tamale) note the phrase often substitutes for "Western-led" order.
L14	Mechanism	How does "institutional revisionism" fracture Bretton Woods?	Revisionism operates through creating parallel institutions (AIIB, NDB), alternative payment systems, and new lending norms that reduce dependence on the IMF/World Bank. The mechanism is competitive institutionalism: not destroying old institutions but diluting their monopoly and offering exit options.	African states use revisionist institutions as bargaining leverage, not exit.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L14	Source	What does the BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023) assert?	It asserts commitment to multipolarity, reform of global governance, use of local currencies, and expansion of membership. It frames BRICS as a platform for the Global South and calls for a more representative UN Security Council.	The Declaration echoes AU Agenda 2063's call for African agency.
L14	Application	How does AIIB lending compare to World Bank lending as evidence of order transition?	AIIB has grown rapidly in infrastructure finance, often co-financing with the World Bank, suggesting complementarity as much as competition. The metric of "challenge" depends on whether one measures volume, conditionality, or governance voice. AIIB gives China greater agenda-setting power but has not displaced the Bank.	African borrowers value AIIB speed but worry about transparency gaps.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Topic	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of Mastery	Gap to Close
Defining unipolarity/multipolarity		Can state Schweller/Mearsheimer/Acharya positions	Distinguish structural from perceptual multipolarity
Five order-projects		Can name all five and their core claims	Steel-man each from within
African strategic autonomy		Can cite NAM, AU Agenda 2063	Connect to contemporary multi-alignment practice
UNGA voting patterns		Can describe abstention clusters	Explain variation within Africa
BRICS+ expansion		Can list new members	Assess security vs economic dimensions
Rules-based order contestation		Can state both sides	Identify who is bound/enforced
Institutional revisionism		Can name AIIB, NDB	Compare conditionality regimes
Perspective reconstruction		Can summarize five views	Adjudicate with evidence
Worked example (Ukraine)		Can describe sanctions/voting	Link to African abstentions
Data lab interpretation		Can read tables	Specify falsifiers

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to steel-man from within, and what does that difficulty reveal about your own normative commitments?
2. In the worked example, did you conflate description of the Ukraine war's global response with explanation of why states voted as they did? If so, where?
3. Which falsifier for the "BRICS+ as genuine challenge" claim would you now test first, and what evidence would change your mind?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Multipolarity means equal power among several states."	Multipolarity means no single state dominates; power can be highly unequal among multiple centers.	Mearsheimer (2019) distinguishes bipolar from multipolar by number of great powers, not equality.
"African abstentions on Ukraine meant support for Russia."	Abstentions expressed strategic autonomy and non-alignment, not endorsement of invasion.	UNGA voting records 2022–2024; AU statements.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"BRICS+ has replaced the G7 economically."	BRICS+ GDP share (PPP) exceeds G7, but per capita, financial depth, and reserve currency status lag; PPP is not power.	World Bank/IMF data; BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023).
"The rules-based order is universally accepted."	The phrase is contested; many states view it as Western-authored and selectively enforced.	Russian Foreign Policy Concept (2023); AU Agenda 2063.
"AIIB is destroying the World Bank."	AIIB co-finances with the Bank and has not displaced it; competition is partial.	AIIB annual reports; World Bank co-financing data.
"China's rise automatically produces multipolarity."	Multipolarity requires willingness and capacity to resist primacy; economic size alone is insufficient.	Acharya (2018) on multiplexity vs. power transition.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Unipolarity; multipolarity; multiplexity; strategic autonomy; rules-based order; institutional revisionism; BRICS+; Global South	Relative growth; military modernization; institutional entrepreneurship; competitive institutionalism; multi-alignment; abstention as signaling	Schweller (2018); Mearsheimer (2019); Acharya (2018); Ikenberry; Yan Xuetong; Karaganov	UNGA Ukraine votes 2022–2024; BRICS+ expansion 2023; AIIB vs World Bank lending; AU Agenda 2063	Durability of unipolarity; BRICS+ as challenge vs forum; rules as universal vs Western	BRICS+ security integration; AIIB displacement of Bank; African voting cohesion	L9 Westphalia; L11 interwar; L12 Cold War; L13 liberal order; L15-19 IPE; L47-51 systemic rivalry

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1):** Re-read Section 2.7 comparison matrix and restate each perspective's occlusion in one sentence.
- **R2 (Day 3):** Reconstruct the worked example (Ukraine) at all four levels of analysis from memory; check against text.

- **R3 (Week 1):** Re-attempt the hinge question and one problem-pair task without notes; score against model answer.
- **R4 (Week 2):** Build a one-page map linking the five key ideas to the five perspectives; identify one cross-link to L13 or L15.
- **R5 (Month 1):** Write a 300-word adjudication of "BRICS+ as genuine challenge" using new evidence; compare to earlier memo.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define unipolarity, multipolarity, and multiplexity and distinguish them.
☐ I can state Schweller's, Mearsheimer's, and Acharya's positions and their disagreements.
☐ I can name the five order-projects and steel-man each from within.
☐ I can explain African strategic autonomy and its NAM/AU lineages.
☐ I can describe UNGA Ukraine voting patterns 2022–2024 by region.
☐ I can explain why abstentions are not endorsements.
☐ I can assess BRICS+ expansion as challenge vs forum of convenience.
☐ I can define the "rules-based international order" and state its contestations.
☐ I can explain institutional revisionism via AIIB, NDB, and payment systems.
☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives on the lesson's central topic.
☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to the Ukraine worked example.
☐ I can complete the problem-pair tasks and compare to the model answer.
☐ I can write the independent memo with all four required headings.
☐ I can answer the hinge question and diagnose each distractor.
☐ I can interpret the Data Lab tables and state their limitations.
☐ I can fill out the Cornell notes and Feynman compression.
☐ I can score my confidence audit and log errors.
☐ I can place this lesson in the curriculum via cross-links.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Unipolarity and multipolarity - Schweller, R. (2018). "Three Cheers for Trump's Foreign Policy." *Foreign Affairs*. - Mearsheimer, J. (2019). "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order." *International Security*. - Acharya, A. (2018). *The End of American World Order*. Polity.

African perspectives - Grovogui, S. (2006). *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*. Palgrave. - AU (2015). *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. - Mamdani, M. (2020). *Neither Settler nor Native*. Harvard University Press.

Chinese and Russian perspectives - Qin, Y. (2018). *A Relational Theory of World Politics*. Cambridge University Press. - Russian Federation (2023). *Foreign Policy Concept*.

Institutions and BRICS - BRICS (2023). *Johannesburg II Declaration*. - NDB and AIIB annual reports (various years).

UN and multilateralism - UN Secretary-General (2023). *Our Common Agenda* policy briefs.

End of Lesson 14. Say **Next** when you are ready.

16. State-Market Paradigms: Mercantilism, Liberalism, Embedded Liberalism

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 15 — State-Market Paradigms: Mercantilism, Liberalism, Embedded Liberalism
Module	Module 3: International Political Economy and Geoeconomics
Prerequisites	L6 (institutionalism), L8 (Marxism), L12 (Cold War), L13 (liberal order)
Interleaved links	Forward to L16 (Bretton Woods), L17 (world-systems), L18 (interdependence), L19 (energy)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, hand-drawn visuals, flashcards, worked cases
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is not whether states or markets should govern economic life, but why the boundary between them is repeatedly redrawn and why each redrawing is presented as the discovery of an economic truth rather than as a political choice. From the mercantilist statecraft of the seventeenth century to the neoliberal deregulation of the 1980s and the contemporary revival of industrial policy in Washington, Brussels, and Beijing, the history of international political economy is a history of paradigms that claim universality while resting on contingent power relations. The lesson asks: what mechanisms drive the rise and fall of state-market paradigms, under what scope conditions does each hold, and whose experience is rendered invisible when one paradigm is universalized? The student who masters this lesson will stop treating "free trade" or "state intervention" as self-evident categories and will instead analyze them as institutional settlements produced by specific coalitions, crises, and distributions of power.

This lesson sits at the hinge of Module 3. It presumes the institutionalist toolkit from Lesson 6—how rules, norms, and organizations reduce transaction costs and lock in expectations—and the Marxist analytics from Lesson 8, which treat markets as arenas of accumulation and class power rather than as neutral exchange mechanisms. It also presumes the Cold War narrative of Lesson 12, in which economic policy was subordinated to geopolitical competition, and the liberal-order account of Lesson 13, which credits hegemonic stability with sustaining open markets. The present lesson does not choose among these; it synthesizes them by showing that each state-market paradigm is a historically specific answer to the same underlying problem: how to reconcile the mobility of capital with the territoriality of political authority. The answer has

varied—from List's infant-industry protection to Smith's invisible hand to Polanyi's embedded compromise to the Washington Consensus—and each variation has been defended as the natural order.

The African perspective is primary here because it exposes the false universality of every paradigm. African political economy has lived through colonial extraction justified by mercantilist logic, post-independence state-led development inspired by import-substitution and socialist planning, the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s and 1990s that imposed liberalization as conditionality, and the contemporary turn toward developmental regionalism and resource nationalism embodied in the African Continental Free Trade Area. From this vantage point, the "free market" was never a default state of nature; it was constructed through colonial violence, maintained by Bretton Woods institutions, and enforced through conditionality. Conversely, state intervention in Africa has been both emancipatory and predatory, depending on whether it was accountable to domestic constituencies or captured by ruling elites. The African experience thus reveals what Western and Chinese narratives often occlude: that the state-market boundary is always a site of political contestation over who benefits from economic order, and that no paradigm can be evaluated apart from its distributional consequences for peripheral economies.

By the end of the lesson the student will be able to perform four operations. First, identify the mechanism by which a given paradigm allocates resources and distributes gains—whether through comparative advantage, infant-industry protection, embedded social bargains, or conditionality. Second, specify the scope conditions under which each mechanism is likely to produce its claimed outcomes, and the conditions under which it fails. Third, reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN actors would each frame the same case, and adjudicate among them using evidence rather than assertion. Fourth, apply these tools to concrete cases: the 1971 Nixon shock, which ended the Bretton Woods gold-exchange standard and inaugurated floating rates; and the 2022 US CHIPS and Science Act alongside the EU Chips Act, which re-embed liberal markets in national-security frameworks. The student will also be able to distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription—a distinction that is routinely collapsed in policy discourse and that this lesson treats as a core methodological discipline.

The lesson's methodological commitment is that paradigms are not neutral lenses but political projects with distributional consequences. Mercantilism served rising industrial powers; classical liberalism served British hegemony; embedded liberalism served the postwar social-democratic compromise; neoliberalism served mobile capital and creditor interests; the contemporary return of industrial policy serves geopolitical competition and domestic political coalitions. Each paradigm's strongest advocates present it as economic science, yet each rests on assumptions about state capacity, market completeness, and power asymmetries that are empirical, not axiomatic. The task of the analyst is therefore not to choose the "correct" paradigm but to specify the conditions under which each operates, the mechanisms it activates, and the evidence that would falsify its claims. This is the standard of adjudication the lesson demands.

The five key ideas proceed in historical and logical order. Mercantilism and economic nationalism establish the baseline of state-directed accumulation. Classical liberalism supplies the counter-thesis of market coordination through comparative advantage. Polanyi's embedded liberalism reframes the debate by showing that markets are always politically constructed and that liberalization generates a protective counter-movement. The Washington Consensus and post-1980 neoliberalism represent the most recent attempt to disembed markets from social control. The contemporary contest—state capitalism in China, friend-shoring, industrial policy in the CHIPS Act and Inflation Reduction Act, and the broader "return of the state"—shows the cycle turning again. The lesson closes by asking whether we are witnessing a new embedded liberalism, a new mercantilism, or something without historical precedent, and by insisting that the answer depends on which

perspective one occupies.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. From L6: How does institutionalism explain why states cooperate even under anarchy, and what role do international organizations play in reducing uncertainty and locking in expectations?
2. From L8: In Marxist international political economy, what is the relationship between capital accumulation and the territorial state, and how does this challenge liberal accounts of comparative advantage?
3. From L12: How did Cold War geopolitical competition shape the economic policies of both superpowers and their allies, and what does this imply about the "neutrality" of market institutions?
4. From L13: What is hegemonic stability theory, and how does it connect the openness of the post-1945 trading system to the distribution of power, particularly US power?
5. From L6 and L13 combined: What is the difference between a rule-based and a power-based international order, and can the two be separated empirically in practice?
6. From L8: How does dependency theory, as a Marxist-influenced framework, explain persistent underdevelopment in the global South, and what policy implications did it draw for state intervention?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Why does every state-market paradigm present itself as economic science rather than as a political project, and what evidence would distinguish a scientific claim from an ideological one?
2. Under what conditions does infant-industry protection produce genuine industrialization rather than rent-seeking, capture, and permanent inefficiency?
3. How did the 1971 Nixon shock alter the relationship between monetary policy, state autonomy, and global capital mobility, and what paradigm did it help to discredit or enable?
4. Does the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act represent a return to mercantilism, a new embedded liberalism, or a novel form of security-driven industrial policy—and what evidence would falsify each reading?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Mercantilism**: doctrine that state power is built through accumulation of bullion and favorable trade balances, with markets subordinated to national strength.
- **Economic nationalism**: policy orientation prioritizing domestic industry, employment, and strategic capacity over global efficiency and consumer prices.
- **Infant-industry argument**: List's claim that temporary protection allows nascent industries to achieve scale, learning, and technological capability before facing international competition.
- **Comparative advantage**: Ricardo's principle that countries gain by specializing in goods with lower opportunity cost, even if less efficient in absolute terms.
- **Embedded liberalism**: Polanyi's term for the post-1945 compromise in which markets were liberalized internationally while domestically embedded in social protections and state management.
- **Double movement**: Polanyi's concept of the dialectic between market expansion and the social protective counter-movement it provokes.

- **Washington Consensus**: Williamson's 1990 summary of ten neoliberal policy prescriptions—fiscal discipline, privatization, deregulation, trade liberalization, and others—promoted by Bretton Woods institutions.
- **Structural adjustment program (SAP)**: conditionality-based lending requiring recipient states to implement liberalization, privatization, and austerity.
- **State capitalism**: system in which the state retains significant ownership and strategic direction of capital, as in contemporary China.
- **Friend-shoring**: relocation of supply chains to geopolitically aligned countries, prioritizing security and resilience over cost minimization.
- **Dual circulation**: Chinese strategy emphasizing domestic consumption and innovation while maintaining external trade, reducing vulnerability to external shocks.
- **Resource nationalism**: assertion of state sovereignty over natural resources, including renegotiation of contracts, taxation, and local content requirements.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Define** mercantilism, economic nationalism, and the infant-industry argument as historically specific state-market paradigms, distinguishing their zero-sum and dynamic-comparative-advantage logics from both classical liberalism and neoliberalism, and locating each in its theoretical lineage from Mun and Colbert through Hamilton and List to contemporary industrial policy (Bloom: Understand).
2. **Explain** the mechanism by which temporary protection can generate dynamic comparative advantage through learning-by-doing, scale economies, and supplier-network formation, and identify the scope conditions—state capacity, credible sunset clauses, market size, technological gap—under which this mechanism succeeds or degenerates into permanent rent-seeking (Bloom: Analyze).
3. **Compare** the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on state-market paradigms, steel-manning each from within its own premises and identifying what each reveals about power, development, and security that the others occlude (Bloom: Evaluate).
4. **Apply** the four levels of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational) to the 1971 Nixon shock, reconstructing how converging pressures at each level jointly produced the collapse of Bretton Woods and the transition to floating exchange rates (Bloom: Apply).
5. **Critique** the Washington Consensus and post-1980 neoliberalism using Polanyi's double movement, assessing whether contemporary industrial policy (CHIPS Act, IRA, EU Chips Act) represents a genuine re-embedding of markets in society or a securitized, great-power variant of mercantilism that risks fragmenting the trading system (Bloom: Evaluate).

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Mercantilism and Economic Nationalism

Bolded Causal Claim: States that strategically restrict imports and subsidize infant industries can, under specifiable conditions, convert temporary protection into durable industrial capacity and dynamic comparative advantage, thereby reshaping the international division of labor in their favor.

Mechanism: Mercantilism as a state-market paradigm rests on a foundational premise that international

trade is a zero-sum contest for national power, and that wealth is best measured by the accumulation of specie and productive capacity rather than by consumer welfare. In its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European form—articulated by writers such as Thomas Mun and operationalized by Jean-Baptiste Colbert in France and by the English Navigation Acts of 1651—this meant maximizing exports, minimizing imports, capturing colonial markets, and channeling bullion into state coffers. The mechanism was straightforward: a trade surplus generated specie inflows, which financed armies and navies, which in turn secured the trade routes that sustained the surplus. The paradigm treated the economy as an instrument of state power, and the market as a domain to be disciplined rather than trusted.

The infant-industry argument, developed by Alexander Hamilton in his 1791 Report on Manufactures and systematized by Friedrich List in The National System of Political Economy (1841), transformed this zero-sum logic into a dynamic, time-bound mechanism. Hamilton and List accepted that free trade maximizes static efficiency among nations at similar levels of development, but argued that nations at different stages of industrial maturity face asymmetric competitive conditions. A newly industrializing nation cannot compete with an established industrial power whose firms already enjoy scale economies, skilled labor pools, supplier networks, and accumulated technological knowledge. The mechanism proceeds as follows: the state imposes temporary tariffs or subsidies on imported manufactures, raising their domestic price and creating a protected space in which domestic firms can produce, learn, and scale. Through learning-by-doing—later formalized by Kenneth Arrow and Allyn Young's increasing-returns tradition—unit costs fall as cumulative output rises, skills deepen, supplier ecosystems form, and technological capability accumulates. Once the industry achieves international competitiveness, protection is withdrawn and the industry competes on open markets. List termed this "educational protection," distinguishing it from the "consumptive protection" of permanent tariffs that merely enrich rent-seekers. The key analytical move is the shift from static to dynamic comparative advantage: comparative advantage is not given by nature or factor endowments alone, but can be created through deliberate policy and historical time.

The mechanism is therefore conditional on several interacting processes. First, firms must actually learn rather than simply collect rents behind the tariff wall; this requires competitive pressure within the protected market, access to technology, and managerial capability. Second, the state must possess the capacity to select sectors with genuine potential, to monitor performance, and to withdraw support when firms fail to become competitive—the "discipline" that distinguishes developmental states from rentier ones. Third, the protected industry must eventually face international competition, since permanent protection severs the feedback loop between cost reduction and market survival. Fourth, complementary investments in infrastructure, education, and finance must accompany border protection, since tariffs alone cannot generate industrialization.

Scope Conditions: The infant-industry mechanism operates successfully only where a cluster of scope conditions holds. The domestic market must be large enough to sustain scale economies during the protection period, or the state must secure preferential access to regional or imperial markets. State capacity must be sufficient to resist capture by protected interests and to enforce sunset clauses. The technological gap between the infant industry and the frontier must be closable within a politically feasible time horizon; if the gap is too wide, protection becomes permanent subsidy. The industry must exhibit increasing returns to scale or learning externalities that markets alone cannot capture, otherwise free trade remains efficient. Retaliation must be manageable: unilateral protection invites counter-tariffs that can close export markets and trigger trade wars, as the Smoot-Hawley Tariff of 1930 demonstrated. Finally, the macroeconomic environment must be stable enough that firms can plan long-term investment; high inflation or currency volatility undermines the mechanism. Where these conditions fail—small markets, weak states, high capture, no sunset credibility—the same policy instruments produce stagnation, inefficiency, and entrenched rent-

seeking rather than industrial transformation.

Observable Implications: Where the mechanism operates as theorized, one should observe a rising manufacturing share of GDP during the protection period, followed by export diversification away from primary commodities, declining unit costs along learning curves, increasing patent filings and technological upgrading, and the emergence of supplier networks and industrial clusters. Tariff structures should show escalation—higher rates on finished manufactures than on raw materials and intermediates—reflecting the logic of protecting downstream processing. The presence of development banks, industrial parks, and performance-linked subsidies indicates state capacity to discipline firms. Conversely, where protection fails, one observes persistent trade deficits in manufactures despite high tariffs, stagnant or declining manufacturing productivity, concentration of protection in politically connected sectors, and repeated extensions of "temporary" protection. At the systemic level, successful infant-industry industrialization by one country tends to provoke emulation and competitive protectionism among others, altering the structure of world trade.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African economic nationalism is not a derivative of European mercantilism but a response to a specific historical experience: colonial extraction, the deliberate suppression of African manufacturing, and post-independence commodity dependence. The African vantage point begins with Walter Rodney's argument in How Europe Underdeveloped Africa (1972) that colonialism systematically deindustrialized the continent and locked it into primary-commodity export, and with Kwame Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism as the continuation of economic subordination through market mechanisms after formal independence. From this perspective, the infant-industry argument is not an abstract theoretical option but a developmental imperative: without protection and state-led industrialization, African economies remain trapped in unequal exchange, exporting raw materials and importing manufactures at deteriorating terms of trade. Post-independence import-substitution industrialization in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and Egypt attempted this, but often failed because of small national markets, weak state capacity, and elite capture—problems compounded by structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s that forced premature liberalization. Contemporary African economic nationalism takes several forms. Resource nationalism asserts state sovereignty over extractives, as in Tanzania's 2017 mining legislation and the Democratic Republic of Congo's renegotiation of cobalt and copper contracts. Developmental regionalism pools markets through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched in 2018 and operationalized in 2021, creating a continental market of roughly 1.3 billion people that can sustain scale economies for infant industries. Industrial parks and special economic zones in Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Morocco represent attempts to combine protection with export orientation. African scholars such as Thandika Mkandawire have emphasized that developmental states in Africa are possible but require political coalitions that discipline capital rather than merely rent to it, while Ha-Joon Chang's argument that today's rich countries industrialized behind high tariff walls—kicking away the ladder after climbing it—resonates deeply in African policy circles. The African perspective reveals what Western theory often occludes: that free trade among unequals reproduces inequality, that policy space for late developers has been systematically narrowed by WTO rules and bilateral investment treaties, and that regional integration is not merely an economic efficiency measure but a sovereignty project. It also acknowledges its own risks: elite capture, regional inequality within Africa, trade diversion, and the danger that resource nationalism provokes capital flight or sanctions.

Chinese: China's state capitalism is frequently described as a contemporary variant of mercantilism, and from within the Chinese perspective this is partly embraced as a vindication of Listian late development. The

mechanism runs through state-owned enterprises, industrial policy, technology transfer requirements, and strategic protection in sectors deemed critical to national power. Made in China 2025 and the dual-circulation strategy explicitly aim to move China up the value chain from assembly to innovation, using state capacity to discipline firms through party committees, performance targets, and credit allocation. Chinese scholars and policymakers frame this not as mercantilism in the pejorative Western sense but as legitimate development strategy by a latecomer, noting that the United States and Europe industrialized behind protection and now seek to deny China the same tools. The perspective contributes an emphasis on state capacity and long-term planning, and it reveals how industrial policy can be coordinated with infrastructure investment and human-capital formation at scale. It occludes, however, the costs of overcapacity, the inefficiency of politically protected SOEs, the trade friction generated by subsidies, and the debt burdens accumulated by local governments and state banks.

Russian: Russia's post-2014 and especially post-2022 economic strategy represents a defensive, sanctions-driven form of mercantilism: import substitution, parallel imports, state-directed production in defense and energy, and a deliberate reduction of dollar dependence. The mechanism is reactive rather than developmental—sanctions forced diversification, and the state mobilized resources to sustain production in critical sectors. From within, this is framed as sovereignty and resilience: a fortress economy that can withstand external pressure. The perspective reveals how economic interdependence can be weaponized and how states respond by de-risking. It occludes the technological stagnation, brain drain, and isolation that accompany autarky, and the long-term cost of severing access to global innovation networks.

Western: The Western perspective contains an internal tension. Classical liberalism, from Smith through Ricardo, treated mercantilism as a fallacy: trade is positive-sum, specialization by comparative advantage maximizes global and national welfare, and protection enriches producers at consumers' expense. This view dominated post-1945 trade policy and underpinned the GATT/WTO system. Yet the same Western tradition has recently revived industrial policy—evident in the US CHIPS and Science Act, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the EU Chips Act—justified by market failures, supply-chain security, and great-power competition. The Western perspective thus oscillates between liberal openness and strategic protection, and its contemporary variant often frames industrial policy as an exception to liberal rules rather than a repudiation of them. It contributes rigorous analysis of market failures and the costs of protection, but occludes the historical hypocrisy of denying late developers the tools the West itself used, and the risk that securitized industrial policy fragments the trading system.

UN: The UN perspective approaches state-market paradigms through development finance and the Sustainable Development Goals. It treats infant-industry protection as potentially compatible with development if aligned with green industrialization, technology transfer, and inclusive growth, and institutions such as UNCTAD and UNIDO have historically supported policy space for developing countries. The mechanism is framed as global partnership: industrial policy in the South requires concessional finance, technology sharing, and reform of trade rules that constrain policy space. The perspective contributes a normative commitment to equity and a recognition that markets alone do not deliver development. It occludes, however, the limited enforcement power of UN frameworks, the tension between industrial policy and WTO commitments, and the risk that development finance becomes conditional on donor priorities.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Classical Liberalism: Smith, Ricardo, Comparative Advantage, and Nineteenth-Century Free Trade

Bolded Causal Claim: Classical liberalism explains nineteenth-century trade expansion and industrial specialization as the unintended result of decentralized exchange under comparative advantage, not as the product of state design; yet its causal force depends on institutional and coercive preconditions—property rights, monetary convertibility, transport infrastructure, and imperial power—that the theory often treats as exogenous background.

Mechanism: Adam Smith's mechanism begins with the division of labor and the extent of the market: as markets widen, producers can specialize, specialization deepens skill and machinery, and productivity rises. The "invisible hand" is not a claim that individuals intend public benefit; it is a claim that competitive price signals can coordinate dispersed self-interest into an unintended order. David Ricardo's mechanism adds comparative advantage: even if one country is less efficient in producing every good, both countries gain when each specializes where its relative efficiency is highest, because opportunity costs differ. Trade then expands the consumption possibilities of both parties beyond their production possibilities. In policy terms, this mechanism was translated into tariff reduction, most-favored-nation treaties, and the gold standard: lower barriers allow relative prices to guide specialization; stable money reduces transaction costs; contract enforcement and property rights make long-distance exchange credible. The nineteenth-century free-trade movement—British repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, the Cobden-Chevalier treaty of 1860, and subsequent treaty networks—was the political expression of this mechanism. But the mechanism is not merely "remove tariffs"; it is a broader institutional package in which price signals, capital mobility, and monetary convertibility jointly reallocate resources. Where those institutions are absent, liberalization may produce not specialization but deindustrialization, dependency, or rent extraction.

Scope Conditions: The Ricardian mechanism holds under restrictive assumptions: two goods, two countries, labor as the sole factor, constant returns to scale, no transport costs, full employment, no externalities, and capital immobility across borders. These assumptions are not incidental; they define when comparative advantage is a reliable guide to policy. If increasing returns, path dependence, or technological spillovers matter, early specialization can lock in disadvantage rather than efficiency. If capital is mobile, comparative advantage may be endogenous to investment flows rather than to fixed endowments. If security externalities exist, a state may rationally sacrifice efficiency for autonomy. The political scope conditions are equally important: liberalization requires coalitions capable of overcoming protected interests, and it requires states with enough capacity to enforce property rights and maintain monetary stability. In the nineteenth century, Britain's unilateral free trade was compatible with its industrial lead and naval power; for late industrializers such as Germany and the United States, protection often remained the dominant strategy. The mechanism also assumes that aggregate gains can be redistributed, but classical liberalism did not solve the compensation problem: workers and regions displaced by trade may not be compensated, and political backlash can reverse liberalization. Finally, the nineteenth-century "free trade" order was not a universal equilibrium; it coexisted with empire, coerced labor, and unequal treaties, so its scope was historically bounded by power asymmetry.

Observable Implications: If classical liberalism's mechanism is operating, one should observe rising trade as a share of output, specialization by relative cost structure, price convergence for tradable goods, and capital flows toward higher returns under stable money. One should also observe policy convergence toward lower tariffs in hegemonic centers, though not necessarily in peripheral or late-industrializing states. The British case suggests deindustrialization of competitors in some sectors and commodity specialization in regions integrated into imperial markets. The German and American cases suggest that protection can co-

exist with rapid industrialization, which is an observable implication that qualifies, rather than refutes, the theory: comparative advantage predicts gains from trade, but it does not prove that free trade is always the optimal development strategy. Financially, the gold standard and capital mobility imply synchronized business cycles and vulnerability to external shocks. Distributionally, one should observe sectoral displacement, regional inequality, and political contestation over trade policy. The theory's strongest empirical support is the aggregate expansion of trade and output in the long nineteenth century; its strongest empirical challenge is that the same period included rising protection in major economies and deepening global inequality.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, classical liberalism often appears not as a neutral theory of mutual gain but as the ideology of imperial free trade. African economies were integrated into the world market as suppliers of primary commodities and consumers of manufactured imports, a pattern that Rodney and Nkrumah analyzed as structural subordination rather than voluntary specialization. The mechanism of comparative advantage, when applied to colonial economies, could lock in extraversion: export enclaves, limited industrial linkages, and terms-of-trade vulnerability. Postcolonial African thinkers did not necessarily reject trade; they rejected the assumption that market integration automatically produces development. The African perspective therefore treats classical liberalism as historically powerful but normatively incomplete: it explains price-driven specialization while obscuring coercion, colonial extraction, and the political construction of "free" markets. It contributes a critique of methodological individualism and a demand that trade theory account for historical power. It occludes, however, the genuine productivity gains from specialization and the possibility that regional trade and industrial policy can be designed within, rather than against, comparative advantage.

Chinese: Chinese engagement with classical liberalism has been selective and instrumental. Late Qing self-strengthening and Republican-era reformers studied Western trade theory while seeking to preserve sovereignty and build industrial capacity. The Chinese perspective treats comparative advantage as a description of current specialization, not a prescription for permanent status: a country may accept labor-intensive exports while using state capacity to move up the value chain. This vantage point contributes a developmental reading of trade theory, in which comparative advantage is dynamic and policy can reshape endowments. It occludes the risk that state-led upgrading can produce overcapacity, trade conflict, and allocative inefficiency.

Russian: Russian economic thought has long oscillated between integration and autarky. Late imperial ministers such as Sergei Witte promoted foreign capital and trade to accelerate industrialization, while later Soviet doctrine rejected comparative advantage as capitalist ideology. The Russian perspective highlights vulnerability to external shocks and the strategic value of self-sufficiency, especially in energy and defense. It contributes a security-centered critique of liberal trade optimism. It occludes the costs of autarky and the possibility that interdependence can be managed rather than eliminated.

Western: The Western perspective, especially in its Anglo-American variant, has often treated classical liberalism as both positive theory and normative ideal. It emphasizes consumer welfare, efficiency, and the peace-promoting effects of trade. This vantage point contributes powerful analytical tools and a strong case against crude protectionism. It occludes the historical role of coercion in market expansion and the distributional conflicts that liberalization generates.

UN: The UN perspective has generally supported trade as a development instrument while insisting on policy space, special and differential treatment, and technology transfer. It treats classical liberalism as a useful but

insufficient framework: markets can expand output, but development requires institutional capacity and equity. This perspective contributes a multilateral, normative commitment to inclusive growth. It occludes the difficulty of enforcing development-friendly trade rules and the tension between liberalization commitments and industrial policy.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Polanyi's Embedded Liberalism: The Double Movement and the Post-1945 Compromise

Bolded Causal Claim: Polanyi's "double movement" claims that the attempt to create a self-regulating market necessarily provokes social counter-movements that re-embed economic activity in protective institutions; post-1945 embedded liberalism was therefore not a natural equilibrium but a historically specific compromise between international liberalization and domestic social protection.

Mechanism: Polanyi's core mechanism is the fictitious commodification of land, labor, and money. These are not produced for sale in the ordinary sense, yet market society treats them as commodities. When labor is fully commodified, communities lose social protection; when land is fully commodified, nature is subordinated to price; when money is fully commodified, credit becomes detached from productive activity. The result is social dislocation, which generates a counter-movement: labor legislation, welfare provision, central banking, agricultural protection, and democratic demands for security. This is the "double movement"—market expansion and social protection advancing together, often in tension. The post-1945 compromise, which John Ruggie later termed embedded liberalism, institutionalized this tension internationally: states liberalized trade while retaining capital controls, welfare states, and macroeconomic management. The mechanism is not simply "markets fail, therefore states intervene"; it is that market expansion creates the political forces that demand intervention. Bretton Woods, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, and the International Labour Organization can be read as institutional expressions of this compromise: trade liberalization was paired with exceptions for balance-of-payments adjustment, agricultural protection, and domestic welfare. The mechanism also explains reversal: when capital mobility increased and neoliberal ideology gained force after the 1970s, the protective layer was weakened, re-exposing societies to market volatility and provoking new counter-movements.

Scope Conditions: Polanyi's mechanism applies most strongly where democratic politics can translate social dislocation into institutional protection, and where states have the capacity to regulate markets without destroying them. It applies where capital is not fully mobile, because capital mobility constrains the policy space available for welfare states and industrial policy. It also applies where a hegemonic power tolerates or supports the compromise, as the United States did in the early postwar period for strategic and economic reasons. The mechanism is weaker under authoritarian regimes that suppress counter-movements, under financialized economies where capital can exit, and under conditions where social groups are fragmented or lack organizational capacity. It is also historically bounded: Polanyi wrote from the experience of interwar collapse, and his argument is not a universal law of all market societies but a historically grounded theory of European and North Atlantic transformation. The post-1945 compromise was further bounded by colonial exclusion: many non-Western societies were not included in the welfare bargain, and their integration into the liberal order occurred through different, often coercive, mechanisms. Finally, embedded liberalism is not a stable endpoint; it is a contingent settlement that can be renegotiated or dismantled.

Observable Implications: If Polanyi's mechanism is operating, one should observe market expansion followed by protective legislation, welfare-state growth, and institutionalized exceptions to free trade. In the postwar period, this appears as capital controls, fixed but adjustable exchange rates, agricultural subsidies,

labor rights, and social insurance. One should also observe that trade liberalization is accompanied by domestic compensation mechanisms, not by pure laissez-faire. When the protective layer erodes—as in the 1980s and 1990s—one should observe rising inequality, financial instability, and political backlash against globalization. The mechanism implies that attempts to impose self-regulating markets without social protection will generate resistance, whether through populism, nationalism, labor militancy, or demands for industrial policy. It also implies that international institutions will contain internal contradictions: the same order that liberalizes trade must accommodate exceptions for social protection. Observable evidence includes the expansion of welfare states in the 1950s and 1960s, the rollback of capital controls in the 1980s, and the contemporary return of industrial policy and subsidy competition. The theory's strength is its explanation of why market expansion produces political counter-reactions; its weakness is that it can be overextended to explain too many outcomes unless scope conditions are specified.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on embedded liberalism is shaped by the fact that the post-1945 compromise was largely a North Atlantic bargain. African societies were integrated into the world economy through colonial extraction and, after independence, through commodity dependence and conditional finance, not through a welfare-state bargain. Polanyi's double movement is nonetheless analytically powerful for Africa: structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s dismantled protective institutions and re-commodified labor and land, provoking counter-movements in the form of protests, informalization, and demands for policy space. African developmental regionalism and the African Continental Free Trade Area can be read as attempts to re-embed markets in regional institutions that protect development rather than merely liberalize trade. This perspective contributes a critique of the universalization of European social history and a demand that embeddedness be understood in postcolonial terms. It occludes, however, the diversity of African political economies and the risk that regional protection can shelter inefficient elites.

Chinese: China's perspective treats the market as an instrument embedded in state strategy, not as a self-regulating order. The socialist market economy, dual circulation, and state-owned enterprises represent a deliberate re-embedding of markets in party-state institutions. Polanyi's framework helps explain why China resisted full commodification of land and labor and why it maintains capital controls. This vantage point contributes a model of market governance in which development and security precede liberalization. It occludes the costs of state discretion, including allocative inefficiency and the suppression of certain social counter-movements.

Russian: The Russian perspective emphasizes the collapse of Soviet embeddedness and the shock therapy of the 1990s, which rapidly commodified assets and labor with severe social consequences. The subsequent turn toward state capitalism, sanctions resilience, and strategic sectors reflects a counter-movement against unregulated market integration. This perspective contributes a security-driven understanding of re-embedding. It occludes the economic costs of autarky and the possibility that some market integration can be stabilizing.

Western: The Western perspective has treated embedded liberalism as the golden age of the liberal order and neoliberalism as its unraveling. It contributes a rich institutional history of welfare states, Bretton Woods, and the politics of compromise. It occludes the colonial and racial exclusions of the postwar order and the extent to which embedded liberalism depended on American hegemony.

UN: The UN perspective frames embedded liberalism through development decades, social protection floors, and the Sustainable Development Goals. It treats markets as requiring institutional embedding to deliver equity and sustainability. This perspective contributes a normative commitment to social protection and

multilateral development finance. It occludes the limited enforcement capacity of UN frameworks and the tension between industrial policy and trade commitments.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Washington Consensus and post-1980 neoliberalism — conditionality, deregulation, SAPs

Bolded Causal Claim: The Washington Consensus transformed a contingent set of market-liberalizing reforms into a conditionality-backed policy orthodoxy, so that access to finance, debt relief, and institutional legitimacy became dependent on states meeting creditor-defined benchmarks; the result was not the retreat of the state but its reorientation toward compliance, market enforcement, and externally monitored adjustment.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with John Williamson's 1990 formulation of the Washington Consensus, which distilled a recognizable package of reforms—fiscal discipline, tax reform, interest-rate liberalization, competitive exchange rates, trade liberalization, liberalization of inward foreign direct investment, privatization, deregulation, and property-rights enforcement—into a shared language for policymakers, creditors, and international financial institutions. The operative instrument was conditionality: the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank attached policy requirements to loans, stand-by arrangements, structural adjustment programs, and debt-relief initiatives. Conditionality worked through a financing chokepoint. States facing balance-of-payments crises, debt overhangs, or exclusion from private capital markets needed official liquidity; creditors used that need to require policy changes that would otherwise have faced domestic resistance. Structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the 1980s and 1990s typically combined fiscal austerity, subsidy removal, currency devaluation, trade liberalization, privatization of state enterprises, and public-sector retrenchment. The theoretical justification drew on public-choice and state-failure arguments: governments were assumed to distort prices, protect rents, and misallocate capital; markets, by contrast, were treated as information-processing mechanisms whose price signals could coordinate investment more efficiently than planning. Deregulation reduced the state's direct allocative role while expanding its enforcement role—protecting property rights, enforcing contracts, maintaining macroeconomic stability, and opening capital accounts. Capital-account liberalization added a disciplinary mechanism: mobile capital could exit when policy deviated from investor expectations, narrowing the space for redistributive or industrial policies. The paradigm therefore did not eliminate state capacity; it redirected it toward market-conforming governance and creditor confidence.

Scope Conditions: This paradigm was most powerful where states faced acute financing constraints, high external debt, weak domestic coalitions for alternative development strategies, and dependence on multilateral or bilateral creditors. It was reinforced by the collapse of Soviet-style planning, the debt crises of the 1980s, and the ideological ascendancy of market liberalism in the United States and United Kingdom. It worked best, or at least was most implementable, where states already possessed basic administrative capacity, legal institutions, and political stability sufficient to execute reforms. It worked poorly or destructively where state capacity was thin, social safety nets were absent, informal economies were large, or reforms were imposed without domestic ownership. In such settings, austerity could compress public investment, privatization could transfer assets to politically connected buyers, and trade liberalization could expose infant industries to competition before they had accumulated productive capability. The paradigm also assumed that market failures were secondary to state failures; where externalities, coordination problems, or strategic industries mattered, liberalization could lock in specialization patterns that were difficult to reverse.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include widespread tariff reductions, privatization

waves, financial deregulation, capital-account opening, and the institutionalization of inflation targeting and fiscal rules in many developing and transition economies. One can also observe the social and political costs associated with adjustment: compressed public spending, removal of food and fuel subsidies, currency crises, unemployment in formerly protected sectors, and in some cases deindustrialization or premature specialization in primary commodities. The period produced growth accelerations in some economies, especially where reforms coincided with favorable global demand, but also recurrent crises—Mexico in 1994, East Asia in 1997, Russia in 1998, Argentina in 2001—that exposed the fragility of capital-account liberalization and the procyclicality of market discipline. Politically, the paradigm generated backlash: anti-austerity movements, resource-nationalist reactions, and later demands for industrial policy. The Washington Consensus also became a contested label; Williamson himself distinguished his original ten points from what critics called the "augmented" or "neoliberal" Washington Consensus, suggesting that the term had hardened into an ideological brand beyond its initial technocratic content.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: The African perspective treats the Washington Consensus less as neutral technocracy than as a restructuring of sovereignty under creditor power. Structural adjustment programs are read as episodes in which policy autonomy was traded for liquidity, often with severe consequences for public health, education, food security, and industrial capacity. African scholarship emphasizes that conditionality interacted with colonial legacies, weak state capacity, and commodity dependence, producing adjustment without development. The perspective also notes that African states were not merely passive recipients; they bargained, resisted, and selectively implemented reforms. Its contribution is to center the lived costs of macroeconomic stabilization and the political economy of debt. It occludes, if taken alone, the genuine fiscal crises and inflationary spirals that motivated reform in some cases.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective reads the Washington Consensus as a cautionary example of excessive marketization and external conditionality. China's reform trajectory—gradual, experimental, and state-led—deliberately avoided shock therapy and full capital-account liberalization. The perspective contributes a model in which markets are instruments of state strategy rather than autonomous allocators. It occludes the internal costs of China's state-led model, including financial repression, regional inequality, and the political risks of concentrated state power.

Russian: The Russian perspective associates the Washington Consensus with the 1990s transition experience, including privatization, price liberalization, and external advice. It often frames that period as a loss of state capacity and national wealth, followed by a reassertion of state control over strategic sectors. The perspective contributes an emphasis on sovereignty, strategic industries, and the dangers of rapid liberalization in weak institutional settings. It occludes the inefficiencies and corruption that also characterized state-led alternatives.

Western: The Western perspective is internally divided. One strand treats the Washington Consensus as a necessary correction to state failure and a driver of global growth and poverty reduction. Another strand, especially after the 2008 financial crisis, treats it as an overreach that underestimated market failure, inequality, and the need for regulation. The perspective contributes sophisticated institutional analysis and policy evaluation. It occludes the asymmetry between Western states that retained industrial policy space and developing states that faced stricter conditionality.

UN: The UN perspective frames the Washington Consensus through development decades, poverty reduction, and the Millennium Development Goals. It emphasizes social protection, human development, and

the need for policy space. It contributes a normative commitment to equity and multilateral development finance. It occludes the limited enforcement capacity of UN frameworks and the tension between its social goals and the macroeconomic constraints imposed by creditors.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Contemporary contest — state capitalism (China), friend-shoring, industrial policy (CHIPS Act, IRA), 'return of the state'

Bolded Causal Claim: The contemporary turn toward industrial policy, friend-shoring, and state capitalism does not abolish liberal markets but re-embeds them in security, technological, and geopolitical logics, using subsidies, procurement, export controls, and alliance coordination to reshape comparative advantage around strategic resilience rather than static cost minimization.

Mechanism: The mechanism is a shift in the dominant policy paradigm from efficiency-first globalization to security-conscious geoeconomics. Chinese state capitalism operates through state-owned enterprises, policy banks, directed credit, subsidies, and strategic planning, using markets as instruments of national capability-building rather than as autonomous allocators. Its scale and integration into global supply chains made it both a growth engine and a perceived strategic competitor. The United States and European Union responded not by abandoning markets but by layering security and industrial objectives onto them. The 2022 CHIPS and Science Act provides subsidies, tax credits, and research funding to expand domestic semiconductor manufacturing and reduce dependence on concentrated East Asian supply chains. The 2022 Inflation Reduction Act uses tax credits and domestic-content requirements to accelerate clean-energy manufacturing and electric-vehicle supply chains. The European Chips Act and related industrial strategies similarly combine subsidies, research coordination, and supply-chain monitoring. Friend-shoring, articulated in U.S. Treasury and allied policy discourse, seeks to relocate or diversify production toward politically aligned or trusted partners rather than purely lowest-cost jurisdictions. Export controls—especially on advanced semiconductors, manufacturing equipment, and related technologies—weaponize interdependence by restricting access to chokepoint technologies. The mechanism is therefore not simple protectionism; it is a reconfiguration of market incentives through public finance, regulation, standards, and alliance structures. The state becomes a risk-socializer and market-maker: it absorbs upfront capital costs, coordinates private investment, and defines which sectors are strategic. This "return of the state" is better understood as a change in the state's function—from neutral referee to strategic coordinator—than as a return to mid-twentieth-century planning.

Scope Conditions: This paradigm is most likely where three conditions converge: first, geopolitical rivalry raises the perceived cost of dependence on potential adversaries; second, supply chains are concentrated in technologies with high fixed costs, long lead times, or national-security externalities; third, domestic political coalitions support public investment and are willing to absorb fiscal costs. Semiconductors, batteries, critical minerals, pharmaceuticals, and clean-energy technologies fit these conditions because they combine economic importance with security sensitivity. The paradigm is weaker where fiscal space is limited, institutional capacity for industrial policy is low, or alliance coordination is unreliable. It also depends on the credibility of long-term commitments: private firms will not relocate production unless subsidies, permits, and demand signals are durable. A further scope condition is technological asymmetry. Export controls work best where the controlling state or alliance occupies a chokepoint; they can accelerate indigenous innovation, retaliation, or parallel supply chains if targets have sufficient resources and time. The contemporary contest is therefore not a settled victory of state capitalism over liberalism or vice versa, but an ongoing bargaining process over the boundaries of legitimate intervention.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include new semiconductor fabrication plants in the

United States, Europe, and Japan; battery and electric-vehicle supply-chain investments tied to IRA-style incentives; expanded export-control lists; "de-risking" rather than full decoupling language; and the proliferation of industrial-policy strategies across advanced and emerging economies. One can also observe trade fragmentation, subsidy races, WTO disputes, and retaliatory measures, as well as efforts to build "trusted" supply networks among allies. Market outcomes are increasingly shaped by policy eligibility: firms reorganize production to qualify for subsidies, meet domestic-content rules, or avoid controlled technologies. The paradigm also produces distributional effects: regions and firms that receive subsidies gain, while consumers may face higher costs in the short run; developing countries may be excluded from preferential supply chains unless they align with major powers. The "return of the state" is visible in public spending, but its success remains contingent on implementation quality, technological learning, and geopolitical stability.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: The African perspective sees the contemporary contest as both an opportunity and a risk. On one side, resource nationalism, critical-minerals strategies, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aim to move Africa from raw-material export to value-added production and regional industrialization. On the other, friend-shoring and great-power competition may reproduce extractive patterns if African states remain suppliers of unprocessed minerals while processing and technology stay elsewhere. The perspective contributes a focus on developmental regionalism, bargaining power, and the need for policy space. It occludes, if overstated, the internal governance and infrastructure constraints that limit industrialization regardless of external demand.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames state capitalism as a development strategy and a response to perceived Western containment. Dual circulation—strengthening domestic demand and technological self-reliance while maintaining external engagement—reflects a strategy of reducing vulnerability to sanctions and supply shocks. The perspective contributes an alternative to liberal market orthodoxy and a demonstration that state coordination can accelerate industrial upgrading. It occludes the risks of overcapacity, debt, opacity, and the geopolitical backlash that state-led expansion can provoke.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats sanctions and economic pressure as catalysts for a resilience economy: import substitution, parallel imports, state-directed credit, and reorientation toward non-Western markets. It contributes an emphasis on sovereignty, strategic autonomy, and the limits of financial weaponization. It occludes the efficiency losses, technological gaps, and long-term growth constraints that can result from isolation from advanced markets and technology.

Western: The Western perspective is split between liberal-internationalist commitments and a revived acceptance of industrial policy. One strand argues that targeted intervention is necessary to correct market failures, secure supply chains, and compete with state-capitalist rivals. Another warns that subsidy races, protectionism, and politicized trade can undermine the rules-based order and raise costs. The perspective contributes institutional capacity for policy design and evaluation. It occludes the possibility that Western industrial policy may be judged by the same standards of conditionality and market distortion that were applied to developing countries.

UN: The UN perspective frames the contemporary contest through sustainable development, financing for development, and the Sustainable Development Goals. It emphasizes that industrial policy should support green transition, technology transfer, and inclusive growth rather than zero-sum competition. It contributes a normative commitment to multilateral cooperation and development finance. It occludes the limited enforcement capacity of UN frameworks and the difficulty of reconciling national security industrial policy

with global public goods.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY) The African vantage point on state-market paradigms begins from a position that the other four perspectives systematically understate: the African continent has never experienced the "free market" as a neutral baseline from which deviations—mercantilism, embedded liberalism, neoliberalism—are measured. Rather, African economies have been constituted through successive waves of external market-making that were always already political: slave trades, colonial extraction, post-colonial conditionality, and contemporary resource competition. This is the foundational insight that Walter Rodney (1972) developed in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*: underdevelopment was not a pre-existing condition but an active process of market integration on unequal terms. The African perspective therefore does not ask "state versus market" but "whose state, whose market, on what terms, and to whose benefit." This reframing is not a regional variation on a universal debate; it is a challenge to the universality of the debate itself.

The theoretical lineage runs through several distinct but converging traditions, each of which redefines the state-market relationship from within African historical experience. Kwame Nkrumah's (1965) *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* argued that formal political independence masked continued economic subordination through control of trade, finance, and multinational corporations. For Nkrumah, the state-market question was not about efficiency but about sovereignty: a post-colonial state that did not control its productive base remained a neo-colonial state regardless of its constitutional status. This framing inverts the liberal assumption that markets precede and constrain states; for Nkrumah, markets were instruments of imperial power that post-colonial states had to capture or be captured by. The mechanism of neo-colonialism operated through unequal exchange in trade, debt dependency, and the structural power of multinational corporations to determine investment, technology transfer, and pricing. Nkrumah's scope condition was the post-colonial state with formal sovereignty but substantive economic dependence—a condition that described most of Africa in the 1960s and, in modified form, persists today.

Julius Nyerere's (1968) Ujamaa socialism offered a different but complementary critique. Nyerere argued that African societies possessed pre-colonial traditions of communal ownership and mutual obligation that were destroyed by colonial capitalism, and that post-colonial development required rebuilding these solidarities through state-led cooperative production. The Arusha Declaration (1967) explicitly rejected both capitalist and communist models in favor of a specifically African socialism rooted in village-level democracy. Nyerere's contribution was to show that the state-market binary itself was Eurocentric: African political economy had historically operated through kinship, lineage, and communal obligation rather than through the individualized property relations assumed by both Smith and Marx. The mechanism of Ujamaa was the villagization program, which sought to concentrate dispersed rural populations into cooperative settlements where collective production and distribution would replace market exchange. The scope conditions were rural, agrarian societies with strong communal traditions; the program struggled where these conditions were absent or where state coercion replaced voluntary cooperation. Nyerere's legacy is contested—critics point to economic stagnation and forced resettlement—but his theoretical contribution endures: the state-market debate must be grounded in actually existing social relations, not abstract models.

Amílcar Cabral (1973) in *Return to the Source* added a crucial dimension by insisting that national liberation required not merely political independence but economic transformation of the productive base. Cabral's

concept of "class suicide"—the obligation of the petty bourgeoisie to commit class suicide in order to merge with the masses—was a theory of state-market relations in which the state's role was not to regulate markets but to dissolve class distinctions through productive transformation. Cabral's work is particularly important because it linked the state-market question to the epistemological question: whose knowledge counts in development planning? Cabral argued that the colonial bourgeoisie had been replaced by a national bourgeoisie that reproduced the same extractive patterns, and that genuine liberation required the development of a "revolutionary petty bourgeoisie" committed to mass mobilization. The mechanism was the PAIGC's (African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde) practice of combining armed struggle with the construction of alternative institutions—schools, clinics, agricultural cooperatives—in liberated zones. Cabral's scope condition was the anti-colonial struggle itself; his framework has been extended by later scholars to analyze post-colonial states that have failed to transform their productive bases.

Frantz Fanon (1961) in *The Wretched of the Earth* provided the psychological and cultural dimension that the other traditions lacked. Fanon argued that colonialism created a "Manichean" world divided into settler and native zones, and that post-colonial elites risked reproducing this division by adopting the consumption patterns and institutional forms of the former colonizers. Fanon's analysis of the "national bourgeoisie" as a class that sought to replace the colonial bourgeoisie rather than transform the productive structure anticipated later critiques of African states as "gatekeeper" regimes that mediated external resource extraction rather than developing domestic productive capacity. The mechanism Fanon identified was the "psychopathology of colonization": the internalization of colonial hierarchies that led post-colonial elites to identify with the colonizer's culture and interests. Fanon's scope condition was the immediate post-independence period, but his analysis of the national bourgeoisie has been extended to explain contemporary patterns of elite capture and extraversion.

Mahmood Mamdani (1996) in *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* provided the institutional analysis that connected these earlier thinkers to contemporary debates. Mamdani argued that colonial rule in Africa created a bifurcated state: "citizens" in urban areas governed by civil law, and "subjects" in rural areas governed by customary law through "decentralized despotism." This institutional inheritance meant that post-colonial African states lacked the unified legal and administrative capacity that Western theories of state-market relations assumed. The African state was not a Weberian monopoly on legitimate violence but a patchwork of direct and indirect rule that shaped how markets functioned. Mamdani's framework explains why African states have historically struggled to implement industrial policy: the institutional capacity for policy design and enforcement was fragmented by colonial inheritance. The mechanism is that bifurcated citizenship creates dual legal regimes that undermine the uniform application of commercial law, property rights, and regulatory standards that market economies require. Mamdani's scope conditions are the former British and French colonies in Africa; his framework has been extended to analyze contemporary challenges of state-building and market development.

Jean-François Bayart (1993) in *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* offered a different but complementary analysis. Bayart argued that African states were not "weak" in the sense of lacking capacity, but rather operated through "extraversion"—the strategic use of external resources to maintain domestic political coalitions. The African state was not a failed version of the Western state but a distinct form of political organization that used international markets, aid, and investment as resources for domestic political management. This reframes the state-market question: rather than asking why African states failed to develop markets, Bayart asks how African states used markets to reproduce themselves. The "politics of the belly" was not corruption in the Western sense but a mode of social reproduction that linked state elites to international capital through patronage networks. The mechanism of extraversion operates through the control

of "gateways"—ports, borders, mineral concessions, aid flows—through which external resources enter the domestic economy. State elites capture these gateways and distribute rents to maintain political coalitions. Bayart's scope condition is the post-colonial African state with limited domestic productive capacity but significant external resource flows; his framework explains why African states often prioritize rent extraction over productive investment.

Achille Mbembe (2001) in *On the Postcolony* extended this analysis by examining the cultural and symbolic dimensions of state-market relations. Mbembe argued that the post-colonial state operated through "commandement"—a mode of authority that combined violence, spectacle, and consumption. The post-colonial economy was not a market in the liberal sense but a "convivial" system in which state power, market exchange, and social obligation were intertwined. Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics" (2003) further argued that sovereign power to decide who lives and who dies was exercised not only through direct violence but through the structuring of economic life—through debt, structural adjustment, and the withdrawal of public services. This connects the African perspective directly to Polanyi's double movement: the "disembedding" of markets in Africa was experienced not as abstract economic liberalization but as the withdrawal of the state's protective function and the exposure of populations to market forces without social protection. The mechanism of necropolitics operates through the differential allocation of life chances: some populations are integrated into circuits of accumulation while others are abandoned to zones of death. Mbembe's scope condition is the post-colonial state with weak legitimacy and high violence; his framework has been applied to analyze everything from structural adjustment to the political economy of pandemics.

Siba Grovogui (2006) in *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions* provided the international relations theoretical framework. Grovogui argued that the discipline of IR was built on Eurocentric assumptions that treated European state formation as universal, and that African political experience offered alternative conceptions of sovereignty, authority, and international order. Grovogui's critique is essential for the state-market debate because it challenges the premise that "the state" and "the market" are universal categories. In many African contexts, authority is exercised through chiefs, religious leaders, and community elders alongside or instead of state institutions; markets operate through informal networks, kinship obligations, and moral economies that do not conform to either liberal or mercantilist models. Grovogui's work demands that state-market paradigms be evaluated not against an idealized Western state but against the actual institutional diversity of African political economy. The mechanism of Eurocentrism operates through the epistemic violence of treating European categories as universal, which renders African institutional forms invisible or pathological. Grovogui's scope condition is the entire field of international relations theory; his framework has been extended to analyze the construction of global economic governance.

Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997) in *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* contributed a gendered critique that is often overlooked in state-market debates. Oyěwùmí argued that the categories of "man" and "woman" as used in Western social science were not universal but were products of specific Yoruba and European social organizations. Applied to political economy, this suggests that the "household" as the unit of economic analysis in liberal theory, and the "worker" as the unit in Marxist theory, both embed gendered assumptions that obscure the actual organization of production and reproduction in African societies. The state-market debate in Africa cannot be understood without examining how women's labor—often informal, unpaid, and unrecognized—subsidizes both state capacity and market exchange. The mechanism operates through the invisibility of reproductive labor in national accounts and policy frameworks, which leads to the systematic underestimation of women's contribution to economic output and the overestimation of state and market capacity. Oyěwùmí's scope condition is the Yoruba social

organization she studied, but her epistemological critique has been extended to other African contexts.

Sylvia Tamale (2020) in *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* extended this by arguing that decolonization is not merely a political project but an epistemological one: African knowledge systems must be centered in the analysis of African political economy. Tamale's work suggests that the state-market paradigms developed in European intellectual history—mercantilism, liberalism, embedded liberalism—are themselves products of specific historical experiences that may not translate to African contexts. The task is not to apply these paradigms to Africa but to develop African paradigms that can speak back to the global debate. The mechanism of epistemic decolonization operates through the centering of African languages, concepts, and methodologies in the production of knowledge about African political economy. Tamale's scope condition is the contemporary academy, but her framework has implications for policy design and institutional reform.

The contemporary African contribution to the state-market debate centers on three concepts: developmental regionalism, AfCFTA, and resource nationalism. Developmental regionalism, associated with scholars like Carlos Lopes and institutions like the African Union, argues that African development requires regional integration that goes beyond trade liberalization to include industrial policy, infrastructure coordination, and collective bargaining with external partners. The mechanism is that regional integration creates larger markets that can support industrialization, while collective bargaining increases African states' leverage in negotiations with external partners. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched in 2021, represents the most ambitious attempt to create a continental market, but its success depends on resolving the tension between liberalization and industrial policy: if AfCFTA merely opens African markets to external competition without building domestic productive capacity, it risks reproducing the neo-colonial pattern that Nkrumah identified. The scope conditions for AfCFTA's success include infrastructure investment, harmonization of standards and regulations, and the development of regional value chains.

Resource nationalism represents the contemporary African assertion that states should control and benefit from their natural resources. From Tanzania's renegotiation of mining contracts under President Magufuli to Zambia's copper nationalization debates to the DRC's cobalt export restrictions, African states are increasingly challenging the liberal assumption that resource extraction should be governed by market contracts. This is not a return to 1970s state socialism but a pragmatic recognition that the terms of trade between resource exporters and industrialized consumers have historically been unfavorable, and that state intervention is necessary to capture value-added. The mechanism operates through the renegotiation of contracts, the imposition of local content requirements, and the development of downstream processing capacity. The scope conditions include the availability of technical expertise, the willingness of investors to accept renegotiated terms, and the capacity of states to manage resource revenues transparently.

What the African perspective contributes that the other four cannot: First, it reveals that the state-market binary is itself a product of European historical experience that does not capture the diversity of institutional forms in Africa. Second, it demonstrates that "market integration" has historically been a mechanism of extraction rather than development, and that the terms of integration matter more than the fact of integration. Third, it provides a theory of the state as a site of extraversion and patronage rather than as a neutral regulator or developmental actor. Fourth, it centers gender and epistemology as dimensions of political economy that Western theories systematically exclude. Fifth, it offers a critique of the universalism of Western categories that is not merely relativist but grounded in alternative institutional practices.

What the African perspective occludes: It can understate the agency of African states in shaping their own trajectories, sometimes reducing African political economy to a story of external domination. It can romanticize pre-colonial communalism without adequately examining its internal hierarchies, including those of

gender, age, and caste. It can treat "Africa" as a unified category, obscuring the enormous variation between, say, South Africa's industrial economy and Chad's pastoral economy, or between Nigeria's oil-dependent state and Kenya's more diversified economy. And it can struggle to generate prescriptive policy frameworks that are both theoretically grounded and practically implementable, sometimes oscillating between radical critique and pragmatic accommodation. The tension between Nkrumah's revolutionary socialism and Nyerere's pragmatic Ujamaa, or between Bayart's extraversion thesis and the developmental state literature, remains unresolved.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective The Chinese perspective on state-market paradigms is rooted in a distinct theoretical tradition that does not map neatly onto either Western liberalism or Soviet Marxism-Leninism. The concept of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," formalized under Deng Xiaoping, represents a pragmatic synthesis that treats the market as an instrument of socialist development rather than as an end in itself. This framing has deep roots in Chinese political thought, particularly in the tradition of "statecraft" (jingshi) that emphasizes the state's responsibility for economic welfare and social order, and in the Leninist tradition of state-led modernization that the Chinese Communist Party inherited.

The contemporary Chinese perspective is most clearly articulated through the concept of the "socialist market economy," though Western analysts often use the term "state capitalism." Chinese scholars and officials reject the latter as a Cold War category that misrepresents the Chinese model. The key theoretical claim is that the state and the market are not opposites but complements: the state provides strategic direction, infrastructure, and long-term planning, while the market provides efficiency, innovation, and consumer welfare. This is not a temporary deviation from liberal norms but a permanent feature of the Chinese model, grounded in the argument that markets are tools that must be subordinated to political objectives.

The mechanism of Chinese state-market relations operates through several channels. State-owned enterprises (SOEs) account for a significant share of economic output—estimates vary depending on measurement, but SOEs and state-controlled firms represent roughly 30-40% of GDP. These enterprises operate in strategic sectors including energy, telecommunications, finance, and transportation, providing the state with direct control over key inputs to the economy. The state also exercises control through the banking system, where state-owned banks direct credit toward priority sectors and projects. The "dual circulation" strategy, announced in 2020, represents the latest evolution: it emphasizes domestic consumption and innovation as the primary growth driver while maintaining international trade as a secondary circuit. This is a response to perceived vulnerabilities in global supply chains and US technology restrictions, and it reflects a strategic reassessment of China's position in the global economy.

The Chinese perspective contributes an empirical demonstration that rapid economic development can occur without full liberalization. China's growth from 1978 to the present—averaging roughly 9-10% annually for three decades—represents the most significant poverty reduction in human history, lifting approximately 800 million people out of extreme poverty. This empirical record challenges the Washington Consensus assumption that liberalization is necessary for growth. It also challenges the mercantilist assumption that state intervention must be protectionist: China's growth was driven by export-oriented manufacturing that integrated into global markets while maintaining state control over key sectors. The mechanism of Chinese growth combined market incentives at the micro level (household responsibility system in agriculture, township and village enterprises, special economic zones) with state direction at the macro level (five-year plans, infrastructure investment, credit allocation).

The Chinese perspective also contributes the argument that political legitimacy derives from performance

rather than electoral competition. This challenges the Western assumption that liberal democracy is a prerequisite for economic development, and suggests that state capacity for long-term planning may be enhanced by insulation from short-term electoral pressures. The mechanism is that the CCP's monopoly on political power allows it to implement long-term strategies—such as the Belt and Road Initiative or the Made in China 2025 plan—without the policy reversals that electoral cycles can produce.

What the Chinese perspective occludes: It tends to understate the costs of state capitalism, including allocative inefficiency, corruption, and the suppression of private entrepreneurship in sectors where SOEs dominate. It struggles to account for the environmental and social costs of rapid industrialization, including air pollution, labor exploitation, and regional inequality. It presents a unified "Chinese model" that obscures significant regional variation—between coastal and interior provinces, between state and private sectors—and internal debate about the appropriate balance between state and market. And it tends to treat state capacity as given rather than examining how it was built and at what cost, including the human costs of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, which preceded the reform era. The Chinese perspective also struggles to explain why similar state-capitalist models in other countries have not produced comparable growth, suggesting that China's success may depend on factors—scale, timing, geopolitical context—that are not easily replicable.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective The Russian perspective on state-market paradigms is shaped by a distinctive historical trajectory: the collapse of the Soviet planned economy, the chaotic liberalization of the 1990s, and the subsequent reassertion of state control under Putin. This experience has produced a perspective that is deeply skeptical of both liberal market orthodoxy and Soviet-style planning, while embracing a pragmatic statism that prioritizes sovereignty, security, and great-power status.

The theoretical lineage begins with the Soviet experience itself. The Soviet model represented the most thorough attempt to replace market coordination with state planning, and its collapse in 1991 was interpreted in Russia not as a failure of socialism per se but as a failure of a specific bureaucratic model. The 1990s "shock therapy" reforms, associated with Jeffrey Sachs and the IMF, produced hyperinflation, deindustrialization, and the rise of oligarchs who acquired state assets at fire-sale prices. This experience discredited liberal market reforms in Russian political discourse and created a constituency for state reassertion. The mechanism of shock therapy's failure was the rapid removal of price controls and subsidies without the institutional infrastructure—property rights, bankruptcy law, regulatory capacity—needed to support market coordination. The result was not a market economy but a "virtual economy" in which enterprises continued to produce without paying taxes or wages, sustained by barter and non-payment chains.

The contemporary Russian perspective is best understood through the concept of the "power vertical" (vertikal vlasti) and the associated economic model of selective state capitalism. Under Putin, the state reasserted control over strategic sectors—particularly energy—through the renationalization of assets (most notably Yukos in 2003) and the creation of state corporations (Rosneft, Gazprom, Rostec, VEB). The state does not seek to control the entire economy but to dominate strategic sectors while allowing private enterprise in non-strategic areas. This is a selective statism rather than comprehensive planning, and it reflects a pragmatic assessment of where state control is necessary for security and where market coordination is more efficient.

The sanctions-resilience economy represents the most recent evolution. Following the 2014 sanctions and the 2022 escalation, Russia has pursued import substitution, de-dollarization, and the development of alternative payment systems. The National Wealth Fund and the Central Bank's management of reserves have been reoriented toward sanctions resilience. The Russian perspective frames this not as autarky but as

"sovereign development"—the capacity to maintain economic function under external pressure. The mechanism operates through state-directed credit, subsidized domestic production, and the redirection of trade toward non-Western partners, particularly China and India. The "Fortress Russia" strategy, developed after 2014, included the accumulation of foreign exchange reserves, the reduction of dollar-denominated debt, and the development of domestic alternatives to Western technology.

The Russian perspective contributes an empirical demonstration that economies can adapt to severe external pressure through state-directed restructuring. The Russian economy contracted by roughly 2% in 2022 following the invasion of Ukraine and the imposition of unprecedented sanctions, but recovered to grow by approximately 3% in 2023, driven by military spending and import substitution. This resilience challenges the assumption that sanctions can rapidly cripple a large, resource-rich economy. The mechanism of resilience includes the redirection of energy exports to China and India, the development of parallel import channels through third countries, and the fiscal stimulus provided by military spending.

What the Russian perspective occludes: It tends to present state reassertion as a response to external threat rather than as a choice that preceded and contributed to confrontation. It understates the long-term costs of sanctions, including technological stagnation, brain drain, and dependence on Chinese inputs for critical technologies. It treats the 1990s liberalization as a failure without adequately examining the structural conditions—Soviet legacy, institutional weakness, absence of rule of law—that shaped its outcomes. And it struggles to distinguish between genuine state capacity and the personalistic control of a narrow elite, conflating regime survival with national interest. The Russian perspective also tends to obscure the distributional consequences of state capitalism: the concentration of wealth among state-connected elites, the suppression of independent business, and the militarization of the economy at the expense of civilian investment.

2.7.4 Western Perspective The Western perspective on state-market paradigms has undergone a significant evolution over the past century, from classical liberalism through embedded liberalism to neoliberalism and, most recently, to a revival of industrial policy. This evolution reflects changing assessments of the state-market relationship in response to historical crises, and it reveals a pattern of theoretical innovation driven by practical failure.

The classical liberal tradition, rooted in Smith (1776) and Ricardo (1817), treats the market as a spontaneous order that generates efficiency through the division of labor and comparative advantage. The state's role is limited to providing public goods, enforcing contracts, and maintaining order. This tradition dominated 19th-century British policy and shaped the post-1945 liberal international order, though in modified form. The mechanism of comparative advantage operates through specialization: countries export goods in which they have lower opportunity costs and import goods in which they have higher opportunity costs, generating mutual gains from trade. The scope conditions include the absence of externalities, perfect competition, and factor mobility—conditions that are rarely met in practice but that serve as a benchmark for policy evaluation.

The embedded liberalism compromise, articulated by Ruggie (1982) and rooted in Polanyi (1944), represented a modification: markets were to be liberalized internationally while domestically embedded in social welfare systems and regulatory frameworks. This was the Bretton Woods compromise: free trade plus capital controls plus welfare states. The mechanism was that domestic social protection would absorb the dislocations of international market integration, preventing the political backlash that had destroyed the interwar gold standard. Polanyi's (1944) "double movement" provided the theoretical foundation: the expansion of self-regulating markets generates a counter-movement of social protection, and the stability of the system depends on maintaining a balance between the two. The scope conditions for embedded liberalism included

the existence of strong labor movements, social democratic parties, and state capacity for welfare provision—conditions that were present in post-war Western Europe but not in most developing countries.

The neoliberal turn of the 1980s, associated with Williamson's (1990) Washington Consensus, represented a partial disembedding: deregulation, privatization, and liberalization were promoted as universal prescriptions, with conditionality as the enforcement mechanism. The mechanism was that market liberalization would generate efficiency gains that would trickle down to all segments of society. The scope conditions were assumed to be universal: what worked in the US and UK would work everywhere. The Washington Consensus included ten policy prescriptions: fiscal discipline, reordering of public expenditure priorities, tax reform, liberalization of interest rates, competitive exchange rates, trade liberalization, liberalization of inward FDI, privatization, deregulation, and property rights. The mechanism of conditionality operated through the IMF and World Bank, which made loans contingent on the implementation of these reforms.

The contemporary Western perspective is characterized by what might be called "liberalism with industrial policy." The US CHIPS and Science Act (2022), the Inflation Reduction Act (2022), and the EU Chips Act (2023) represent a significant departure from neoliberal orthodoxy. The mechanism is that national security and supply chain resilience require state intervention in strategic sectors, even at the cost of market efficiency. This is not a return to mercantilism—the US and EU remain committed to open trade in non-strategic sectors—but a recognition that the liberal order itself requires protection from geopolitical competition. The scope conditions are the existence of a geopolitical rival (China) and the perceived vulnerability of supply chains (semiconductors, critical minerals, pharmaceuticals).

Rodrik (2011) in *The Globalization Paradox* provides the theoretical framework for this evolution: the "trilemma" of hyperglobalization, democracy, and national sovereignty. Rodrik argues that you can have at most two of the three, and that the post-1990s pursuit of hyperglobalization sacrificed democracy and sovereignty. The contemporary industrial policy revival represents a reassertion of sovereignty and democracy at the expense of hyperglobalization. The mechanism is that democratic polities will not sustain economic policies that produce concentrated losses without compensation, and that national sovereignty requires the capacity to respond to external shocks. Rodrik's scope conditions include the existence of democratic institutions and the political salience of distributional concerns.

What the Western perspective contributes: A rich theoretical tradition that has generated testable hypotheses about the relationship between institutions, markets, and development. A demonstrated capacity for self-correction, as evidenced by the shift from Washington Consensus to industrial policy revival. And institutional capacity for policy design and evaluation that other perspectives lack, including independent central banks, regulatory agencies, and research institutions.

What the Western perspective occludes: It tends to universalize its own historical experience, treating the European and North American path as the template for all development. It can understate the coercive dimensions of its own market-making, from colonialism to structural adjustment. It tends to judge non-Western state intervention by standards that it does not apply to its own industrial policy, creating a double standard that undermines its normative claims. And it can present its own evolution—from liberalism to neoliberalism to industrial policy—as a learning process while treating non-Western alternatives as deviations or failures.

2.7.5 UN Perspective The UN perspective on state-market paradigms is framed through the lens of sustainable development, financing for development, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It represents a multilateral, normative approach that seeks to reconcile market efficiency with social equity and environmental sustainability, and it draws on a longer tradition of UN-sponsored development thinking that stretches

back to the 1950s.

The theoretical lineage draws on the development economics tradition that emerged from the UN system itself: the Prebisch-Singer thesis on terms of trade, the UNCTAD conferences on trade and development, and the Brandt Commission reports of the 1980s. These frameworks argued that the global trading system was structurally biased against developing countries and that state intervention was necessary to correct these biases. The UN perspective thus has roots in both liberal internationalism and developmentalism, and it has historically served as a forum for articulating the grievances of developing countries against the liberal international order. The mechanism of the Prebisch-Singer thesis operates through the tendency of primary commodity prices to decline relative to manufactured goods over time, which means that developing countries specializing in primary exports face a structural disadvantage in international trade. This provides a theoretical justification for import-substituting industrialization and state intervention in trade.

The contemporary UN perspective is articulated through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development. The mechanism is that industrial policy should support green transition, technology transfer, and inclusive growth rather than zero-sum competition. The UN framework emphasizes that the SDGs require massive investment in infrastructure, education, and health, and that this investment cannot be left to markets alone. The state has a role in directing investment toward public goods, while the market provides efficiency and innovation. The SDGs include 17 goals with 169 targets, covering poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, water, energy, economic growth, industry, inequality, cities, consumption, climate, oceans, ecosystems, peace, and partnerships. The mechanism of the SDG framework is to create a common set of goals that all countries can work toward, with the UN providing monitoring, technical assistance, and normative guidance.

The UN perspective contributes a normative commitment to multilateral cooperation and development finance. It provides a framework for evaluating state-market arrangements against criteria of sustainability, equity, and human rights rather than purely economic efficiency. The UN's role in setting standards, monitoring progress, and providing technical assistance gives it a unique position in the state-market debate. The mechanism of UN influence operates through norm-setting (the SDGs, the Paris Agreement), technical assistance (UNCTAD, UNIDO, UNDP), and convening power (conferences, summits, expert groups). The scope conditions for UN effectiveness include the willingness of member states to cooperate, the availability of funding, and the capacity of UN agencies to deliver technical assistance.

What the UN perspective occludes: The limited enforcement capacity of UN frameworks means that its normative commitments often lack teeth. The difficulty of reconciling national security industrial policy with global public goods creates tensions that the UN framework struggles to resolve: when the US and China both pursue semiconductor self-sufficiency, the UN's call for technology transfer and inclusive growth is difficult to operationalize. The UN's own institutional biases—toward Western donors, toward technocratic solutions, toward incremental reform rather than structural transformation—can limit its transformative potential. And the UN's dependence on member state contributions means that its agenda is shaped by the priorities of its largest funders, which may not align with the needs of the poorest countries. The UN perspective also struggles to address the power asymmetries that shape state-market relations: it can call for fair trade and debt relief, but it cannot compel powerful states to comply.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Shows state-market paradigms as externally imposed constraints on developmental sovereignty; centers resource nationalism, AfCFTA, and developmental regionalism	May underweight internal governance failures, elite capture, and variation in state capacity within Africa	Developmental sovereignty and structural transformation over market efficiency	AfCFTA (signed 2018, trading 2021); resource nationalism in DRC, Zambia, Nigeria; SAP resistance movements	Western: internal institutional quality, not external paradigms, is the binding constraint on development
Chinese	Demonstrates that state capitalism can deliver rapid industrialization and technological upgrading within global markets	Obscures costs of state direction: capital misallocation, debt accumulation, repression, and negative global spillovers	State-led development and technological sovereignty within managed globalization	SOE share of GDP ~25–30%; Made in China 2025; dual circulation strategy; semiconductor self-sufficiency push	Western: state capitalism distorts competition, creates security externalities, and undermines rules-based trade
Russian	Shows how sanctions can be absorbed through import substitution, parallel trade, and energy pivot, preserving state autonomy	Understates long-run technological stagnation, brain drain, and deepening dependence on China	Sovereign economic resilience and multipolarity against Western hegemony	Ruble stabilization post-2022; parallel imports; energy exports to Asia; de-dollarization rhetoric	Western: resilience is partial and temporary; technological capacity is eroding

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Provides coherent framework for gains from trade, comparative advantage, and institutionalized liberal order	Treats market outcomes as natural; obscures power asymmetries, colonial legacies, and historical coercion	Liberal international order with managed openness and rules-based trade	Bretton Woods institutions; GATT/WTO; postwar growth; CHIPS/IRA as "friend-shoring"	African: liberal order was built on colonial extraction and unequal exchange
UN	Articulates universal development norms and multilateral frameworks (SDGs, Addis Ababa Action Agenda)	Lacks enforcement power; agenda shaped by largest donors; technocratic bias	Inclusive multilateral development and global public goods	SDG 8, 9, 17; UNCTAD reports; Financing for Development conferences	African: UN frameworks are donor-driven and incremental, not structurally transformative

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 1971 Nixon Shock — Closing the Gold Window and the Transition from Bretton Woods to Floating Rates

On August 15, 1971, President Richard Nixon announced the suspension of the convertibility of the US dollar into gold at $35 per ounce, imposed a 10 percent surcharge on imports, and froze wages and prices for ninety days. Delivered on a Sunday evening from Camp David, the announcement ended the Bretton Woods system of fixed exchange rates that had governed international monetary relations since 1944. Within two years the major currencies were floating; by 1976 the Jamaica Accords formally ratified a regime of managed flexibility. The Nixon shock is the pivotal moment in which the postwar embedded-liberal compromise gave way to a more market-driven, financially liberalized order, and it remains the canonical case for understanding how state decisions restructure systemic monetary arrangements.

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the decision was shaped by Nixon's political calculations amid falling approval ratings, Treasury Secretary John Connally's aggressive advocacy for unilateral action, and Federal Reserve Chairman Arthur Burns's reluctant acquiescence; the Camp David meeting deliberately excluded the State Department and the IMF, concentrating authority in a small circle of economic advisors. At the state level, the United States faced a structural balance-of-payments deficit driven by Vietnam War spending, Great Society programs, and an overvalued dollar; the US gold stock had fallen from roughly $22 billion in 1958 to under $11 billion by 1971, while foreign dollar claims exceeded $60 billion. At the systemic level, the Triffin dilemma — identified by Robert Triffin in 1960 — captured the contradiction: the global

economy needed dollar liquidity, which required US deficits, but those same deficits eroded confidence in the dollar's gold backing; the system required a hegemon to supply public goods, yet the hegemon's domestic priorities undermined its capacity to do so. At the transnational level, the Eurodollar market, which had grown from negligible size in the late 1950s to over $50 billion by 1971, allowed capital to move across borders outside national regulatory control, enabling speculative attacks on the dollar and constraining the policy space available to US authorities; multinational corporations and private banks had created a parallel financial infrastructure that made unilateral state action both necessary and, in some respects, already fait accompli.

Mechanism. The mechanism operates through a three-step causal chain. First, the structural contradiction identified by Triffin created a confidence problem: as US liabilities to foreigners grew, the ratio of gold to dollar claims deteriorated, making the fixed rate of $35 per ounce increasingly notional. Second, capital mobility — the Eurodollar market and the growing integration of financial markets — translated this structural vulnerability into an acute crisis by allowing private actors to move funds in anticipation of devaluation, forcing central banks to defend parities through reserve losses or interest-rate hikes that damaged domestic economies. Third, the state-level decision to suspend convertibility was the triggering event that resolved the immediate crisis by removing the gold constraint, but in doing so it transformed the systemic regime: without a nominal anchor, exchange rates floated, monetary policy became domestically oriented, and capital account liberalization accelerated. The December 1971 Smithsonian Agreement briefly attempted to patch the system with a devalued dollar ($38 per ounce) and wider bands, but speculative pressure resumed and by March 1973 the major currencies were floating; the 1976 Jamaica Accords then formally demonetized gold and legitimized floating. The mechanism is therefore not simply "Nixon decided" but rather a structural pressure (Triffin) transmitted through transnational capital mobility (Eurodollars) and resolved by a state decision (suspension) that reconstituted the systemic order. The post-1971 regime of floating rates and financial globalization was not designed but emerged from the interaction of these levels, a point emphasized by Helleiner (1994) and James (1996).

Perspective reconstruction. The African perspective, which is primary here, interprets the Nixon shock as the moment when the developmentalist compromise of the postwar order was abandoned and African economies were exposed to the volatility of unmanaged global finance. African scholars and policymakers had benefited from the relative predictability of fixed rates and from the UNCTAD-led push for commodity stabilization and special drawing rights; the collapse of Bretton Woods removed these anchors and inaugurated the era of petrodollar recycling, debt crises, and structural adjustment. From this vantage, the shock was not a technical monetary adjustment but a redistribution of risk: the costs of dollar instability were exported to commodity-dependent economies that had no voice in the decision, a dynamic that Samir Amin (1976) and Walter Rodney (1972) anticipated in their critiques of unequal exchange. The Chinese perspective, at the time still outside the Bretton Woods system, viewed the collapse with a mixture of vindication and caution: the dollar's loss of gold backing confirmed Maoist critiques of imperialist monetary hegemony, yet China's subsequent integration into the global economy after 1978 meant that the post-1971 floating regime became the environment in which China's export-led growth strategy was constructed; Chinese scholars later emphasized that dollar hegemony persisted despite the gold suspension, and that the post-1971 order, while more flexible, remained asymmetrically favorable to the reserve-currency issuer. The Russian (Soviet) perspective saw the Nixon shock as confirmation of the inherent instability of capitalism: the Soviet bloc's separate monetary system, anchored by the transferable ruble and Comecon trade, appeared insulated from dollar volatility, and Soviet economists argued that the collapse demonstrated the impossibility of reconciling national monetary sovereignty with international capitalist integration; yet the shock also complicated Soviet

trade with the West, as floating rates introduced uncertainty into hard-currency transactions and contributed to the eventual Soviet turn toward Western borrowing in the 1970s. The Western perspective, dominant in the historiography, frames the shock as a necessary adjustment to an unsustainable system: the Triffin dilemma made the gold-dollar standard unworkable, and Nixon's action, while unilateral and disruptive, cleared the way for a more efficient market-based monetary order; Western economists emphasize the gains from floating rates — automatic adjustment, monetary policy autonomy, and the avoidance of deflationary gold-standard discipline — while acknowledging the costs of increased volatility and the eventual need for coordination (Plaza Accord, Louvre Accord), as analyzed by Eichengreen (2011). The UN perspective, articulated through UNCTAD and the Group of 77, treated the shock as a crisis of global economic governance requiring multilateral reform; UNCTAD's 1972 Nairobi conference and subsequent calls for a New International Economic Order demanded commodity price stabilization, debt relief, and a reformed monetary system with greater developing-country voice, holding that the unilateral US decision violated the spirit of Bretton Woods and that the post-1971 order, by privileging market forces over managed development, worsened North-South inequality.

Adjudication. The systemic-level Western structuralist account — the Triffin dilemma transmitted through capital mobility — best explains the mechanism and timing of the Nixon shock: it identifies why the system became unsustainable and why the crisis broke when it did. However, this account underweights the distributional consequences that the African perspective foregrounds: the shock was not merely a technical adjustment but a reallocation of monetary risk toward the global South, and the subsequent debt crises of the 1980s cannot be understood without this lens. The Western account also tends to treat the post-1971 order as an improvement in efficiency, whereas the African and UN perspectives reveal it as a shift in power that disadvantaged commodity exporters and borrowers. The Chinese and Russian perspectives add the important insight that dollar hegemony survived the gold suspension, meaning the shock changed the form but not the substance of US monetary dominance — a point that Western narratives of "the end of Bretton Woods" sometimes obscure. What the Western account misses, the African account captures: the shock's costs were borne asymmetrically. What the African account misses, the Western account captures: the gold-dollar standard was genuinely unsustainable and required adjustment. The best synthesis is therefore: the Triffin mechanism explains the collapse, the African perspective explains who bore its costs, and the Chinese and Russian perspectives explain why US dominance persisted. No single perspective is sufficient; the case requires multi-level, multi-perspective analysis, and the student should treat the Nixon shock not as a closed historical episode but as the origin point of the financialized, dollar-centered order that contemporary industrial policy and de-dollarization debates are now contesting.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Mechanism.** Trace how the 2022 US CHIPS and Science Act and the EU Chips Act alter firm incentives in semiconductor supply chains. Specify at least two policy instruments and one market failure they target.

2. **Levels of analysis.** Explain the same episode at the individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels without conflating them.

3. **Perspective reconstruction.** In 3–4 sentences each, reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN vantage points interpret these acts.

4. **Historical analogue.** Compare the acts to one of List's infant-industry argument, Hamilton's Report on Manufactures, or Polanyi's double movement. State one similarity and one difference.

5. **Falsifiers.** Identify two observable developments that would weaken the claim that this is a durable paradigm shift rather than a temporary subsidy.

6. **Adjudication.** Decide whether the acts are better described as mercantilist revival, embedded-liberal re-regulation, or state-capitalist competition, and justify with scope conditions.

Model answer. The CHIPS Act and EU Chips Act are best understood as a re-embedding of liberal semiconductor markets in national-security priorities, not as a return to either nineteenth-century mercantilism or 1990s neoliberalism. The mechanism runs through a recognized market failure: advanced logic and memory production is highly concentrated, capital-intensive, and geopolitically exposed, so private firms underinvest in redundancy and allied capacity. Washington and Brussels respond with subsidies, tax credits, research funding, and export controls that change expected returns for firms such as Intel, TSMC, Samsung, and ASML-linked suppliers. The state does not abolish trade; it prices security into location decisions and restricts technology transfer to rivals. At the individual level, executives optimize subsidy eligibility and compliance; at the state level, governments frame chips as critical infrastructure; at the systemic level, the policy is inseparable from US-China rivalry and alliance management; at the transnational level, the EU's parallel act and firm-level cross-border investment show emulation and interdependence rather than autarky. African observers can read the episode as vindication that industrial policy is a normal tool of development, yet they may also note that African states rarely possess comparable fiscal capacity or bargaining power, and that "friend-shoring" can redirect investment away from non-aligned suppliers. Chinese analysts tend to interpret the acts as technological containment that accelerates dual circulation and domestic substitution, while also revealing the limits of US unilateralism because allied firms remain embedded in Chinese markets. Russian perspectives emphasize sanctions resilience and the weaponization of supply chains, treating chips policy as part of a broader geoeconomic bloc formation that justifies import substitution and parallel trade. Western liberal accounts often describe the acts as a correction to hyper-globalization: markets remain open, but only within a security perimeter, echoing Polanyi's double movement in which the expansion of global markets provokes a protective countermovement. UN development perspectives stress technology access, SDG financing, and the risk that subsidy races divert resources from poorer countries; they may welcome capacity diversification but warn against a two-tier global economy. Historically, the acts resemble List's infant-industry logic and Hamilton's manufacturing promotion in their acceptance of temporary protection for strategic sectors, yet they differ because they target knowledge-intensive, networked production rather than simple tariff walls, and because they depend on alliance coordination rather than national self-sufficiency. They also echo Polanyi's embedded liberalism: the post-1945 compromise subordinated markets to social stability, whereas the new compromise subordinates them to security and resilience. The claim of a durable paradigm shift would be weakened if subsidy programs were repealed after one electoral cycle, if firms accepted funds but failed to reach production milestones, if export controls were relaxed without reciprocal concessions, or if WTO disputes forced a retreat to narrower national-security exceptions. Conversely, durable shift would be supported by multi-administration continuity, allied co-financing, and measurable capacity relocation. On adjudication, "mercantilist revival" captures the zero-sum rhetoric but overstates autarky; "state-capitalist competition" captures Chinese and US emulation but blurs the difference between party-state direction and regulated market incentives; "embedded-liberal re-regulation" best fits the

evidence because liberal trade remains the baseline while security, labor, and climate conditions are layered onto it. The scope condition is sectoral and geopolitical: this is not a general return of the state to all markets, but a targeted re-embedding in technologies deemed systemically critical.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. Indonesia's 2020 ban on exports of unprocessed nickel ore, combined with domestic processing requirements, tax incentives for smelters, and downstream investment rules, has repositioned the country from a raw-material exporter to a prospective hub in electric-vehicle battery supply chains. Jakarta defends the policy as industrialization and value capture; several trading partners have challenged aspects of it at the WTO; and Chinese, Korean, European, and US-linked firms have invested in ferronickel, precursor, and battery projects. The case sits at the intersection of resource nationalism, green-transition demand, and great-power competition over critical minerals, while raising questions about environmental costs, local community impacts, and whether downstream gains are durable or subsidy-dependent.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts.

- **Mechanism:** How do export restrictions and downstream mandates alter firm location, technology transfer, and state revenue? Identify the market failure or political objective being corrected.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of Indonesia's policy in 3–5 sentences each, noting what each reveals and occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the policy to one of List's infant-industry argument, Hamilton's manufacturing promotion, or Polanyi's double movement; state one similarity and one difference.
- **Falsifiers:** What evidence would show that the policy is (i) a durable developmental success, (ii) a temporary rent-seeking arrangement, or (iii) a trigger for supply-chain relocation?

(c) Self-check line. Self-check: Did you distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in your memo?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: The 2022 US CHIPS and Science Act is best classified as:

A. A return to classical liberalism because subsidies reduce production costs.
B. A revival of pure mercantilism because it ends semiconductor trade.
C. An embedded-liberal re-regulation in which market openness is subordinated to security and resilience goals.
D. A continuation of Washington Consensus neoliberalism because it relies on private firms.

Correct answer: C.

Distractor diagnoses.
- **A** mistakes a subsidy for laissez-faire; classical liberalism opposes discretionary state allocation of capital and selective industrial targeting.
- **B** overstates autarky; the act preserves trade and allied supply chains rather than abolishing them.
- **D** misidentifies the era; neoliberal conditionality is replaced by strategic conditionality, security screening, and sector-specific state direction.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Trade Openness (Exports + Imports as % of GDP), Selected Benchmarks, 1870–2023

Period	World average (approx.)	United States	United Kingdom	China	Interpretive label
1870	~12%	~12%	~45%	~5%	First globalization (steam, gold standard)
1913	~21%	~11%	~50%	~8%	Peak of classical liberal order
1938	~15%	~9%	~35%	~7%	Interwar collapse, protectionist turn
1970	~25%	~10%	~40%	~5%	Embedded-liberal Bretton Woods era
1990	~38%	~20%	~50%	~25%	Post-Cold War liberalization
2008	~61%	~28%	~60%	~65%	Peak "hyper-globalization"
2023	~58%	~25%	~65%	~38%	Plateau; "slowbalization"/fragmentation

Sources: World Bank World Development Indicators; Maddison Project Database (Bolt & van Zanden 2020); WTO World Trade Statistical Review. Figures are rounded benchmarks for pedagogical use; country definitions and measurement conventions vary across series.

Table 2 — Average Applied Tariff Rates (Simple Mean, %), Selected Economies

Economy	1990	2000	2010	2023	Notes
United States	~4.5	~3.5	~3.4	~3.4 (MFN); higher effective rates under Section 301 tariffs on China	GATT/WTO rounds; post-2018 bilateral tariffs

Economy	1990	2000	2010	2023	Notes
European Union	~6.0	~4.5	~4.0	~5.1	Common external tariff; agricultural peaks remain
China	~40	~15	~9.5	~7.5	Accession to WTO (2001) drove reduction
India	~80	~30	~12	~12	Post-1991 liberalization; recent selective hikes
Sub-Saharan Africa (unweighted avg.)	~25	~18	~12	~10	AfCFTA (2021) aims at intra-regional reduction

Sources: World Bank WDI (tariff rate, applied, simple mean, all products); WTO Tariff Profiles. "Applied" rates understate bound rates and non-tariff barriers.

Table 3 — State Role in the Economy: SOE Share and Industrial Policy Spending

Indicator	China	European Union	United States
SOE share of GDP (approx.)	25–30%	5–8%	<2% (utilities, postal, Amtrak)
SOE share of listed market cap (approx.)	~40–45%	~8–12%	~1–2%
Flagship industrial policy package	Made in China 2025; semiconductor subsidies; "dual circulation"	EU Chips Act (€43bn); Green Deal Industrial Plan	CHIPS and Science Act ($52.7bn); Inflation Reduction Act (~$369bn over 10 yrs)
Industrial policy spending as % of GDP (recent, approx.)	~1.5–2.0%	~0.5–1.0%	~0.5–1.0% (front-loaded)
Dominant paradigm label	State capitalism / "socialist market economy"	Embedded liberalism revived (green + security)	Liberal order + industrial policy revival

Sources: OECD (2021) "The Size and Sectoral Distribution of State-Owned Enterprises"; IMF (2020) "State-Owned Enterprises: The Other Government"; US Congressional Budget Office scoring of CHIPS Act and IRA; European Commission (2023) EU Chips Act. SOE shares are contested and vary by definition (assets vs. value-added vs. employment).

Five Numbered Analysis Questions

1. Trend. Describe the long-run trajectory of trade openness from 1870 to 2023 using Table 1. Identify the two peaks (1913, 2008) and the two collapses (1930s, 2008–2023 plateau). What does the post-2008 plateau—rather than a sharp collapse—suggest about the state-market paradigm? Is the world experiencing a "deglobalization" or a "reconfiguration" of trade, and what evidence in the table supports your reading?

2. Level of analysis. At which of the four levels (individual, state, systemic, transnational) does a tariff schedule such as the EU's common external tariff primarily operate? Which level is most neglected in standard trade theory, and why does that neglect matter for understanding why tariffs persist even when aggregate welfare models predict free trade? Connect your answer to List's infant-industry argument and to contemporary "friend-shoring."

3. Perspective reconstruction (all five). Read Tables 1–3 through each of the five lenses. For each perspective, state (a) what the data most strongly supports, and (b) what the data most dangerously obscures: - *African* (developmental regionalism, AfCFTA, resource nationalism) - *Chinese* (state capitalism, dual circulation) - *Russian* (sanctions-resilience economy) - *Western* (liberal order plus industrial policy revival) - *UN* (development finance, SDGs)

4. Interpretation. Does the data support a "return of the state" thesis? Construct the strongest affirmative case using Table 3 (SOE share, industrial policy spending) and the strongest negative case using Table 1 (still-high trade openness) and Table 2 (still-low average tariffs). What single additional data series would most decisively adjudicate between these two readings, and why?

5. Limitation. These aggregates conceal as much as they reveal. Identify three specific blind spots: (a) the treatment of services and digital trade in goods-based openness ratios; (b) the gap between applied and bound tariffs and the role of non-tariff barriers (subsidies, standards, export controls); and (c) the quality and governance of SOEs rather than their quantity. For each blind spot, explain how a different measurement choice would change the policy conclusion drawn from the tables.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Paradigm Pendulum": State-Market Regimes, 1800–2025

What to draw. A horizontal timeline from 1800 to 2025 across the bottom of the page. Above it, a vertical axis labeled "Degree of state direction of the market" running from LOW at the bottom to HIGH at the top. Plot a single continuous curve (the "pendulum") that rises and falls across five regimes, each shaded in a different color band:

1. **Mercantilism / Economic Nationalism (pre-1846)** — HIGH; label with "List 1841; Hamilton's Report on Manufactures 1791; Corn Laws."
2. **Classical Liberalism (1846–1914)** — LOW; label with "Corn Laws repealed 1846; Cobden-Chevalier 1860; gold standard."
3. **Embedded Liberalism (1944–1971/73)** — MEDIUM-HIGH; label with "Bretton Woods 1944; GATT; capital controls; welfare state."

4. **Neoliberalism / Washington Consensus (1980–2008)** — LOW and falling; label with "Reagan/Thatcher; SAPs; WTO 1995; China WTO 2001."
5. **State Capitalism / Industrial Policy Revival (2008–present)** — RISING; label with "GFC 2008; COVID; CHIPS Act 2022; IRA 2022; friend-shoring."

Mark three "shocks" as vertical dashed lines: 1914 (WWI), 1971 (Nixon shock), 2008 (GFC). At each shock, draw a small arrow showing the curve's reversal.

Perspective overlay (annotate in the margins). On the left margin, write "African: developmental regionalism re-embeds markets regionally (AfCFTA)"; on the right margin, "Chinese: dual circulation = internal market + controlled external"; at the bottom, "Western: liberal order + industrial policy revival"; top, "UN: SDGs re-embed markets in development"; and a small Russian flag note "sanctions-resilience = autarkic turn."

Why this visual works. It compresses the entire lesson into one image: the paradigm is not a linear march toward free trade but an oscillation driven by crises, with each swing producing a new compromise between state and market.

Visual 2 — "Five Lenses on One Object": Perspective Star

What to draw. A central circle labeled "STATE-MARKET PARADIGM (e.g., CHIPS Act 2022)". From the circle, draw five thick rays to five outer boxes, one per perspective, arranged like a star or pentagon. Each outer box contains:

- **African (PRIMARY, largest box):** "Developmental regionalism; AfCFTA; resource nationalism; asks: who owns the minerals? who captures value?"
- **Chinese:** "State capitalism; dual circulation; SOEs as instruments; asks: does this build sovereign capability?"
- **Russian:** "Sanctions-resilience; import substitution; asks: does this reduce external vulnerability?"
- **Western:** "Liberal order + industrial policy revival; asks: does this preserve rules-based trade?"
- **UN:** "Development finance; SDGs; asks: does this advance inclusive development?"

Draw a dashed inner ring labeled "Shared blind spot: all five under-theorize transnational supply-chain labor." Annotate each ray with a one-word "contribution" (African: *agency*; Chinese: *capability*; Russian: *resilience*; Western: *rules*; UN: *inclusion*) and a one-word "occlusion" (African: *scale*; Chinese: *accountability*; Russian: *efficiency*; Western: *power*; UN: *enforcement*).

Why this visual works. It forces the student to see that no single perspective owns the object; each illuminates one face and darkens another.

Visual 3 — "Four Levels, One Policy": Levels of Analysis Matrix for the CHIPS Act

What to draw. A 2×2 grid (or four stacked horizontal bands) with rows labeled:

- **Individual level:** "Firm lobbying (Intel, TSMC, Samsung); CEO testimony; patent holders; worker skill premiums."
- **State level:** "Congressional coalitions; Commerce Department subsidies; export controls; national security framing."

- **Systemic level:** "WTO subsidy rules; US-China tech competition; alliance coordination (Quad, EU-US TTC)."
- **Transnational level:** "TSMC Arizona fab; ASML lithography (Netherlands); Korean memory; global semiconductor supply chain."

Draw arrows showing feedback: individual → state (lobbying), state → systemic (rule-breaking), systemic → transnational (friend-shoring), transnational → individual (wage effects). In the center, place a small circle "CHIPS Act $52.7bn" with radiating lines to all four bands.

Perspective overlay. Color-code each band by which perspective privileges it: African (transnational, value chains), Chinese (state), Russian (state/systemic), Western (systemic/individual), UN (individual/transnational). Add a legend.

Why this visual works. It operationalizes Lesson 1's four levels of analysis and shows that a single industrial policy is simultaneously four different objects depending on the level at which one looks.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue Column (Prompts)

#	Cue (Question / Keyword)
1	Define mercantilism vs. economic nationalism; what is the infant-industry argument?
2	Smith's invisible hand: mechanism and scope conditions?
3	Ricardo's comparative advantage: core assumption that fails in reality?
4	Polanyi's "double movement": the two movements and their collision?
5	Embedded liberalism: what post-1945 compromise?
6	Washington Consensus (Williamson 1990): list the 10 points in 3 words each?
7	SAPs: mechanism by which they harmed developing economies?
8	State capitalism (China): how does it differ from Soviet central planning?
9	Friend-shoring: what problem does it solve, what does it cost?
10	CHIPS Act: mechanism linking subsidy to national security?
11	"Return of the state": strongest evidence and strongest counter?
12	African perspective: what does developmental regionalism add that Western theory misses?

Notes Column (with Source Log)

1. Mercantilism / economic nationalism. Mercantilism treats wealth as zero-sum and the state as the instrument of national power; trade is a means to bullion accumulation and military capacity. Economic nationalism (List 1841, *The National System of Political Economy*) updates this: nations at different stages of development require different policies; the infant-industry argument holds that temporary protection allows domestic manufacturing to reach scale economies before facing British competition. Hamilton's *Report on Manufactures* (1791) is the US precedent. *Mechanism:* protection → learning-by-doing → productivity convergence → eventual competitiveness. *Scope condition:* protection must be time-limited and performance-conditioned; otherwise it produces rent-seeking (Krueger 1974, "rent-seeking society").

2. Classical liberalism. Smith (1776, *Wealth of Nations*): division of labor and the "invisible hand" coordinate self-interest into social benefit under competition and rule of law. Ricardo (1817, *Principles*): comparative advantage—countries gain by specializing in goods where their opportunity cost is lowest, even if absolutely less efficient. *Mechanism:* price signals → specialization → gains from trade. *Scope conditions:* no externalities, no increasing returns, no strategic industries, no power asymmetries. These conditions are systematically violated in development, which is List's point.

3. Polanyi's double movement. Polanyi (1944, *The Great Transformation*): the "double movement" is (a) the push to disembed the economy from society (marketization, commodification of land, labor, money) and (b) the counter-movement to re-embed it (social protection, regulation, planning). The two movements are not sequential but simultaneous and contradictory. *Mechanism:* market expansion → social dislocation → political backlash → re-embedding → new market expansion. Polanyi's scope condition: the "self-regulating market" is a utopian construct; land, labor, and money are "fictitious commodities."

4. Embedded liberalism. Ruggie (1982, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change"): the post-1945 Bretton Woods order was "embedded liberalism"—multilateralism and free trade at the international level, but with domestic policy space for welfare states, capital controls, and Keynesian demand management. *Mechanism:* international openness + domestic compensation = political sustainability of trade. The compromise collapsed in the 1970s (stagflation, Nixon shock 1971) and was replaced by neoliberalism.

5. Washington Consensus. Williamson (1990): ten policy prescriptions (fiscal discipline, tax reform, interest-rate liberalization, competitive exchange rates, trade liberalization, FDI liberalization, privatization, deregulation, property rights, redirection of public spending). *Mechanism:* price liberalization → efficient allocation → growth. *Critique:* Rodrik (2011, *The Globalization Paradox*): the "trilemma"—deep economic integration, national sovereignty, and democratic politics cannot all be maximized simultaneously; choose two. SAPs (structural adjustment programs) applied these prescriptions via IMF/World Bank conditionality in the 1980s–90s; evidence on growth is mixed, on inequality and poverty negative in many cases (Stiglitz 2002, *Globalization and Its Discontents*).

6. State capitalism / China. China's model: SOEs in strategic sectors, state-directed credit, industrial policy (Made in China 2025), "dual circulation" (internal market + controlled external). Differs from Soviet planning: market prices, profit motives, integration into global trade, party-state steering rather than central planning. *Mechanism:* state capacity + market discipline → targeted capability building. *Critique:* efficiency losses, debt, overcapacity, opacity.

7. Contemporary contest. Friend-shoring (Yellen 2022): relocate supply chains to "trusted" partners. CHIPS Act 2022 ($52.7bn subsidies + export controls); IRA ($369bn green industrial policy). EU Chips Act (€43bn). "Return of the state" (Rodrik 2019; Tooze 2018, *Crashed*): post-2008, state capacity returned

as crisis manager and industrial planner. *Mechanism:* security externalities + supply-chain fragility → state intervention → re-embedding markets in national strategy.

8. African perspective. Developmental regionalism: regional integration (AfCFTA, 2021) as a vehicle for industrialization and value-chain upgrading, not just market access. Resource nationalism: state capture of mineral rents (cobalt, lithium, copper) for domestic processing. *Mechanism:* regional scale → infant-industry protection at continental level → reduced dependence on raw-material exports. *Occlusion:* intra-African trade barriers, infrastructure gaps, elite capture.

9. Russian perspective. Sanctions-resilience economy: import substitution, parallel imports, pivot to Asia, de-dollarization. *Mechanism:* external shock → autarkic adjustment → reduced but not eliminated vulnerability. *Occlusion:* technological dependence, efficiency losses, long-run stagnation risk.

10. Western perspective. Liberal order (rules-based trade, WTO) plus industrial policy revival. Tension: the US now subsidizes and protects while preaching rules. *Mechanism:* hegemonic provision of public goods → under strain → selective protection. *Occlusion:* power asymmetries in rule-making.

11. UN perspective. Development finance, SDGs, "leaving no one behind." Re-embedding markets in development goals. *Mechanism:* normative frameworks → financing → capacity building. *Occlusion:* enforcement weakness, donor conditionality.

12. Adjudication. The paradigms are not mutually exclusive stages but recurring responses to crises; the "return of the state" is real in spending terms but operates within, not against, globalized markets (Rodrik's trilemma).

Source Log: Polanyi (1944); Smith (1776); Ricardo (1817); List (1841); Hamilton (1791); Williamson (1990); Rodrik (2011, 2019); Tooze (2018); Ruggie (1982); Stiglitz (2002); Krueger (1974); Yellen (2022); WTO (2023); World Bank WDI; OECD (2021); IMF (2020).

Summary (3–5 sentences). State-market paradigms oscillate rather than progress: mercantilism, liberalism, embedded liberalism, neoliberalism, and the contemporary industrial-policy revival each re-solve the tension between market efficiency and social/political stability. Polanyi's double movement explains why: market expansion provokes re-embedding. The Washington Consensus applied liberal prescriptions via conditionality with mixed results, while China's state capitalism and the West's post-2008 industrial policy revival show the state returning as planner and crisis manager. The African vantage—developmental regionalism and resource nationalism—reveals that the real question is not state vs. market but who captures value and at what scale. Rodrik's trilemma remains the binding constraint: deep integration, sovereignty, and democracy cannot all be maximized.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Countries have always disagreed about how much the government should steer the economy. Sometimes governments protect home industries and steer investment (mercantilism, industrial policy). Sometimes they let markets and prices decide (free trade). After World War II, rich countries tried a middle path: open trade abroad, but strong welfare states and controls at home—Polanyi called the back-and-forth a "double movement," because every push to free markets provokes a push to protect people. In the 1980s and 90s, the free-market side won globally through IMF and World Bank conditions. Since 2008, and especially since COVID and the Ukraine war, governments are back in the business

of subsidizing chips, green energy, and "trusted" supply chains. The African view says the real issue is not state versus market but who owns the resources and who captures the value; regional blocs like AfCFTA try to build industry at continental scale. The Chinese view says state direction can build capability; the Western view worries about rules; the UN worries about development; Russia worries about sanctions. Nobody has solved the basic trade-off: you cannot have deep global integration, full national sovereignty, and democratic politics all at once.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. (a) I asserted that SAPs had "mixed to negative" effects but did not specify which countries or metrics; (b) I treated "return of the state" as established without defining the threshold (spending? regulation? ownership?); (c) I did not explain why comparative advantage fails in practice beyond listing assumptions; (d) I conflated mercantilism and economic nationalism, which List distinguished; (e) I did not specify the mechanism by which AfCFTA would overcome the infant-industry problem at continental scale.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-check: Polanyi (1944) on fictitious commodities and the double movement; Ricardo (1817) on opportunity cost; List (1841) on stages of development; Williamson (1990) ten points; Rodrik (2011) trilemma; Tooze (2018) on crisis and state capacity. Verify that "embedded liberalism" is Ruggie's (1982) term, not Polanyi's. Verify CHIPS Act figure ($52.7bn) and IRA figure (~$369bn) against CBO scoring. Verify AfCFTA entry into force (2021) and its tariff-reduction commitments.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. *Analogy:* The state-market paradigm is like a thermostat in a house with two occupants who disagree about temperature—one wants it cold (market efficiency), one wants it warm (social protection). The thermostat swings back and forth; each swing is a "paradigm." *Limits:* The analogy implies a single optimal temperature and a neutral device; in reality there is no neutral "market" baseline (Polanyi), the occupants have unequal power (class, North/South), and the house itself (global institutions) changes shape with each swing. The analogy also hides the African point: the question is not the temperature but who owns the house.

Step 5 — Rewrite. State-market paradigms are recurring, crisis-driven compromises between efficiency and protection, not stages in a linear progression. Polanyi's double movement predicts the oscillation: marketization generates counter-movements that re-embed the economy in society and politics. The post-1945 embedded-liberal compromise (Ruggie) gave way to the Washington Consensus (Williamson 1990), whose conditionality produced contested development outcomes; since 2008, industrial policy and state capitalism have returned, but within—not against—globalized markets. The African lens (developmental regionalism, AfCFTA, resource nationalism) reframes the debate around value capture and scale; the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN lenses each illuminate one face. Rodrik's trilemma remains the binding constraint: deep integration, sovereignty, and democracy are mutually incompatible in full.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L15	Definition	What is mercantilism in IPE?	Mercantilism treats trade as a zero-sum competition for national power, privileging bullion accumulation, export surpluses, colonies, and state-directed industry. It is not merely "protectionism"; it is a theory of statecraft in which economic capacity serves security.	African resource-nationalist arguments often echo mercantilist premises when they insist that raw-material exports should be converted into domestic industrial capacity.
L15	Definition	What is classical liberalism's core trade claim?	Classical liberalism argues that voluntary exchange under division of labor raises aggregate wealth; Ricardo's comparative advantage shows gains from trade even when one country is less efficient in all goods.	Western liberal order narratives often universalize this claim, while African and post-colonial critics ask who captures the gains and who bears adjustment costs.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L15	Mechanism	How does the infant-industry argument work?	A temporary tariff or subsidy protects a nascent sector until learning-by-doing, scale economies, and supplier networks make it internationally competitive; the policy is justified only if protection is time-limited and performance-tested.	List's version was developmental, not permanent rent-seeking; African industrial policy debates turn on whether states can credibly withdraw protection.
L15	Definition	What is Polanyi's "double movement"?	Market expansion provokes a protective counter-movement by society; embedded liberalism is the post-1945 attempt to reconcile international openness with domestic social protection.	Polanyi's framework helps explain why African states resist pure liberalization when it threatens land, labor, and food security.
L15	Definition	What was the Washington Consensus?	Williamson's 1990 agenda summarized market-oriented reforms—fiscal discipline, trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and secure property rights—often implemented through IMF/World Bank conditionality.	In Africa, SAPs are remembered as externally imposed adjustment that compressed public investment and social spending.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L15	Mechanism	How does conditionality transmit policy preferences?	Loans and debt relief are made contingent on policy benchmarks; governments trade sovereignty over fiscal, monetary, and regulatory choices for financing and market access.	Conditionality can stabilize macroeconomies but may also narrow democratic deliberation over development strategy.
L15	Application	What did the 1971 Nixon shock change?	Closing the gold window ended dollar-gold convertibility, accelerated the shift from fixed to floating exchange rates, and weakened the Bretton Woods compromise between openness and capital controls.	For developing economies, the shock increased exchange-rate volatility and debt-servicing uncertainty.
L15	Comparison	Mercantilism vs. liberalism: what is the key disagreement?	Mercantilism prioritizes relative gains, state power, and strategic sectors; liberalism prioritizes absolute gains, consumer welfare, and comparative advantage.	African policymakers often seek a hybrid: market access plus industrial policy and resource sovereignty.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L15	Source	What is Polanyi's central warning in *The Great Transformation*?	Unregulated markets can disembed economy from society, producing social dislocation; therefore market construction requires political and institutional embedding.	This is foundational for critiques of SAPs and for arguments that development is a political project, not just price adjustment.
L15	Debate	Is the Washington Consensus discredited?	Critics cite inequality, deindustrialization, and financial crises; defenders cite growth in some reformers and the absence of a superior universal formula.	Rodrik's argument that "one economics, many recipes" reframes the debate around context-specific institutions.
L15	Reconstruction	How does the African perspective reframe state-market paradigms?	It centers developmental regionalism, AfCFTA, resource nationalism, and the need to convert commodity dependence into productive capacity.	This perspective treats markets as instruments of sovereignty rather than ends in themselves.
L15	Occlusion	What does the Chinese perspective often occlude in Western debates?	State capitalism and dual circulation are sometimes read only as distortions, obscuring their role in technology upgrading, employment, and strategic autonomy.	Western industrial-policy revival now borrows tools China long used, while still framing them as exceptions.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L15	Adjudication	When is industrial policy defensible?	It is more defensible when tied to measurable capability-building, sunset clauses, competitive discipline, and security externalities; less defensible when it becomes permanent rent protection.	CHIPS/IRA-style policies must be judged by whether they create spillovers or merely subsidize firms.
L15	Visual	What does the trade-as-%-of-GDP series suggest?	Long-run globalization rose sharply after 1945 and especially after 1980, but recent shocks, tariffs, and friend-shoring indicate partial fragmentation rather than full deglobalization.	African economies remain vulnerable to commodity-price and shipping shocks despite aggregate trade growth.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (0–100)

Skill	Self-rating (0–100)	Evidence from last attempt	Next action
Defining mercantilism, liberalism, embedded liberalism, neoliberalism			Rehearse one-sentence definitions aloud without notes
Tracing causal mechanisms (infant industry, conditionality, double movement)			Draw each mechanism as a causal chain with scope conditions

Skill	Self-rating (0–100)	Evidence from last attempt	Next action
Reconstructing all five perspectives fairly			Write 3–5 sentence steel-man for the perspective you find least intuitive
Applying the framework to the 1971 Nixon shock			Reconstruct levels of analysis and adjudicate competing explanations
Interpreting trade/GDP and industrial-policy data			Label each data point with level of analysis and perspective
Distinguishing description, explanation, prediction, prescription			Annotate your memo with D/E/P/P tags

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which perspective did you reconstruct most weakly, and what evidence would force you to revise it?
2. Did you confuse a normative preference (e.g., free trade is good) with an empirical claim (e.g., tariff removal raised exports)?
3. Which mechanism in this lesson would you struggle to explain to a skeptical policymaker in two minutes?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Mercantilism is just old-fashioned protectionism."	Mercantilism is a statecraft doctrine linking wealth to power, colonies, and strategic capacity; protection is one instrument among several.	List (1841); Hamilton's Report on Manufactures (1791)
"Comparative advantage proves free trade always benefits everyone."	It proves aggregate gains under assumptions (full employment, no externalities, no strategic dependence); it does not guarantee distribution or security.	Ricardo (1817); Rodrik (2011)

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Embedded liberalism means markets were heavily planned."	It means markets were politically constructed and socially buffered, not abolished; capital controls and welfare states coexisted with trade openness.	Polanyi (1944); Ruggie (1982)
"The Washington Consensus was uniformly imposed and uniformly failed."	It was a policy agenda with variable implementation; outcomes differed by initial institutions, sequencing, and external shocks.	Williamson (1990); Rodrik (2011)
"Contemporary industrial policy is a return to 1970s state planning."	Modern industrial policy is more targeted, subsidy-based, and security-framed; it often operates inside liberal trade rules rather than replacing them.	CHIPS and Science Act (2022); EU Chips Act (2023)
"State capitalism is only a market distortion."	It can be a development and strategic-autonomy strategy with real capability-building effects, though it also creates opacity and rent risks.	Chinese dual-circulation debates; Rodrik (2011)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Mercantilism; economic nationalism; infant industry; classical liberalism; comparative advantage; embedded liberalism; double movement; Washington Consensus; neoliberalism; conditionality; state capitalism; friend-shoring; industrial policy	State-directed accumulation; learning-by-doing under protection; market disembedding and social countermovement; policy conditionality; deregulation/privatization; strategic subsidies; supply-chain relocation	List (1841); Hamilton (1791); Smith (1776); Ricardo (1817); Polanyi (1944); Williamson (1990); Rodrik (2011); Tooze (2018)	1971 Nixon shock; Bretton Woods to floating rates; SAPs in Africa; CHIPS and Science Act (2022); EU Chips Act (2023); AfCFTA; Chinese SOE share; trade as % of GDP 1870–2023	Universal free trade vs. strategic protection; market efficiency vs. social embedding; conditionality vs. sovereignty; state capitalism vs. liberal order; deglobalization vs. reconfiguration	Sustained industrial upgrading without protection; no social backlash after liberalization; conditionality producing durable inclusive growth; industrial policy failing to build capabilities; trade fragmentation reversing all gains	L6 institutionalism; L8 Marxism; L12 Cold War; L13 liberal order; L16 Bretton Woods; L17 world-systems; L18 interdependence; L19 energy

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 — 24 hours after first study:** Re-read flashcards 1–7 and recite the five key ideas in order without notes.
- **R2 — 3 days:** Redraw the trade-as-%-of-GDP trend from memory and annotate one African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN interpretation.
- **R3 — 1 week:** Reconstruct the 1971 Nixon shock at all four levels of analysis and write a 200-word adjudication.
- **R4 — 2 weeks:** Complete a fresh problem pair on CHIPS/IRA-style industrial policy using the memo headings and compare with your earlier answer.
- **R5 — 1 month:** Teach the lesson's central puzzle to a peer or record a 5-minute explanation, then update the error-log with any remaining gaps.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define mercantilism, classical liberalism, embedded liberalism, neoliberalism, and state capitalism.

☐ I can explain List's infant-industry mechanism and its scope conditions.

☐ I can explain Ricardo's comparative advantage and its main assumptions.
☐ I can explain Polanyi's double movement and why it matters for IPE.
☐ I can explain Williamson's Washington Consensus and its African reception.
☐ I can explain how conditionality works as a mechanism.
☐ I can reconstruct the 1971 Nixon shock at individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels.
☐ I can reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives fairly.
☐ I can identify what each perspective contributes and occludes.
☐ I can interpret trade-as-%-of-GDP and industrial-policy data with appropriate caution.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I can state falsifiers for at least three claims in this lesson.
☐ I can connect this lesson to L6, L8, L12, and L13.
☐ I can connect this lesson forward to L16–L19.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit honestly.
☐ I have updated my error-log with at least one correction.
☐ I can explain the lesson's central puzzle in under two minutes.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- **Mercantilism and economic nationalism:** List, F. (1841) *The National System of Political Economy*; Hamilton, A. (1791) *Report on Manufactures*; Chang, H.-J. (2002) *Kicking Away the Ladder*.
- **Classical liberalism:** Smith, A. (1776) *The Wealth of Nations*; Ricardo, D. (1817) *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*.
- **Embedded liberalism:** Polanyi, K. (1944) *The Great Transformation*; Ruggie, J. G. (1982) "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change"; Helleiner, E. (1994) *States and the Reemergence of Global Finance*.
- **Washington Consensus and neoliberalism:** Williamson, J. (1990) "What Washington Means by Policy Reform"; Rodrik, D. (2011) *The Globalization Paradox*; Stiglitz, J. E. (2002) *Globalization and Its Discontents*.
- **Contemporary contest and state capitalism:** Tooze, A. (2018) *Crashed*; Naughton, B. (2017) "The Chinese Economy"; Ostry, J. D., Loungani, P., and Furceri, D. (2016) "Neoliberalism: Oversold?"
- **African perspectives:** Mkandawire, T. (2001) "Thinking about Developmental States in Africa"; Adesina, J. O. (2011) "Beyond the Social Protection Paradigm"; UNCTAD (2023) *Economic Development in Africa Report*.
- **Russian and security-economy perspectives:** Connolly, R. (2018) *Russia's Response to Sanctions*; Tooze, A. (2022) commentary on war-economy adjustment.
- **UN and development finance:** UNCTAD (2023) trade and development reporting; World Bank (2020) *World Development Report*.

End of Lesson 15. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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17. Hegemonic Stability and the Bretton Woods System

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 16 — Hegemonic Stability and the Bretton Woods System
Module	Module 3: International Political Economy and Geoeconomics
Prerequisites	L6 (institutionalism); L15 (state-market paradigms)
Interleaved links	Forward to L18 (weaponized interdependence); L38 (sanctions); L49 (revisionism)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text core; Data lab; Visual anchor; Cornell notes; Flashcards; Worked example; Problem pair; Memo; Hinge question
Bloom ceiling	Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is whether international economic order is something that can be built and sustained by institutions alone, or whether it ultimately depends on the material power and political will of a single dominant state. The Bretton Woods system — the monetary and financial architecture negotiated in 1944 at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, and anchored by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD, now the World Bank Group), fixed but adjustable exchange rates, capital controls, and a dollar-gold standard — is the canonical case through which this puzzle has been debated. For nearly three decades after the Second World War, the system delivered unprecedented growth, trade expansion, and macroeconomic stability across the industrialized North. Yet it collapsed in 1971 when the United States suspended dollar convertibility into gold, and the subsequent half-century has been marked by recurrent financial crises, deepening inequality between North and South, and persistent contestation over who governs global money. Understanding why the system was built, how it functioned, why it broke, and what replaced it is therefore not merely historical reconstruction; it is the foundation for analyzing every contemporary debate about global economic governance, from IMF conditionality in Africa to the BRICS demand for quota reform.

The theoretical stakes are set by Charles Kindleberger's *The World in Depression, 1929–1939* (1973), which argued that the Great Depression was so severe and so prolonged because no single power was willing and able to act as a "lender of last resort" to the international economy — providing liquidity, maintaining open markets, and stabilizing exchange rates. Kindleberger's hegemonic stability theory posits that a liberal international economic order requires a hegemon: a state with sufficient economic size, military capacity, and ideological commitment to supply the public goods that markets cannot provide on their own. The United States, in this reading, deliberately constructed Bretton Woods to avoid a repeat of the 1930s, embedding its own currency at the center of the system and extracting seigniorage and structural privilege in return. The theory is elegant and parsimonious, but it is also deeply contested: Robert Keohane's *After Hegemony* (1984) argued that institutions can sustain cooperation even after the hegemon declines, while Robert Gilpin's *The Political Economy of International Relations* (1987) insisted that hegemonic power and the distribution of

gains remain foundational. The lesson forces you to adjudicate between these positions using evidence rather than assertion.

The African perspective is not an add-on to this debate; it is the lens that reveals what the hegemonic-stability framework systematically occludes. From the vantage point of the global South, and Africa in particular, Bretton Woods was never primarily a stability mechanism. It was a structure of power that locked newly independent states into commodity dependence, subjected them to conditionality designed in Washington, and reproduced colonial hierarchies through the language of development. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), and the subsequent structural-adjustment critique — articulated by scholars such as Thandika Mkandawire and by movements from the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) to the Ezulwini Consensus (2005) — frame the system as a mechanism of extraction dressed in technocratic neutrality. The 1997–98 Asian financial crisis and the IMF's response, the 1980s structural adjustment programs (SAPs) imposed across Africa, and the 2020–2022 allocation of $650 billion in Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) — of which Africa received roughly 5 percent despite bearing disproportionate pandemic costs — are not aberrations. They are the system working as designed. This lesson therefore places the African critique at the center of the analysis and asks what it reveals that Western institutionalism, Chinese reformism, Russian anti-dollarism, and UN developmentalism each miss.

The lesson also traces the system's evolution and contestation across five key ideas. First, Kindleberger and the Great Depression establish the hegemonic-stability baseline. Second, the Bretton Woods architecture itself — the IMF, the IBRD, fixed rates, capital controls, and the dollar-gold standard — is unpacked as a deliberate political construction with distributional consequences. Third, the theoretical debate among Gilpin, Keohane, and others is presented with scope conditions and counterarguments, not as settled doctrine. Fourth, the 1971 Nixon shock and the subsequent rise of the dollar as a fiat global reserve currency are analyzed as both a crisis of hegemony and a reconstitution of it. Fifth, contestation — the New International Economic Order (NIEO) of the 1970s, SAPs in the 1980s, the 1997 Asian crisis, and BRICS reform demands from 2009 to the present — is examined as evidence that the system has always been politically disputed, never a neutral technocracy. Each key idea is developed through its theoretical lineage, its mechanism, its scope conditions, its observable implications, and a brief perspective note across all five traditions.

The worked example — the 1997–98 Asian financial crisis and IMF conditionality — applies these ideas at four levels of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational) and adjudicates among the five perspectives. The problem pair — the 2020–2022 IMF allocation of $650 billion in SDRs and the debate over rechanneling to African states — asks whether recent reforms reproduce or challenge hierarchy. The data lab supplies quantitative anchors: IMF voting shares, SDR allocations by region, IMF conditionality counts, and the USD share of global reserves from 1999 to 2024. Together, these components train you to move from description to explanation, from explanation to prediction, and from prediction to prescription — while keeping the African vantage point primary rather than decorative.

By the end of this lesson you will be able to: reconstruct the hegemonic-stability debate with its strongest versions on all sides; explain the Bretton Woods architecture and its 1971 collapse as political-economic events, not merely technical adjustments; evaluate IMF crisis management through African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN lenses; and produce an evidence-based adjudication of whether contemporary reform demands (SDR rechanneling, quota reform, BRICS alternatives) constitute genuine transformation or managed reproduction of hierarchy. You will also be able to identify the falsifiers that would distinguish these hypotheses — a skill that carries forward to L18 on weaponized interdependence, L38 on sanctions, and L49

on revisionism, where the same questions of power, institutions, and hierarchy recur in different domains.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer these from memory before reading further; check your answers against L6 and L15.

1. **Institutionalism (L6):** What is the difference between rationalist (neoliberal) institutionalism and constructivist institutionalism, and which scholar is most closely associated with each?
2. **Institutional functions (L6):** Name two functions that international institutions perform according to Keohane's *After Hegemony*, and explain how each reduces transaction costs.
3. **Embedded liberalism (L15):** How did John Ruggie's concept of "embedded liberalism" describe the post-1945 compromise between free trade and domestic welfare states?
4. **Washington Consensus (L15):** List three of the ten policy prescriptions associated with the Washington Consensus, and identify the institution most closely linked to its diffusion.
5. **Path dependence (L6):** What is path dependence, and how does it explain why international institutions persist even after the power distribution that created them changes?
6. **Polanyi's double movement (L15):** In *The Great Transformation*, what did Karl Polanyi mean by the "double movement," and how does it anticipate contemporary backlash against globalization?

1.2 Orientation Questions Consider these before engaging the core; they frame the lesson's central puzzle.

1. Does international economic order require a hegemon to supply public goods, or can institutions sustain cooperation once hegemonic power declines?
2. How did the 1971 collapse of Bretton Woods fixed exchange rates reshape the global financial system, and did it end or reconstitute dollar hegemony?
3. Whose interests do IMF conditionality, quota-based voting, and SDR allocations serve — and can these instruments be reformed without transforming the underlying power structure?
4. How does the African critique — from structural adjustment to the Ezulwini Consensus — reframe Bretton Woods from a stability mechanism into a hierarchy-reproducing structure, and what does this vantage point reveal that Western institutionalism misses?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach Provisional definitions to be refined in the lesson core.

- **Hegemonic stability theory:** The argument, associated with Kindleberger, that a liberal international economic order requires a single dominant state willing and able to supply public goods such as liquidity, open markets, and exchange-rate stability.
- **Bretton Woods system:** The monetary and financial architecture established in 1944, comprising the IMF, the IBRD/World Bank, fixed but adjustable exchange rates, capital controls, and a dollar-gold standard.
- **Fixed exchange rate:** A currency peg in which a state commits to maintaining its currency's value relative to another currency or gold, requiring intervention and reserve management.
- **Capital controls:** State restrictions on the cross-border movement of financial capital, used under Bretton Woods to preserve monetary autonomy and prevent speculative attacks.

- **Dollar-gold standard (gold-exchange standard):** The Bretton Woods arrangement in which the US dollar was convertible into gold at $35 per ounce and other currencies pegged to the dollar, making the dollar the central reserve asset. - **Triffin dilemma:** The structural tension identified by Robert Triffin in which the global economy's need for dollar liquidity conflicts with confidence in dollar convertibility into gold. - **Special Drawing Rights (SDRs):** An IMF-created international reserve asset, allocated to member states in proportion to quota shares, used to supplement official reserves. - **Conditionality:** The policy requirements — fiscal austerity, privatization, trade liberalization — that the IMF attaches to its lending, typically negotiated with borrowing governments. - **Structural adjustment programs (SAPs):** IMF/World Bank-mandated economic reforms imposed on developing countries, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, often criticized for social costs and sovereignty erosion. - **New International Economic Order (NIEO):** A 1974 UN General Assembly program demanding restructuring of global trade, finance, and technology transfer to benefit developing countries. - **Embedded liberalism:** Ruggie's term for the post-1945 compromise permitting domestic welfare states alongside international free trade, underwritten by capital controls. - **Nixon shock:** The August 1971 suspension of dollar-gold convertibility by President Nixon, which collapsed the Bretton Woods fixed-rate system and ushered in floating exchange rates. - **Reserve currency:** A currency held in significant quantities by foreign central banks and used for international trade invoicing and debt denomination; the US dollar has been the dominant reserve currency since 1944.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. **Define** hegemonic stability theory and identify the four international public goods that Kindleberger argued were undersupplied during the interwar period, distinguishing a hegemon's provision of public goods from ordinary great-power self-interest. (Bloom: Remember/Understand)
2. **Explain** the causal mechanism through which the absence of a willing hegemon transformed the 1929 Wall Street crash into a global depression, tracing the chain from liquidity contraction through competitive devaluation to trade collapse and banking panics. (Bloom: Analyze)
3. **Evaluate** the scope conditions of hegemonic stability theory, specifying when a hegemon's provision of public goods is likely, when it is not, and which alternative explanations—domestic political coalitions, institutional design, ideological commitment, or multilateral coordination—compete with or complement it. (Bloom: Evaluate)
4. **Reconstruct** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each interpret the claim that international economic order requires a hegemon, identifying what each perspective contributes to our understanding and what it systematically occludes. (Bloom: Analyze)
5. **Apply** Kindleberger's framework to a contemporary episode of international economic instability, distinguishing description of what happened, explanation of why it happened, prediction of what will happen next, and prescription of what should be done. (Bloom: Apply)

These objectives are cumulative. The first two build conceptual and causal literacy; the third introduces critical evaluation of a theory's boundaries; the fourth requires perspective-taking across five distinct intellectual traditions; the fifth demands that the student move from theory to judgment without conflating analytic and

normative registers. Mastery is demonstrated not by reciting Kindleberger's conclusions but by being able to specify the mechanism, its scope conditions, its strongest counterargument, and the vantage point from which each of those is assessed.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Kindleberger and the Great Depression: Absence of a Hegemon Willing to Provide Public Goods

Bolded Causal Claim: The Great Depression became global and prolonged not because of the 1929 crash alone but because no state possessed both the capacity and the willingness to supply the international public goods—countercyclical lending, a market of last resort for distress goods, stable exchange rates, and macroeconomic coordination—that would have arrested the downward spiral; Britain had the willingness but not the capacity after 1914, and the United States had the capacity but not the willingness until 1933, by which time the damage was done.

Mechanism: Kindleberger's argument in *The World in Depression, 1929-1939* (1973) rests on a public-goods logic applied to the international economy. In a closed economy, a central bank can act as lender of last resort, injecting liquidity when private credit contracts; in an open economy with fixed exchange rates, that function must be performed internationally, or at least by a state large enough that its domestic monetary policy has systemic effects. Kindleberger identified four specific public goods whose undersupply turned a severe but potentially containable downturn into a decade-long depression. First, a **lender of last resort** at the international level: someone willing to extend credit to distressed borrowers—banks, firms, and governments—when private capital fled. Second, a **market of last resort**: a large economy willing to keep its import markets open and absorb the exports of distressed countries, providing them with the foreign exchange needed to service debts and maintain employment. Third, **exchange-rate stability**: a credible anchor (in the interwar case, the gold standard) that prevented competitive devaluations from destroying trade volumes. Fourth, **macroeconomic coordination**: leadership in convening conferences, setting agendas, and persuading or coercing other states into cooperative adjustment rather than beggar-thy-neighbor policies.

The mechanism operates through a free-rider problem. Each of these goods is non-excludable and non-rivalrous at the international level: if the United States stabilizes the gold standard, all trading partners benefit whether or not they contribute; if Britain keeps its market open, all exporters gain. Rational states therefore have an incentive to free-ride, waiting for another state to bear the cost. Only a state whose stake in the system is large enough that the cost of non-provision exceeds the cost of provision—a hegemon—will overcome this collective-action failure. Britain performed this role before 1914, when its financial center (the City of London), its colonial trade network, and its gold-standard commitment gave it both the capacity and the incentive to lend countercyclically and absorb distress goods. After 1914, Britain's war debts, industrial decline, and domestic unemployment destroyed its capacity; it could not afford to be the market of last resort. The United States, by contrast, emerged from the war as the world's largest creditor and industrial power, with the Federal Reserve capable of international lending and the American market capable of absorbing imports. But American policymakers—shaped by isolationism, the gold-standard orthodoxy of the Federal Reserve, and a domestic political coalition that prioritized agricultural protection (the Smoot-Hawley Tariff of 1930) over international stability—refused to play the role. The result was a cascade: the 1929 crash triggered credit contraction; without a lender of last resort, banks failed across Europe and the United States; without a market of last resort, distressed countries could not earn foreign exchange; without exchange-rate stability, countries abandoned gold and devalued competitively; without coordination, each state raised tariffs and imposed quotas. World trade fell by roughly two-thirds between 1929 and 1934, and

unemployment reached catastrophic levels in industrial countries. Kindleberger's counterfactual is explicit: had the United States acted as Britain had before 1914—lending to distressed economies, keeping its market open, stabilizing exchange rates—the depression would have been shorter and shallower. The crash was American; the depression was global because no one managed the international consequences.

Scope Conditions: Hegemonic stability theory, in Kindleberger's formulation, applies under specific conditions that must be stated precisely or the theory becomes unfalsifiable. First, the theory assumes a high degree of international economic interdependence: if economies are largely autarkic, the failure to provide international public goods has limited consequences. The interwar period qualified because the gold standard and pre-1914 trade integration had created dense financial and commercial linkages. Second, the theory requires a state with disproportionate economic capacity—large enough that its domestic market can absorb global distress goods and its central bank can lend internationally without exhausting its own reserves. Third, and critically, the theory requires that the hegemon's domestic political economy permit international provision: the state must have a coalition willing to bear the costs (inflation, fiscal outlays, trade adjustment) for benefits that are partly captured by foreigners. This is the theory's most contested scope condition. Kindleberger himself noted that the United States in the 1920s and 1930s was constrained by the gold standard, by the Federal Reserve's misunderstanding of its international role, and by a Congress dominated by agricultural protectionists. The theory therefore does not predict that hegemons always provide public goods; it predicts that order is more likely when a hegemon's domestic interests align with international stability. Fourth, the theory is primarily about short-to-medium-run crisis management, not about long-run structural transformation. It explains why a downturn became a depression; it does not explain why some economies industrialized and others did not, or why the postwar order took the specific form it did. Fifth, the theory is sensitive to the definition of "public good": what Kindleberger treated as public goods (stable exchange rates, open markets) were, from other perspectives, mechanisms of imperial extraction or creditor privilege. This normative ambiguity is not a flaw in the theory's logic but a boundary on its applicability: the theory describes how order is maintained, not whether that order is just.

Observable Implications: If Kindleberger's mechanism is correct, several observable patterns should hold. (a) Periods of hegemonic transition or hegemonic reluctance should correlate with deeper and more prolonged international economic crises, holding other factors constant. (b) The presence of a willing hegemon should be associated with faster recovery from financial crises, as measured by trade recovery, credit flows, and output gaps. (c) In the absence of a hegemon, states should exhibit beggar-thy-neighbor behavior—competitive devaluation, tariff escalation, capital controls—more frequently and more severely. (d) The specific public goods Kindleberger identified should be traceable in the historical record: central-bank swap lines, import-absorption policies, exchange-rate stabilization agreements, and summit diplomacy should appear during hegemonic periods and be absent during hegemonic gaps. (e) Conversely, if crises of comparable severity occur during periods of clear hegemonic dominance, or if non-hegemonic coordination (as in the 1933 London Economic Conference's failure, or conversely in the post-1973 floating-rate era) successfully manages crises, the theory's explanatory power is weakened. The 1997-98 Asian financial crisis, the 2008 global financial crisis, and the 2020 COVID-19 shock each provide test cases: in 2008, the United States and the G20 coordinated massive stimulus and central-bank swap lines, consistent with hegemonic provision; in 2020, the Federal Reserve extended dollar swap lines to fourteen central banks, again consistent; but the 1997-98 crisis, in which the IMF (not the United States directly) imposed conditionality, raises questions about whether the hegemon provided public goods or creditor protection.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point on Kindleberger's thesis begins from a position that the theory itself does not occupy: the position of those for whom the "public goods" of the interwar and postwar orders were experienced not as stability but as subordination. Kindleberger's framework is built around North Atlantic powers—Britain, the United States, France, Germany—and treats the rest of the world as the passive terrain on which hegemonic provision or its absence plays out. African economies in the 1920s and 1930s were overwhelmingly colonial, dependent on primary commodity exports (cocoa, coffee, cotton, minerals) whose prices collapsed during the Depression. The colonial fiscal regimes of British, French, and Belgian Africa responded not with countercyclical spending but with forced labor, tax increases, and cuts to social services—policies that deepened rather than cushioned the shock. From this perspective, the "absence of a hegemon" was not the central problem; the central problem was that the existing hegemon (Britain, as colonial power) used its capacity not to provide public goods to African subjects but to extract resources and maintain imperial control. Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) and Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) frame this not as a failure of hegemonic stability but as the normal operation of a system designed for extraction. The African critique therefore inverts Kindleberger's causal logic: the Depression's severity in Africa was not caused by the absence of a hegemon willing to provide public goods but by the presence of a hegemon (imperial Britain) whose "stability" was built on African exploitation. Post-independence African leaders—Nyerere in Tanzania, Nkrumah in Ghana, Touré in Guinea—drew from this experience a deep skepticism toward any theory that treats great-power provision as benign. Nyerere's *ujamaa* and the Arusha Declaration (1967) were, in part, attempts to build economic self-reliance precisely because dependence on external hegemons had proven catastrophic. The Ezulwini Consensus (2005), adopted by the African Union, and subsequent African demands for reform of the IMF and World Bank voting structures reflect this inherited skepticism: African states do not deny that international order requires coordination, but they reject the premise that such coordination must be provided by a single hegemon whose interests are structurally misaligned with African development. Mamdani's analysis of the colonial state in *Citizen and Subject* (1996) adds a further dimension: the "public goods" of the colonial order were distributed along racial and ethnic lines, so that even when a hegemon provided stability, it was stability for settlers and extractors, not for the colonized. Bayart's concept of the "politics of the belly" (*La politique du ventre*, 1989) suggests that African states developed informal, extraverted strategies for surviving in a system where formal public-goods provision was unreliable or predatory. Grovogui's *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy* (2006) argues that the entire framework of hegemonic stability theory is Eurocentric: it assumes that international order is produced by great powers and that non-Western actors are either recipients or disruptors, never co-producers. From the African perspective, the lesson of the 1930s is not that the world needed a better hegemon but that the very structure of hegemony—whether British, American, or multilateral—systematically subordinates African interests, and that genuine stability requires not hegemonic provision but structural transformation of the global economy and democratic reform of its institutions. This is the longest and most developed of the five perspectives because it is the one that most fundamentally challenges the theory's premises rather than merely disputing its application.

Chinese: Chinese international-relations scholarship approaches Kindleberger's thesis with a characteristic ambivalence that reflects China's own trajectory from victim of hegemonic disorder to potential provider of international public goods. Historically, China in the 1930s was itself a victim of the absence of hegemonic stability: the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931), the collapse of the silver standard, and the inability of the League of Nations to coordinate a response are read in Chinese historiography as evidence that a weak or absent hegemon produces not freedom but predation by regional powers. This experience supports the Kindlebergerian premise that order requires a provider. At the same time, Chinese scholars—drawing on the

tradition of "tianxia" (all-under-heaven) and on contemporary debates about China's global role—resist the conclusion that hegemony must be unipolar or Western. Yan Xuetong and other Chinese IR theorists have argued that a "humane authority" (wangdao) can provide public goods without the coercive dominance associated with Western hegemony. China's contemporary provision of infrastructure finance through the Belt and Road Initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and bilateral swap lines is framed by Chinese policymakers as a contribution to international public goods, not as hegemonic domination. Yet Chinese scholars also note that the Kindleberger framework is frequently deployed by Western analysts to pressure China into assuming the costs of a system from which it has historically been excluded—a "hegemonic trap" in which China is asked to subsidize an order it did not design. The Chinese perspective thus accepts the descriptive logic of hegemonic stability (order requires provision) while rejecting its normative implication that the United States or any single Western power is the legitimate or sole provider.

Russian: The Russian and Soviet perspective on Kindleberger's thesis is shaped by a Marxist-Leninist critique of imperialism that treats "hegemonic stability" as an ideology of domination rather than a neutral theory of public goods. From this vantage, the interwar period is not a story of missing public goods but of capitalist crisis: the Depression was an inevitable consequence of overproduction and underconsumption in the capitalist mode of production, and the "hegemon" (Britain, then the United States) was not a failed provider but an exploiter whose system generated the crisis in the first place. The Soviet Union's relative insulation from the Depression—through autarky and state planning—was cited as evidence that capitalist hegemony was neither necessary nor desirable. In the post-Soviet period, Russian IR scholars and policymakers have revived a critique of dollar hegemony, arguing that the United States uses its position as provider of the global reserve currency to extract seigniorage, impose sanctions, and finance deficits at others' expense. Karaganov and others have framed the post-1991 unipolar moment as a period of "hegemonic instability" in which the United States provided not public goods but public bads—wars, financial crises, and institutional capture. The 1998 Russian default and the IMF's role in it are cited as evidence that "stability" in the Bretton Woods system means stability for creditors. The Russian perspective therefore rejects Kindleberger's premise that the problem was the absence of a willing hegemon; the problem, on this view, was and remains the presence of a hegemon whose interests are structurally opposed to those of the periphery.

Western: The Western perspective is the tradition in which Kindleberger's thesis originated and in which it has been most extensively developed. Liberal institutionalists—Keohane in *After Hegemony* (1984), Nye, and others—accepted Kindleberger's premise that hegemony matters but argued that institutions can sustain cooperation after hegemonic decline, a position that directly engages the question of whether order requires a hegemon or merely requires hegemonic creation of institutions. Realists—Gilpin in *The Political Economy of International Relations* (1987)—argued that hegemonic stability is not a choice but a structural feature of the international system: the hegemon provides public goods because its interests are served by an open, stable order, and when its relative power declines, the order decays. The Western tradition also contains a strong self-critical strand: Eichengreen's *Globalizing Capital* (1996) and Stiglitz's *Globalization and Its Discontents* (2002) document how the United States and the Bretton Woods institutions provided "stability" selectively—stabilizing finance for creditors while imposing austerity on debtors. This self-critique does not abandon the hegemonic stability framework but complicates it: the question becomes not whether a hegemon provides public goods but whose interests those goods serve and at what cost to whom. The Western perspective's contribution is the most systematic theoretical development of Kindleberger's insight; its occlusion is the tendency to treat the hegemon's provision as presumptively benign and to understate the distributional consequences of hegemonic order.

UN: The United Nations perspective on Kindleberger's thesis is refracted through the lens of development

finance and the institutional mandate of the UN system. From this vantage, the interwar period is not primarily a story of missing hegemonic public goods but of missing multilateral development finance: the League of Nations' financial committees, the Bank for International Settlements (founded 1930), and later the Bretton Woods institutions were attempts to multilateralize what Kindleberger treated as a hegemonic function. The UN's emphasis—visible in the Financing for Development process, the Monterrey Consensus (2002), and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015)—is on the SDG financing gap and the need for concessional, predictable, long-term finance rather than on the identity of the hegemon. The UN perspective thus accepts that international economic stability requires provision but insists that provision should be institutionalized and democratized, not personalized in a single state. The NIEO demands of the 1970s, advanced through the UN General Assembly, were in part a rejection of the premise that the existing hegemon (the United States) could be trusted to provide public goods equitably. The UN perspective's contribution is to shift the question from "who is the hegemon?" to "how are public goods financed, governed, and distributed?"; its occlusion is a tendency toward institutional optimism that may underestimate the power asymmetries that shape even multilateral provision.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Bretton Woods Architecture: IMF, IBRD, Fixed Rates, Capital Controls, and the Dollar-Gold Standard

Bolded Causal Claim: The Bretton Woods system was not merely a set of institutions but a *causal architecture* in which fixed exchange rates, capital controls, a dollar-gold anchor, and two multilateral institutions (the IMF and the IBRD) jointly produced a postwar order in which trade liberalization became compatible with macroeconomic stabilization and domestic welfare commitments—a compatibility that had collapsed in the interwar period.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through four interlocking components. First, the *adjustable peg*: member states fixed their currencies to the dollar within a narrow band (±1 percent, later widened to ±2.25 percent under the Smithsonian Agreement of 1971, though that came later), with the dollar itself convertible to gold at $35 per ounce. This eliminated the competitive devaluations and exchange-rate volatility that had devastated interwar trade. Second, *capital controls*: the Bretton Woods Articles of Agreement explicitly permitted (indeed encouraged) restrictions on capital movements, which insulated domestic monetary policy from speculative flows and allowed governments to pursue full employment without fear of capital flight. As Eichengreen (1996) emphasizes, this was the "impossible trinity" resolved in favor of fixed rates and monetary autonomy at the expense of capital mobility. Third, the *IMF*: a quota-based lending facility that provided short-term balance-of-payments financing to members facing temporary deficits, conditional on adjustment programs, thereby substituting multilateral liquidity for the destabilizing gold-standard adjustment of the 1920s–30s. Fourth, the *IBRD (World Bank)*: long-term development and reconstruction lending, initially focused on European reconstruction and later on development finance. The causal chain runs: fixed rates reduce trade uncertainty → capital controls preserve policy space → IMF liquidity prevents forced deflation → IBRD finance rebuilds productive capacity → trade expands under stable rules. The dollar-gold standard at the center meant that the United States, as the reserve-currency issuer, had to run balance-of-payments deficits to supply global liquidity—the Triffin dilemma—while other states accumulated dollar reserves. The system thus required US willingness to subordinate domestic monetary autonomy to global liquidity provision, a willingness that eroded by the late 1960s.

Scope Conditions: The architecture functioned only under specific conditions: (a) US hegemony sufficient

to underwrite the dollar-gold peg and absorb adjustment costs; (b) capital controls enforceable by states with administrative capacity; (c) a shared memory of interwar collapse generating political support for multilateralism; (d) limited capital mobility, which made the adjustable peg credible; and (e) European and Japanese reconstruction demand that absorbed US exports. Where these conditions failed—where capital mobility rose, where US deficits became unsustainable, where domestic inflation diverged—the system broke down, as it did in 1971–73. The architecture was thus historically contingent, not a universal template.

Observable Implications: If the Bretton Woods architecture causally produced postwar stability, we should observe: (i) rising trade volumes and declining exchange-rate volatility 1945–1971; (ii) widespread use of capital controls throughout the period; (iii) IMF lending concentrated in short-term balance-of-payments support rather than structural transformation; (iv) US current-account deficits growing as global liquidity provision; (v) eventual collapse when US inflation and deficits undermined gold convertibility. The data confirm these: world trade grew roughly 8 percent annually 1950–1973, exchange-rate volatility was minimal, and capital controls were near-universal. The Nixon shock of August 1971—suspending dollar-gold convertibility—marks the empirical endpoint of the architecture's viability, not of its influence, since IMF and World Bank structures persisted and adapted.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The Bretton Woods architecture is read from the African vantage as a system designed for the reconstruction of Europe and the management of advanced-capitalist macroeconomics, with Africa incorporated only as a source of primary commodities and a recipient of development finance on terms set by others. The IBRD's early lending prioritized European reconstruction; African states, entering independence in the 1960s, found themselves subject to an architecture they had not designed. The dollar-gold standard meant that African export earnings fluctuated with commodity prices denominated in dollars, while African states lacked the policy space that capital controls theoretically provided because their economies were structurally dependent on a few exports. The African perspective emphasizes that the "stability" Bretton Woods produced was stability for the core, not for the periphery: African states experienced the system as a set of constraints (conditionality, commodity dependence, limited voice in IMF/World Bank governance) rather than as a framework of managed stability. The Ezulwini Consensus and subsequent reform demands reflect this reading: the architecture's legitimacy deficit in Africa stems from its origins in a moment when African states were colonies, not members. The African contribution is to show that institutional design reflects power at the moment of creation, and that formal membership does not equal substantive voice.

Chinese: China's perspective treats Bretton Woods as a historically specific arrangement that served US hegemony and European recovery, not as a neutral public good. Chinese scholarship emphasizes that the system's collapse in 1971 demonstrated the unsustainability of dollar-gold anchoring and the Triffin dilemma, lessons that inform contemporary Chinese advocacy for a multipolar reserve system. China's own integration into Bretton Woods institutions (IMF membership 1980, World Bank borrowing, eventual WTO accession 2001) is understood as strategic engagement with an inherited architecture rather than endorsement of its design. The Chinese view contributes the insight that institutional persistence does not imply institutional legitimacy: the IMF and World Bank survived 1971 because they adapted, but their governance structures remained anchored in mid-twentieth-century power distributions. The occlusion is a tendency to understate the genuine developmental finance that IBRD lending provided to China and others.

Russian: The Russian/Soviet perspective historically rejected Bretton Woods as a capitalist instrument of US hegemony, with the USSR refusing to join and establishing alternative institutions (Comecon, the International Bank for Economic Cooperation). Post-Soviet Russian scholarship has shifted toward a more

analytical critique: the system's dollar-gold anchor created structural dependence on US monetary policy, and the IMF's conditionality represented an infringement on sovereignty that Russia experienced directly during the 1998 crisis. The Russian contribution is to highlight the sovereignty costs of embedded liberalism: the same capital controls and fixed rates that enabled European recovery constrained policy autonomy elsewhere. The occlusion is a nostalgic overstatement of Soviet-era alternatives, which were themselves hierarchical.

Western: Western scholarship (Eichengreen 1996; Kindleberger 1973) treats Bretton Woods as a successful, if temporary, solution to the interwar problem of reconciling trade openness with domestic stability—the "embedded liberalism" of Ruggie (1982). The Western perspective emphasizes the genuine public goods provided: exchange-rate stability, liquidity, reconstruction finance. Its self-critique, developed in Stiglitz (2002) and others, acknowledges that the system's benefits were unevenly distributed and that its governance structures became anachronistic. The occlusion is a tendency to treat the system's success as evidence of its design wisdom rather than of US hegemonic capacity.

UN: The UN perspective, particularly through UNCTAD and the development-finance agenda, treats Bretton Woods as an incomplete project: the IMF and World Bank were created to manage stability and reconstruction, but the development dimension (trade, commodities, technology transfer) was underprovided. The NIEO demands of the 1970s were in part a response to the perception that Bretton Woods institutions served creditor interests. The UN contribution is to insist that architecture must include development finance and commodity stabilization, not just macroeconomic management. The occlusion is institutional optimism about reforming inherited structures.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Gilpin, Keohane, and Hegemonic Stability: Does Order Require a Hegemon, and Can It Persist After Hegemony?

Bolded Causal Claim: Hegemonic stability theory (HST) posits that international economic order requires a single dominant state willing and able to provide public goods—open markets, stable money, security of property rights—and that such order decays when hegemonic capacity or willingness declines; yet Keohane's (1984) institutionalist challenge demonstrates that institutions can sustain cooperation after hegemony by reducing transaction costs and locking in expectations, provided that the costs of defection exceed the benefits.

Mechanism: The mechanism has two competing variants. *Gilpin's (1987) realist variant*: hegemony creates order because the hegemon has both the interest (gains from trade exceed costs of provision) and the capacity (economic and military dominance) to enforce rules, absorb adjustment costs, and punish defectors. The hegemon's decline—relative economic decline, overextension, or domestic political shifts—removes the enforcement mechanism, and order fragments into protectionism and conflict. The causal chain: hegemonic dominance → rule-setting and enforcement → predictable expectations → investment and trade → hegemonic decline → enforcement gap → order erosion. *Keohane's (1984) institutionalist variant*: institutions created during hegemony (IMF, GATT/WTO, World Bank) develop independent causal force by (a) reducing information asymmetries, (b) lowering transaction costs of cooperation, (c) creating sunk costs in compliance, and (d) generating reputational stakes. The mechanism: hegemony → institution creation → institutionalization of rules and expectations → post-hegemonic persistence of cooperation because defection costs exceed gains. The two theories share the premise that hegemony originates order but diverge on whether institutions can substitute for hegemonic enforcement. Keohane's "after hegemony" argument is not that institutions replace power but that they transform the strategic environment so that cooperation becomes

self-sustaining among states with convergent interests. The scope conditions for institutional persistence include: low number of major actors, high issue density creating iterated interaction, and roughly symmetrical vulnerability to defection.

Scope Conditions: HST applies most strongly when (a) public goods are non-excludable and non-rivalrous (security of sea lanes, monetary stability), (b) the hegemon's relative decline is rapid, (c) no alternative provider emerges, and (d) institutions are weak or absent. Institutional persistence applies when (a) institutions have acquired independent legitimacy, (b) exit costs are high, (c) states share an interest in continued cooperation, and (d) the hegemon's decline is gradual enough for adaptation. The theories are not mutually exclusive: HST explains origins and crises; institutionalism explains persistence and adaptation. The 1970s–80s transition—US relative decline, institutional adaptation (floating rates, G7 coordination, expanded IMF)—tests both: HST predicts disorder; institutionalism predicts managed adaptation. The evidence is mixed: trade volumes continued growing, but monetary instability increased and protectionist pressures rose.

Observable Implications: If HST is correct, we should observe: (i) economic order correlating with hegemonic concentration of power; (ii) order erosion during hegemonic decline; (iii) weaker states free-riding on hegemonic provision; (iv) hegemonic withdrawal producing protectionism. If institutionalism is correct, we should observe: (i) institutional persistence after hegemonic decline; (ii) cooperation continuing among non-hegemonic states; (iii) institutional adaptation rather than collapse; (iv) compliance driven by reputational and transaction-cost considerations. The post-1971 record supports institutionalism partially: IMF, World Bank, and GATT/WTO persisted and expanded, but the monetary order became more volatile and US unilateralism (e.g., Volcker shock, Plaza Accord) remained decisive. The 2008 financial crisis tested both: HST would predict US-led rescue; institutionalism would predict multilateral coordination. Both occurred, suggesting complementarity rather than competition.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on hegemonic stability is distinctive because it questions the premise that hegemony—whether US or any other—produces order for Africa. From the African vantage, the "order" HST describes is an order of extraction: the hegemon provides public goods (security of sea lanes, monetary stability) primarily to secure its own trade and investment, while African states bear the costs (commodity price volatility, conditionality, limited policy space) without commensurate voice. Gilpin's framework, read from Africa, naturalizes a hierarchy in which the hegemon's interests are conflated with global interests. The African contribution is to ask: stability for whom? The Bretton Woods institutions' persistence "after hegemony" (Keohane) is read not as institutional success but as the institutionalization of asymmetric power: the IMF and World Bank survived US relative decline because they served creditor interests regardless of hegemon. The African perspective thus inverts HST: order does not require a hegemon; it requires *legitimacy*, and legitimacy requires voice. The Ezulwini Consensus and African Union reform demands reflect this: African states do not seek a new hegemon but a reformed architecture in which provision is decoupled from domination. The occlusion in African scholarship is a tendency to treat all institutional persistence as reproduction of hierarchy, which may understate genuine institutional learning (e.g., IMF's post-2008 flexibility, SDR allocations).

Chinese: China's perspective engages HST through the lens of its own rise: if order requires a hegemon, and the US is declining, does China's rise produce a new hegemony or a multipolar order? Chinese scholarship (e.g., Yan Xuetong's moral realism, though not a canonical source here) generally rejects the premise that China seeks hegemony, framing its rise as producing a "community of shared future" rather than a new

dominant state. The Chinese contribution to the HST debate is to question whether the public goods the US provided were genuinely global or selectively beneficial, and whether China's provision (Belt and Road, AIIB, BRICS institutions) constitutes an alternative or a complement. The occlusion is a tendency to understate the coercive dimensions of Chinese economic statecraft and to overstate the novelty of its institutional alternatives.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats HST as a legitimizing discourse for US dominance: the claim that order requires a hegemon is read as an ideological justification for unilateralism. Russian scholarship emphasizes that the Soviet Union provided an alternative order (however flawed) and that the post-Cold War "unipolar moment" produced not stability but interventionism and disorder. The Russian contribution is to highlight the *coercive* dimension of hegemonic provision: the same institutions that HST treats as public goods are experienced by weaker states as instruments of control. The occlusion is a tendency to romanticize multipolarity and to understate the transaction-cost benefits of institutionalized cooperation.

Western: Western scholarship is the home of both HST (Kindleberger, Gilpin) and its institutionalist critique (Keohane). The Western perspective's strength is its theoretical self-reflection: it generated the debate and has tested it against evidence. The Western contribution is to have identified the public-goods problem at the core of international order and to have developed both realist and institutionalist solutions. Its self-critique (Stiglitz 2002; Grabel 2018) acknowledges that HST can legitimate hegemonic overreach and that institutionalism can obscure power asymmetries. The occlusion is a tendency to treat Western theoretical frameworks as universal, when they may reflect the specific experience of advanced capitalist states.

UN: The UN perspective approaches HST through the lens of collective security and development: if order requires a hegemon, then the UN system (which presupposes collective rather than hegemonic provision) is structurally disadvantaged. The UN contribution is to insist that public goods can be provided multilaterally through institutionalized burden-sharing, as in peacekeeping or development finance. The NIEO and SDG agendas reflect this: the demand is for institutionalized provision, not hegemonic charity. The occlusion is institutional optimism: the UN's own record of providing public goods (e.g., in conflict zones) is mixed, and its effectiveness depends on member-state willingness that resembles hegemonic provision in practice.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The 1971 Nixon Shock, Floating Rates, and the Rise of the Dollar as Global Reserve Currency

Bolded Causal Claim: The suspension of dollar-gold convertibility in 1971 and the subsequent move to floating exchange rates did not terminate American monetary hegemony; instead, by removing the gold constraint while preserving dollar invoicing, settlement, and reserve functions, the Nixon shock converted the dollar from a gold-backed reserve currency into a fiat reserve currency whose persistence depends on US financial-market depth, geopolitical demand, and network externalities rather than on metallic convertibility.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the Triffin dilemma: the Bretton Woods system required the United States to supply dollar liquidity to the world through current-account deficits, yet those same deficits eroded confidence in the dollar's convertibility into gold at $35 per ounce. As US inflation accelerated in the late 1960s—driven by Vietnam War spending and Great Society programs—the gap between outstanding dollar claims and US gold reserves widened. Speculative attacks on the dollar forced Nixon's August 1971 suspension of convertibility, followed by the Smithsonian Agreement's failed attempt to realign parities and, ultimately, the Jamaica Accords of 1976, which legalized floating rates and demonetized gold.

The crucial point is that the collapse of the gold anchor did not collapse dollar demand. Three reinforcing mechanisms replaced convertibility. First, the Eurodollar market and, after 1973, petrodollar recycling created offshore dollar liquidity outside US regulatory control, deepening dollar use in trade and finance. Second, the US Treasury market became the world's premier safe asset: foreign central banks and private investors held dollars not because they could be converted into gold, but because they could be converted into liquid, default-remote US government debt. Third, network externalities and path dependence locked in dollar invoicing: commodity markets, especially oil, were priced in dollars; trade contracts, derivatives, and clearing systems were built around dollar settlement; and the cost of switching to an alternative currency rose with each additional user. The result was a fiat reserve system in which the United States could finance external deficits at lower cost—the "exorbitant privilege" of seigniorage and lower borrowing costs—while adjustment pressures fell disproportionately on deficit countries in the periphery, which faced IMF programs, reserve depletion, or currency crises. Floating rates also increased exchange-rate volatility, encouraging hedging, derivatives markets, and capital mobility, thereby financializing international monetary relations. In this sense, the Nixon shock was not the end of hegemonic monetary order but its mutation: from a gold-exchange standard to a dollar standard sustained by market depth and institutional habit.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism operates only where several conditions hold. The United States must maintain deep, liquid, and relatively open financial markets, especially in government debt, so that foreign holders can enter and exit without large price effects. US monetary policy must remain sufficiently credible that inflation does not destroy the store-of-value function, even if short-run inflation occurs. There must be no rival currency with comparable market depth, convertibility, and geopolitical backing; the euro and, more recently, the renminbi have challenged the dollar at the margins but have not replicated the full bundle of liquidity, rule of law, and security guarantees. Demand for dollars must be reinforced by structural factors such as commodity invoicing, offshore dollar debt, and security alliances. The mechanism also assumes that the US is willing to run the deficits necessary to supply global liquidity and that foreign actors are willing to absorb dollar assets; if the US pursued sustained fiscal consolidation or if foreign states coordinated a rapid diversification, the equilibrium would weaken. Finally, the mechanism is historically contingent: it was reinforced by the Volcker shock of the early 1980s, which restored dollar credibility after 1970s inflation, and by the absence of a credible alternative after the collapse of the Bretton Woods fixed-rate system.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include the persistence of the dollar's share of global foreign-exchange reserves at roughly two-thirds in the early 2000s and still above 55 percent in the mid-2020s, despite decades of US current-account deficits. They include the dominance of the dollar in trade invoicing, cross-border banking, and international debt issuance, as well as the recurring pattern in which emerging-market crises—such as the 1997 Asian financial crisis or the 2008 global financial crisis—manifest as dollar shortages requiring Federal Reserve swap lines. They include the accumulation of dollar reserves by developing countries as self-insurance, which diverts fiscal resources from domestic investment, and the asymmetric adjustment pattern in which peripheral economies raise interest rates or seek IMF support while the United States adjusts through exchange-rate and monetary channels. They also include the geopolitical implication that dollar centrality gives the United States leverage through financial sanctions and control over clearing infrastructure, although overuse of that leverage can accelerate diversification without immediately displacing the dollar.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, the Nixon shock and floating-rate order are not merely technical monetary events but a reorganization of global hierarchy that exposed postcolonial economies to

dollar volatility, commodity-price swings, and foreign-currency debt. African states that had gained independence under fixed or managed rates found their export revenues, import costs, and debt burdens increasingly determined by US monetary policy and by exchange-rate movements they did not control. The shift to fiat dollar hegemony meant that African central banks had to hold dollar reserves as self-insurance, diverting scarce resources from development, while their currencies became more vulnerable to sudden stops. African political economists have long read this as a monetary dimension of neo-colonial dependence: Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism and Rodney's account of underdevelopment provide the lineage for understanding how formal sovereignty coexists with monetary subordination. The African perspective reveals that what Western accounts call "stability" often means predictability for core creditors and volatility for peripheral debtors; it also shows that reserve-currency status is not a neutral market outcome but a structure of power that shapes who bears adjustment costs. Contemporary African demands for SDR rechanneling, local-currency trade settlement, and institutional reform are therefore not technical preferences but claims against a monetary order whose rules were set without African consent.

Chinese: China's perspective is reformist rather than revolutionary. Beijing benefited enormously from dollar-based globalization: export-led growth, foreign direct investment, and reserve accumulation were all enabled by a stable dollar anchor and US consumer demand. At the same time, Chinese policymakers have criticized the "exorbitant privilege" and the risks of dollar dependence, promoting renminbi internationalization through bilateral swap lines, the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System, and inclusion of the renminbi in the IMF's Special Drawing Rights basket. Yet China has not sought an immediate displacement of the dollar, recognizing that its own capital controls, shallow offshore markets, and institutional trust deficits limit renminbi reserve status. The Chinese occlusion is a tendency to treat dollar dominance as a policy choice that can be incrementally adjusted without confronting the deeper network effects and geopolitical bargains that sustain it.

Russian: Russia's perspective treats dollar hegemony as a strategic vulnerability, especially after sanctions and the freezing of reserves. Moscow has promoted de-dollarization in trade with partners, alternative payment messaging, and gold accumulation. The Russian critique correctly identifies the coercive potential of reserve-currency status, but it often overstates the feasibility of rapid alternatives and understates the institutional trust, liquidity, and legal predictability required for reserve-currency status. Its occlusion is the conflation of geopolitical opposition to the United States with a viable monetary alternative.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in US and European scholarship, defends the dollar system as a provider of global public goods—liquidity, safe assets, and a nominal anchor—while acknowledging the Triffin dilemma and "exorbitant privilege." Eichengreen's historical work on international monetary systems emphasizes that reserve-currency transitions are rare and path-dependent, implying that dollar dominance is durable but not eternal. Western self-critique focuses on US fiscal deficits, inflation risks, and the geopolitical overuse of financial sanctions. The occlusion is a tendency to equate US interests with global interests and to treat the costs of dollar volatility as transitional or manageable.

UN: The UN perspective approaches the post-1971 monetary order through development finance and liquidity provision. It highlights how floating rates and dollar dominance create debt vulnerabilities, reserve accumulation burdens, and procyclical capital flows for developing countries. UN agencies and the Financing for Development process have called for SDR reform, debt relief, and multilateral liquidity mechanisms. The occlusion is institutional optimism: the UN can diagnose monetary hierarchy but lacks the power to restructure the reserve system, which depends on the consent of major shareholders and central banks.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Contestation: NIEO, Structural Adjustment, the Asian Crisis, and BRICS Reform Demands

Bolded Causal Claim: The Bretton Woods order has survived not because it is uncontested but because contestation has been absorbed through partial reform, crisis management, and institutional adaptation; from the NIEO through structural adjustment, the 1997 Asian crisis, and BRICS demands, challengers have exposed legitimacy deficits and forced changes in conditionality and governance, yet the core hierarchy of dollar centrality and shareholder power has remained intact.

Mechanism: The mechanism is a cycle of challenge, crisis, adaptation, and re-legitimation. In the 1970s, the New International Economic Order (NIEO) demanded commodity price stabilization, technology transfer, debt relief, and greater voice for developing countries in international institutions. The oil shocks and stagflation of the 1970s gave commodity exporters temporary leverage, but the NIEO's institutional demands were largely blocked by advanced capitalist states; the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) became a forum for grievance rather than redistribution. The 1980s debt crisis shifted the terrain: IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programs (SAPs) offered financing in exchange for liberalization, privatization, fiscal austerity, and trade opening. SAPs were not merely technical stabilization; they were a political project to restructure state-market relations in the Global South, often with severe social costs. Contestation here took the form of riots, electoral backlash, and scholarly critique, including Stiglitz's argument that IMF conditionality was often procyclical and ideologically driven. The 1997 Asian financial crisis revealed another dimension: IMF programs initially demanded high interest rates and fiscal austerity in economies suffering from capital-account liberalization and currency mismatches, prompting accusations of misdiagnosis and double standards. The crisis generated institutional learning—greater emphasis on financial-sector surveillance, reserve adequacy, and, eventually, more flexible conditionality—but also accelerated self-insurance through reserve accumulation in Asia. The 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath shifted power further: the G20 displaced the G7 as the premier economic forum, BRICS states demanded quota and voice reform, and new institutions such as the New Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank emerged. Yet reform has been partial. The 2010 IMF quota reform, which increased emerging-market shares, was delayed for years by US congressional politics; the 2021 allocation of $650 billion in Special Drawing Rights distributed according to quota, giving low-income countries a small share relative to need; and debates over rechanneling SDRs to African states have exposed the gap between liquidity provision and structural inequality. Thus contestation operates through multiple channels—diplomatic demands, crisis backlash, institutional entrepreneurship, and scholarly critique—but incumbent institutions retain agenda-setting power through voting structures, conditionality design, and control over liquidity.

Scope Conditions: Contestation is most effective when challengers possess market power, regional coordination, or crisis leverage. China's rise and the BRICS' collective weight have made quota reform and alternative institutions possible in ways that were unavailable to African or Latin American states in the 1980s. Regional mechanisms such as the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralization demonstrate that contestation can produce parallel liquidity arrangements, though these often remain linked to IMF frameworks. Contestation is weaker where states are heavily indebted, dependent on concessional finance, or fragmented; in such cases, IMF programs remain the only available source of balance-of-payments support. The mechanism also depends on the willingness of incumbent powers to accommodate: the United States and Europe have accepted incremental reforms that do not threaten core privileges, such as dollar centrality or European overrepresentation, while resisting changes that would. Finally, contestation requires ideational resources; the shift from Washington Consensus to "country ownership" and "social spending floors" in IMF programs reflects not only power but also the legitimation strategies of institutions under pressure.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include the changing composition and number of IMF conditions over time, with a shift from broad structural conditions in the 1980s and 1990s toward more targeted macro-critical conditions and, in some programs, social spending floors. They include the creation of new institutions such as the NDB and AIIB, which both complement and compete with the World Bank. They include persistent disparities in IMF voting shares, with the United States retaining a veto-level share and Europe overrepresented relative to emerging markets. They include the 2021 SDR allocation's distribution by quota, which gave Africa a small share relative to pandemic financing needs, and the subsequent debate over rechanneling SDRs through multilateral development banks or the IMF's Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust. They also include BRICS expansion and de-dollarization rhetoric, which signal dissatisfaction but have not yet produced a reserve alternative. Finally, they include the continued use of IMF programs in Africa and Latin America, indicating that contestation has altered the terms of engagement without ending dependence.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective places NIEO and SAPs at the center of the story, not as footnotes to Western institutional history. African states experienced structural adjustment as externally imposed austerity that cut public services, liberalized trade, and often undermined industrialization, while debt burdens persisted. The Ezulwini Consensus of 2005, adopted by the African Union, crystallized demands for UN Security Council reform and greater African voice in international financial institutions. More recently, the 2021 SDR allocation and rechanneling debate have been read in Africa as a test of whether global liquidity provision can be decoupled from quota-based hierarchy. African scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, and Mamdani provide the analytical vocabulary: Grovogui's critique of international legal and institutional orders as systems of domination; Mbembe's analysis of necropolitics and the unequal valuation of life; Bayart's concept of extraversion, by which African elites navigate external power; and Mamdani's insistence on the political construction of state and civil society. The African perspective reveals that contestation is not an abstract debate over governance reform but a lived experience of austerity, debt, and conditional sovereignty. It also warns that BRICS or new institutions may reproduce hierarchy in new forms if they do not alter decision-making power and if African states remain rule-takers. The strongest African claim is that reform must be measured not by institutional creation but by whether it changes who decides, who pays, and who benefits.

Chinese: China's perspective is reformist: it seeks greater voice in the IMF and World Bank, supports SDR expansion, and has created parallel institutions, but it does not advocate abolishing the Bretton Woods system. Beijing's strategy is to increase optionality—AIIB, NDB, bilateral swaps—while remaining embedded in global markets. The occlusion is that China's creditor power in new institutions can reproduce the very asymmetries it criticizes, and its support for multilateralism is tempered by geopolitical competition with the United States.

Russian: Russia frames contestation in geopolitical terms, emphasizing multipolarity, de-dollarization, and resistance to Western-dominated institutions. Its critique of IMF conditionality and dollar hegemony resonates with Global South grievances, but Russia's institutional alternatives remain limited by sanctions, shallow financial markets, and trust deficits. The occlusion is the instrumentalization of anti-hegemonic rhetoric for state interests rather than systemic reform.

Western: The Western perspective combines institutional defense with self-critique. Stiglitz's critique of IMF conditionality, the IMF Independent Evaluation Office's assessments, and academic work on "augmented Washington Consensus" reforms show that Western scholars and officials have acknowledged failures. Yet

the dominant Western view treats institutions as reformable and preferable to fragmented alternatives. The occlusion is a tendency to measure reform by procedural changes—conditionality counts, transparency—rather than by shifts in power.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes development finance, debt sustainability, and the SDG financing gap. It has supported the NIEO legacy through UNCTAD, Financing for Development conferences, and calls for SDR rechanneling and debt relief. The UN's contribution is to keep distributional questions on the agenda. Its occlusion is the lack of enforcement power: UN resolutions can frame demands but cannot compel quota reform or debt cancellation without the consent of major shareholders.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

From an African vantage point, the Bretton Woods system is not first and foremost a technical solution to the problem of hegemonic public goods; it is a historically specific arrangement through which economic sovereignty has been stratified, deferred, and, in many periods, hollowed out. The central puzzle is therefore not whether a hegemon can supply liquidity, stable exchange rates, and crisis lending, but whether an international order built on unequal sovereignty can ever be neutral, even when it is efficient by the standards of its most powerful shareholders. African scholarship reconstructs this order from the experience of states that entered it not as architects but as latecomers, often through colonial subordination, and that have repeatedly encountered its institutions as sites where political independence is separated from economic self-determination. Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism captures the foundational suspicion: formal sovereignty can coexist with continued external control over finance, trade, currency, and development strategy, so that the flag changes while the structure of dependence remains. Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment as an active historical process rather than a natural condition sharpens the point; Bretton Woods institutions are not merely responding to African backwardness but are embedded in a longer chain of extraction, unequal exchange, and constrained industrialization. Fanon's insistence that decolonization must be a total transformation, not only a transfer of political office, gives the critique its existential dimension: an order that leaves the colonized dependent on externally determined prices, credit, and policy templates reproduces the colonial relation in economic form. Cabral's emphasis on returning to the source implies that liberation requires control over the material conditions of production and social reproduction, not simply participation in institutions designed elsewhere. Nyerere's ujamaa and self-reliance tradition adds a normative alternative: development should be measured by collective dignity and autonomous capacity, not by integration into a hierarchy whose rules are set by creditors. Taken together, these thinkers frame Bretton Woods not as a neutral framework but as one of the principal arenas in which neo-colonialism has been institutionalized.

The mechanism is not only ideological; it is concrete and institutional. The IMF and World Bank allocate voice through quota formulas that reflect economic weight at particular historical moments, which means that African states, individually small in GDP and trade shares, possess limited formal influence even when their collective needs are large. Conditionality converts liquidity into policy leverage: loans are accompanied by requirements concerning fiscal consolidation, privatization, trade liberalization, exchange-rate adjustment, and public-sector reform. The dollar's role as global reserve currency, consolidated after the 1971 collapse of Bretton Woods fixed rates, means that African states must earn or borrow dollars to import, service debt, and stabilize currencies, while the United States can finance deficits in its own currency. Special Drawing Rights are allocated according to quota, so a global liquidity injection such as the 2021 allocation of roughly $650 billion delivers proportionally more to already wealthy economies, leaving African states with a small

share relative to need and forcing debates about rechanneling that reproduce donor-recipient hierarchies. Structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s are remembered in much African scholarship not as technocratic stabilization but as a contraction of developmental state capacity, with cuts to health, education, and public employment, and with long-term effects on industrial policy and social protection. The 1997 Asian financial crisis, though geographically outside Africa, reinforced African suspicions because IMF conditionality appeared to prioritize creditor confidence and rapid liberalization over domestic stability, suggesting that crisis management is also a mechanism for disciplining states into market conformity. The NIEO demands of the 1970s, including commodity price stabilization, technology transfer, debt relief, and voting reform, represented an African and broader Global South attempt to renegotiate this hierarchy; their partial defeat is read as evidence that Bretton Woods institutions are responsive to power, not merely to need. More recent BRICS reform demands, in which South Africa participates, continue this tradition but also expose its tensions: African states seek greater voice within existing institutions while also experimenting with alternative forums, yet those forums may reproduce new dependencies rather than end old ones.

Bayart's concept of extraversion is crucial for avoiding a simplistic victim narrative. African political elites have not merely suffered Bretton Woods; they have also used external resources, aid, debt, and institutional relationships to build domestic power. This means the African perspective must include internal agency and complicity: conditionality can be resisted, negotiated, instrumentalized, or welcomed by factions within states. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated postcolonial state helps explain why adjustment often landed unevenly, reinforcing distinctions between citizens with rights and subjects governed through custom and coercion, and why reforms that weakened public institutions could strengthen authoritarian or patrimonial rule. Mbembe's work on the postcolony and on necropolitics suggests that debt and austerity are not just economic constraints but modes of governing life, in which some populations are rendered disposable in the name of fiscal credibility. Grovogui's reconstruction of sovereignty in international law shows that African sovereignty has often been treated as quasi-sovereignty, contingent on recognition by powerful states and institutions; Bretton Woods governance is one of the sites where that contingency is reproduced. Oyěwùmí and Tamale add an epistemic and gendered dimension: development categories, household models, and policy metrics often universalize Western social arrangements, obscuring African gender systems and local knowledge. From this angle, Bretton Woods is not only a financial architecture but a knowledge regime that defines what counts as development, rationality, and reform.

The African perspective contributes what the other four largely cannot: a view of international order in which stability and hierarchy are not separable. Western hegemonic stability theory tends to treat public goods as potentially welfare-enhancing for all; the African vantage insists that the same institutions can stabilize an unequal structure. It reveals the racialized and colonial genealogy of sovereignty, the epistemic violence of conditionality, and the way liquidity provision can become a technology of discipline. It also centers African agency, showing that African states and movements have repeatedly proposed alternatives, from the Lagos Plan of Action to the NIEO, from self-reliance doctrines to contemporary demands for SDR rechanneling and quota reform. The Ezulwini Consensus, though most often discussed in relation to UN Security Council reform, expresses a broader African claim: global governance must be restructured to reflect equitable representation, not merely the economic weight of the powerful. In financial terms, that claim translates into demands for quota reform, voice, debt cancellation, and conditionality-free liquidity. The perspective also highlights that reform debates are not only about efficiency but about recognition: who is treated as a full sovereign, whose knowledge counts, and whose suffering is legible in policy design.

Its occlusions must be acknowledged if it is to be steel-manned rather than romanticized. It can homogenize a continent of fifty-four states with divergent interests, resource endowments, and institutional capacities; not

all African states experience Bretton Woods in the same way, and some have benefited from market access, debt relief, and crisis support. It can understate the genuine public-goods problem identified by Kindleberger: the absence of a hegemon willing to provide liquidity during the Great Depression was catastrophic, and some form of coordinated stabilization may be preferable to fragmentation. It can also understate the agency of African elites in extraversion, as Bayart reminds us, and can risk idealizing autarkic or state-led alternatives that have their own records of failure. It may not fully account for the interests of other non-Western powers, including China and Russia, whose critiques of dollar hegemony are not identical to African demands for structural transformation. Finally, it can sometimes treat Western self-critique as merely cosmetic, underestimating the extent to which scholars such as Stiglitz, Eichengreen, and Grabel have documented institutional failures and pushed for reform. The strongest version of the African perspective therefore does not deny that Bretton Woods institutions can provide liquidity or that reform is possible; it insists that reform must be measured by shifts in power, sovereignty, and distribution, not only by procedural transparency or reduced conditionality counts. On that standard, the 2021 SDR allocation and subsequent rechanneling debates are not simply technical adjustments but tests of whether the system can move from hierarchy toward genuine multilateralism.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on hegemonic stability and Bretton Woods is reformist rather than revolutionary. It does not seek the abolition of the IMF, the World Bank, or the dollar-based trading system in the short term; rather, it argues that these institutions were built for a mid-twentieth-century distribution of power and must be adapted to a multipolar economy. This position follows from China's own trajectory: it benefited from export-led growth, foreign direct investment, and access to global markets under a relatively open trading order, while also experiencing the vulnerabilities of dollar dependence and external conditionality. Chinese officials and scholars typically acknowledge that Bretton Woods provided a framework for postwar reconstruction and trade expansion, but they criticize the concentration of voting power, the asymmetry of crisis lending, and the use of conditionality as an instrument of political influence. The 1971 Nixon shock is read less as a technical regime change than as evidence that the United States can unilaterally alter the rules of the monetary system when its domestic interests require it, exposing the exorbitant privilege of dollar issuance. The 1997 Asian financial crisis reinforced Chinese skepticism toward rapid capital-account liberalization and IMF-prescribed austerity, contributing to China's insistence on gradual financial opening and strong capital controls. The 2008 global financial crisis further strengthened the argument that Western financial governance had failed and that emerging economies deserved greater voice.

China's preferred response is institutional pluralism within a broadly multilateral framework. It has pushed for quota and voting reform in the IMF, supported the inclusion of the renminbi in the SDR basket in 2016, and promoted the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank as complements rather than replacements for Bretton Woods institutions. The BRICS agenda, including demands for reform of global financial governance, is framed as democratization rather than secession. Chinese discourse emphasizes "win-win" development, non-interference, and infrastructure finance, contrasting its approach with the policy conditionality associated with Western-led institutions. At the same time, China's position is constrained by its own interests: it holds large dollar reserves, depends on export markets, and benefits from the stability of the current system even as it criticizes its asymmetries. This creates a reformist posture that wants more influence without assuming the full burdens of hegemonic provision. The perspective contributes an important corrective to Western hegemonic stability theory by showing that order can be maintained through institutional diversification and that legitimacy requires voice, not only efficiency. It also highlights that the Bretton Woods system is not static; it has been repeatedly renegotiated, and its future may involve layered

governance rather than a single hegemon. Its occlusions are equally significant. Chinese rhetoric of multipolarity can obscure the ways in which its own lending, infrastructure projects, and bilateral arrangements create new dependencies and asymmetries. It tends to understate concerns about transparency, debt sustainability, and political conditionality in its own development finance. It also frames reform in terms that often align with Chinese strategic interests, making it difficult to distinguish universalist claims from great-power ambition. The strongest objection to the Chinese perspective is that its reformism may be less a challenge to hierarchy than a demand for a larger share of it, leaving the underlying structure of dollar dominance and creditor power largely intact.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective treats Bretton Woods and dollar hegemony as instruments of American power rather than as neutral public goods. From this vantage, the system's central feature is not liquidity provision but the capacity of the United States to convert monetary dominance into geopolitical leverage. The 1971 Nixon shock is interpreted as the moment when the dollar's link to gold was severed, freeing the United States to finance deficits and project power without external constraint. The IMF is seen not as an impartial crisis manager but as an institution whose conditionality and surveillance reinforce Western preferences, particularly when applied to states outside the Western core. Russian discourse emphasizes that the post-1944 order was designed by and for the victors of the Second World War, and that its persistence after the Cold War reflected unipolar dominance rather than universal consent. Sanctions, especially financial sanctions and exclusion from payment systems, are treated as proof that interdependence has been weaponized; this connects the Bretton Woods legacy to contemporary conflicts and to the broader argument that dollar centrality is a security threat. The Russian perspective therefore aligns with demands for de-dollarization, alternative payment mechanisms, and BRICS-led financial cooperation, while also invoking a language of multipolarity and sovereign equality.

This perspective contributes a sharp awareness that financial order is never merely economic. It highlights the coercive potential of reserve-currency status, the political uses of conditionality, and the vulnerability of states that depend on dollar liquidity. It also draws attention to the ways in which crisis management can serve creditor interests, a point that resonates with African and other Global South critiques. In the context of the 1997 Asian crisis, Russian analysts would likely emphasize that IMF programs protected international creditors and imposed adjustment on domestic populations, reinforcing the view that Bretton Woods institutions manage crises in ways that preserve the hierarchy of global finance. The perspective is further strengthened by its insistence that reform cannot be limited to quota shares; it must address the structural privilege of the reserve-issuing state. However, the Russian position is heavily shaped by its own geopolitical conflicts and by a desire to escape Western sanctions, which means its universalist claims are entangled with particular strategic interests. It occludes the extent to which Russia's own economy remains dependent on commodity exports and on access to global markets, and it offers few fully developed institutional alternatives capable of replacing the liquidity, depth, and credibility of the dollar system. Its critique of Western hegemony is often coupled with a defense of state sovereignty that can be selectively applied, particularly when Russian actions are at issue. The strongest objection is that anti-hegemonic rhetoric may mask an attempt to build a parallel sphere of influence rather than a genuinely equitable order. Even so, the Russian perspective remains important because it forces attention onto the security dimension of monetary power, a dimension that Western institutionalism often treats as secondary.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective is anchored in hegemonic stability theory and institutionalist analysis. It begins

from the Kindleberger problem: the Great Depression was deepened by the absence of a hegemon willing and able to provide liquidity, maintain open markets, and coordinate adjustment. On this view, Bretton Woods was a successful response to that failure, creating institutions that supplied public goods—stable exchange rates, crisis lending, development finance, and trade liberalization—under American hegemony. Keohane's argument that institutions can persist after hegemony by reducing transaction costs and information asymmetries provides the theoretical basis for believing that the order can survive relative decline. Gilpin's political economy adds that international economic order reflects the distribution of power but also requires ideological legitimacy and institutionalized rules. From this perspective, the 1971 Nixon shock did not destroy the system; it transformed it into a dollar-centered order in which floating rates, deep financial markets, and IMF surveillance continued to provide coordination. The rise of the dollar as global reserve currency is treated as a source of stability and efficiency, even if it confers privilege on the United States. Western scholars and officials generally defend the IMF and World Bank as reformable institutions that have adapted to new challenges, including the NIEO critique, structural adjustment controversies, the 1997 Asian crisis, and contemporary demands for SDR rechanneling.

This perspective is not uncritical. Stiglitz's critique of IMF conditionality and of market fundamentalism represents an important internal challenge, arguing that the Fund imposed inappropriate policies and worsened crises in East Asia and elsewhere. Eichengreen's historical work on Bretton Woods emphasizes that the system was always politically constructed and that its collapse reflected tensions between domestic and international objectives. Grabel's more recent analysis of global financial governance after 2008 suggests that institutions have become more fragmented and experimental, with space for capital controls and alternative arrangements. These self-critical strands acknowledge that conditionality has often been excessive, that surveillance has been asymmetric, and that the institutions have sometimes served creditor interests. Nevertheless, the dominant Western view holds that the alternatives—fragmented liquidity, bilateral dependence, or politicized finance—are worse. It measures progress through procedural reform: more transparent conditionality, better debt-sustainability frameworks, increased but still limited quota adjustments, and targeted SDR rechanneling. The contribution of this perspective is its attention to systemic stability, institutional learning, and the genuine public-goods problem. It reminds critics that liquidity crises can be devastating and that coordination requires credible institutions. Its occlusion is a tendency to treat power as a background condition rather than a constitutive feature of order. It often measures reform by institutional procedure rather than by shifts in substantive control, and it can underestimate the extent to which African, Chinese, Russian, and UN critiques identify not merely policy errors but structural hierarchy. The strongest objection is that Western institutionalism risks conflating the survival of institutions with their legitimacy, assuming that because Bretton Woods institutions are useful, their current distribution of power is acceptable.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective centers development finance, debt sustainability, and the gap between global resources and the Sustainable Development Goals. It does not treat Bretton Woods primarily as a problem of hegemonic stability; rather, it treats the international financial architecture as one component of a broader development system that must be aligned with human rights, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. UNCTAD has long carried the legacy of the NIEO, documenting commodity dependence, unequal exchange, and the constraints imposed by debt and conditionality. Financing for Development conferences have repeatedly called for debt relief, increased official development assistance, SDR rechanneling, and reform of international financial institutions. The UN's contribution is to keep distributional questions on the agenda and to frame global finance in terms of obligations to the most vulnerable. It has supported calls for the 2021 SDR allocation and for rechanneling unused SDRs to countries with the greatest need, while also emphasizing

that liquidity provision should not be accompanied by harmful conditionality. In this sense, the UN perspective bridges African demands for sovereignty and Western institutional reform by insisting that financial governance must be evaluated against development outcomes.

The UN perspective also highlights the temporal dimension of Bretton Woods contestation. From the NIEO in the 1970s through structural adjustment in the 1980s and 1990s, the Asian crisis in 1997, and BRICS reform demands after 2009, the UN has provided forums in which Global South grievances are articulated, even when they are not fully resolved. It treats the 1997 Asian crisis as a warning that financial liberalization without adequate safeguards can devastate development gains, and it treats the 2021 SDR allocation as evidence that the system can mobilize resources at scale but also as a reminder that allocation rules reproduce inequality. Its normative stance is reformist and solidaristic: it seeks a more equitable financial architecture within a multilateral framework, not the dismantling of global institutions. The perspective contributes a development-centered metric for evaluating hegemonic stability: an order is not stable if it produces recurrent debt crises, austerity, and unmet SDGs. Its occlusion is the lack of enforcement power. UN resolutions can frame demands and create norms, but they cannot compel quota reform, debt cancellation, or SDR rechanneling without the consent of major shareholders. This means the UN often functions as a moral and analytical counterweight rather than as a decision-maker. The strongest objection to the UN perspective is that its normative authority can create the appearance of action without altering power relations, allowing states to endorse development goals while resisting the financial transfers and institutional reforms required to achieve them. Even so, it remains indispensable because it prevents the debate over Bretton Woods from being reduced to either hegemonic efficiency or great-power rivalry, insisting that the ultimate test of international financial order is whether it enables inclusive and sustainable development.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Exposes the distributional asymmetry of Bretton Woods governance; centers the experience of conditionality and debt; articulates reform demands from the NIEO through the Ezulwini Consensus	May understate the role of domestic policy choices and institutional weakness in crises; can treat all conditionality as illegitimate	Sovereign equality and developmental autonomy; international financial order must be accountable to those it affects	Structural adjustment programs in Africa (1980s–90s); SDR allocation disparities 2020–2022; African Union reform demands	Western: that governance reform without capacity-building risks institutional decay and that domestic institutional failure is a genuine causal factor
Chinese	Demonstrates that state-led development within Bretton Woods is possible; provides a model of gradual, sequenced integration; highlights double standards in IMF prescriptions	Understates the costs of its own mercantilist practices and opacity in lending; ambiguous on whether it seeks reform or replacement of the system	Multipolar stability; reform from within; non-interference in domestic affairs; strategic autonomy	China's rise within IMF quota system; maintenance of capital controls through 1997; AIIB creation as parallel institution	Western: that Chinese lending lacks transparency and conditionality standards, creating a race to the bottom in governance

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Highlights the weaponization of dollar hegemony and financial sanctions; questions the legitimacy of unilateral US power over global finance	Ignores Russia's own use of economic coercion; offers no constructive alternative architecture; conflates critique with great-power rivalry	Sovereign equality; opposition to unipolar financial order; multipolarity as an end in itself	De-dollarization rhetoric; BRICS expansion; sanctions on Russia 2022; 1998 ruble crisis experience	African: that Russian critique serves great-power rivalry rather than developmental justice and does not address the needs of the global South
Western	Provides the theoretical and institutional framework for hegemonic stability; acknowledges need for reform; self-critique (Stiglitz) on conditionality	Treats US interests as global public goods; underestimates the legitimacy deficit; applies double standards in crisis response	Rules-based order with US leadership; efficiency, stability, and market discipline as foundations of prosperity	Post-WWII growth; IMF crisis lending; G20 coordination 2008; Stiglitz's critique of IMF overreach	African: that "rules-based" order is selectively enforced and that the rules are written by and for the powerful
UN	Maintains development finance agenda; quantifies SDG financing gap; provides normative counterweight to power politics	Lacks enforcement power; dependent on member state contributions; can create appearance of action without altering power relations	Inclusive development; human rights-based approach to finance; financial stability as means to human development	Monterrey Consensus; Addis Ababa Action Agenda; SDG financing gap reports; SDR rechanneling debates	Western: that normative authority without power creates illusion of action and that UN agencies lack the technical capacity to manage financial crises

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 1997–98 Asian Financial Crisis and IMF Conditionality

Levels of analysis

At the individual level, the crisis was shaped by the decisions of specific actors operating under radical uncertainty. IMF staff economists, drawing on the Washington Consensus playbook, prescribed fiscal austerity and high interest rates to Thailand, Indonesia, and South Korea. Finance ministers and central bankers in these countries faced impossible choices between defending pegged exchange rates and preserving domestic output. Hedge fund managers and currency speculators, operating with leverage and short time horizons, accelerated the collapse of the Thai baht in July 1997. The individual-level analysis reveals that the crisis was not merely a structural inevitability but was mediated by human judgment, cognitive frameworks, and incentive structures — including the moral hazard created by implicit guarantees to domestic banks and the IMF's own lending practices, which may have encouraged risk-taking by signaling that crises would be managed.

At the state level, the crisis originated in the domestic political economies of the affected countries. Thailand, Indonesia, South Korea, and Malaysia had pursued rapid growth through export-led industrialization, but their financial sectors were characterized by weak regulation, connected lending, and implicit government guarantees. Capital account liberalization, often undertaken under pressure from the US Treasury and the IMF, allowed short-term foreign borrowing to flood in. When confidence evaporated, the sudden stop of capital flows forced abrupt adjustments. The state-level analysis shows that the crisis was endogenous to domestic institutional weaknesses, but that these weaknesses were amplified by the policy advice and market access conditions promoted by external actors.

At the systemic level, the crisis exposed the fragility of the post-Bretton Woods dollar standard and the absence of a genuine international lender of last resort. The United States, as hegemon, had an interest in preventing contagion that might threaten global financial stability, but its response was shaped by domestic political constraints and by the ideological preferences of the Clinton administration's Treasury. The IMF, as the systemic institution, lacked the resources and the mandate to act as a true lender of last resort; its conditionality reflected the preferences of its major shareholders rather than the needs of the borrowing countries. The systemic analysis reveals that the crisis was not just a series of national failures but a failure of the international financial architecture to manage capital mobility.

At the transnational level, the crisis propagated through channels that transcended national borders. Cross-border bank lending, portfolio investment, and derivative positions linked the fates of East Asian economies to global financial markets. Rating agencies downgraded sovereign debt, triggering forced selling by institutional investors with mandate constraints. Contagion spread from Thailand to Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, and beyond, reaching Russia and Brazil in 1998. The transnational analysis demonstrates that the crisis was a product of financial globalization itself, and that the IMF's country-by-country approach was structurally inadequate to address a systemic phenomenon.

Mechanism

The mechanism of the Asian financial crisis can be decomposed into three linked stages. First, the buildup: capital account liberalization in the 1990s allowed short-term foreign capital to flow into East Asian economies, where it was intermediated by weakly regulated domestic banks into speculative real estate and equity investments. Exchange rates were pegged to the dollar, creating an implicit guarantee that encouraged

unhedged foreign borrowing. Second, the trigger: the collapse of the Thai baht in July 1997, following the exhaustion of foreign reserves, initiated a sudden stop. Capital flight accelerated as investors reassessed risk, and the pegs became unsustainable. Third, the IMF intervention: the Fund provided emergency financing conditioned on fiscal austerity, monetary tightening, and structural reforms including financial sector restructuring and corporate governance changes. The mechanism of conditionality operated through the leverage of financing: countries in crisis had no alternative source of liquidity, and the IMF's terms were non-negotiable. The result was a deepening of the recession in the short run, as austerity contracted domestic demand, followed by recovery driven by export competitiveness gained through currency depreciation and by the eventual restructuring of debt. The mechanism thus combined market-driven contagion with institutionally mediated adjustment, and the distributional consequences fell disproportionately on workers, small businesses, and the poor, while creditors and large corporations were largely protected.

Perspective reconstruction

African perspective: The Asian crisis and IMF conditionality confirmed what African states had experienced during the structural adjustment era of the 1980s and 1990s: that Bretton Woods institutions impose uniform policy prescriptions that ignore local institutional contexts and social costs. African scholars and policymakers noted that the same Fund that demanded austerity from Thailand and Indonesia had demanded it from Ghana, Nigeria, and Zambia a decade earlier, with similarly devastating effects on public services and employment. The African vantage point reveals that the Asian crisis was not an anomaly but a systemic feature of a financial architecture that socializes losses while privatizing gains, and that the IMF's claim to technocratic neutrality masks a political project of enforcing market discipline on the global South. From this perspective, the Ezulwini Consensus and subsequent African Union demands for quota reform and SDR rechanneling are not requests for charity but claims for sovereign equality in global economic governance. The African perspective also highlights that the recovery of East Asian economies owed more to capital controls and state intervention — Malaysia's rejection of IMF conditionality being the clearest case — than to the Fund's prescriptions, a lesson that African policymakers have drawn in their own debates over debt and development finance.

Chinese perspective: China observed the Asian crisis with alarm and drew the lesson that capital account liberalization without adequate institutional safeguards is dangerous. Beijing's response was to maintain capital controls, accumulate foreign exchange reserves, and pursue gradual financial reform on its own terms — a strategy that insulated China from the 1997 contagion and that has shaped its approach to global financial integration ever since. From the Chinese vantage point, the crisis demonstrated both the risks of premature liberalization and the value of state capacity in managing financial flows. China also noted that the IMF's prescriptions for its neighbors were not applied to Western economies facing similar crises, reinforcing the perception of double standards. The Chinese perspective contributes the insight that development within the Bretton Woods system is possible but requires strategic autonomy, and that the Fund's legitimacy depends on its willingness to accommodate diverse development models.

Russian perspective: Russia experienced its own financial crisis in 1998, partly triggered by contagion from Asia, and its perspective on the IMF is shaped by the experience of conditionality during the Yeltsin era. From Moscow's vantage point, the Fund's prescriptions — privatization, fiscal austerity, and market liberalization — facilitated the transfer of state assets to oligarchs and contributed to the collapse of the ruble. The Russian perspective frames the IMF as an instrument of Western geopolitical influence, using financial conditionality to reshape the domestic political economies of non-Western states. The 1997–98 crisis reinforced Russian skepticism toward dollar hegemony and contributed to the long-term project of de-dollarization and the

construction of alternative financial institutions. The Russian perspective's contribution is its insistence that financial institutions are never neutral but are embedded in power relations, though it occludes Russia's own use of economic coercion and its lack of a constructive alternative architecture.

Western perspective: The Western perspective, particularly as articulated by the US Treasury and the IMF, framed the Asian crisis as a consequence of crony capitalism, weak financial regulation, and premature capital account liberalization. The Fund's conditionality was defended as necessary to restore market confidence, restructure insolvent financial systems, and prevent moral hazard. Western scholars such as Eichengreen and Stiglitz debated whether the IMF's prescriptions were appropriate — Stiglitz famously criticized the Fund for applying inappropriate templates and deepening the recession — but the mainstream Western view held that the crisis validated the need for stronger domestic institutions and greater transparency. The Western perspective's contribution is its attention to the role of domestic governance failures and its acknowledgment, post-crisis, that capital account liberalization should be sequenced carefully. Its occlusion is the tendency to treat Western financial practices as the benchmark and to underestimate the systemic role of dollar hegemony and capital mobility in generating crises.

UN perspective: The UN perspective on the Asian crisis emphasized the human costs of IMF conditionality and the need for a more development-centered approach to crisis management. UN agencies documented the rise in poverty, unemployment, and inequality that followed austerity programs, and called for social safety nets, debt relief, and greater attention to the Millennium Development Goals. The UN's contribution is its insistence that financial stability is a means to human development, not an end in itself, and that crisis management must be accountable to affected populations. The UN perspective also highlights the gap between the resources available to the IMF and the scale of financing needed for sustainable development, a theme that has persisted through the 2020 SDR allocation debates. Its limitation is that it lacks the institutional power to alter IMF conditionality or to compel quota reform.

Adjudication

The African perspective best explains the 1997–98 Asian crisis as a systemic phenomenon rather than a series of national failures, because it correctly identifies the pattern of conditionality as a recurring feature of Bretton Woods governance that predates and postdates the Asian episode. The African vantage point reveals that the IMF's prescriptions were not tailored to Asian conditions but drawn from a standard template applied across the global South, and that the distributional consequences — borne by workers and the poor while creditors were protected — were structurally predictable. However, the African perspective risks underweighting the genuine domestic institutional weaknesses in the affected countries, including connected lending, weak supervision, and implicit guarantees, which created the vulnerabilities that capital flows exploited. The Western self-critique, particularly Stiglitz's intervention, partially addresses this by acknowledging that the IMF's prescriptions were inappropriate, but it stops short of questioning the legitimacy of the Fund's governance structure. The Chinese perspective adds the crucial insight that capital controls and state capacity can provide insulation, but it does not fully account for the contagion dynamics that affected even well-regulated economies. The Russian perspective correctly identifies the geopolitical dimension of financial institutions but offers no constructive alternative. The UN perspective captures the human costs but lacks analytical leverage on the mechanism. The most complete explanation combines the African perspective's structural critique with the Western self-critique's attention to domestic institutional failure, yielding a verdict that the crisis was produced by the interaction of domestic vulnerabilities with a global financial architecture that amplified risk and distributed losses asymmetrically.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. Define the mechanism by which the 2021 SDR allocation was distributed and explain why quota-based allocation is not need-based.

2. Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on rechanneling, steel-manning each.

3. Identify the level of analysis at which the SDR debate is most coherently explained and justify excluding at least one alternative level.

4. Compare the SDR case with one historical analogue and state what is similar and what differs.

5. Use the data on IMF voting shares, regional SDR shares, conditionality counts, and USD reserve share to evaluate whether the case shows reform or reproduction.

6. Specify two falsifiers: one that would support "reform" and one that would support "reproduction."

Model answer (continuous prose): The 2021 allocation of $650 billion in Special Drawing Rights is best understood as a liquidity operation conducted through an institution whose governance still reflects the power distribution of 1944 rather than the distribution of contemporary need. SDRs are reserve assets created by the IMF and allocated according to quota shares, which are tied to relative economic size and to bargaining power at Bretton Woods and in subsequent reviews. Consequently, the largest shares accrue to the United States, the euro area, Japan, and China, while African states receive a small fraction despite facing acute foreign-exchange and debt-servicing constraints. The mechanism is not simply market failure; it is institutionalized hierarchy. The IMF can create global liquidity, but the rules of creation allocate voice and resources together, so that the states most able to self-insure receive the largest automatic claims. Rechanneling proposals through the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust and the Resilience and Sustainability Trust do not remove this hierarchy; they relocate it. Rechanneling converts an automatic, quota-based entitlement into a discretionary, donor-influenced flow. African governments and the African Union have argued, consistent with the Ezulwini Consensus and broader demands for UN Security Council and Bretton Woods reform, that liquidity should be allocated by need and that conditionality should not reproduce the structural-adjustment logic of the 1980s and 1990s. From this vantage point, rechanneling is a palliative: it may finance imports or climate adaptation, but it leaves quota shares, voting weights, and the US veto over major decisions intact. The African perspective thus treats the SDR episode as evidence that hegemonic stability without hegemonic reform produces managed dependency. Other perspectives qualify this judgment without refuting it. A Chinese perspective is typically reformist rather than revolutionary: Beijing has sought greater quota share and influence commensurate with its economic weight, supports multilateral liquidity provision, and has used bilateral swap lines and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to diversify channels without dismantling the IMF. A Russian perspective emphasizes dollar hegemony and the weaponization of finance, arguing that SDRs and IMF programs are instruments of Western power; yet this critique often understates the extent to which non-Western states also benefit from dollar liquidity and IMF crisis lending. A Western perspective defends the 2021 allocation as a rapid, large-scale public good provided under US leadership, while acknowledging governance anachronisms; self-critique focuses on delayed quota reform and congressional constraints on US participation. The UN perspective frames the issue through development finance and the SDG financing gap, treating rechanneling as necessary but insufficient because it does not close structural

gaps in concessional finance or debt sustainability. The most useful historical analogue is the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis. In both cases, the IMF appeared as crisis manager under Western leadership, and conditionality became the terrain on which sovereignty and adjustment were contested. The difference is that in 1997 the IMF imposed austerity and structural conditions on affected states, whereas in 2021 the allocation itself was unconditional; conditionality enters only at the rechanneling stage. This difference matters because it shows institutional learning and a partial move away from the Washington Consensus, but it also shows that hierarchy persists in the gatekeeping function. The 1970s New International Economic Order demanded a more fundamental restructuring of trade, finance, and voting power; the SDR debate is narrower, focused on liquidity rather than production or terms of trade. Thus the case is less a replay of NIEO than a technocratic contest over who controls the spigot. At the systemic level, the episode supports the claim that hegemonic stability can outlast relative hegemonic decline through institutional inertia: the dollar remains central, IMF liquidity is dollar-denominated in effect, and US voting power remains decisive. Yet the same episode shows that inertia is not legitimacy. African states, middle powers, and UN agencies increasingly treat quota reform as a condition for institutional credibility. The data pattern is consistent with reproduction: voting shares change slowly, regional SDR shares track quotas rather than need, conditionality counts remain significant in IMF programs, and the dollar's share of reserves, though gradually declining, remains dominant. Evidence of genuine reform would include a quota realignment that raises African and low-income shares, an expansion of unconditional liquidity, and African representation in IMF decision-making beyond advisory roles. Evidence of reproduction would include stalled quota reviews, donor-controlled rechanneling, and continued reliance on conditionality. On current evidence, the 2021-2022 SDR episode is better described as a managed adaptation of hierarchy than as a transformation of it: it expanded liquidity without redistributing power, and it invited contestation without resolving it.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: In 2022-2024, policymakers debated whether to rechannel part of the 2021 $650 billion SDR allocation through the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Trust and Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust to African and other vulnerable states. African governments, the African Union, and civil-society groups argued that quota-based allocation had given them too little liquidity relative to debt and climate needs, and that rechanneling should be large, predictable, and free of structural conditions. Donor governments and IMF management emphasized fiduciary safeguards, debt sustainability, and program conditionality. The debate occurred alongside stalled IMF quota reviews, continued dollar dominance in reserves, and UN warnings about an SDG financing gap. Assess whether this episode represents institutional reform of Bretton Woods hierarchy or its reproduction under new instruments.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

Mechanism: Explain how SDR allocation, quota shares, and rechanneling convert liquidity provision into hierarchical control; specify the causal chain from rule to distributional outcome.

Perspective reconstruction: Steel-man African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN views on whether rechanneling is reform or reproduction.

Historical analogue: Compare with one earlier episode (1997-98 Asian crisis, 1970s NIEO, or 1980s SAPs) and identify one similarity and one difference.

Falsifiers: State one observable development that would falsify "reform" and one that would falsify "reproduction."

(c) Self-check: Does your memo clearly separate description of the SDR debate from explanation of its causes, prediction of likely outcomes, and prescription for institutional change?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

The 2021 $650 billion SDR allocation most clearly illustrates which proposition about hegemonic stability and Bretton Woods institutions?

A. Quota-based liquidity provision automatically corrects global imbalances by directing resources to greatest need.
B. Hegemonic stability can persist through institutional inertia even when the hegemon's relative power declines, because rules and dollar centrality lock in hierarchy.
C. The absence of a hegemon in 2021 caused the IMF to fail to provide any public goods.
D. SDR rechanneling proves that African states now hold decisive influence over IMF governance.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses:

- Option A conflates liquidity provision with need-based redistribution; SDR quotas reflect relative economic and bargaining power, not financing need.
- Option C misreads Kindleberger's hegemonic-stability argument: in 2021 the United States remained the decisive hegemon and the IMF did provide a large liquidity public good.
- Option D overstates reform; rechanneling remains donor-controlled and quota shares, voting weights, and US veto power were not transformed.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — IMF Quota and Voting Shares (post-2016 reform, selected members)

Member	Quota (SDR bn)	Voting share (%)	Rank
United States	82.99	16.52	1
Japan	30.82	6.15	2
China	30.48	6.08	3
Germany	26.63	5.32	4
France	20.14	4.03	5
United Kingdom	20.14	4.03	6
Italy	15.07	3.02	7
India	13.11	2.63	8
Russia	12.93	2.59	9
Brazil	11.02	2.22	10
South Africa	3.05	0.64	24
Nigeria	2.45	0.51	29
Sub-Saharan Africa (all 46 members)	~11.5	~2.3	—

Member	Quota (SDR bn)	Voting share (%)	Rank
European Union (aggregate)	~130	~26	—

Source: IMF, "IMF Members' Quotas and Voting Power, and IMF Board of Governors" (2024). The United States retains an effective veto over amendments requiring an 85% supermajority; no other single member approaches the 15% blocking threshold.

Table 2 — 2021 Special Drawing Rights Allocation of USD 650 billion, by income group

Group	Share of allocation (%)	Approx. amount (USD bn)	Share of global GDP (%)
Advanced economies	58.1	377.6	~42
Emerging market and developing economies (excl. LIDCs)	32.6	212.0	~45
Low-income developing countries (LIDCs)	3.2	20.8	~3
Africa (all)	5.1	33.2	~3
— of which Sub-Saharan Africa	3.6	23.4	~2

Source: IMF (2021) allocation data; ONE Campaign (2021) rechanneling analysis; World Bank GDP shares (2021). The allocation was made in proportion to existing IMF quotas, not to pandemic need or income level.

Table 3 — USD Share of Global Foreign-Exchange Reserves, 1999–2024 (IMF COFER)

Year	USD (%)	EUR (%)	JPY (%)	GBP (%)	CNY (%)	Other (%)
1999	71.0	18.0	6.4	2.9	—	1.7
2005	66.5	24.0	3.8	3.6	—	2.1
2010	61.8	26.0	3.7	4.0	—	4.5
2015	65.7	19.1	3.8	4.7	1.1	5.6
2020	59.0	21.2	5.8	4.7	2.3	7.0
2024	58.4	20.0	5.5	4.9	2.8	8.4

Source: IMF Currency Composition of Official Foreign Exchange Reserves (COFER), quarterly releases, 1999–2024. Percentages are shares of allocated reserves; "Other" includes AUD, CAD, CHF, and smaller currencies.

Table 4 — Average Number of Conditions per IMF Program, by Decade

Period	Avg. conditions per program	Dominant conditionality type
1980–1989	~2.5	Macroeconomic (fiscal, monetary)
1990–1999	~6.5	Structural (privatization, trade liberalization)
2000–2009	~10.5	Deep structural (labor markets, pension reform)
2010–2019	~7.0	Fiscal consolidation + targeted social spending
2020–2023	~5.5	Emergency liquidity + debt sustainability

Source: Kentikelenis, Stubbs, and King (2016), "IMF Conditionality and Development Policy Space, 1985–2014," Review of International Political Economy*; IMF Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) reviews (2014, 2020). Counts reflect legally binding prior actions and performance criteria, not indicative targets.*

Analysis Questions

Q1 (Trend). The COFER series shows the USD share of global reserves falling from roughly 71% in 1999 to roughly 58% in 2024, a decline of about thirteen percentage points over twenty-five years, while the "Other" category (AUD, CAD, CHF, and smaller currencies) rose from 1.7% to 8.4% and the CNY share rose from zero to 2.8%. Does this trend falsify the hegemonic-stability thesis, or does it illustrate a distinction between *structural* hegemony (the dollar's role in invoicing, clearing, and safe-asset provision) and *compositional* hegemony (the share of reserves held in dollars)? Specify the mechanism by which a hegemon can lose reserve share without losing systemic dominance, and identify the threshold or indicator that would genuinely challenge the thesis.

Q2 (Level of analysis). The 2021 SDR allocation can be analyzed at four levels. At the *individual* level, which households and firms in African states gained purchasing power from the roughly USD 33 billion that reached the continent? At the *state* level, how did finance ministries use SDRs to service external debt or finance imports? At the *systemic* level, what does the allocation reveal about the distribution of liquidity creation in the international monetary system? At the *transnational* level, how did private creditors, rating agencies, and the IMF's own surveillance apparatus interact with the allocation? Which level is most analytically productive for explaining why Africa received 5.1% of an allocation justified by pandemic need, and which level is most productive for explaining what would have to change for the next allocation to differ?

Q3 (Perspective reconstruction — all five). Reconstruct how each perspective reads Table 2 (the 2021 SDR allocation). The African perspective must be developed first and at greatest length: how does the Ezulwini Consensus frame the allocation as a reproduction of quota-based hierarchy, and what does it demand instead? The Chinese perspective: does Beijing treat the allocation as a reformist opportunity or a confirmation of dollar dependency? The Russian perspective: how does Moscow read the allocation through the lens of sanctions vulnerability and de-dollarization? The Western perspective: how do US and European officials defend the quota-proportional formula, and what self-critique exists within that camp (Stiglitz, Grabel)? The UN perspective: how does the SDG financing gap frame the allocation as insufficient, and what institutional alternatives does it propose (the Liquidity and Sustainability Facility, the G20 Common Framework)?

Q4 (Interpretation). Table 4 shows average conditionality counts peaking at roughly 10.5 per program in the 2000s and declining to roughly 5.5 in 2020–2023. Two competing interpretations exist. Interpretation A (institutional learning): the IMF genuinely reduced conditionality after the 2008 crisis and the 2010s reviews, shifting toward "ownership" and "streamlining." Interpretation B (modality shift): the *number* of conditions

fell but their *depth* increased, with fiscal consolidation targets and debt-sustainability frameworks replacing structural conditions, and with conditionality migrating from program documents to surveillance reports and debt-sustainability analyses. Adjudicate between these interpretations using the evidence in Table 4 and the canonical sources (Stiglitz 2002; Grabel 2018; Kentikelenis et al. 2016). What observable implication would distinguish them?

Q5 (Limitation). What do these four tables systematically fail to capture about power in the Bretton Woods system? Consider at least three of the following: (a) the informal power of the US Treasury and the New York Fed in dollar swap lines; (b) the role of private credit-rating agencies in determining which states can access SDR rechanneling; (c) the epistemic power of IMF staff in defining "debt sustainability" and "macroeconomic stability"; (d) the absence of African representation in the IMF's executive board decision-making on conditionality design. For each, explain why its omission from the tables matters for the hegemonic-stability thesis.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Bretton Woods Triangle"

What to draw. A large equilateral triangle on a single page, oriented with one vertex at the top. At the top vertex, write "Fixed Exchange Rates (par values, ±1% band)." At the bottom-left vertex, write "Capital Controls (Bretton Woods Agreement, Article VI)." At the bottom-right vertex, write "Dollar-Gold Convertibility (USD 35/oz, US Treasury guarantee)." In the center of the triangle, draw a small circle labeled "US Hegemony (lender of last resort, market of last resort, reserve currency)." Draw three arrows from the center circle to each vertex, labeled respectively "enforces," "permits," and "guarantees." Outside the triangle, on the left side, draw a dashed arrow pointing inward labeled "Kindleberger's public goods (1973)." On the right side, draw a dashed arrow pointing outward labeled "Nixon shock (1971) — vertex removed."

How to label it. Use a bold title at the top: "The Bretton Woods Triangle, 1944–1971." Below the triangle, add a legend: solid lines = institutional commitments; dashed lines = external shocks or theoretical claims. In the bottom margin, write: "The triangle collapses when any vertex is removed; the Nixon shock removed dollar-gold convertibility, leaving floating rates and capital mobility to reconstitute the system around dollar hegemony without gold."

Perspective overlay. Annotate the top vertex in red ink: "African view: fixed rates stabilized import prices but locked in commodity-export dependence." Annotate the bottom-left vertex in blue ink: "Chinese view: capital controls preserved policy space; their removal in the 1990s enabled crisis." Annotate the bottom-right vertex in green ink: "Western view: convertibility anchored expectations; its end was regrettable but necessary." Annotate the center circle in purple ink: "UN view: the center should be multilateral, not unilateral."

Visual 2 — "Kindleberger's Public-Goods Provision (Hub and Spoke)"

What to draw. A central hub circle labeled "Hegemon (United States, 1945–1971)." Four spokes radiate outward to four rectangular boxes. Spoke 1 (top): "Lender of Last Resort — discount window, swap lines, IMF quota." Spoke 2 (right): "Market of Last Resort — countercyclical import demand, Marshall Plan, commodity purchases." Spoke 3 (bottom): "Stable Reserve Currency — dollar-gold, deep Treasury market, convertibility." Spoke 4 (left): "Countercyclical Lending — IBRD, Ex-Im Bank, bilateral aid." Each box

has a small icon: a bank for spoke 1, a shopping cart for spoke 2, a coin for spoke 3, a handshake for spoke 4. Below the hub, draw a dashed circle labeled "Absence of Hegemon (1929–1933)" with a red X through it, and an arrow pointing to a small box labeled "Great Depression — competitive devaluations, tariff wars, liquidity collapse."

How to label it. Title: "Kindleberger (1973): The Hegemon as Public-Goods Provider." Subtitle: "Order requires a single state willing to bear the costs of stability." In the bottom margin, write the causal chain: "No hegemon → no lender of last resort → liquidity collapse → competitive devaluation → trade contraction → depression."

Perspective overlay. Annotate the hub in red ink: "African view: the hegemon's 'public goods' were provided to Europe; Africa received extractive terms." Annotate spoke 2 in blue ink: "Chinese view: market of last resort became a tool of leverage, not stability." Annotate spoke 3 in green ink: "Western view: the dollar's reserve role is a service, not exploitation." Annotate the dashed circle in purple ink: "UN view: multilateral institutions can substitute for a single hegemon."

Visual 3 — "SDR Allocation as Mirror of Quota (Bar Chart Sketch)"

What to draw. A hand-drawn grouped bar chart with five regions on the x-axis: "Advanced Economies," "Emerging Markets (excl. LIDCs)," "Low-Income Developing," "Africa (all)," "Sub-Saharan Africa." For each region, draw two adjacent bars: a taller bar in dark blue labeled "Share of global GDP (%)" and a shorter or taller bar in red labeled "Share of 2021 SDR allocation (%)." The advanced-economies bar pair should show GDP ~42% and SDR ~58%; emerging markets ~45% GDP and ~33% SDR; LIDCs ~3% GDP and ~3% SDR; Africa ~3% GDP and ~5% SDR; Sub-Saharan Africa ~2% GDP and ~3.6% SDR. Draw a horizontal dashed line at 5% labeled "Proportional-to-need benchmark (illustrative)." Add error bars or brackets on the Africa bars labeled "Rechanneling gap: ~USD 30 bn pledged, ~USD 15 bn delivered (2024)."

How to label it. Title: "The 2021 SDR Allocation: Quota Logic vs. Need Logic." X-axis: "Region / income group." Y-axis: "Share (%) of global total." Legend: blue = GDP share; red = SDR share. Below the chart, write: "The allocation reproduced quota weights; advanced economies received ~58% of new liquidity despite ~42% of global GDP, while Africa received ~5% despite ~3% of GDP — a modest pro-poor tilt that rechanneling was meant to correct but has not."

Perspective overlay. Annotate the advanced-economies bars in green ink: "Western view: quota reflects contribution to IMF resources and risk-bearing." Annotate the Africa bars in red ink: "African view: quota reflects colonial-era voting weights, not contemporary need." Annotate the rechanneling gap bracket in blue ink: "Chinese view: rechanneling is a partial fix that leaves the quota structure intact." Annotate the dashed benchmark line in purple ink: "UN view: need-based allocation is the SDG-consistent standard."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue Column (prompts)

Cue	Notes
What is hegemonic stability theory?	Kindleberger (1973): order in the international economy requires a single hegemon willing to provide public goods — lender of last resort, market of last resort, stable reserve currency, countercyclical lending. The Great Depression resulted from the absence of such a hegemon after British decline and before US willingness. Scope condition: the hegemon must internalize the costs of stability; free-riding by others is assumed.
What is the Bretton Woods architecture?	IMF (exchange-rate surveillance, short-term liquidity), IBRD (long-term development lending), fixed par values (±1%), capital controls (Article VI), dollar-gold convertibility at USD 35/oz. Designed at Bretton Woods, NH, July 1944. Premise: avoid 1930s competitive devaluations and beggar-thy-neighbor tariffs.
Gilpin vs. Keohane	Gilpin (1987): hegemonic stability is structural; order decays as hegemon declines; transition periods are conflict-prone. Keohane (1984): institutions persist after hegemony through "after hegemony" — sunk costs, information, and reduced transaction costs create path dependence. Adjudication: institutions persist but lose enforcement capacity; hegemony matters for creation, less for maintenance.
1971 Nixon shock	Suspension of dollar-gold convertibility (August 15, 1971); Smithsonian Agreement (December 1971) attempted realignment; collapse of fixed rates by 1973. Result: floating rates, capital mobility, and dollar hegemony without gold — "exorbitant privilege" (Giscard d'Estaing) plus seigniorage.
NIEO and SAPs	NIEO (1974 UN General Assembly Resolution 3201): demands for commodity price stabilization, technology transfer, debt relief. Rejected by West. SAPs (1980s): IMF/World Bank conditionality — privatization, trade liberalization, fiscal austerity. Critiqued by Stiglitz (2002) and African scholars as undermining development sovereignty.

Cue	Notes
Asian crisis 1997–98	Thailand float (July 1997); contagion to Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia. IMF programs: high interest rates, fiscal austerity, structural conditions. Critique: procyclical policy deepened recession; Malaysia's capital controls (Mahathir) recovered faster. Stiglitz (2002) argues IMF misdiagnosed liquidity crisis as solvency crisis.
2021 SDR allocation	USD 650 bn allocated August 2021, largest in IMF history. Distributed by quota: advanced economies ~58%, Africa ~5%. Rechanneling pledges (~USD 100 bn target, ~USD 50 bn pledged by 2024) partially delivered. African states demand quota reform and need-based allocation (Ezulwini Consensus, 2005).
USD reserve share trend	COFER: 71% (1999) → 58.4% (2024). Decline is gradual, not collapse. Mechanism: diversification into smaller currencies and gold; sanctions (Russia 2022) accelerated de-dollarization rhetoric but not yet practice. Structural dominance (invoicing, clearing, safe assets) persists.
Conditionality counts	Peak ~10.5 conditions/program (2000s); decline to ~5.5 (2020–23). Debate: institutional learning (streamlining) vs. modality shift (fiscal targets replace structural conditions; conditionality migrates to surveillance). Kentikelenis et al. (2016) document persistence of intrusive conditions.
African perspective (primary)	Structural adjustment critique: SAPs undermined state capacity, social services, and industrial policy. Ezulwini Consensus (2005): demands UNSC reform and IMF/World Bank quota reform. Rodney (1972): underdevelopment as active process. Mamdani (1996): state-society relations distorted by colonial and post-colonial conditionality. Bayart (2009): extraversion — African elites leverage external dependence for domestic power.
Chinese perspective	Reformist not revolutionary: seeks greater quota share (achieved 2016), RMB internationalization (SDR basket inclusion 2016), AIIB and NDB as complementary institutions. Does not seek to dismantle Bretton Woods; seeks to rebalance it. Critique: US veto power and dollar weaponization (sanctions).

Cue	Notes
Russian perspective	Critique of dollar hegemony intensified post-2014/2022 sanctions. De-dollarization: bilateral trade in national currencies, gold accumulation, BRICS Pay. View: Bretton Woods institutions are instruments of US geopolitical power, not neutral technocracy.
Western perspective	Institution defense: IMF provides global public goods (liquidity, surveillance, debt sustainability). Self-critique: Stiglitz (2002) on Asian crisis misdiagnosis; Grabel (2018) on institutional resilience and heterogeneity; Eichengreen (1996) on path dependence of dollar. Reform debates: quota adjustment, conditionality streamlining, SDR rechanneling.
UN perspective	Development finance and SDG financing gap (~USD 4 tn/yr). Proposals: Liquidity and Sustainability Facility (LSF), G20 Common Framework for debt treatment, multilateral development bank (MDB) capital increases, need-based SDR allocation. Critique: Bretton Woods institutions are insufficiently responsive to development needs.

Source log. Kindleberger (1973) *The World in Depression*; Keohane (1984) *After Hegemony*; Gilpin (1987) *The Political Economy of International Relations*; Eichengreen (1996) *Globalizing Capital*; Stiglitz (2002) *Globalization and Its Discontents*; Grabel (2018) *When Things Don't Fall Apart*; Kentikelenis et al. (2016) *RIPE*; IMF COFER (2024); IMF quota data (2024).

Summary (3–5 sentences). Hegemonic stability theory holds that international economic order requires a single state willing to provide public goods, a role the United States performed from 1945 to 1971 through the Bretton Woods architecture of fixed rates, capital controls, and dollar-gold convertibility. The 1971 Nixon shock removed the gold anchor but left dollar hegemony intact, reconstituting the system around floating rates and capital mobility. Contestation from the NIEO through SAPs, the 1997 Asian crisis, and BRICS reform demands has challenged the legitimacy of quota-based governance without dismantling it. The 2021 SDR allocation illustrates the tension: it distributed liquidity by quota, sending 58% to advanced economies and 5% to Africa, reproducing hierarchy even in a crisis-response instrument. Whether institutions can persist and reform after hegemony — Keohane's question — remains the central puzzle, with African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives offering incompatible answers.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Imagine a neighborhood where one wealthy family pays for the streetlights, the fire department, and the road repairs, and everyone else free-rides. If that family moves away or goes broke, the streetlights go dark, the fire department disbands, and the roads crumble — unless someone else steps up or the neighbors agree to share costs. That is hegemonic stability theory: the international economy needs one big country willing to pay for stability, and when no one does, you get the 1930s. The Bretton Woods system was the United States paying for those streetlights from 1944 to 1971, with fixed exchange rates, capital controls, and dollars convertible to gold. When the US stopped converting dollars to gold in 1971, the streetlights did not go dark — the dollar stayed dominant — but the rules changed: rates floated, money moved freely, and the system became more fragile. Today, the IMF is the fire department, but its budget and voting rules reflect who paid for it in 1944, not who needs it now. African states receive 5% of new emergency money despite being 3% of the economy, while rich countries receive 58%. The question is whether the fire department can be reformed without the wealthy family agreeing to give up its veto.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. Three gaps in the Step 1 explanation: (a) It does not explain *why* the dollar remained dominant after 1971 — the mechanism of network externalities, deep Treasury markets, and the absence of a credible alternative is asserted but not developed. (b) It treats the IMF as a single actor ("the fire department") and obscures the distinction between the IMF's liquidity function, its surveillance function, and its conditionality function, which operate through different mechanisms and are contested differently. (c) It does not specify the scope condition for Keohane's "after hegemony" argument — institutions persist only where sunk costs are high and information asymmetries favor incumbents; this is not automatic.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading Kindleberger (1973), the public-goods claim is specifically about the *1929–1933* period and the absence of a hegemon willing to act as lender of last resort; it is not a universal claim about all international order. Re-reading Keohane (1984), the persistence argument depends on *regime theory* — institutions reduce transaction costs and provide information — and is explicitly conditional on the absence of a hegemonic challenger. Re-reading Stiglitz (2002), the critique is not that the IMF is unnecessary but that its conditionality was *procyclical* and its diagnosis of the Asian crisis was *wrong* — a mechanism-level critique, not an abolitionist one. Re-reading Grabel (2018), the argument is that institutional change is *heterogeneous and incremental*, not revolutionary, which complicates both the "reform" and "reproduction" narratives. The gaps identified in Step 2 are partially addressed: network externalities are in Eichengreen (1996); the three IMF functions are distinguished in the IMF's own Articles of Agreement and IEO reviews; Keohane's scope conditions are in Chapter 6 of *After Hegemony*.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. The neighborhood/streetlight analogy captures the *cost-bearing* logic of hegemonic stability and the *free-rider problem*, and it makes the distributional question intuitive (who pays, who benefits). Its limits are three. First, streetlights are a pure public good with non-excludability; the dollar's reserve role is an *impure* public good — the US extracts seigniorage and sanctions leverage, so the "hegemon" is not purely altruistic. Second, neighborhoods have no equivalent of *path dependence*: once the dollar is entrenched in invoicing and clearing, switching costs are enormous, which is why the hegemon can decline in share without losing dominance. Third, the analogy implies a single wealthy family; the actual system has *multiple* centers of financial power (EU, China, Japan) that cooperate and compete, so the "absence of hegemon" scenario is not the only alternative to US dominance — multipolarity is.

Step 5 — Rewrite. Hegemonic stability theory argues that international economic order requires a single state willing to bear the costs of providing public goods — liquidity, market access, a stable reserve currency — because these goods are non-excludable and subject to free-riding. The United States performed

this role from 1945 to 1971 through the Bretton Woods system: fixed exchange rates, capital controls, and dollar-gold convertibility at USD 35 per ounce. The 1971 Nixon shock ended convertibility but not dollar dominance; the system reconstituted itself around floating rates, capital mobility, and the dollar's network externalities in invoicing, clearing, and safe-asset markets. Whether order can persist after hegemony is contested: Keohane argues institutions create path dependence that outlives the hegemon, while Gilpin argues order decays without a dominant power. Contestation has been continuous — from the NIEO's demands for commodity stabilization in 1974, through structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, the 1997 Asian crisis and its procyclical IMF conditionality, to BRICS demands for quota reform today. The 2021 SDR allocation of USD 650 billion illustrates the unresolved tension: distributed by quota, it sent 58% to advanced economies and 5% to Africa, reproducing the hierarchy it was meant to relieve. The African perspective, drawing on Rodney, Mamdani, and the Ezulwini Consensus, reads this not as a technical formula but as a structural feature of a system designed by and for the hegemon; the Chinese perspective seeks reform within the system; the Russian perspective seeks exit from dollar dependence; the Western perspective defends the institutions while acknowledging failures; the UN perspective demands need-based allocation to close the SDG financing gap. The central puzzle for the student is whether hegemony is a *condition* for order or a *phase* in its evolution — and whether the answer depends on which of the five perspectives one adopts.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L16	definition	What is hegemonic stability theory?	Hegemonic stability theory argues that a stable international economic order requires a single dominant state willing and able to supply public goods—liquidity, open markets, a stable currency, and crisis lending. Kindleberger applied it to the Great Depression; Gilpin and Keohane later formalized and debated its scope.	Western institutionalists read hegemony as functional; African critics read it as a license for asymmetric power.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L16	mechanism	What was Kindleberger's "lender of last resort" mechanism?	Kindleberger argued that the 1929–1939 collapse occurred because no hegemon provided countercyclical liquidity, stabilized exchange rates, or kept markets open; the absence of a hegemonic stabilizer turned a recession into a depression. The mechanism is supply of public goods, not mere dominance.	The mechanism is Western in origin but its absence is felt most acutely by peripheral economies.
L16	application	What were the four pillars of the Bretton Woods architecture?	The Bretton Woods system combined (1) the IMF for balance-of-payments financing, (2) the IBRD/World Bank for reconstruction and development, (3) fixed but adjustable exchange rates pegged to the dollar-gold standard, and (4) capital controls to preserve domestic policy space.	African states joined later and inherited rules they did not write.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L16	comparison	How do Gilpin and Keohane differ on order after hegemony?	Gilpin (1987) treats hegemonic decline as likely to unravel order because public goods provision erodes; Keohane (1984) argues institutions can persist after hegemony by reducing transaction costs and locking in cooperation. The debate is over whether institutions substitute for or depend on power.	African scholars side with Gilpin's power realism but add that institutions also discipline the weak.
L16	source	What is Eichengreen's (1996) core claim about the gold standard?	Eichengreen argues the interwar gold standard transmitted shocks and constrained macroeconomic adjustment, and that Bretton Woods improved on it by allowing capital controls and adjustable pegs—though the dollar-gold link recreated vulnerabilities.	His institutional history is Western; African readers stress who bore adjustment costs.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L16	debate	What was the New International Economic Order (NIEO)?	The NIEO was a 1970s UN General Assembly agenda (Resolution 3201) demanding commodity price stabilization, technology transfer, and sovereign control over resources; it was blocked by Western states and the oil shocks.	The NIEO is the African/Global South's most systematic reform blueprint.
L16	reconstruction	How do African scholars read structural adjustment programs (SAPs)?	African critics (e.g., Mkandawire, Adedeji) argue SAPs imposed procyclical austerity, shrank state capacity, and prioritized creditor repayment over development, reproducing colonial extraction under technocratic guise.	This is the African vantage point: conditionality as sovereignty erosion.
L16	occlusion	What does the Western "institution defense" occlude?	Western defenders of the IMF/World Bank stress crisis prevention and global public goods but often occlude the distributional asymmetry of conditionality, the democratic deficit in voting shares, and the procyclical bias of programs.	Occlusion is structural, not merely rhetorical.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L16	adjudication	What did the 1997–98 Asian crisis reveal about IMF conditionality?	The crisis showed that IMF programs could deepen recessions by demanding fiscal tightening and high interest rates; Stiglitz (2002) argued the Fund misdiagnosed liquidity crises as solvency crises. Evidence is mixed: some programs stabilized, others prolonged pain.	African states watched closely, seeing parallels to their own SAP experience.
L16	visual	What trend does the USD share of global reserves (1999–2024) show?	The dollar's share fell from roughly 70% in 1999 to about 58% by 2024, indicating gradual diversification without displacement; euro and gold gained modestly.	Decline is real but slow; African reserves remain dollar-dependent.
L16	definition	What are Special Drawing Rights (SDRs)?	SDRs are an IMF reserve asset allocated to members in proportion to quota; they can be exchanged for hard currency and were massively issued in 2020 ($650bn) to ease pandemic liquidity.	Allocation by quota reproduces hierarchy; rechanneling debates target this.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit (score 0–100)

Topic	Confidence (0–100)	Basis for rating	Next step
Kindleberger's hegemonic-stability mechanism	0–100	Can I state the public-goods logic without notes?	Re-read Kindleberger 1973 ch. 1–3
Bretton Woods institutional design	0–100	Do I know the four pillars and their trade-offs?	Review Eichengreen 1996
Gilpin vs. Keohane debate	0–100	Can I adjudicate persistence-after-hegemony?	Compare primary texts
1971 Nixon shock and floating rates	0–100	Can I explain the Triffin dilemma?	Add to error log if weak
Contestation (NIEO, SAPs, BRICS)	0–100	Can I sequence reforms and counter-reforms?	Timeline drill
African structural-adjustment critique	0–100	Can I name African scholars and mechanisms?	Read Mkandawire
Chinese/Russian/Western/UN positions	0–100	Can I steel-man each in 3 sentences?	Perspective drill
1997 Asian crisis and IMF conditionality	0–100	Can I distinguish liquidity vs. solvency?	Stiglitz 2002
2020–22 SDR allocation and rechanneling	0–100	Do I know quota shares and rechanneling options?	Data lab review
USD reserve share trend 1999–2024	0–100	Can I state levels and drivers?	COFER data check

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which concept did you most overestimate your confidence in, and what evidence would change your rating?
2. Which perspective (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) did you find hardest to steel-man from within, and why?
3. What is one falsifier that would make you abandon hegemonic stability theory entirely?

7.3 Error-log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Hegemonic stability theory says any dominant power keeps order."	It requires a hegemon willing to supply public goods, not merely dominance; a predatory hegemon can destabilize.	Kindleberger (1973); Gilpin (1987)

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Bretton Woods collapsed because of US weakness alone."	Collapse involved the Triffin dilemma, Vietnam-era deficits, and European/Japanese recovery; Nixon's 1971 suspension was a policy choice, not inevitability.	Eichengreen (1996)
"The IMF always imposes identical conditionality."	Programs vary by country and era; post-2008 and COVID-era lending relaxed some conditions, though procyclical bias persists.	Grabel (2018); Stiglitz (2002)
"SDR allocations are needs-based."	Allocations follow quota shares, so high-income countries receive the largest shares; rechanneling is the contested remedy.	IMF quota data; African Union statements
"The dollar's decline is imminent."	Reserve share fell gradually (~70% to ~58%, 1999–2024); no alternative currency has displaced it.	IMF COFER data
"African states uniformly reject the IMF."	Positions range from Ezulwini Consensus reform demands to pragmatic borrowing; critique targets hierarchy, not cooperation per se.	African Union; Mkandawire

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Hegemonic stability; public goods; Bretton Woods; fixed rates; capital controls; dollar-gold; SDRs; conditionality; NIEO; SAPs; Triffin dilemma	Hegemon supplies liquidity/open markets; IMF leverage via financing; quota-based allocation; conditionality shapes domestic policy; capital controls preserve autonomy	Kindleberger (1973); Gilpin (1987); Keohane (1984); Eichengreen (1996); Stiglitz (2002); Grabel (2018)	Great Depression; Bretton Woods 1944; Nixon shock 1971; NIEO 1974; SAPs 1980s; Asian crisis 1997; SDR $650bn 2020–22; USD reserves 1999–2024	Order requires hegemon vs. institutions persist after hegemony; reform vs. revolution; conditionality as stabilization vs. sovereignty erosion	A multipolar order with stable public goods without a hegemon; IMF programs that are consistently countercyclical; SDR reallocation by need	L6 institutionalism; L15 state-market paradigms; L18 weaponized interdependence; L38 sanctions; L49 revisionism

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (same day, 20 min):** Re-read the five key ideas and recite the Bretton Woods four pillars from memory; check against the lesson.
- **R2 (24 hours, 30 min):** Redo the Data Lab tables from memory (IMF voting shares, SDR allocations, USD reserve share); compare to source.
- **R3 (1 week, 45 min):** Write a one-page adjudication of Gilpin vs. Keohane using the 1997 Asian crisis as evidence; include one African perspective sentence.
- **R4 (2 weeks, 60 min):** Complete the Independent Memo prompt on SDR rechanneling; have a peer or rubric check the four headings.
- **R5 (1 month, 90 min):** Full timed reconstruction: explain the lesson's central puzzle to a non-specialist, then answer the hinge question and two flashcard decks cold.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can state hegemonic stability theory and its public-goods mechanism.
☐ I can list the four pillars of Bretton Woods and their trade-offs.
☐ I can explain the Triffin dilemma and the 1971 Nixon shock.
☐ I can contrast Gilpin's and Keohane's positions on order after hegemony.
☐ I can sequence NIEO, SAPs, Asian crisis, and BRICS demands.
☐ I can reconstruct the African critique of SAPs with named scholars.
☐ I can steel-man Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
☐ I can explain IMF conditionality as a mechanism, not just an outcome.
☐ I can interpret the USD reserve-share trend 1999–2024.
☐ I can explain SDR allocation by quota and the rechanneling debate.

☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to the 1997 Asian crisis.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in a memo.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit honestly.
☐ I have logged at least three errors in the error-log.
☐ I have scheduled R1–R5 in my calendar.
☐ I can answer the hinge question and diagnose each distractor.
☐ I can draw the three visuals from memory with labels.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- **Hegemonic stability:** Kindleberger, C. P. (1973) *The World in Depression, 1929–1939*; Gilpin, R. (1987) *The Political Economy of International Relations*; Keohane, R. O. (1984) *After Hegemony*.
- **Bretton Woods architecture:** Eichengreen, B. (1996) *Globalizing Capital: A History of the International Monetary System*.
- **Crisis and conditionality:** Stiglitz, J. E. (2002) *Globalization and Its Discontents*; Grabel, I. (2018) *When Things Don't Fall Apart*.
- **African perspectives:** Nkrumah, K. (1965) *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*; Rodney, W. (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; Mkandawire, T. (2001) "Thinking about Developmental States in Africa."
- **Reform and contestation:** Mamdani, M. (1996) *Citizen and Subject*; Bayart, J.-F. (2009) *The State in Africa*.

End of Lesson 16. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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18. World-Systems and Dependency: Structural Political Economy of Hierarchy

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 17: World-Systems and Dependency: Structural Political Economy of Hierarchy
Module	Module 3: International Political Economy and Geoeconomics
Prerequisites	L8 (Marxism, dependency), L10 (imperialism), L15 (state-market paradigms)
Interleaved links	Forward to L19 (minerals), L27-29 (African political economy), L33 (critical minerals), L51 (climate)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, tables, diagrams, flashcards, worked example, problem pair, data lab
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create (Bloom Levels 5-6)

Field	Value
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple and profoundly unsettling: why does the global economy reproduce hierarchy rather than dissolve it? Why, after six decades of decolonization, hundreds of billions of dollars in aid, repeated rounds of debt relief, and the most ambitious trade-liberalization agenda in history, does the Democratic Republic of Congo capture roughly three to five percent of the final value of the cobalt that powers the world's electric vehicles, while the same continent that holds the majority of the world's critical minerals remains the poorest region on earth by almost every aggregate measure? Mainstream development economics tends to answer this question in the language of stages, policies, and institutions: countries are poor because they have not yet accumulated enough capital, reformed enough markets, or built enough state capacity. World-systems analysis and dependency theory answer it differently. They argue that poverty and wealth are not sequential stages of a single ladder but simultaneous products of a single, hierarchically structured capitalist world-economy. Underdevelopment, on this view, is not the absence of development; it is the *development of underdevelopment*—a relational outcome produced by the same processes that produce development elsewhere. This lesson exists to teach you to hold both answers in tension, to specify the mechanisms that distinguish them, and to adjudicate between them on evidence rather than on theoretical allegiance.

The lesson sits at a precise point in the curriculum. Prerequisites L8 (Marxism, dependency), L10 (imperialism), and L15 (state-market paradigms) have already equipped you with the theoretical vocabulary of surplus extraction, core-periphery relations, and the debate between market-led and state-led development. What this lesson adds is the *structural* layer: the claim that these relations are not merely national or bilateral but systemic, organized through a single division of labor that assigns different zones of the world economy different functions—core zones specialize in high-value, capital-intensive, technologically complex production; peripheries specialize in raw-material extraction and low-wage labor; semi-peripheries occupy an intermediate position that both stabilizes the system and offers a mobility path that is, in practice, rarely traversed. You will learn to read the global economy not as a collection of national economies trading with one another but as one economy with an internal geography of hierarchy. That reframing is the single most consequential intellectual move in the lesson, and everything else—Arrighi's hegemonic cycles, Nkrumah's neo-colonialism, global value-chain analysis, the Prebisch-Singer terms-of-trade deterioration, the measurement of illicit financial flows—hangs from it.

The African perspective is the primary lens through which this lesson is constructed, and this is not a regional courtesy. It is an epistemic choice. The African vantage point reveals something that the Western mainstream, the Chinese official narrative, the Russian multipolarity discourse, and even the UN's financing-for-development framework systematically occlude: that the question "why is Africa poor?" is wrongly posed. The better question, posed by Rodney, Amin, and Nkrumah from within the African experience, is "how has Africa been made poor, and by whom, and through what mechanisms, and with what continuities from colonial to post-colonial periods?" This shift from a deficit framing to a relational, historical, and structural framing is what the African perspective contributes and what the other four perspectives, each in its own way, struggle to accommodate. The Chinese perspective sees opportunity and partnership; the Russian

sees multipolarity and Western hypocrisy; the Western mainstream sees policy failure and market distortion; the UN sees financing gaps and sustainable-development shortfalls. All four are real and partial. None of them, without the African structural critique, can explain why the same patterns of extraction recur across radically different policy regimes, political systems, and historical periods.

You will be asked to master five key ideas in sequence, each with its own causal claim, mechanism, scope conditions, observable implications, and perspective reconstruction. First, Wallerstein's world-systems: the core, semi-periphery, and periphery as a single division of labor. Second, Arrighi's hegemonic cycles: the rise and decline of hegemons through production, finance, and military power. Third, African dependency: Frank, Rodney, Amin, and Nkrumah on the development of underdevelopment and neo-colonialism. Fourth, contemporary value-chain analysis: global value chains, lead firms, and the distribution of gains. Fifth, empirical measurement: the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis, terms of trade, capital flight, debt distress, and illicit financial flows. These five ideas are not a list; they are a chain. World-systems provides the architecture; hegemonic cycles provide the temporal dynamics; African dependency provides the regional application and the normative core; value-chain analysis provides the contemporary micro-mechanism; empirical measurement provides the evidentiary test. By the end of the lesson you should be able to move fluently between these levels, from the systemic to the firm-level to the statistical, without losing the thread of the structural argument.

The worked example— the 1980s-1990s African debt crisis and the subsequent HIPC and MDRI debt-relief initiatives—will require you to apply dependency theory to a concrete historical episode and to adjudicate between competing explanations: was the crisis caused by African mismanagement and oil shocks (the mainstream view), by the structural position of African economies in a declining hegemonic cycle (the dependency view), or by the interaction of both? The problem pair— the DRC cobalt value chain—will require you to explain, using world-systems logic, why a country holding the majority of global cobalt reserves captures a tiny fraction of final value, and to identify what would have to change for that share to rise. The data lab will give you the numbers: value capture by stage in the cobalt supply chain, Africa's share of global manufacturing value added, and UNCTAD's estimates of illicit financial flows. You will be expected to read these numbers not as neutral facts but as evidence in a theoretical dispute, and to specify what each number can and cannot adjudicate.

What you will be able to do after mastering this lesson is substantial and assessable. You will be able to define and deploy the core concepts of world-systems and dependency theory with precision, including their scope conditions and their strongest counterarguments. You will be able to reconstruct five distinct perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on the structural political economy of hierarchy, steel-manning each from within and identifying what each reveals and what each occludes. You will be able to apply the framework to cases, distinguishing description from explanation, prediction from prescription. You will be able to identify falsifiers: what evidence would weaken or refute the structural claim. And you will be able to write a policy memo that moves between levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, transnational—without conflating them. The lesson is demanding because the subject is demanding. Structural political economy is not a theory that can be memorized; it is a way of seeing that must be practiced. The exercises, the worked example, the problem pair, and the independent memo are designed to force that practice.

One methodological caution before you begin. The theories in this lesson are contested, and they should be. Wallerstein's world-systems has been criticized for economic determinism, for underestimating the agency of peripheral states, and for treating the system as more coherent than it is. Dependency theory has been

criticized for predicting permanent stagnation in the face of the East Asian developmental success. Arrighi's hegemonic cycles have been criticized for periodization disputes and for the difficulty of identifying hegemonic transitions in real time. Value-chain analysis has been criticized for focusing on firm-level governance while neglecting state power and labor. The empirical measures—Prebisch-Singer, capital flight estimates, IFF estimates—are methodologically contested and politically charged. Your task is not to choose a side but to understand the structure of the disagreement: what each theory can explain, what it cannot, what evidence would move the debate, and what normative commitments are embedded in each. That is the standard of mastery this lesson sets, and it is the standard against which your memo, your problem-pair answer, and your hinge-question response will be assessed.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer each question from memory before reading the lesson core. These draw on Lessons 8, 10, and 15.

1. **Dependency theory's core claim.** In one or two sentences, state the central claim of dependency theory about the relationship between developed and underdeveloped countries. What is the mechanism by which wealth in one zone is said to produce poverty in another?

2. **Imperialism.** How did Lenin define imperialism, and what were its five features? Which of those features, if any, do you think still operate in the contemporary global economy, and in what modified form?

3. **State-market paradigms.** Contrast the Washington Consensus and the developmental-state paradigm on the role of the state in industrialization. Give one historical example of each.

4. **Prebisch-Singer.** State the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis in your own words. What is the predicted long-run trend in the terms of trade of primary-commodity exporters relative to manufactured-goods exporters, and what is the proposed mechanism?

5. **Surplus value and extraction.** In Marxist terms, how is surplus value generated, and how does the concept of "unequal exchange" extend this logic to international trade between countries with different wage levels?

6. **Neo-colonialism.** According to Nkrumah, what is neo-colonialism, and how does it differ from formal colonialism? What instruments does it use to maintain control after political independence?

1.2 Orientation Questions

These questions frame the puzzle of this lesson. Do not look up answers; use them to set your expectations.

1. The DRC holds roughly 70 percent of global cobalt reserves and produces the majority of world supply, yet captures an estimated 3-5 percent of final battery value. Is this best explained as a market failure that better policy could fix, or as a structural feature of the global division of labor that policy alone cannot fix? What evidence would distinguish the two?

2. World-systems theory posits that countries can move from periphery to semi-periphery but rarely to

core. Is this a falsifiable empirical claim or a definitional tautology? What would count as evidence of genuine upward mobility within the system?

3. Arrighi argues that hegemonic decline is marked by a shift from production to finance. Does the current period—marked by US financialization, Chinese manufacturing dominance, and rising debt—fit this pattern, or does it require a modified framework?
4. If dependency theory predicts persistent underdevelopment for peripheral economies, how does it account for the rapid growth of several East and Southeast Asian economies? Is this a refutation, a scope condition, or a case of semi-peripheral mobility?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Provisional definitions to be refined during the lesson. Each term will be developed with theoretical lineage, mechanism, and scope conditions in the core.

- **World-system / world-economy:** A single, integrated capitalist economy spanning the globe, with an internal division of labor among core, semi-periphery, and periphery zones. Not a collection of national economies but one economy with a geography of hierarchy. (Wallerstein)
- **Core, semi-periphery, periphery:** The three structural zones of the world-economy. Core zones specialize in high-value, capital-intensive, technologically complex production and capture disproportionate surplus. Peripheries specialize in raw-material extraction and low-wage labor. Semi-peripheries occupy an intermediate position, both stabilizing the system and offering a rare mobility path.
- **Global division of labor:** The assignment of different production functions to different zones of the world-economy, such that the wealth of core zones and the poverty of peripheral zones are produced simultaneously by the same processes.
- **Hegemonic cycle:** The rise, dominance, and decline of a hegemonic power, marked by shifts among production, finance, and military power. Hegemons stabilize the world-system during their rise and generate systemic crisis during their decline. (Arrighi)
- **Development of underdevelopment:** The thesis that underdevelopment is not a pre-capitalist residue or a stage preceding development but a product of the same capitalist processes that produce development elsewhere. (Frank, Rodney)
- **Neo-colonialism:** The continuation of colonial-era economic control after political independence, exercised through multinational corporations, aid conditionality, debt, and trade structures rather than through direct political rule. (Nkrumah)
- **Global value chain (GVC):** The full range of activities required to bring a product from conception to end use, distributed across multiple firms and countries, with value capture concentrated at certain stages (design, branding, finance) and thin at others (extraction, assembly). (Gereffi)
- **Lead firm:** The firm that governs a global value chain, typically through control of intangible assets—brand, technology, standards, finance—rather than through ownership of production facilities. Lead firms capture disproportionate value relative to their share of physical production.
- **Terms of trade:** The ratio of export prices to import prices. A deterioration means a country must ex-

port more to import the same quantity. The Prebisch-Singer hypothesis predicts long-run deterioration for primary-commodity exporters.

- **Prebisch-Singer hypothesis:** The claim that the terms of trade of primary-commodity exporters deteriorate over the long run relative to manufactured-goods exporters, due to differences in income elasticity of demand and in market structure (competitive primary markets vs. oligopolistic manufacturing).
- **Illicit financial flows (IFFs):** Money illegally earned, transferred, or utilized across borders, including trade misinvoicing, tax evasion, and corruption proceeds. UNCTAD estimates these flows from Africa at tens of billions of dollars annually, exceeding aid and FDI inflows.
- **Capital flight:** The rapid outflow of financial assets from a country, often driven by political risk, macroeconomic instability, or the search for higher returns and secrecy. In the African context, capital flight is frequently linked to debt-fueled accumulation by elites and to the recycling of borrowed funds offshore.

End of requested chunk. Sections 2 onward follow in subsequent lessons.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the structural logic of Wallerstein's world-systems theory, identifying how the core-semi-periphery-periphery division of labor produces and reproduces global inequality through unequal exchange, surplus transfer, and the interstate system's role in maintaining differential state strength, drawing on Wallerstein's four volumes of *The Modern World-System* (1974, 1980, 1989, 2011) and his synthetic *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (2004).
2. **Evaluate** the scope conditions under which world-systems theory explains observed patterns of specialization, terms of trade, and capital flows, and identify the cases—such as East Asian industrialization, resource-rich African states, and semi-peripheral mobility—where its predictions require modification or where agency-based and institutional explanations supplement structural ones.
3. **Apply** the world-systems framework to the African debt crisis of the 1980s–1990s and to contemporary cobalt value chains, distinguishing structural explanation from policy prescription and identifying the falsifiers that would weaken the theory's claims about persistent underdevelopment.
4. **Compare** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives reconstruct the same world-systems claims, identifying what each tradition contributes, what it occludes, and how each perspective's normative commitments shape its reading of global hierarchy and the possibility of restructuring it.
5. **Synthesize** world-systems theory with dependency theory (Frank, Rodney, Amin, Nkrumah), Arrighi's hegemonic-cycle analysis, and global value-chain scholarship (Gereffi, Humphrey, Sturgeon)

to produce a multi-level, mechanism-based explanation of persistent underdevelopment that can be tested against empirical measures of value capture, capital flight, illicit financial flows, and debt distress.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Wallerstein's World-Systems: Core, Semi-Periphery, Periphery as Single Division of Labor

Bolded Causal Claim: The modern world-system is a single, integrated capitalist division of labor in which core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral zones are structurally differentiated by the type of production they perform and the surplus they capture; this differentiation is not a transitional stage of development but a permanent, constitutive feature of the system, so that peripheral "underdevelopment" is produced by the system's normal operation rather than by its absence or by internal failures of peripheral societies.

Mechanism: Wallerstein's world-systems analysis, developed across four volumes of *The Modern World-System* (1974, 1980, 1989, 2011) and synthesized in *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (2004), posits that the capitalist world-economy emerged in the sixteenth century as a single, integrated system of production and exchange spanning the globe. The mechanism operates through several interconnected channels. First, an axial division of labor assigns different types of production to different zones: core zones specialize in high-skill, capital-intensive, high-profit activities such as manufacturing, finance, and advanced services; peripheral zones specialize in low-skill, labor-intensive, low-profit activities such as primary commodity extraction and agriculture; and semi-peripheral zones occupy an intermediate position, combining some core-like and some peripheral-like activities. Second, surplus is transferred from periphery to core through unequal exchange: because peripheral production is labor-intensive and core production is capital-intensive, and because labor is cheaper in the periphery while capital is more expensive in the core, the terms of trade systematically favor the core. Third, the interstate system reinforces this division: core states are strong—able to protect their capitalists, project power, and shape rules—while peripheral states are weak, dependent on external capital, subject to intervention, and unable to protect domestic producers. The semi-periphery mediates: it prevents the polarization of the system into two camps, absorbs upward and downward mobility, and provides a political buffer. Fourth, the system is driven by the endless accumulation of capital as its defining logic, and states exist within it as instruments of accumulation rather than as autonomous actors. The system expands geographically and intensifies through cyclical rhythms (Kondratieff waves of roughly fifty years) and secular trends (the long-term rise and decline of hegemonic powers, the proletarianization of labor, the commodification of everything). The key theoretical move is that "development" and "underdevelopment" are not separate processes but two sides of the same coin: the development of the core is the underdevelopment of the periphery, and both are produced by the same system. This builds on and systematizes earlier dependency arguments—Frank's "development of underdevelopment" (1967), Rodney's historical account of how Europe underdeveloped Africa (1972), and Amin's theory of unequal development (1976)—while adding the interstate system and the semi-periphery as analytical categories that earlier dependency theory lacked.

Scope Conditions: World-systems theory applies under specific conditions that must be stated explicitly. It applies to the capitalist world-economy from roughly the sixteenth century to the present, not to pre-capitalist world-empires, which Wallerstein distinguishes as politically unified rather than economically integrated across state boundaries. It requires a single, integrated division of labor across multiple states, with capital mobility but labor immobility or at least differential labor costs. It assumes that states are the primary political units and that the interstate system is constitutive of the world-economy. It works best for explaining long-

run structural patterns—specialization, terms of trade, capital flows—rather than short-term policy outcomes or individual state trajectories. The theory's scope is limited in several ways. It may overstate the coherence and stability of the system: the boundaries between core, semi-periphery, and periphery are fuzzy and shift over time, and South Korea's rise from periphery to semi-periphery to near-core status is a case in point. It may understate the agency of peripheral states and social movements: Nkrumah's neo-colonialism critique and Rodney's underdevelopment thesis both emphasize external domination, but later African scholarship—Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) and Bayart's *The State in Africa* (1993)—has shown how internal political dynamics and the "politics of the belly" complicate structural determinism. It may also understate the role of non-economic factors such as race, gender, and culture in shaping the division of labor, though Wallerstein incorporated some of these in later work. Finally, the theory's predictive power is limited: it predicts persistent inequality but not the specific timing or form of crises, and it has been criticized for being unfalsifiable in its stronger versions.

Observable Implications: If world-systems theory holds, several empirical patterns should be observable. (1) Persistent terms-of-trade deterioration for primary-commodity exporters relative to manufactured-goods exporters, consistent with the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis that Wallerstein incorporates. (2) Concentration of high-value manufacturing and services in core zones, with peripheral zones locked into primary extraction and low-value assembly. (3) Capital flight from periphery to core, as surplus generated in the periphery is repatriated or invested in core financial centers. (4) Debt dependency: peripheral states borrow from core financial institutions to finance development, creating structural dependency. (5) Semi-peripheral industrialization that raises incomes but does not fully close the gap with the core, and that often reproduces peripheral-like conditions internally, such as informal labor and environmental degradation. (6) The persistence of the division of labor despite formal decolonization: political independence does not equal economic independence, as Nkrumah argued in *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). (7) Cyclical crises (Kondratieff downturns) that hit the periphery hardest and trigger restructuring that reinforces core dominance. These implications are testable against data on value capture by stage in supply chains, Africa's share of global manufacturing value added, illicit financial flows, and debt distress indicators.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African scholarship has both drawn on and fundamentally challenged world-systems theory, and the African vantage point reveals dimensions that the other four perspectives miss. From within the African experience, the theory's central insight—that global inequality is structurally produced rather than the result of internal failure—resonates powerfully with the lived experience of colonial extraction and neo-colonial dependency. Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) argued that political independence masked continued economic domination, a claim that world-systems theory formalizes into a systemic framework. Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) provided the empirical and historical grounding: the development of Europe was the underdevelopment of Africa, through the slave trade, colonial extraction, and the destruction of African productive capacity. Amin's *Unequal Development* (1976) and *Accumulation on a World Scale* (1974) extended the analysis to the contemporary period, arguing that peripheral capitalism is structurally incapable of autonomous development. Yet African scholars have also pushed back against the determinism that world-systems theory can imply. Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) showed that the colonial state's bifurcated power—direct rule in urban areas, indirect rule in rural areas—created internal hierarchies that world-systems theory's focus on external domination tends to obscure. Bayart's *The State in Africa* (1993) argued that African states are not merely weak instruments of external capital but have their own logics of power, including the "politics of the belly" and extraversion (using external resources for internal political purposes). More recently, African scholars and policymakers

have emphasized resource sovereignty and regional integration: the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and initiatives like the DRC-Zambia battery value chain project represent attempts to restructure the division of labor from within rather than merely resist it from without. The African perspective thus both validates world-systems theory's structural critique—confirming that peripheral underdevelopment is systemically produced—and insists on African agency, internal political dynamics, and the possibility of restructuring the system through collective action and regional integration. What the African vantage point reveals that the other four miss is the lived experience of extraversion: the way African elites have historically used external dependency as a resource for internal power, complicating any simple core-versus-periphery narrative.

Chinese: Chinese scholarship on world-systems theory has evolved significantly across political eras. In the Maoist period, world-systems-like ideas circulated through the "three worlds" theory, which positioned China as part of the Third World alongside Africa and Latin America, sharing a common experience of imperialism and underdevelopment. Post-1978 reform-era scholarship has been more ambivalent. Official Chinese discourse emphasizes "win-win" cooperation and mutual benefit, positioning China as a partner rather than a dominant core power, and rejecting the label of neo-colonialism in Africa. Academic Chinese scholars, however, have engaged more critically: some have applied world-systems categories to China's own rise, debating whether China is becoming a core power or remains semi-peripheral, and whether its engagement with Africa reproduces or disrupts the core-periphery division of labor. Chinese scholars have also critiqued Western-centric IPE for ignoring China's distinctive development path and for assuming that all late developers must follow the same trajectory. The Chinese perspective thus contributes a challenge to the binary core-periphery framework by introducing a rising power that does not fit neatly into either category, while its official narrative occludes the power asymmetries in China-Africa economic relations.

Russian: Russian scholarship on world-systems theory draws on a long tradition of Marxist and dependency-influenced thought, from Lenin's imperialism theory to contemporary multipolarity discourse. Russian scholars have generally been sympathetic to world-systems analysis as a critique of Western dominance, and have used it to frame Russia's own position in the global hierarchy—often as a semi-peripheral or rising power challenging unipolar US hegemony. The contemporary Russian perspective emphasizes multipolarity: the idea that the world-system is transitioning from US unipolarity to a multipolar order in which Russia, China, and other powers share influence. This perspective contributes a geopolitical reading of world-systems theory, highlighting military power and great-power competition as dimensions that Wallerstein's economic focus sometimes underweights. However, it occludes the internal dynamics of Russian capitalism and the ways in which Russian engagement with Africa and other peripheral regions may reproduce extractive patterns similar to those of Western powers. The Russian perspective also tends to treat "the West" as a unified bloc, obscuring internal divisions and the agency of peripheral states.

Western: Western scholarship on world-systems theory is deeply divided. Mainstream IPE—liberal institutionalism and neoclassical economics—has generally rejected world-systems theory as overly deterministic, insufficiently attentive to domestic institutions, and empirically unfalsifiable. From this perspective, the theory's emphasis on structural constraint underestimates the role of policy choices, institutional quality, and market integration in promoting development, with the East Asian "miracle" as the standard counterexample. However, critical Western scholarship—dependency theory in Latin America, world-systems analysis in sociology, and more recently critical IPE—has engaged seriously with Wallerstein's framework. Scholars such as Arrighi, Hopkins, and Chase-Dunn have refined and tested the theory's empirical implications. Western critical scholarship has also contributed the concept of global value chains (Gereffi, Humphrey, Sturgeon), which operationalizes world-systems insights at the firm level. The Western perspective thus contains an in-

ternal tension: mainstream IPE rejects structural determinism, while critical IPE incorporates and refines it. The mainstream Western view occludes the historical violence of colonialism and the structural constraints on peripheral development, while the critical view risks romanticizing resistance and underestimating the benefits of market integration.

UN: The UN perspective on world-systems theory is institutional and normative rather than theoretical. UN agencies—UNCTAD, UNDP, UNECA—have produced extensive empirical research on the patterns that world-systems theory predicts: terms-of-trade deterioration, capital flight, illicit financial flows, debt distress, and unequal value capture in supply chains. UNCTAD's Trade and Development Report and its work on illicit financial flows provide data that both supports and complicates world-systems claims. The UN perspective contributes a policy-oriented framing: it identifies structural inequalities and proposes remedies—debt relief, technology transfer, fair trade, financing for development—without necessarily endorsing the full theoretical apparatus of world-systems analysis. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent an attempt to address the symptoms of global inequality within the existing system rather than to transform the system itself. This perspective occludes the deeper structural critique: by framing inequality as a development problem solvable through better policies and more financing, it may underestimate the systemic reproduction of hierarchy that world-systems theory identifies. The UN perspective is thus both a source of valuable empirical data and a potential depoliticization of structural critique.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Arrighi's Hegemonic Cycles: Production, Finance, and Military Power in the Rise and Decline of Hegemons

Bolded Causal Claim: Hegemony in the capitalist world-economy is not a static distribution of power but a temporal sequence in which a leading state's accumulation strategy shifts from material production to financial intermediation; the financialization of capital, combined with the militarization of interstate competition, marks the transition from hegemonic maturity to hegemonic decline, while any successor hegemon must reconstitute productive leadership rather than merely inherit financial dominance.

Mechanism: Arrighi (1994) reconstructs the history of the modern world-system as a succession of systemic cycles of accumulation, each anchored by a hegemonic state and organized around a distinctive spatial and institutional configuration of capital. The cycle begins with a phase of material expansion, in which the hegemon and its allies expand production, trade, and fixed capital investment across an increasingly integrated world-economy. Over time, competitive pressures, rising costs, and the diffusion of technology erode profit rates in material production. Capital then shifts toward financial circuits—credit, speculation, and intermediation—producing a phase of financial expansion. This shift is not merely a sectoral preference; it is a reorganization of the global division of labor in which the hegemon specializes in high-value services, finance, and military power while production relocates to lower-cost regions, especially the semi-periphery. The hegemon's military capacity protects property rights, sea lanes, and the institutional framework of global accumulation, but military overextension can accelerate decline. Arrighi distinguishes between a "signal crisis," which marks the end of material expansion and the beginning of financialization, and a "terminal crisis," which marks the exhaustion of financial expansion and the possible transition to a new hegemon. Financial expansion can be highly profitable for the hegemon's elites and institutions, but it also signals that the hegemon's productive base is no longer the primary engine of systemic growth. The transition between hegemons is therefore not simply a transfer of GDP; it is a reconfiguration of how capital is accumulated, how states coerce and consent, and how the global division of labor is politically organized. The mechanism is cumula-

tive and path-dependent: each hegemon inherits institutional residues from its predecessor, and each decline creates space for new centers of accumulation, but no transition is guaranteed to produce a stable successor.

Scope Conditions: Arrighi's framework applies most directly to the capitalist world-economy from the long sixteenth century onward, where capital is mobile, states compete in an anarchic interstate system, and accumulation is organized through a hierarchy of sovereign territories. It requires a leading state with sufficient productive, financial, and military capacity to shape global rules, and it assumes that capital responds to profit-rate differentials by moving across space. The framework is macro-historical and interpretive rather than a short-run predictive model; it does not specify the timing of crises, the identity of the next hegemon, or the domestic political coalitions that sustain or undermine hegemony. It also does not imply that every episode of financialization is hegemonic decline, since financial expansion can occur within a still-dominant productive regime. Its scope is further limited by its tendency to center the experience of the hegemon; when applied to Africa, it must be supplemented by theories of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and racialized extraction, because the "periphery" is not merely a passive location of relocated production but a historically constituted zone of coerced labor, resource extraction, and political subordination. Finally, the framework is contingent: wars, revolutions, technological breakthroughs, and social movements can interrupt or redirect cycles, and the absence of a clear successor hegemon may produce an interregnum rather than a smooth transition.

Observable Implications: If Arrighi's mechanism is operating, one should observe a cluster of patterns rather than a single indicator. First, the hegemon's economy should exhibit a rising share of financial profits, financial assets, and service-sector rents relative to manufacturing value added. Second, manufacturing capacity should relocate to lower-cost regions, especially the semi-periphery, while the hegemon retains command over finance, technology, and military logistics. Third, the hegemon should run persistent trade deficits financed by capital inflows, turning its currency and debt instruments into global stores of value. Fourth, military expenditure should rise or remain high as the hegemon attempts to secure global order, supply chains, and investment outlets. Fifth, peripheral and semi-peripheral states should experience debt accumulation, austerity, and conditionality during financial-expansion phases, because global liquidity and creditor power discipline their policy space. Sixth, major crises—such as the 1970s stagflation, the 1980s debt crisis, or the 2008 financial crisis—should appear as moments of systemic restructuring rather than as isolated market failures. In the African case, the 1980s–1990s debt crisis can be read as a financial-expansion phase in which African states were repositioned as debtors and adjusters, while contemporary competition over cobalt, lithium, and other transition minerals occurs amid a possible hegemonic transition in which finance, military power, and industrial policy are again being reorganized. The DRC's capture of only a small share of final electric-vehicle battery value is consistent with a world-system in which extraction remains peripheral while finance, technology, and branding are concentrated elsewhere.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): Arrighi's cycles are most useful to African political economy when they are not treated as a neutral chronology of great-power leadership but as a global rhythm that repeatedly repositions Africa as a zone of extraction, cheapened labor, and debt absorption. African scholarship from Rodney (1972) to Amin (1976) would read hegemonic transitions not as benign changes in management but as reorganizations of surplus extraction: when a hegemon financializes, the pressure to extract primary commodities and service debt often intensifies in the periphery. The 1980s–1990s structural adjustment period can be understood as a moment when financial expansion in the core was stabilized partly through austerity and liberalization in Africa. Yet African perspectives also insist on agency and variation: African states, movements, and re-

gional institutions have resisted extraction, renegotiated contracts, and pursued industrial policy, as seen in resource-nationalist measures and in initiatives such as the DRC–Zambia battery project. Arrighi's framework contributes a sense of systemic timing, but it risks treating Africa as a passive "periphery" unless it is joined to African analyses of class, state capacity, gendered labor, and social struggle. The African vantage point reveals that hegemonic decline in the core does not automatically produce liberation at the periphery; it may instead produce new forms of competition over African resources, new debt instruments, and new security arrangements.

Chinese: The official Chinese narrative presents China's rise as peaceful development and mutually beneficial cooperation, explicitly rejecting the ambition to become a hegemon in the Western sense. Chinese academic discussions often use Arrighi to argue that China's ascent is rooted in material production, infrastructure, and industrial capacity rather than in financialization, and that United States decline is marked by financial excess, deindustrialization, and military overextension. This perspective contributes an alternative accumulation model and a critique of financialized hegemony, but it may occlude how Chinese lending, investment, and offtake agreements in Africa can reproduce hierarchical extraction, debt distress, and limited local value capture. It also risks understating African concerns about sovereignty when "win-win" rhetoric is not matched by transparent contracts, technology transfer, and domestic industrial linkages.

Russian: Russian international-relations discourse frequently interprets Arrighi's cycles through the lens of multipolarity, arguing that United States financial hegemony is eroding and that a polycentric order is emerging. This perspective highlights the geopolitical weaponization of finance, sanctions, and dollar dominance, and it resonates with critiques of Western-led globalization. Its contribution is to foreground power and coercion in the international economy. However, it may occlude Russia's own extractive interests, security engagements, and authoritarian partnerships in Africa, and it often treats African states as arenas of great-power competition rather than as autonomous actors with their own developmental projects. It can also understate the internal political and economic conditions that shape African outcomes.

Western: Mainstream Western international political economy, especially hegemonic-stability theory, treats the hegemon as a provider of public goods such as open markets, liquidity, and security; from this view, hegemonic decline is a source of disorder. Critical Western scholarship, including Arrighi and Wallerstein, treats hegemony as a structured form of exploitation and financialization as a symptom of systemic crisis. Mainstream analysis contributes rigorous measurement of trade, capital flows, debt, and military spending, but it often universalizes Western institutional experience and treats African economies as "failing to develop" rather than as structurally positioned within a hierarchical division of labor. Critical self-correction within Western scholarship has increasingly acknowledged colonial legacies, unequal exchange, and racial capitalism, yet policy prescriptions often remain within liberal institutionalism, emphasizing governance reform and market integration rather than transformation of the system's core-periphery structure.

UN: The UN perspective does not usually adopt Arrighi's cyclical theory in full, but it is attentive to the instability produced by hegemonic transitions, financial crises, and debt distress. Through UNCTAD, the IMF/World Bank system, and the financing-for-development agenda, it emphasizes multilateral cooperation, debt relief, and macroeconomic stability. Its contribution is empirical monitoring, normative frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals, and institutional mechanisms for crisis response. However, by framing global inequality as a development problem solvable through better policies, more financing, and improved governance, it may depoliticize the structural reproduction of hierarchy that Arrighi identifies. The UN perspective is thus valuable as a source of data and as a forum for mitigation, but it may underestimate how financial expansion and hegemonic competition systematically constrain African policy space.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — African Dependency: Frank, Rodney, Amin, and Nkrumah on the Development of Underdevelopment and Neo-Colonialism

Bolded Causal Claim: Underdevelopment in Africa is not a natural, pre-capitalist, or culturally determined condition but a historically produced outcome of the same capitalist world-system that generated development in the core; after formal independence, neo-colonialism reproduces this condition through control of finance, trade, technology, and elite alliances, so that the "development of underdevelopment" persists unless the structure of insertion into the world-economy is transformed.

Mechanism: The dependency tradition argues that development and underdevelopment are not separate stages but relational products of a single capitalist system. Frank (1967) formulated the "development of underdevelopment" through the metropolis-satellite model: surplus is extracted from satellite regions to metropolitan centers through chains of exploitation, and the satellite's apparent "backwardness" is the result of its integration into the system on subordinate terms. Rodney (1972) applied this logic to Africa, arguing that Europe underdeveloped Africa through the slave trade, colonial conquest, forced labor, and the creation of export economies oriented toward European industrial needs; underdevelopment is therefore not the absence of development but the active production of poverty and dependency. Amin (1976) added the concept of peripheral capitalism and unequal exchange: the periphery is integrated into the world-economy through the export of primary commodities and the import of manufactured goods, with the terms of trade systematically transferring surplus to the center; he proposed "delinking" as a strategy to reduce subordination, not autarky but a reorientation of accumulation toward internal needs. Nkrumah (1965) shifted attention to neo-colonialism, the "last stage of imperialism," in which formal political sovereignty coexists with substantive economic control by foreign capital, aid agencies, military alliances, and local comprador elites. The mechanisms include commodity specialization and terms-of-trade deterioration; unequal exchange in trade; technological dependence and enclave production with weak domestic linkages; debt and financial dependence; institutional constraints imposed by trade agreements, investment treaties, and international financial institutions; and the reproduction of elites whose power depends on external rents. Fanon (1961) complements this by showing how colonialism produces a native bourgeoisie oriented toward consumption and mediation rather than national productive transformation. Together, these authors do not merely describe poverty; they specify a causal chain in which global hierarchy is reproduced through structures of extraction, not only through bad domestic policy.

Scope Conditions: The dependency framework applies most strongly where economies are inserted into the world division of labor as primary-commodity exporters with limited industrial diversification; where colonial institutions created extractive states and weak fiscal capacity; where global finance and trade rules constrain macroeconomic and industrial policy; and where technological capabilities are imported rather than domestically generated. It is less deterministic than sometimes caricatured: African economies vary significantly in resource endowments, state capacity, regional integration, and policy choices, and some have achieved partial diversification or manufacturing growth. The framework also has internal limits. Early formulations sometimes treated the periphery as homogeneous and underplayed internal class dynamics, gendered labor, ethnic politics, and African agency. Later African political economy—associated with scholars such as Mkandawire and others—has criticized "African pessimism" and argued for greater attention to state capacity, institutional variation, and the possibility of developmental states. Dependency theory is therefore best used as a structural critique of global hierarchy and a warning against naive convergence, not as a claim that no African state can alter its position. Its contemporary relevance is renewed by new forms of dependency: digital platforms, green-mineral value chains, private debt, and climate finance can reproduce subordination even where old colonial structures have changed.

Observable Implications: If the dependency mechanism is operating, one should observe persistent commodity dependence; a low and stagnant share of manufacturing value added; volatile or deteriorating terms of trade for primary exports; capital flight and illicit financial flows; recurrent debt distress and recourse to IMF or World Bank programs; enclave economies with weak backward and forward linkages; technological import dependence; elite consumption tied to external rents; and limited fiscal capacity to fund public goods. Counterevidence would include sustained diversification, rising domestic value capture, reduced illicit financial flows, autonomous industrial policy, and regional value chains that retain more surplus locally. The DRC cobalt chain, in which the DRC captures only an estimated 3–5 percent of final electric-vehicle battery value, is a contemporary illustration: extraction occurs in Africa, while refining, manufacturing, branding, and finance are concentrated elsewhere. Similarly, Africa's small share of global manufacturing value added suggests that formal independence has not by itself transformed the continent's position in the international division of labor. The mechanism also implies that policy reforms focused only on governance or market access, without addressing value capture and structural position, may improve efficiency without altering hierarchy.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African dependency theory is not simply Western Marxism applied to Africa; it is rooted in anti-colonial struggle, lived experience of extraction, and African scholarly traditions that treat sovereignty as both political and economic. Rodney (1972), Amin (1976), and Nkrumah (1965) wrote from positions shaped by decolonization, pan-Africanism, and the recognition that formal independence could be emptied of content by continued control of finance, trade, and technology. The central insight is that "development" is not a neutral technocratic goal but a political project of transforming Africa's insertion into the world-economy. Neo-colonialism is therefore not merely foreign interference; it is a structure in which local elites, foreign capital, and international institutions jointly reproduce subordination. African perspectives also highlight mechanisms that Western mainstream accounts often miss: the destruction of pre-colonial productive systems, the racialization of labor, the gendered burden of adjustment, and the cultural dimensions of domination. At the same time, African scholarship has critically revised dependency theory: some argue that it can be economistic, that it underestimates African agency and regional variation, and that it risks treating all external engagement as exploitation. Contemporary African perspectives connect dependency to resource sovereignty, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and industrial strategies aimed at value addition rather than raw extraction. The African vantage point reveals that Western "development" discourse often treats African poverty as a failure to converge to a universal model, whereas dependency theory treats it as a relation produced and reproduced by global hierarchy.

Chinese: The official Chinese narrative emphasizes mutual benefit, "win-win" cooperation, and a shared future, often presenting China's engagement in Africa as an alternative to Western conditionality. Chinese academic critics of dependency may acknowledge unequal exchange and advocate "shared development," infrastructure-led growth, and technology transfer as ways to alter Africa's structural position. This perspective contributes an alternative to liberal institutionalism and highlights the possibility of industrialization through external partnership. However, it may occlude debt risks, enclave projects, limited local value capture, and the possibility that Chinese capital reproduces dependency if African states lack bargaining power and industrial strategy. It can also understate African demands for sovereignty when "win-win" rhetoric is not matched by transparent contracts and domestic linkages.

Russian: Russian discourse often frames African dependency as a product of Western neo-colonialism, emphasizing multipolarity as a route to greater African autonomy. It contributes a critique of Western financial

dominance, sanctions, and unilateralism, and it resonates with anti-imperialist traditions. Yet it may occlude Russia's own extractive interests, security engagements, and authoritarian partnerships in Africa, and it frequently treats African states as arenas of great-power competition rather than as autonomous developmental actors. It can also understate the internal political and economic conditions that shape whether external partnerships reduce or reproduce dependency.

Western: Mainstream Western international political economy often treats dependency theory as deterministic, outdated, or empirically refuted, emphasizing institutions, governance, market integration, and convergence. It contributes methodological rigor, cross-country data, and policy tools for macroeconomic management. Critical Western scholarship, including Frank and Wallerstein, acknowledges structural inequality and colonial legacies, and more recent work on global value chains and unequal exchange has partially rehabilitated dependency insights. Nevertheless, Western perspectives often individualize failure, prescribe convergence to a Western model, and treat African poverty as a domestic governance problem. Critical self-correction has improved recognition of historical injustice, but policy frameworks frequently remain within liberal institutionalism, emphasizing aid, trade access, and governance reform rather than transformation of the global division of labor.

UN: The UN perspective frames dependency as a development deficit addressable through the Sustainable Development Goals, financing for development, debt relief, technology transfer, and capacity building. It contributes valuable empirical data, normative commitments, and institutional mechanisms for crisis response. However, by treating inequality as a problem of underdevelopment solvable through better policies and more financing, it may depoliticize the structural critique advanced by dependency theory. The UN perspective is therefore both a source of useful evidence and a potential normalization of hierarchy: it can mitigate symptoms without transforming the system that produces them.

SECTION 2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Contemporary Value-Chain Analysis: GVCs, Lead Firms, and Distribution of Gains

Bolded Causal Claim: Global value chains are not neutral efficiency networks; they are hierarchically governed structures in which lead firms capture disproportionate rents by controlling intangible assets, standards, logistics, and market access, while peripheral suppliers compete on cost, absorb volatility, and face structurally constrained upgrading paths.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the fragmentation of production across borders, but fragmentation alone does not explain distribution. What matters is governance: who sets specifications, who owns brands, who controls data, who finances working capital, and who can switch suppliers. Gereffi, Humphrey, and Sturgeon (2005) distinguish market, modular, relational, captive, and hierarchical governance, showing that as asset specificity and complexity rise, lead firms exercise more coordination power. In captive and hierarchical chains, suppliers are locked into buyer-driven standards, price targets, and delivery schedules; their margins are squeezed because they compete with other suppliers for orders while lead firms retain pricing power downstream. The "smile curve" captures the resulting asymmetry: value added is concentrated in research and development, design, branding, finance, and retail, while assembly, fabrication, and raw-material processing earn thin margins. Lead firms do not need to own factories to control value; they own intangibles—patents, trademarks, algorithms, certification systems, and consumer trust—and use them to appropriate rents. Suppliers may upgrade process efficiency, but functional upgrading into design, branding, or finance is often blocked by lead-firm strategies, intellectual property, and the need for scale. The

mechanism is therefore not simply outsourcing; it is the separation of high-value intangible functions from low-value material functions across space, with the former concentrated in core economies and the latter pushed to the periphery. In African cases, this appears when cobalt is mined and partially processed in the Democratic Republic of Congo, while battery design, cell manufacturing, electric-vehicle assembly, and brand rents accrue elsewhere. The chain's apparent "global" character can obscure a territorial hierarchy: the same product crosses borders, but value capture does not cross them evenly.

Scope Conditions: This framework applies most strongly where production is fragmented across multiple jurisdictions, where lead firms possess intangible-asset advantages, where supplier capabilities are uneven, and where governance is buyer-driven rather than purely market-based. It is less explanatory where suppliers have strong state-backed industrial capacity, technological autonomy, or bargaining power; where value chains are short and commodity-like; or where production is vertically integrated within one firm or country. It also has limits as a standalone theory. Global value-chain analysis can overemphasize firm-level governance and understate geopolitics, colonial legacies, racialized labor regimes, and state power. It may treat "upgrading" as a technical ladder while ignoring that the ladder itself is politically constructed and that some rungs are deliberately withheld. It can also imply that integration into chains is developmentally beneficial if suppliers move up, whereas dependency theorists would ask whether upgrading within a hierarchy still reproduces subordination. Thus the framework is powerful for describing micro-level rent distribution but must be connected to macro-level structural hierarchy to avoid becoming a managerial theory of development.

Observable Implications: If lead-firm governance dominates, one should observe high concentration of value added in design, branding, finance, and retail; low and volatile margins for suppliers; limited technology transfer; supplier lock-in through standards and certification; and persistent gaps between export values and final consumer prices. One should also observe that peripheral exports are often measured by gross trade flows that overstate their contribution, because imported inputs and foreign-owned intangible services are embedded in the final price. In cobalt, the implication is that mining and early processing capture a small share of final battery value, while refining, cell manufacturing, pack assembly, vehicle production, and brand rents capture the rest. Another implication is that "participation" in global value chains can coexist with weak domestic industrialization: a country may export more while capturing less value per unit, especially if it remains in extraction or low-margin assembly. Finally, one should observe political struggles over local content, beneficiation, standards, and technology transfer, because these are attempts to alter the chain's distributional logic rather than merely increase export volume.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): African scholarship and policy discourse treat global value chains as a contemporary language for an older problem: the international division of labor that reserves high-value functions for core economies and low-value, high-risk functions for Africa. From this vantage point, "upgrading" is not automatically emancipatory; it can mean becoming a more efficient subordinate. The African perspective emphasizes resource sovereignty, local content, beneficiation, industrial policy, and regional integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area. Initiatives such as the DRC-Zambia battery value-chain project are read not merely as investment promotion but as attempts to move from extraction toward higher-value stages and to retain more of the chain within the continent. This perspective also highlights that lead-firm power is reinforced by financial, legal, and standards infrastructures that African states did not design. Chinese: The official narrative presents Chinese participation in African value chains as win-win, emphasizing infrastructure, manufacturing relocation, employment, and mutual benefit. Academic and policy critiques within China and beyond note asymmetries in technology transfer, standards, and bargaining power, and ask whether Chinese firms are becoming lead firms in some sectors while remaining suppliers in others. The Chinese perspective contributes an alternative to Western

corporate dominance but does not eliminate hierarchy; it may redistribute it. Russian: Russian discourse often frames Western lead-firm dominance as part of a broader unipolar economic order and supports multipolarity, sovereign industrial policy, and resistance to sanctions. It contributes a geopolitical critique of corporate power but may understate the internal dynamics of supplier upgrading and the role of non-Western lead firms. Western: Mainstream international political economy emphasizes efficiency gains, comparative advantage, and the possibility of upgrading through integration; critical Western scholarship emphasizes monopsony power, labor exploitation, environmental externalities, and the political construction of standards. The Western perspective contributes rich firm-level evidence and policy tools but risks normalizing hierarchy as market outcome. UN: The UN perspective frames value-chain participation as a development opportunity addressable through decent work, technology transfer, capacity building, and sustainable development goals. It contributes data and normative standards but may depoliticize lead-firm power by treating distributional outcomes as implementation gaps rather than structural features.

SECTION 2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Empirical Measurement: Prebisch-Singer, Terms of Trade, Capital Flight, Debt Distress, and Illicit Financial Flows

Bolded Causal Claim: Structural hierarchy is not only a theoretical construct; it is measurable through long-run deterioration in the terms of trade for primary commodities, net resource transfers via capital flight and debt service, and illicit financial flows that drain fiscal capacity from peripheral states.

Mechanism: The empirical case begins with the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis. Prebisch and Singer argued that the terms of trade for primary commodities tend to deteriorate relative to manufactured goods over the long run. The mechanism has several channels: demand for primary commodities is relatively income-inelastic, so growth in core economies does not raise commodity prices proportionally; technological progress in manufacturing lowers unit costs and prices in ways that are not matched in commodity extraction; and core producers possess oligopolistic pricing power while peripheral producers face competitive markets. The result is a transfer of surplus from periphery to core even when trade volumes expand. Terms of trade are measured through export and import price indices, unit value ratios, and purchasing-power measures, though methodological choices—base years, quality adjustments, and commodity baskets—can alter findings. Capital flight operates through a different but complementary mechanism: resources leave peripheral economies through unrecorded outflows, trade misinvoicing, debt-fueled capital flight, and offshore accumulation. Ndikumana and Boyce (2011) argue that capital flight is not merely a symptom of poor governance but is structurally linked to external borrowing and debt, creating a circuit in which borrowed funds are siphoned abroad while debts remain domestically. Debt distress then compounds the transfer: debt service crowds out public investment, forces austerity, and subjects states to creditor conditionality. Illicit financial flows add another layer. UNCTAD (2020) estimates that Africa loses billions annually through illicit financial flows, with trade misinvoicing as a major channel. These flows reduce tax bases, weaken state capacity, and make development finance dependent on external inflows that may themselves be volatile or conditional. Together, these metrics suggest that hierarchy can be tracked not only in theory but in balance-of-payments, debt-sustainability, and fiscal data.

Scope Conditions: These measures apply most strongly to commodity-dependent economies, especially those with narrow export bases, limited manufacturing diversification, and high external debt. They are less decisive for diversified exporters, service-oriented economies, or countries with strong industrial policy and technological upgrading. The Prebisch-Singer hypothesis itself is contested: some studies find long-run deterioration for certain commodity baskets, while others find stability or improvement during commod-

ity booms; the result depends on period, index construction, and whether one examines relative prices or purchasing power. Capital-flight estimates are sensitive to assumptions about normal trade and investment patterns, and illicit financial flow estimates involve large uncertainty because the flows are deliberately hidden. Debt distress is also overdetermined: it can reflect domestic borrowing decisions, governance failures, commodity price shocks, interest-rate cycles, and creditor behavior, not only structural hierarchy. Therefore these metrics should be treated as evidence of structural pressure and net transfer, not as automatic proof of a single causal mechanism. They are strongest when combined with case-level analysis of who borrows, who benefits, and where the money goes.

Observable Implications: If structural hierarchy is operating through these channels, one should observe long-run weakness in commodity terms of trade relative to manufactures; large gaps between recorded and estimated trade values; debt-service ratios that crowd out health, education, and infrastructure spending; and illicit financial flows that exceed official development assistance or foreign direct investment in some periods. One should also observe that debt relief can provide temporary fiscal space without resolving the underlying transfer mechanisms, as seen in the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative experiences. Another implication is that fiscal capacity in peripheral states is systematically understated: governments appear unable to fund development not only because of low productivity but because taxable value is shifted offshore through mispricing, tax havens, and debt-driven outflows. Finally, one should observe policy responses that target measurement and recovery—transfer-pricing rules, beneficial-ownership registries, automatic exchange of information, and demands for reparations or debt cancellation—because these are attempts to make hierarchy visible and contestable.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): African scholars and policymakers have long treated terms-of-trade deterioration, capital flight, debt distress, and illicit financial flows as empirical confirmations of dependency. Rodney's argument that underdevelopment is produced, not natural, is reinforced by data showing net resource transfers from Africa to the rest of the world. From this perspective, debt is not merely a liquidity problem but a mechanism of extraction and conditionality; illicit financial flows are not technical tax issues but structural drains on sovereignty. African demands therefore include debt cancellation, recovery of stolen assets, tax justice, and reform of global financial governance. The African perspective also insists that measurement itself is political: who defines "debt sustainability," who audits trade misinvoicing, and who controls the data shapes what counts as evidence. Chinese: Chinese official discourse often uses terms-of-trade and financing data to criticize Western-dominated financial institutions and to present China as a partner in development finance. Academic critiques may note that China's own rise complicates simple core-periphery models, while also acknowledging that Chinese lending and trade can reproduce asymmetries. The Chinese perspective contributes an alternative source of finance and a multipolar framing but does not resolve measurement disputes about debt distress or illicit flows. Russian: Russian discourse frames Western financial hegemony, sanctions, and dollar dominance as mechanisms of extraction and dependency, and supports multipolarity, alternative payment systems, and sovereign debt restructuring outside Western institutions. It contributes a geopolitical critique of financial power but may be less focused on the micro-mechanisms of African capital flight and tax justice. Western: Mainstream international political economy often treats terms-of-trade movements as market outcomes, debt as a governance and sustainability issue, and illicit financial flows as enforcement problems. Critical Western scholarship has increasingly acknowledged tax havens, transfer pricing, and odious debt, contributing empirical tools and policy reforms. The Western perspective contributes methodological rigor but can normalize the system by framing structural transfers as correctable market failures. UN: The UN perspective frames these issues through Sustainable Development Goals, financing for development, debt relief, and illicit-financial-flow

task forces. It contributes indispensable data, normative commitments, and institutional mechanisms for crisis response. However, by treating inequality as a development deficit solvable through better policies and more financing, it may depoliticize the structural critique advanced by dependency theory. The UN perspective is therefore both a source of useful evidence and a potential normalization of hierarchy: it can mitigate symptoms without transforming the system that produces them.

SECTION 2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY) The African perspective on world-systems and dependency begins from a question that formal sovereignty does not answer: why does political independence so often coexist with continued economic subordination? Nkrumah (1965) named this condition neo-colonialism, arguing that the state flag could change while control over finance, trade, strategic resources, and military alignments remained external. Rodney (1972) sharpened the historical claim by arguing that underdevelopment is not a natural stage or an absence of development but a product of the same process that produced European development; Europe's accumulation and Africa's impoverishment are dialectically linked. Frank (1967) and Amin (1976) extended this logic into a global chain of metropolis-satellite extraction and unequal exchange, in which peripheral economies are integrated into capitalism not as latecomers to a universal path but as structurally subordinate suppliers of cheap labor and raw materials. Wallerstein's world-systems theory gives this critique a systemic architecture: Africa appears largely as periphery within a single capitalist division of labor, specialized in low-value extraction and labor-intensive production while core zones monopolize high-value, capital-intensive, technologically dynamic, and financial activities. Yet African scholarship insists that this hierarchy is not merely functional or market-generated. It is historically constituted through colonial conquest, racialized labor regimes, externally imposed borders, and institutions that survived formal decolonization. Mamdani's analysis of the colonial state, for example, shows how bifurcated power—between citizen and subject, between modern and customary authority—created durable structures of extraction and domination that outlived empire. Bayart's thesis of extraversion shows African elites as active participants in external dependence rather than passive victims, which complicates any simple core-periphery determinism and forces attention to the internal politics of subordination. Mbembe's work on the postcolony and necropolitics highlights how sovereignty itself can be hollowed out by violence, debt, conditionalities, and the militarization of resource extraction. The African perspective is therefore not merely a regional application of dependency theory; it is a theory of incomplete sovereignty and historically produced subordination.

Arrighi's hegemonic cycles add a crucial temporal dimension to this critique. The movement from production to finance in declining hegemons maps onto Africa's experience of the 1980s and 1990s: debt crisis, structural adjustment, privatization, currency devaluation, and the reorganization of extraction under financialized global capitalism. From an African vantage point, these were not neutral technocratic corrections to policy failure but reorganizations of surplus transfer under new hegemonic conditions. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank, though multilateral in form, are often read as instruments through which core financial power disciplines peripheral states, converting debt into governance. Debt becomes not simply a liability but a mechanism for constraining fiscal space, shaping public investment, and privileging creditor interests over domestic development priorities. This is where the empirical measurement tradition becomes politically charged. Prebisch-Singer terms-of-trade deterioration, capital flight, debt distress, and illicit financial flows are not treated as unfortunate market outcomes or technical development indicators;

they are read as measurable evidence of structural transfer. UNCTAD's estimates of illicit financial flows from Africa, for example, are interpreted not as leakage around an otherwise sound system but as systemic plunder enabled by global financial architecture, tax havens, trade misinvoicing, and weak enforcement. The African perspective thus uses numbers to demonstrate that hierarchy is reproduced through concrete channels of value extraction, not only through abstract market forces.

Contemporary global value-chain analysis sharpens the critique further. In the cobalt chain, the Democratic Republic of Congo captures only a small share of final electric-vehicle battery value, while lead firms control refining, cathode production, battery assembly, branding, and consumer markets. The African perspective sees this as continuity of the enclave economy: resource extraction without industrialization, employment without technological upgrading, and export earnings without durable transformation. Yet it also sees agency and possibility. Initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area, the DRC-Zambia battery and electric-vehicle initiative, local-content requirements, and beneficiation policies are attempts to move from extraction to transformation and to build regional value chains that retain more value on the continent. These initiatives are not merely industrial policy; they are sovereignty projects aimed at altering Africa's position in the division of labor. At the same time, the perspective recognizes constraints: infrastructure deficits, capital scarcity, technological dependence, fragmented markets, and the bargaining power of lead firms. The result is a dual reading of contemporary capitalism: Africa remains structurally disadvantaged, but its states and firms are not without strategic room, and regional integration is treated as a necessary counterweight to global hierarchy.

What the African vantage point contributes that the other four perspectives often miss is historical depth, racialized coloniality, and the politics of incomplete sovereignty. It insists that underdevelopment is produced rather than original, that colonialism was not an episode but a structuring force, and that contemporary global institutions carry the sediment of imperial power. It also reveals the internal-external nexus: the comprador class, extraverted elites, and state capture that connect domestic inequality to global hierarchy. This prevents a purely externalist account of African subordination and makes visible the political struggles within African societies over who controls resources, who benefits from extraction, and whose development counts. It further contributes a normative alternative centered on resource sovereignty, pan-African integration, and structural transformation rather than mere insertion into existing value chains on better terms. Finally, it treats hierarchy as political and contestable, not as a natural feature of comparative advantage or technological diffusion.

The African perspective also has occlusions, and steel-manning it requires acknowledging them. It can risk economic determinism by attributing too much explanatory weight to external structures and too little to domestic policy choices, institutional variation, and African agency. It can homogenize a continent of fifty-four states with vastly different resource endowments, industrial capacities, governance trajectories, and growth experiences. It may understate successful episodes of manufacturing growth, service-sector expansion, and African firm participation in global value chains. It can also under-theorize gender, class, and generational differentiation within African societies, although African feminist scholarship has increasingly challenged extraction as a gendered process. There is a further risk of policy paralysis: if underdevelopment is structurally determined, the space for reform may appear narrow, and radical delinking may be impractical in an interdependent world. Resource-sovereignty initiatives may also reproduce elite capture if they are not democratized and if beneficiation becomes a rent-seeking project rather than broad-based transformation. African scholars such as Mkandawire have criticized dependency traditions for pessimism and for insufficient attention to the developmental state and to policy experimentation. Bayart's emphasis on extraversion reminds us that African elites are not simply victims of global capitalism but strategic actors who may benefit

from dependence. The perspective is therefore strongest when it combines structural critique with attention to internal variation, political agency, and the concrete conditions under which sovereignty can be exercised.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective The Chinese perspective on world-systems and dependency is shaped by a dual identity: China presents itself as a developing country and as a rising power that has moved from peripheral status toward the core of the global economy. Officially, Beijing frames its relations with Africa and the wider Global South through a "win-win" narrative of mutual benefit, South-South cooperation, infrastructure development, and non-interference in internal affairs. This narrative rejects Western conditionality and presents China as a partner that respects sovereignty and development rights. It also challenges the Western-centric international political economy by arguing that development should not be measured against a single liberal model and that states have the right to choose their own paths. In this view, China's own rise demonstrates that peripheral economies can industrialize and upgrade within global capitalism, provided they maintain state capacity, strategic planning, and control over key sectors. Chinese academic discourse often critiques Western-centric international political economy and emphasizes industrial upgrading, global value-chain participation, and the developmental state. Some Chinese scholars draw on world-systems theory to argue that China's rise challenges United States hegemony and creates space for multipolarity, while also warning that China must avoid reproducing core-periphery dynamics in its own external relations. On Africa, Chinese perspectives highlight infrastructure gaps, financing needs, and the potential for industrial cooperation, while defending Chinese investment as filling a vacuum left by Western disengagement.

This perspective contributes an important corrective to Eurocentric international political economy. It foregrounds the agency of the Global South, the legitimacy of state-led development, and the possibility of alternative modernization paths. It also draws attention to material constraints—infrastructure, energy, logistics—that mainstream market-focused accounts sometimes understate. However, its occlusions are significant. The official "win-win" narrative can obscure asymmetries in China-Africa trade, in which African economies often export raw materials and import manufactured goods, including from China. It may understate concerns about debt sustainability, labor standards, environmental impacts, and the opacity of some contracts and financing arrangements. In global value-chain terms, Chinese firms may occupy lead-firm positions in processing and manufacturing while African economies remain at the extraction stage, reproducing the very hierarchy that dependency theory describes. The perspective can also normalize hierarchy by reframing extraction as cooperation and by treating African value capture as a secondary issue relative to growth and infrastructure. Thus the Chinese perspective is both a challenge to Western hegemony and a potential new axis of core-periphery relations, depending on whether cooperation produces structural transformation or merely relocates extraction.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective The Russian perspective on world-systems and dependency is organized around multipolarity, sovereignty, and a critique of Western hegemony. It views the post-Cold War international order as unipolar and dominated by the United States and its allies, with Western financial institutions, sanctions, and security alliances serving as instruments of control over peripheral and semi-peripheral states. From this vantage point, dependency is not only an economic condition but a geopolitical one: states that rely on Western-dominated financial systems, reserve currencies, and security guarantees are vulnerable to coercion. Russia's critique of sanctions is central here; sanctions are framed not as neutral enforcement of norms but as weaponized interdependence that punishes dissent and preserves hierarchy. The Russian perspective therefore supports a multipolar world in which power is dispersed across several centers, and it presents partnerships with Africa, Asia, and Latin America as contributions to that order. In relation to

Africa, Russia emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and state-to-state cooperation, often contrasting its approach with Western conditionality. It also highlights historical anti-colonial solidarity and presents itself as an alternative partner in energy, mining, security, and nuclear technology.

This perspective contributes a geopolitical lens that mainstream international political economy sometimes neglects. It highlights how financial and security institutions can be used coercively, and it challenges the assumption that the liberal order is neutral or universally beneficial. It also gives voice to states that experience Western power as constraint rather than opportunity. Yet its occlusions are substantial. The anti-hegemonic framing can instrumentalize Africa by treating the continent primarily as a theater of great-power competition rather than as a site of autonomous development. It may obscure asymmetries in Russia-Africa trade and investment, including the concentration of Russian interests in extractive sectors and security services. Security cooperation, including the use of private military companies, can undermine the very sovereignty that the perspective claims to defend. Moreover, by focusing on Western culpability, the Russian perspective may deflect attention from domestic governance failures, elite capture, and the internal dimensions of dependency. It is strongest as a critique of coercive hierarchy, but weaker as a theory of development or value-chain transformation.

2.7.4 Western Perspective The Western perspective on world-systems and dependency is internally divided between mainstream international political economy and critical self-correction. Mainstream accounts emphasize comparative advantage, market efficiency, global value-chain governance, institutional quality, and the gains from trade. From this standpoint, Africa's position in the global economy reflects a combination of factor endowments, policy choices, institutional weaknesses, and historical legacies, but not necessarily a structurally determined trap. Global value chains are seen as opportunities for participation, learning, and upgrading, even if gains are unevenly distributed. Critical Western scholarship, however, has increasingly incorporated insights from dependency theory, world-systems analysis, and critical international political economy. It examines lead-firm power, unequal exchange, financialization, tax avoidance, and the political economy of debt. This critical turn has produced more nuanced analyses of global value chains, recognizing that governance by lead firms can lock suppliers into low-value segments and that market access does not automatically produce structural transformation. Western scholarship also contributes methodological rigor: econometric analysis of terms of trade, firm-level studies of value capture, debt-sustainability frameworks, and detailed measurement of illicit financial flows.

The Western perspective contributes indispensable data, analytical tools, and policy mechanisms. It can identify market failures, design institutional reforms, and evaluate development interventions with precision. Its critical wing has also partially rehabilitated dependency insights by translating them into measurable concepts such as value capture, rent extraction, and chain governance. However, its occlusions remain significant. Mainstream accounts can normalize hierarchy by framing structural transfers as correctable market failures or policy distortions rather than as constitutive features of global capitalism. They may understate the colonial and racialized foundations of the current order and may treat development as convergence toward a Western model. Even critical Western scholarship can be constrained by methodological individualism and by a tendency to privilege firm-level or country-level analysis over systemic hierarchy. The result is a perspective that is analytically powerful but sometimes politically thin: it can explain how value is distributed without fully questioning why the system is organized to produce such distributions in the first place.

2.7.5 UN Perspective The UN perspective frames world-systems and dependency through sustainable development, financing for development, debt relief, and illicit-financial-flow governance. It is less a single

theory than an institutional and normative framework that aggregates data, sets goals, and mobilizes crisis responses. Through the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN treats inequality, poverty, and underdevelopment as global problems requiring collective action. Through financing-for-development processes, it addresses debt distress, official development assistance, domestic resource mobilization, and international tax cooperation. UNCTAD plays a particularly important role by producing data on trade, value chains, capital flight, and illicit financial flows, and by articulating a development-centered critique of globalization. The UN perspective also includes debt-relief mechanisms such as the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, which were designed to reduce unsustainable debt burdens and create fiscal space for development. In this sense, the UN is both a source of evidence and an arena in which the politics of hierarchy are negotiated.

This perspective contributes indispensable normative commitments and institutional mechanisms. It provides a language of rights, equity, and shared responsibility that can legitimate demands for debt relief, technology transfer, and fairer trade. It also produces data that make structural transfers visible, including estimates of illicit financial flows and analyses of value capture in commodity chains. Its crisis-response capacity can mitigate acute harm and create breathing room for peripheral states. Yet its occlusions are equally important. By treating inequality as a development deficit solvable through better policies, more financing, and improved governance, the UN perspective can depoliticize the structural critique advanced by dependency theory. It may frame hierarchy as a set of gaps to be closed rather than as a system that produces and reproduces subordination. Debt relief, while valuable, can normalize the creditor-debtor relationship rather than transform it. Similarly, illicit-financial-flow task forces may address symptoms without dismantling the global financial architecture that enables extraction. The UN perspective is therefore both a source of useful evidence and a potential normalization of hierarchy: it can mitigate symptoms without transforming the system that produces them.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Structural critique of extraction; "development of underdevelopment"; resource sovereignty agendas (AfCFTA, DRC–Zambia battery initiative)	May understate African elite agency and intra-African variation; risk of structural determinism	Justice, sovereignty, reparative equity	Rodney (1972), Nkrumah (1965), Amin (1976), terms-of-trade deterioration, capital flight	Western: policy variation and agency matter; some African states grew
Chinese	Alternative financing; infrastructure; South–South cooperation; non-interference	Contract opacity; debt sustainability; commercial self-interest	Mutual benefit, development, sovereignty	BRI/FOCAC projects, concessional loans	African/Western: debt-trap and transparency concerns
Russian	Multipolarity critique; anti-hegemonic framing; security partnerships	Limited economic footprint; geopolitical instrumentalization; PMC presence	Multipolar order, sovereignty	Arms sales, UN votes, Wagner in CAR/Mali	Western: undermines governance, supports authoritarianism
Western	Mainstream IPE; market efficiency; institutional reform; critical self-correction (Stiglitz)	Structural power; historical responsibility; conditionality harm	Liberal international order, rules-based trade	WTO, IMF programs, growth episodes	African: conditionality deepened poverty; structural adjustment

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	SDGs; financing for development; data (UNCTAD IFF); debt relief frameworks	Depoliticizes structure; normalizes creditor–debtor; symptoms not causes	Multilateralism, development, equity	UNCTAD reports, SDG indicators, HIPC/MDRI	African: frames hierarchy as gaps not system

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 1980s–1990s African debt crisis and HIPC/MDRI debt relief

Levels of analysis

At the individual level, the crisis was lived and negotiated by specific actors: African finance ministers and central-bank governors who signed structural adjustment programs; IMF and World Bank staff who designed conditionality; Paris Club creditors' negotiators; and civil-society campaigners in the Jubilee 2000 movement who reframed debt as a moral issue. Individual economists—Jeffrey Sachs, Michel Camdessus, Joseph Stiglitz—shaped the intellectual terms of debate, with Stiglitz's later critique of IMF programs illustrating how individual scholarly dissent could challenge institutional consensus.

At the state level, the crisis pitted debtor states against creditor institutions. African governments faced IMF/World Bank conditionality packages; the Paris Club coordinated bilateral creditor relief; the G7 set the political parameters. States were not unitary actors—finance ministries often clashed with planning ministries and parliaments over adjustment—but the state remained the formal contracting party in debt and relief negotiations.

At the systemic level, the crisis reflected the hierarchical structure of the world economy: the position of African economies in the periphery, their export dependence on primary commodities, the volatility of terms of trade, and the hegemonic financial architecture centered on the dollar and on creditor-country institutions. The debt crisis was not merely a series of national misfortunes but a systemic event in which peripheral states absorbed shocks generated in core financial centers.

At the transnational level, commercial banks recycled petrodollars into sovereign loans in the 1970s; multinational corporations structured trade and transfer pricing; diaspora remittances and civil-society networks (Jubilee 2000, the African Forum and Network on Debt and Development—AFRODAD) linked local suffering to global advocacy. Transnational capital flows, both licit and illicit, shaped the magnitude of indebtedness and the feasibility of repayment.

Mechanism section

The mechanism runs through several linked stages. First, the 1970s oil shocks and subsequent recession

in the core generated a glut of petrodollars that commercial banks lent to developing countries, including African states, at variable interest rates. Second, the Volcker shock of 1979–1982 raised US interest rates sharply, increasing debt-service burdens while commodity prices collapsed; the terms of trade for primary exporters deteriorated. Third, African states faced a liquidity crisis that became a solvency crisis: new borrowing serviced old debt, and structural adjustment programs imposed fiscal austerity, privatization, and trade liberalization. Fourth, the HIPC Initiative (1996, enhanced 1999) and later MDRI (2005) provided debt relief conditional on policy reforms and poverty-reduction strategies, reducing nominal debt but embedding creditors' policy preferences. The mechanism thus links global monetary conditions to peripheral fiscal compression and then to conditional relief that preserved the creditor-debtor hierarchy.

Perspective reconstruction

African (primary, longest): From the African vantage point, the debt crisis was not a technical liquidity problem but the latest episode in a long history of extraction. Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism (1965) framed post-independence debt as a mechanism by which formal sovereignty was hollowed out by financial dependence; Rodney (1972) showed how the development of underdevelopment meant that African economies were structured to produce raw materials for core industry, making debt an almost inevitable consequence of unequal exchange. Amin (1976) emphasized delinking and autonomous development as the only escape from peripheralization. In this reading, structural adjustment programs were not neutral technocratic fixes but instruments of continued subordination: they compressed public spending, privatized state assets, and opened markets to core capital while leaving the structural position of African economies unchanged. HIPC and MDRI, while reducing nominal burdens, were read as creditor-managed relief that normalized the debtor relationship and imposed new conditionalities through Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. The African perspective thus sees debt relief as partial and ambivalent: it eased immediate fiscal pressure but did not transform the world-system position that generated the debt. Contemporary African scholarship and policy—AfCFTA, the DRC–Zambia battery initiative, calls for debt cancellation rather than relief—extend this critique by seeking structural transformation and resource sovereignty rather than managed dependency.

Chinese: China's perspective on the African debt crisis is shaped by its own experience as a debtor in the 1980s and by its later role as a creditor. Officially, Beijing frames its engagement through "win-win" cooperation and non-interference, contrasting its approach with Western conditionality. Chinese academic critics, however, have questioned the sustainability of lending and the opacity of contracts, and have debated whether China's rise reproduces hierarchical patterns. On the 1980s–90s crisis specifically, Chinese commentary has often emphasized Western responsibility—IMF conditionality, volatile commodity markets, and the structural disadvantages faced by developing countries—while presenting China as an alternative partner. The Chinese perspective contributes an emphasis on infrastructure and production capacity, but it risks occluding its own creditor interests and the power asymmetries in bilateral lending.

Russian: Russia's perspective is filtered through its post-Soviet experience and its critique of Western hegemony. Moscow has framed the African debt crisis as evidence of the exploitative nature of the Western-led financial order, using it to support arguments for multipolarity and for alternatives to IMF/World Bank dominance. Russian scholarship and policy commentary have emphasized sovereignty and non-interference, often aligning with African governments' resistance to conditionality. At the same time, Russia's economic footprint in Africa during the 1980s–90s was limited, and its contemporary engagement—arms sales, private military company presence, resource deals—has drawn criticism for instrumentalizing anti-Western rhetoric. The Russian perspective contributes a geopolitical critique of unipolarity but occludes its own limited development contribution and its security-first approach.

Western: The Western perspective, dominant in the institutions that managed the crisis, initially framed African debt as a problem of policy failure and governance deficits. IMF and World Bank programs emphasized fiscal discipline, market liberalization, and privatization; the HIPC initiative added poverty reduction as a goal. Critical Western scholarship—Stiglitz's critique of IMF programs, Sachs's advocacy for debt cancellation—later challenged the harshness of conditionality and the pro-cyclical nature of austerity. The Western perspective contributes institutional capacity for debt relief and a tradition of self-correction, but it has historically occluded structural causes: the role of core monetary policy (the Volcker shock), commodity price volatility, and the asymmetry of the global financial architecture. Even critical Western accounts often retain a reformist rather than transformative stance.

UN: The UN perspective frames the debt crisis through development and human-rights lenses. UNCTAD documented the deteriorating terms of trade and the debt overhang; the UN system supported HIPC and MDRI and later advanced the SDGs and financing-for-development agendas. The UN perspective contributes valuable data—UNCTAD estimates of illicit financial flows, debt statistics—and a multilateral forum for debtor voices. However, it risks depoliticizing structure: by treating debt as a development deficit solvable through better policies, more financing, and improved governance, it can normalize the creditor-debtor relationship. Debt relief is framed as progress rather than as a symptom of a system that produces indebtedness. The UN perspective thus mitigates symptoms without necessarily transforming the system.

Explicit adjudication

The African dependency perspective best explains the 1980s–1990s debt crisis and the ambivalent character of HIPC/MDRI relief. It captures the structural position of African economies in the world system, the role of core monetary shocks (the Volcker shock) and commodity price collapse, and the way conditionality preserved rather than transformed hierarchy. Its strongest evidence is the persistence of debt distress and commodity dependence after relief, and the continued outflow of capital. What it misses, or at least underweights, is the genuine variation in African state capacity and policy choices—some states managed adjustment better than others—and the role of African elite agency in borrowing and spending decisions. The Western institutional perspective correctly identifies governance and policy failures but systematically underweights structural causes. The Chinese and Russian perspectives offer geopolitical counterweights but lack the economic depth to explain the crisis mechanism. The UN perspective provides essential data and a forum for relief but tends to normalize the creditor-debtor relationship. A full explanation requires the African structural critique as the primary lens, supplemented by Western institutional analysis of state capacity and by UN data on flows and stocks.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. **Map the chain.** List the principal stages of the cobalt value chain from artisanal and industrial mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) through refining, precursor and cathode production, cell and pack assembly, and final electric-vehicle (EV) integration. For each stage, note the typical geographic location and the approximate share of final battery value captured, using the 3–5 percent figure for DRC mining as your anchor.
2. **Locate the DRC in Wallerstein's hierarchy.** Classify each major node of the chain as core, semi-

periphery, or periphery. Explain why the DRC's position is not merely "poor country" but a structurally assigned role within a single division of labor, and identify which semi-peripheral economies (for example, China in refining) mediate between core demand and peripheral extraction.

3. **Apply Arrighi's hegemonic cycle.** Identify which hegemon's phase of financialization most shaped the contemporary cobalt chain, and explain how the shift from production to finance in that hegemon's cycle altered the terms under which peripheral states could bargain over resource rents.

4. **Deploy African dependency theory.** Using Rodney's "development of underdevelopment," Amin's "delinking," Nkrumah's neo-colonialism, and Frank's "development of underdevelopment," explain why DRC state capacity and domestic industrialization have been systematically constrained even when global cobalt prices rose.

5. **Reconstruct the Chinese perspective.** Contrast the official "win-win" narrative of infrastructure-for-resources deals with the academic critique (for example, concerns about enclave economies, debt, and limited technology transfer). Identify what each framing reveals and what it occludes.

6. **Adjudicate and falsify.** Decide whether low value capture is best explained by (a) market structure and lead-firm governance of global value chains, (b) state capacity and domestic institutional failure, or (c) historically constituted dependency. State one piece of evidence that would weaken each explanation.

MODEL ANSWER

The DRC's capture of only 3–5 percent of final EV battery value is best understood not as a market accident but as the equilibrium outcome of a hierarchically organized world-system in which extraction, refining, and manufacturing are spatially separated and politically unequal. The chain runs from artisanal and industrial mining in Katanga and Lualaba, through refining concentrated in China, to precursor and cathode production, cell and pack assembly largely in East Asia, and final vehicle integration in core economies. Each stage's location reflects not comparative advantage in a neutral sense but a historically produced division of labor in which the DRC is locked into the lowest-value, highest-risk node.

Wallerstein's framework clarifies that the DRC is not simply a poor country trading with rich ones; it occupies a periphery position within a single capitalist world-economy whose core requires cheap raw materials and externalizes environmental and social costs. The semi-periphery—here China in refining and, to a lesser extent, some midstream processing elsewhere—mediates between core demand and peripheral supply, capturing intermediate rents while preventing the periphery from upgrading. This is why the DRC's cobalt, even when prices spike, does not automatically translate into domestic industrialization: the structural position assigns it extraction, and the terms of trade, logistics, and financing are organized to keep it there.

Arrighi's hegemonic cycles add a temporal dimension. The contemporary chain was shaped by the US-led financialization phase, in which capital mobility, commodity speculation, and debt conditionality weakened peripheral states' bargaining power. As hegemonic power shifted from production to finance, resource-rich states faced pressure to liberalize mining codes, accept investor-state arbitration, and prioritize export volumes over domestic processing. The result was a race to the bottom in fiscal terms, even as global demand for cobalt surged with the energy transition.

African dependency theory explains the domestic side of this trap. Rodney's "development of underdevelopment" shows how colonial and post-colonial extraction built infrastructure oriented toward export rather than

internal integration, leaving the DRC with enclave mines and weak linkages. Nkrumah's neo-colonialism captures the post-independence continuity: formal sovereignty without economic sovereignty, as foreign firms, offtake agreements, and debt obligations reproduce dependency. Amin's call for "delinking" highlights the difficulty of autonomous industrial policy under global financial discipline, while Frank's emphasis on the metropolis-satellite relation explains why even state-owned enterprises often remain tethered to external markets. Together, these theorists show that low value capture is not a failure of individual policy but a structurally reproduced outcome.

The Chinese perspective must be taken seriously on its own terms. The official "win-win" narrative emphasizes infrastructure, employment, and market access, and there is evidence that Chinese investment expanded DRC output and fiscal revenue. Yet the academic critique notes enclave dynamics, limited technology transfer, and debt vulnerabilities, suggesting that the relationship, while different in form from Western colonialism, still concentrates high-value stages in China. The Western mainstream IPE view often attributes low capture to governance failures and market efficiency, with critical self-correction acknowledging corporate power and unfair trade rules. The UN perspective frames the issue through SDG financing and illicit financial flows, emphasizing transparency and domestic resource mobilization.

Adjudicating among explanations, market structure and lead-firm governance best account for the 3–5 percent figure at the level of chain organization, while state capacity and dependency explain why the DRC has not escaped that structure. The strongest evidence for market structure is the concentration of refining and cathode production in a few firms and countries; for state capacity, the weakness of domestic processing and tax administration; for dependency, the historical pattern of export-oriented enclaves and debt conditionality. Falsifying evidence would include: sustained DRC capture rising above 15 percent through domestic refining without a change in global lead-firm structure (weakening market-structure claims); or DRC capture remaining at 3–5 percent despite strong institutions and industrial policy (weakening state-capacity claims); or capture rising rapidly under continued dependency (weakening dependency claims). The most plausible synthesis is that market structure sets the ceiling, state capacity determines movement within it, and dependency explains why the ceiling has historically been so low.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description (150–200 words)

Consider the 2022 DRC–Zambia memorandum of understanding to establish a transboundary battery and EV value chain, alongside the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) protocols on rules of origin and digital trade. The initiative proposes to move cobalt and copper from extraction through precursor production and battery assembly within Africa, rather than exporting raw ore. Global demand for EV batteries is projected to grow sharply through 2035, and the DRC holds roughly 70 percent of global cobalt reserves. Yet current capture remains at 3–5 percent of final value, refining is concentrated in China, and African manufacturing value added as a share of GDP has stagnated. The memo asks you to evaluate whether this initiative can restructure the chain or whether it will reproduce enclave dynamics under new institutional branding. Use world-systems, dependency, and value-chain theory, and draw on the five perspectives.

(b) Required memo headings (prompts)

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking the initiative's design to expected value-capture outcomes. Specify scope conditions and what would have to be true for the mechanism to operate.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspec-

tives on this initiative, steel-manning each. Note what each reveals and what it occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one historical case (for example, 1970s import-substitution industrialization, or 1990s HIPC-era mining code reforms) and explain what it suggests about the initiative's prospects.
- **Falsifiers:** List three observable outcomes that would weaken your central claim, and specify the time horizon and metric for each.

(c) Self-check

Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what the initiative contains), explanation (why value capture is currently low), prediction (what will happen under stated conditions), and prescription (what should be done), and that no single paragraph conflates two of these.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which of the following best explains why the DRC captures only 3–5 percent of final EV battery value, according to the structural political-economy framework developed in this lesson?

A) The DRC's low capture is primarily a consequence of weak domestic institutions and corruption, which better governance and transparency reforms would largely resolve.

B) The DRC's low capture reflects its structurally assigned periphery position within a single capitalist world-economy, where core demand, semi-peripheral refining, and lead-firm governance jointly reproduce extraction at the lowest-value node.

C) The DRC's low capture is best explained by Chinese "win-win" investment, which has deliberately prevented African industrialization to maintain a monopoly on refining.

D) The DRC's low capture is an artifact of measurement error in UNCTAD illicit financial flow estimates, and actual capture is substantially higher.

Correct answer: B

Distractor diagnosis:

- **A** attributes low capture solely to domestic institutional failure. This is the Western mainstream IPE view in its uncorrected form; it occludes the historically constituted division of labor, debt conditionality, and lead-firm governance that constrain state capacity in the first place. It is partially true but insufficient as a primary explanation.
- **C** overstates Chinese agency and intent. The Chinese perspective includes both official "win-win" claims and academic critiques of enclave dynamics, but neither supports a deliberate monopoly strategy as the primary cause; this option conflates structural outcome with intentional design.
- **D** misreads the data. UNCTAD estimates of illicit financial flows indicate leakage that worsens, not improves, capture; they are not a measurement artifact that would raise the 3–5 percent figure.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Stage in cobalt-for-EV value chain (illustrative)	Typical location	Approx. share of final EV battery value	Mechanism of capture
Mining / extraction	DRC (dominant global source)	3–5%	Low bargaining power, rent capture, weak fiscal/contract terms, artisanal and industrial extraction
Refining / processing	China dominant	10–20% (illustrative)	Technical capacity, scale, standards, infrastructure, state-industrial coordination
Cathode / precursor manufacturing	East Asia, Europe	20–30% (illustrative)	Process engineering, intellectual property, quality certification
Cell / pack assembly	Asia, Europe, North America	25–35% (illustrative)	Capital intensity, automation, supplier finance, logistics
Vehicle integration, branding, retail, finance	OEMs and global consumer markets	Remainder	Brand rents, consumer markets, credit, after-sales services

Note: shares are illustrative ranges, not audited national accounts; they vary by battery chemistry, cobalt price cycle, contract structure, and accounting boundary. The 3–5% figure for DRC extraction is the anchor claim supplied for this lesson; downstream ranges are pedagogical approximations and should be treated as orders of magnitude.

Indicator	Approximate level / trend	Interpretation
Africa's share of global manufacturing value added	Roughly 2% or less; low and broadly stagnant over decades	Late industrialization, deindustrialization pressures, and concentration of manufacturing in East Asia and advanced economies
Manufacturing value added as share of GDP in many African economies	Often around 10–12%, with wide variation	Manufacturing is not absent, but it is small relative to population, employment needs, and historical industrialization benchmarks
Global manufacturing concentration	East Asia and advanced economies dominate	The international division of labor remains spatially hierarchical

Note: manufacturing shares vary by source, year, and whether North Africa is included; treat these as

approximate structural indicators rather than precise point estimates.

Measure	Estimate	Comparison / implication
Annual illicit financial flows from Africa	About $88.6 billion (UNCTAD 2020)	Larger than many annual inflows of official development assistance and foreign direct investment in comparable periods

Note: IFF estimates depend on mirror-trade data, price benchmarks, and assumptions about normal trade; they measure discrepancies, not adjudicated crimes.

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Taken together, what structural trend do the three tables suggest about Africa's position in the global economy: is the pattern cyclical (driven by commodity prices) or structural (driven by position in the division of labor)? Justify with at least two data points.
2. **Level of analysis.** Which of the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, transnational—best explains (a) the DRC's 3–5% capture, (b) Africa's low manufacturing share, and (c) large IFFs? Where do the levels conflict or reinforce one another?
3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** How would each perspective read the same three tables: African structural critique; Chinese official "win-win" plus academic critique; Russian multipolarity/dependency critique; Western mainstream IPE plus critical self-correction; UN SDG/financing-for-development? Identify one datum each perspective would emphasize and one it would downplay.
4. **Interpretation.** What mechanism links low value capture, low manufacturing share, and IFFs? Distinguish (a) unequal exchange / terms-of-trade mechanisms, (b) global value-chain governance by lead firms, and (c) financialization / tax-avoidance mechanisms. Which is most directly supported by which table?
5. **Limitation.** What are the most serious data and inference limitations? Address informal/artisanal mining, transfer-pricing opacity, price volatility, aggregation across 54 states, and the gap between measured discrepancies and proven illicit intent.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1: World-Systems Concentric Division of Labor

- **What to draw:** Draw three nested, slightly irregular zones on a simplified world outline or as concentric circles if a map is too complex. Label the innermost zone **CORE** (North America, Western Europe, Japan, and other advanced industrial economies). Label the middle ring **SEMI-PERIPHERY** (large emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil, Mexico, Turkey, South Africa). Label the outer ring **PERIPHERY** (much of sub-Saharan Africa, parts of Latin America, and parts of Asia). Draw thick arrows from periphery to core labeled **raw materials, cheap labor, ecological extraction**; draw thinner arrows from core to periphery labeled **manufactured goods, finance, technology, conditional credit**. Add a small "buffer" arrow between semi-periphery and periphery labeled **intermediate manufacturing / subcontracting**.

- **Labels to place:** "Single division of labor (Wallerstein)"; "Core: high wages, capital-intensive production, financial command"; "Semi-periphery: mixed production, upward mobility pressure, downward vulnerability"; "Periphery: labor-intensive extraction, low value capture"; "Unequal exchange."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** African view: the outer ring is not "backward" but structurally positioned for extraction; Chinese view: semi-peripheral ascent is possible through state-led industrial policy; Russian view: core monopoly is a Western-centric order now contested; Western view: zones reflect comparative advantage and institutional quality; UN view: zones map onto SDG financing gaps and capacity needs.

Visual 2: Cobalt Value Capture Waterfall / Staircase

- **What to draw:** Draw a horizontal staircase or waterfall from left to right with five steps: **Mine (DRC)**, **Refine (China)**, **Cathode/Precursor**, **Cell/Pack**, **EV/OEM/Retail**. Make the first step very short (3–5% of final value) and each subsequent step taller, so the visual immediately shows where value accumulates. Use bar height or step height to represent approximate value capture. Add a small "leakage" arrow downward from the first step labeled **IFFs / tax avoidance / underpricing**. Add a second downward arrow from the refining step labeled **technology rent**. Add a final upward arrow at the retail step labeled **brand and finance rent**.
- **Labels to place:** "DRC capture: 3–5%"; "Downstream capture: refining, materials, cells, vehicles"; "Value is not created only at extraction"; "Lead-firm governance"; "Contract, tax, and transfer-pricing leakage."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** African view: the staircase is a map of dispossession and a target for resource sovereignty; Chinese view: refining dominance is industrial upgrading and supply-chain security; Russian view: Western OEMs and financial centers still capture final rents; Western view: efficiency, scale, and innovation explain downstream capture; UN view: the staircase identifies where domestic value addition and fiscal capacity can be strengthened.

Visual 3: Dependency Spiral Linked to Hegemonic Cycle

- **What to draw:** Draw two linked loops. The upper loop is an **Arrighi-style hegemonic cycle**: three boxes labeled **Production**, **Finance**, **Military/Geopolitical Power**, connected by arrows in a rising-and-declining spiral. The lower loop is a **dependency spiral**: boxes labeled **Raw-material export**, **Low manufacturing value added**, **Debt / IFF drain**, **Austerity / import dependence**, connected back to **Raw-material export**. Draw a vertical arrow from the lower loop to the upper loop labeled **surplus transfer to hegemon / core**. Draw a smaller counter-arrow labeled **conditional credit / technology**.
- **Labels to place:** "Hegemon rises through production, shifts to finance, relies on military power (Arrighi)"; "Periphery remains locked into extraction"; "Debt distress and HIPC/MDRI as crisis moments"; "Resource sovereignty as attempted break in the loop."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** African view: the loop is neo-colonial continuity, not development failure; Chinese view: infrastructure and industrial parks can insert periphery into higher-value stages; Russian view: multipolarity can fracture the loop; Western view: institutions, governance, and market access determine loop intensity; UN view: debt relief, FfD, and SDG investment are loop-interruption tools.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue	Notes (with source log)
What is a world-system?	A single capitalist division of labor spanning core, semi-periphery, and periphery; not a set of separate national economies. Source: Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System* (1974–2011).
Core / semi-periphery / periphery	Core: high-skill, capital-intensive, high-wage production and financial command. Semi-periphery: mixed production, mobility and vulnerability. Periphery: labor-intensive extraction and low value capture. Source: Wallerstein.
Hegemonic cycles	Hegemons rise through production, shift toward finance, and sustain position through military/geopolitical power; decline opens space for rivals. Source: Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994).
Development of underdevelopment	Underdevelopment is produced by integration into the capitalist world economy, not by isolation or traditional backwardness. Sources: Frank (1967); Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972).
Neo-colonialism	Political independence without economic sovereignty; control through finance, trade, aid, and multinational corporations. Source: Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism* (1965).
Delinking / unequal exchange	Peripheral economies may need to reduce subordination to unequal exchange; terms of trade systematically disadvantage primary exporters. Sources: Amin (1976); Prebisch; Singer.
Global value chains	Production is fragmented across borders; lead firms govern standards, sourcing, and rents; value capture depends on position in the chain. Sources: GVC literature; UNCTAD trade and development reports.
Prebisch-Singer hypothesis	Long-run terms of trade for primary commodities tend to deteriorate relative to manufactures. Sources: Prebisch; Singer.
Capital flight and IFFs	Unrecorded or illicit outflows drain investable resources; trade misinvoicing is a major channel. Source: UNCTAD (2020) IFF report.
Debt distress and relief	1980s–1990s African debt crisis; HIPC and MDRI reduced debt but raised conditionality and sovereignty questions. Sources: World Bank/IMF HIPC documentation; critical IPE literature.

Cue	Notes (with source log)
Resource sovereignty	African policy responses include AfCFTA, local content, and DRC-Zambia battery initiatives; aim is to move from extraction to processing and manufacturing. Sources: AU/AfCFTA materials; DRC-Zambia initiative.
Measurement limits	IFFs are estimated from discrepancies; manufacturing shares vary by source; value-chain shares are accounting constructs, not causal proof. Source: UNCTAD (2020); UNIDO manufacturing data.

Summary (3–5 sentences): World-systems and dependency theories argue that global hierarchy is produced by a single division of labor, not by separate national failures. Arrighi adds that hegemonic power moves from production to finance to military dominance, while African dependency theorists show how extraction, neo-colonial control, and unequal exchange generate "development of underdevelopment." Contemporary value-chain and IFF data suggest that low capture at the extraction stage, low manufacturing share, and large financial outflows are mutually reinforcing. The theories are strongest as structural diagnostics and weakest when treated as deterministic predictions; empirical measurement is necessary but remains uncertain.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon:** The world economy is like one big factory spread across countries. Some places dig up raw materials, some refine them, some build batteries and cars, and some sell the final product. The money and power mostly pile up at the later steps, while the places that dig often stay poor. Debt and hidden money outflows make the gap worse.

2. **Mark gaps:** I am not yet clear on how much of Africa's low manufacturing share is caused by global structure versus domestic policy, conflict, infrastructure, or geography. I also need to separate correlation from causation in the cobalt value-capture table, and I need to know how UNCTAD's IFF estimates handle informal trade and price volatility.

3. **Reread verification:** Recheck the definitions of core, semi-periphery, and periphery; recheck Arrighi's sequence of production, finance, and military power; recheck UNCTAD's IFF estimate and its comparison to ODA/FDI; recheck whether the DRC's 3–5% figure refers to extraction value, export value, or final battery value.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits:** The global economy resembles a company town: the mine owner controls credit, stores, and wages, so workers never accumulate capital. **Limits:** states are not workers, they have agency, institutions, and policy choices; the analogy hides colonial history, racialized labor regimes, and the possibility of industrial upgrading; it also risks treating all African economies as identical.

5. **Rewrite:** World-systems theory says global inequality is organized through a hierarchical division of labor; dependency theory says peripheral integration can produce underdevelopment; Arrighi says hegemonic power shifts from production to finance; value-chain and IFF data show where value and money leak out of Africa. The theories explain structure well but must be tested against data, policy variation, and historical change.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L17	Definition	What is Wallerstein's world-system?	A single capitalist world-economy divided into core, semi-periphery, and periphery through an international division of labor; the unit of analysis is the world-system, not the nation-state.	African structural critique treats periphery status as historically produced by colonial extraction, not a natural stage.
L17	Mechanism	How does core-periphery exploitation operate in world-systems theory?	Through unequal exchange: surplus is transferred from peripheral producers of low-value or raw commodities to core firms and states that control high-value processing, finance, and technology.	Scope conditions include a capitalist world-economy and state-backed property rights; African dependency theorists add colonial institutional legacies.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L17	Application	Why does the DRC capture only 3–5% of final EV battery value?	Because cobalt extraction occurs in a peripheral node while refining, cathode production, cell manufacturing, and branding are concentrated in core and semi-peripheral lead-firm networks.	Chinese processing dominance and Western lead-firm governance are visible; African resource-sovereignty initiatives seek to move nodes upstream.
L17	Comparison	How does dependency theory differ from world-systems theory?	Dependency theory centers national and colonial underdevelopment and neo-colonial control; world-systems theory centers the global division of labor and systemic hierarchy.	Both share core-periphery logic; African scholars often combine them to explain state weakness and external control.
L17	Source	What is Arrighi's hegemonic cycle?	Each hegemon moves from material expansion in production and trade toward financial expansion in credit and speculation as profitability declines, followed by hegemonic transition.	Western IPE often reads this as cyclical power shift; African and Russian perspectives often read financialization as extraction from the periphery.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L17	Debate	What does the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis claim?	Primary-commodity exporters face long-term deterioration in terms of trade relative to manufactured goods, so growth requires industrialization or value addition.	It underpins African demands for beneficiation; critics note commodity booms and quality upgrading can modify the trend.
L17	Reconstruction	How did African dependency theorists explain the debt crisis?	Rodney, Nkrumah, Amin, and Frank framed debt as neo-colonial leverage: borrowing financed import dependence and adjustment transferred costs to workers and peasants.	HIPC/MDRI relief reduced nominal debt, but conditionality often preserved liberalization; African critics demand policy space.
L17	Occlusion	What does mainstream Western IPE often occlude?	It can treat states as unitary rational actors and markets as neutral, understating structural power, colonial history, and lead-firm governance.	African political economy insists on historical structure and racialized extraction; Western critical IPE partially corrects this.
L17	Adjudication	Does HIPC/MDRI debt relief refute dependency theory?	No single outcome settles it: debt stocks fell, but conditionality, new borrowing, and commodity dependence often reproduced vulnerability.	Adjudication requires comparing counterfactual debt paths, fiscal space, and distributional outcomes.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L17	Visual	What does a hegemonic-cycle diagram show?	A wave or spiral in which material expansion in production, trade, and infrastructure gives way to financial expansion in credit, speculation, and military overstretch before transition.	Label nodes as Genoese/Spanish, Dutch, British, and American; annotate African extraction as an input to each cycle.
L17	Mechanism	How do illicit financial flows work?	Through trade misinvoicing, transfer pricing, tax-haven routing, and corruption; UNCTAD estimates Africa loses about $88.6 billion annually.	IFFs are a mechanism of value extraction; African revenue authorities and UN agencies frame them as development-finance losses.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence you can produce	Next action
Define world-systems and name core, semi-periphery, and periphery		A one-paragraph definition with the unit of analysis	Re-read Wallerstein flashcards
Explain Arrighi's material-to-financial expansion		A labeled diagram of one hegemonic cycle	Draw the visual anchor from memory
Reconstruct African dependency arguments		A 200-word steel-man of Rodney or Nkrumah	Compare with error log
Apply value-chain analysis to DRC cobalt		A stage-by-stage value-capture table	Re-run the Data Lab

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence you can produce	Next action
Interpret Prebisch-Singer and terms of trade		A statement of scope conditions and exceptions	Review commodity-cycle evidence
Identify IFF mechanisms and UNCTAD estimate		A list of four mechanisms and one number	Re-read UNCTAD 2020
Reconstruct all five perspectives		Five 3-sentence summaries	Practice aloud
Adjudicate HIPC/MDRI against dependency		A falsifier and a counterfactual	Re-read worked example

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which concept did you initially treat as a country-level story rather than a system-level structure?
2. Which perspective did you find hardest to steel-man without caricature?
3. What evidence would change your view on whether debt relief altered dependency?

7.3 Error Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Dependency theory says poor countries cannot develop at all.	It says development is constrained and structured by global hierarchy; semi-peripheral mobility is possible.	Wallerstein's semi-periphery category; Amin's unequal development.
World-systems is just Marxism with countries.	It is a distinct historical social science with the world-economy as its unit of analysis.	Wallerstein (1974).
The DRC's low value capture is only due to corruption.	Governance matters, but structural position in GVCs—processing location, standards, finance—explains much of the gap.	Lead-firm concentration in cobalt refining and battery manufacturing.
HIPC/MDRI ended African debt problems.	Relief reduced stocks, but conditionality, new borrowing, and commodity dependence often reproduced vulnerability.	Post-2010 debt distress in several African economies.
Chinese engagement is uniformly a debt trap.	The record is mixed; official win-win narratives and academic critiques both require case-specific assessment.	DRC-Zambia battery initiative and varied project outcomes.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Prebisch-Singer is an iron law.	It is an empirical tendency with exceptions; commodity cycles and quality upgrading can modify the trend.	Terms-of-trade debates and upgrading cases.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
World-systems: core, semi-periphery, periphery	Unequal exchange through international division of labor	Wallerstein (1974-2011)	Africa's low share of global manufacturing value added	Systemic vs. state-centric IPE	Peripheral economies capture rising value without changing structural position	L19, L27-29
Hegemonic cycles	Material expansion shifts to financial expansion; hegemonic transition	Arrighi (1994)	Power shifts among hegemons; African extraction as input	Cyclical vs. linear power	Hegemon sustains material dominance without financialization	L33
African dependency	Development of underdevelopment; neo-colonial control	Frank (1967); Rodney (1972); Amin (1976); Nkrumah (1965)	1980s-1990s debt crisis; HIPC/MDRI	Structural vs. policy failure	Policy autonomy alone eliminates hierarchy	L27-29
GVC analysis	Lead firms govern standards, finance, upgrading, and value distribution	GVC scholarship on lead-firm governance	DRC cobalt captures 3-5% of final EV battery value	Upgrading vs. dependency	Rising local value capture and technology transfer	L19, L33

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Empirical measurement	Prebisch-Singer; IFFs; capital flight; debt distress	UNCTAD (2020)	$88.6 billion annual IFFs from Africa; terms of trade	Measurement vs. theory	Sustained terms-of-trade improvement and low IFFs	L51

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Action	Output
R1 — 24 hours	Re-read flashcards and define the five key ideas aloud	Five 30-second definitions
R2 — 3 days	Reconstruct the African perspective from memory, then compare with Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives	Perspective comparison notes
R3 — 7 days	Re-run the DRC cobalt problem pair and draft memo headings	Mechanism, perspective reconstruction, analogue, falsifiers
R4 — 14 days	Re-run Data Lab tables and identify one falsifier for each key idea	Annotated tables
R5 — 30 days	Complete Feynman compression and teach the lesson to a peer or recorder	Compressed explanation plus error-log update

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define world-systems theory and its three zones.
- ☐ I can explain unequal exchange as a mechanism.
- ☐ I can describe Arrighi's hegemonic cycle.
- ☐ I can reconstruct African dependency arguments from Frank, Rodney, Amin, and Nkrumah.
- ☐ I can explain neo-colonialism in the debt-crisis context.
- ☐ I can apply GVC analysis to the DRC cobalt chain.
- ☐ I can state the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis and its scope conditions.
- ☐ I can identify IFF mechanisms and the UNCTAD estimate.
- ☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives without caricature.
- ☐ I can explain what each perspective occludes.
- ☐ I can adjudicate HIPC/MDRI against dependency theory.
- ☐ I can propose a falsifier for each key idea.
- ☐ I can use the four levels of analysis from Lesson 1.

☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I can complete the Data Lab tables.
☐ I can update my error log after review.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

World-systems foundations - Wallerstein, I. (1974) *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*. - Wallerstein, I. (1979) *The Modern World-System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750*. - Wallerstein, I. (2004) *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*.

Hegemonic cycles - Arrighi, G. (1994) *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*.

African dependency and neo-colonialism - Rodney, W. (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. - Frank, A. G. (1967) *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*. - Amin, S. (1976) *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*. - Nkrumah, K. (1965) *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*.

Empirical measurement and illicit financial flows - UNCTAD (2020) *Economic Development in Africa Report 2020: Tackling Illicit Financial Flows for Sustainable Development in Africa*.

End of Lesson 17. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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19. Weaponized Interdependence and Financial Statecraft

LESSON METADATA

Lesson number and title	Module	Prerequisites	Interleaved links	Reading load	Estimated study time	Content channels	Bloom ceiling
L18: Weaponized Interdependence and Financial Statecraft	Module 3: International Political Economy and Geoeconomics	L6 (institutionalism), L15-17 (IPE), L16 (Bretton Woods)	Forward to L19 (energy), L38 (sanctions), L52-53 (semiconductors, minerals), L48 (chokepoints)	7-9 hours	7-9 hours	Text, Data Lab, Visuals	Analyze and Evaluate

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The transition from the post-war institutional order to the contemporary era of financial statecraft represents a fundamental rupture in International Relations theory. For decades, the prevailing paradigm suggested that economic interdependence would act as a pacifying force, reducing the likelihood of conflict through mutual vulnerability. However, the architecture built at Bretton Woods evolved not into a system of shared security, but into a network topology where centrality conferred coercive capability rather than protection. This lesson confronts the central puzzle: how does the very connectivity that enables global trade become the mechanism for geopolitical coercion? Understanding this requires moving beyond traditional state-centric realism to analyze the networked nature of finance itself. The student will learn that financial power is not merely a function of GDP or reserve holdings, but a structural advantage derived from occupying key nodes in the global payment system. This distinction is critical for analyzing contemporary conflicts where economic warfare substitutes for kinetic force.

The theoretical lineage of this lesson traces from the institutionalism of L6 through to the network theory articulated by Farrell and Newman (2019). Early scholarship, such as Drezner (1999), treated sanctions as blunt instruments of state coercion, assuming rational actors who could calculate compliance costs. However, contemporary analysis reveals that the efficacy of sanctions depends on the structural position of the target within a network. The US dollar's dominance in clearing and settlement is not an accident of history but a maintained position of structural power. This lesson interrogates how this centrality is weaponized, moving beyond the simple binary of "sanctions work" or "sanctions fail." It asks instead *how* they function through specific mechanisms like secondary sanctions and SWIFT exclusions. The curriculum placement here follows L16 (Bretton Woods) to show how the original institutional design inadvertently created the vulnerabilities exploited today.

The African perspective is not merely a case study but the primary lens through which this structural violence must be understood. For the continent, financial statecraft is not abstract theory; it is the reality of debt distress, fuel insecurity, and fertilizer price volatility. When Western powers weaponize interdependence, the Global South faces the brunt of these shocks without political recourse. African scholarship, from Fanon to contemporary analyses by Grovogui and Mamdani, highlights how colonial-era financial structures persist in modern sanctions regimes. This lesson reconstructs that vantage point, showing how debt traps and currency volatility are not market outcomes but geopolitical choices. The student will recognize that "financial sovereignty" is the specific vocabulary African states use to describe their struggle against external coercion.

Furthermore, this lesson must address the distributional question: who bears the cost? Western perspectives often focus on compliance rates or target state behavior. However, an African vantage point reveals that the costs are distributed unevenly across the Global South. The impact of sanctions on food security, specifically through fertilizer imports priced in dollars, demonstrates a mechanism of indirect coercion. This lesson integrates these perspectives to show that the network is not neutral; it reflects historical power asymmetries. By mastering this material, students will be able to critique the normative claims of "smart sanctions" and understand why humanitarian carve-outs often fail to reach intended beneficiaries. The analysis extends beyond US policy to include Chinese parallel systems and UN resolutions on unilateral coercive measures.

The central capability developed here is the ability to distinguish between liquidity constraints and network topology constraints. A state may have reserves but still be cut off from the global system if its banks are disconnected from SWIFT. This distinction is vital for analyzing cases like Russia in 2022 or Iran in 2019. The lesson prepares the student for L19 (energy) and L48 (chokepoints), where physical infrastructure intersects with financial control. Without understanding the financial architecture, one cannot analyze energy

geopolitics correctly. Therefore, this module serves as the foundational layer for geoeconomic analysis.

Finally, mastering this lesson allows the student to evaluate policy interventions critically. They will be able to predict how states adapt through parallel banking systems like CIPS or SPFS. They will understand the limitations of "de-dollarization" campaigns and why they are often defensive reactions rather than offensive strategies. The learning outcomes include the ability to map a sanctions regime, identify its network vulnerabilities, and assess the distributional impacts on third parties. This prepares the student for the complex reality where financial warfare is the new battlefield, requiring a sophisticated understanding of both economic mechanisms and political power dynamics.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. According to L6 institutionalism, what is the primary function of international organizations like the IMF in managing state behavior?
2. In Lesson 16 (Bretton Woods), what specific currency was designated as the anchor for the global monetary system?
3. How did the neoliberal shift described in L15 alter the relationship between national sovereignty and market integration?
4. From L17, recall the distinction made between economic sanctions and trade embargoes regarding their legal mechanisms.
5. What is the definition of "interdependence" as used in the IPE framework covered previously?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. How does the concept of "network centrality" differ from traditional measures of state power like GDP or military size?
2. Why is the US dollar considered a "global public good" by some economists, and how can that status be weaponized?
3. What is a "secondary sanction," and why do they create friction between the target state and third-party trading partners?
4. How does the African experience with debt crises inform the theoretical understanding of financial coercion in this lesson?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

1. **Weaponized Interdependence:** The strategic exploitation of economic network vulnerabilities to coerce other states; coined by Farrell and Newman (2019).
2. **Chokepoint:** A critical node or link within a network whose disruption disproportionately affects the whole system.
3. **Secondary Sanctions:** Legal penalties imposed on third-party entities for doing business with a primary sanction target, extending extraterritorial reach.
4. **De-dollarization:** Policy efforts to reduce reliance on US dollars in international trade and reserve holdings.
5. **SWIFT:** The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication; the messaging system used for cross-border payments.

6. **Parallel Banking System:** Alternative financial infrastructure created by states to bypass primary sanctions (e.g., CIPS, SPFS).
7. **Financial Sovereignty:** A concept emphasizing a state's right to control its own monetary and financial policies without external interference.
8. **Extraterritoriality:** The application of a nation's domestic laws beyond its borders, often used in US sanctions regimes.
9. **Humanitarian Carve-out:** Provisions within sanctions designed to exempt essential goods like food and medicine from restrictions.
10. **Global South:** A geopolitical term referring to nations primarily in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania, distinct from the Global North/West.
11. **Dollar Hegemony:** The dominance of the US dollar in global trade settlement, reserves, and financial markets.
12. **Coercive Diplomacy:** The use of economic pressure to force a change in an adversary's behavior without direct military engagement.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

SECTION 2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the structural shift in international political economy from a state-centric realist framework to a network-theoretic understanding where centrality constitutes power rather than mere possession of resources.
2. **Evaluate** the causal mechanisms by which financial interdependence creates vulnerabilities that can be weaponized, specifically distinguishing between panopticon effects and chokepoint dynamics as identified in Farrell and Newman's framework.
3. **Construct** arguments regarding the scope conditions under which sanctions succeed or fail, accounting for network density, trust levels, and the presence of alternative clearing mechanisms.
4. **Apply** theoretical insights to historical cases such as the 2018-2019 maximum pressure campaign on Iran versus the 2022 sanctions on Russia, adjudicating between competing explanations for efficacy based on network topology.
5. **Critique** the normative implications of weaponized interdependence regarding distributive justice, specifically assessing how the Global South bears disproportionate costs and reconstructing these dynamics through African scholarship on sovereignty and development.

SECTION 2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Network Theory and the Structural Basis of Coercion

Bolded Causal Claim: The fundamental causal claim advanced by Farrell and Newman (2019) is that power in the contemporary international system derives not from material capabilities alone, but from the positionality within a network of interdependence. Specifically, centrality confers power because it allows the controller to influence the flow of goods, capital, and information. This relationship is asymmetric: A can punish B for non-compliance by cutting off access to the network, whereas B cannot reciprocate without suffering catastrophic systemic costs. The claim posits that "interdependence is a form of vulnerability," meaning that the very integration that generates prosperity simultaneously creates the leverage points neces-

sary for coercion. In the context of financial statecraft, this manifests as the ability to exclude non-compliant actors from the global payment system. This structural power operates independently of political will; it exists because the architecture itself relies on a few critical nodes (e.g., US dollar clearing) that process the majority of global transactions. Consequently, sanctions are effective not merely because of the threat of retaliation, but because the target is structurally dependent on the network for basic economic functionality. The claim implies that power is endogenous to the network design, not exogenous to state military or economic size.

Mechanism: The mechanism through which this causal claim operates involves two distinct but related topological features: the panopticon and the chokepoint. The panopticon effect occurs when a central node (like the US financial system) can observe and regulate all transactions passing through it, effectively creating an informational advantage that translates into coercive capability. When a state attempts to bypass this node, the system detects it because the flow of information is centralized. The chokepoint mechanism refers to specific nodes where the volume of traffic is so high that removing them causes systemic disruption for third parties. In financial terms, the US dollar clearing system serves as a chokepoint because nearly all international trade requires settlement in dollars or through correspondent banks domiciled in the United States. When the US freezes assets or excludes a bank from SWIFT, it does not just harm the target state; it threatens the liquidity of the entire global banking system if too many chokepoints are removed simultaneously. This creates a feedback loop where the defender of the network (the US) gains power by maintaining the system's integrity, while challengers must choose between isolation or adaptation. The mechanism relies on trust: banks participate in the dollar system because they expect reciprocity and safety. Weaponization breaks this trust, forcing participants to weigh the cost of compliance against the risk of being cut off.

Scope Conditions: The efficacy of weaponized interdependence is contingent upon specific scope conditions that often limit its universal application. First, network density matters; if a target state has diversified its trade and financial partners sufficiently, the chokepoint effect diminishes. This explains why comprehensive sanctions against Iran were less successful than those against Russia in terms of regime change, though both faced severe economic pain. Second, the level of trust within the network is critical. If participants believe the hegemon will use the system for arbitrary coercion, they will seek alternatives (de-dollarization), which erodes the mechanism over time. Third, the legal and regulatory framework must support extraterritorial reach; US laws like the Helms-Burton Act or secondary sanctions rely on the assumption that foreign banks will comply with domestic US law to avoid reputational risk. If these laws are perceived as overly aggressive, they trigger resistance rather than compliance. Finally, the technological capacity of the target matters. A state without a sophisticated financial bureaucracy cannot easily build alternative systems (like SPFS) quickly enough to offset exclusion from the primary network. These conditions suggest that weaponized interdependence is most potent against states that are deeply integrated into the Western-led architecture but lack the resources to pivot rapidly toward alternative networks.

Observable Implications: The observable implications of this theory are found in the varying outcomes of sanctions regimes across different historical contexts. When a chokepoint is successfully weaponized, we observe a rapid contraction in the target's access to global markets, often accompanied by capital flight and currency devaluation among trading partners fearing secondary liability. We also observe the emergence of parallel architectures, such as the creation of new clearinghouses or the shift toward commodity-backed currencies, indicating the network is fracturing under pressure. In cases where the panopticon effect dominates, we see increased surveillance and compliance monitoring by private banks to avoid sanctions violations, effectively privatizing enforcement. A critical implication is the emergence of "sanctions fatigue" among third-party states; as the cost of complying with US demands rises, they begin to seek alternatives, leading

to a gradual erosion of the hegemon's centrality. Empirical evidence from the Atlantic Council sanctions tracker shows that while comprehensive sanctions often cause humanitarian distress, targeted financial exclusions (like SWIFT bans) have higher success rates in altering behavior if the target lacks deep ties with non-aligned partners. However, we also observe resilience where targets rebuild capacity through regional partnerships, suggesting that network power is not permanent but must be constantly renewed.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective views weaponized interdependence primarily through the lens of historical coloniality and the structural inequalities embedded in the global financial architecture. Scholars like Achille Mbembe and Amina Wadud argue that the current network topology is not neutral but reflects a post-colonial order where the Global South remains structurally dependent on Western nodes for liquidity and trade settlement. From this vantage point, sanctions are often viewed as a continuation of economic warfare that prioritizes geopolitical objectives over human rights and development needs in Africa. The African perspective emphasizes that while network theory explains the mechanics of exclusion, it obscures the historical context of why African economies were integrated into these networks on unequal terms. This is critical because it reveals that "interdependence" often masks dependency relationships established during the Cold War era, where infrastructure was built to serve Western interests rather than local development. Consequently, the African critique focuses on the distributive consequences: when sanctions are weaponized against a state with which Africa trades, African economies bear the brunt of inflation and food insecurity because they lack alternative payment channels. This perspective challenges the neutrality of the panopticon concept by arguing that the "view" is not equal; Western states see the network clearly, while African states often operate in the blind spots of surveillance and compliance regimes designed to protect their own citizens from liability.

The Chinese perspective interprets weaponized interdependence as a challenge to financial sovereignty and a driver of de-dollarization strategies. Beijing views US-centric financial networks as tools of containment rather than neutral infrastructure, leading to investments in alternative systems like CIPS (Cross-Border Interbank Payment System). The Chinese stance emphasizes the need for multipolarity where no single state can dictate the rules of global finance, advocating for local currency settlement to reduce vulnerability to unilateral coercive measures.

The Russian perspective frames sanctions as a form of economic warfare that threatens national survival and seeks to build a parallel financial architecture insulated from Western influence. Moscow argues that the US weaponization of its dollar hegemony violates international law and necessitates a defensive response through gold-backed settlements and bilateral trade agreements, viewing centrality not as power but as an existential threat.

The Western perspective generally defends sanctions as a tool of coercive diplomacy within a rules-based order, arguing that they are necessary to enforce international norms while minimizing humanitarian impact. However, internal critiques acknowledge the collateral damage and the risk of undermining the legitimacy of the financial system itself, leading to debates over proportionality and the effectiveness of secondary sanctions on third-party states.

The UN perspective focuses on humanitarian carve-outs and the Special Rapporteur's role in monitoring unilateral coercive measures, emphasizing that financial restrictions must not violate international human rights law or impede the delivery of essential goods like food and medicine. The UN seeks to balance security concerns with the obligation to protect vulnerable populations from the fallout of geopolitical conflicts played out in financial markets.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — SWIFT and Dollar Clearing: How the US Converts Financial Centrality into Coercive Power

Bolded Causal Claim: The United States converts its structural centrality in global financial networks into coercive power by leveraging the U.S. dollar as the primary medium of exchange and clearing currency, allowing it to exclude non-compliant states from the international payment system via SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) membership termination or freezing assets held in U.S. jurisdictions.

Mechanism: This coercion operates through a network theory framework articulated by Farrell and Newman (2019), where the "panopticon" of global finance relies on intermediary banks that must choose between their own commercial interests and alignment with U.S. security priorities. The mechanism functions because the majority of global transactions are denominated in USD, processed through New York clearing houses, or routed through correspondent accounts held at U.S. banks (e.g., JP Morgan Chase, Citibank). When a state like Iran is targeted, the U.S. does not need to physically block funds; it instructs intermediary banks to cease processing transactions involving that target. The cost of compliance for these banks—loss of access to the dollar liquidity pool—is so high that they self-regulate before explicit orders are given. This creates a "chokepoint" effect where the network architecture itself becomes the weapon. In the 2012 case against Iran, the U.S. utilized this mechanism to restrict oil exports by freezing Iranian Central Bank assets and threatening correspondent banks. Similarly, in February 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. Treasury Department moved to cut off Russian state-owned enterprises from SWIFT. This action severed the ability of the Russian state to receive international payments for gas or trade goods, effectively weaponizing the network's topology. The mechanism relies on the assumption that no viable alternative payment system exists with sufficient liquidity depth to replace the dollar clearing infrastructure.

Scope Conditions: The efficacy of this mechanism is contingent upon three specific conditions: first, the global dominance of the U.S. dollar in foreign exchange reserves and trade invoicing; second, the lack of a credible alternative interbank messaging or clearing system that has achieved universal adoption (prior to 2022); and third, the legal jurisdiction of U.S. courts over non-U.S. entities that interact with the U.S. financial system. If a target state possesses significant hard currency reserves denominated in non-dollar assets (e.g., gold or yuan) and can access a parallel network like China's CIPS without friction, the mechanism weakens. Furthermore, this power is asymmetric; it cannot be reciprocated by smaller states because they lack the network centrality to impose comparable costs on others. The scope condition also depends on the willingness of Western banks to comply with U.S. secondary sanctions, a factor that fluctuates based on political pressure from Washington and the risk of losing access to New York markets.

Observable Implications: Empirically, the weaponization of financial networks manifests as immediate liquidity shocks for targeted states. Following the 2012 sanctions on Iran, oil exports dropped significantly not because of a physical blockade but because buyers could not settle payments in dollars without risking U.S. asset freezes. In 2022, Russia's exclusion from SWIFT for major banks led to a fragmentation of its payment system, forcing Moscow to rely on barter trade and the CIPS platform for settlement. The observable outcome is a bifurcation of the global financial system: a "compliant" dollar network and an emerging "non-compliant" parallel architecture. This also triggers secondary effects such as inflation in targeted economies due to supply chain disruptions, capital flight, and devaluation of local currencies. In 2023, analysts noted that while Russia's economy remained resilient in the short term, the long-term cost was

reduced access to Western technology and insurance markets, compounding the financial isolation initiated by SWIFT cuts.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African Perspective: For African states, the weaponization of dollar clearing represents a continuation of colonial-era financial dependency where sovereignty is subordinated to the security interests of a distant hegemon. Scholars like Amina Mama and Mahmood Mamdani argue that this architecture reproduces neo-colonial hierarchies where Global South nations are treated as subjects rather than equals, unable to participate in global finance without U.S. permission. This impacts food security directly; when fuel or fertilizer payments are blocked via dollar clearing, rural livelihoods collapse regardless of the geopolitical justification. **Chinese Perspective:** Beijing views this mechanism as a demonstration of American hegemony that threatens the multipolar order. China interprets SWIFT exclusions not merely as legal enforcement but as political coercion that undermines the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs. Consequently, China advocates for de-dollarization and alternative settlement systems to protect its Belt and Road Initiative partners from similar vulnerability. **Russian Perspective:** Moscow frames this power as "economic warfare" designed to strangle a sovereign state's ability to govern. Russian analysts emphasize that SWIFT cuts are an illegal use of force under international law, violating the principle of economic sovereignty. They view the mechanism as a tool for regime change rather than legitimate statecraft, arguing that it destabilizes global markets by creating artificial scarcity in energy trade. **Western Perspective:** Washington justifies these actions as necessary to enforce international norms and protect national security interests against malign actors. Western analysts emphasize the distinction between targeted sanctions and comprehensive embargoes, arguing that cutting off specific entities minimizes humanitarian harm while maximizing pressure on regimes violating human rights or international law. However, critics within the West acknowledge the collateral damage to innocent populations and the risk of eroding trust in the financial system itself. **UN Perspective:** The United Nations emphasizes the need for humanitarian carve-outs and adherence to international human rights law when implementing financial restrictions. UN Special Rapporteurs monitor unilateral coercive measures to ensure they do not impede the delivery of essential goods like food and medicine. The UN seeks to balance security concerns with the obligation to protect vulnerable populations, often calling for a moratorium on sanctions that violate the sovereignty of non-targeted states or disrupt global supply chains necessary for basic survival.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Sanctions Design: Smart vs Comprehensive, Secondary Sanctions, and Extraterritorial Reach

Bolded Causal Claim: The design of sanctions—specifically the use of secondary sanctions and extraterritorial jurisdiction—significantly increases coercive leverage by penalizing third-party entities that engage with a targeted state, thereby expanding the reach of U.S. law beyond its borders to coerce non-targeted nations into compliance.

Mechanism: This mechanism relies on "long-arm" jurisdiction where U.S. laws (such as those enforced by the Office of Foreign Assets Control) assert authority over foreign entities that interact with the U.S. financial system or use U.S.-origin technology. Secondary sanctions threaten to cut off these third parties from dollar access if they trade with a sanctioned target, like Russia or Iran. The mechanism functions through "compliance costs": banks and corporations calculate that the cost of violating U.S. law (asset freezes, reputational damage) exceeds the profit gained from trading with the target. In the case of maximum pressure on Iran (2018-2019), the U.S. threatened secondary sanctions on Indian oil importers who bought discounted Iranian crude. The mechanism works by creating a "compliance cascade" where intermediaries self-censor

to avoid risk, effectively extending the reach of U.S. policy without direct military or physical intervention.

Scope Conditions: This design is effective only when the target state lacks sufficient trade alternatives and when third-party states fear retaliation from the U.S. more than they value their economic ties to the target. The mechanism weakens if the target state develops parallel financial channels (e.g., Russia's SPFS) that bypass SWIFT, or if third parties are willing to accept the risk of sanctions evasion. Additionally, the scope condition depends on the global demand for specific commodities; if a target state offers unique resources (like rare earth minerals or discounted energy), third parties may ignore secondary sanctions despite the risks. The mechanism also has limits regarding humanitarian exemptions; if food and medicine trade is legally protected, the coercive pressure on the target regime diminishes because the economic pain cannot be fully transmitted to the population without violating international norms.

Observable Implications: In practice, secondary sanctions lead to observable shifts in trade patterns and corporate behavior. During the 2018-2019 Iran sanctions, India significantly reduced its oil imports from Tehran due to fears of being cut off from dollar clearing, even though the U.S. did not formally sanction Indian banks directly. Similarly, Iraq faced difficulties paying for electricity imports because Western suppliers feared secondary sanctions liability. The observable outcome is often a "de-risking" phenomenon where banks close accounts in sanctioned countries entirely, rather than just restricting specific transactions. This leads to market fragmentation and higher transaction costs globally. Over time, this design can backfire by incentivizing the creation of non-dollar payment systems, thereby accelerating the very de-dollarization that Western policymakers seek to prevent.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African Perspective: African scholars and policymakers view secondary sanctions as a violation of the principle of non-interference and a threat to food security. For nations like Ethiopia or Kenya, which rely on imported fuel and fertilizer, U.S. pressure on third parties disrupts essential imports without targeting the specific regime responsible for instability. This perspective highlights how financial coercion disproportionately affects the Global South, where states lack the diplomatic leverage to negotiate exemptions and suffer collateral damage in terms of debt distress and inflation. **Chinese Perspective:** China critiques secondary sanctions as a violation of international law and an infringement on national sovereignty. Beijing argues that such measures undermine the multilateral trading system by allowing one nation to unilaterally dictate trade rules for others. Consequently, China promotes alternative payment systems like CIPS to provide a sovereign-safe haven for nations unwilling to submit to U.S. extraterritorial jurisdiction, framing this as a defense of the multipolar order. **Russian Perspective:** Moscow characterizes secondary sanctions as "economic warfare" and an illegal extension of military force. Russian analysts argue that these measures violate the UN Charter by imposing unilateral coercive measures without Security Council authorization. They view the threat of asset freezes against third parties as a tool to destabilize global markets and punish states for maintaining diplomatic ties with Russia, framing it as a breach of fundamental international norms. **Western Perspective:** Washington defends secondary sanctions as a necessary tool for enforcing compliance and protecting national security interests. Western policymakers argue that these measures are proportional and targeted, distinguishing them from comprehensive embargoes that harm civilian populations. However, internal critiques within the West acknowledge that extraterritorial reach can damage U.S. reputation and lead to trade wars with allies who feel coerced into violating their own economic interests for American security goals. **UN Perspective:** The United Nations advocates for a strict adherence to international human rights law when designing sanctions regimes, emphasizing the need for humanitarian carve-outs. UN bodies monitor the impact of secondary sanctions on third-party states, warning against measures that violate the sovereignty of non-targeted nations or impede essential trade in food and medicine. The Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures calls for a moratorium on such practices

unless they are approved by the Security Council, ensuring that financial restrictions do not become tools of regime change rather than instruments of peace enforcement.

SECTION 2.5 — KEY IDEA 4: Evasion and Adaptation in Financial Architecture

Bolded Causal Claim: When hegemonic financial coercion targets a state's access to the global payment system, target states will not remain passive; they will actively construct parallel architectures or utilize alternative settlement mechanisms, though the efficacy of these adaptations is strictly bounded by liquidity constraints and network depth.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through institutional bifurcation. Following Farrell and Newman's (2019) framework of weaponized interdependence, states seek to decouple from the "panopticon" of U.S.-centric financial governance. Russia's creation of the System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS) following its 2022 exclusion from SWIFT demonstrates this adaptive capacity. SPFS functions not merely as a messaging tool but as a signaling device to partner states that they may transact without relying on correspondent banks vulnerable to U.S. secondary sanctions. Similarly, China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) offers an alternative clearing channel, though it remains smaller than SWIFT and lacks the deep liquidity of the U.S. dollar market. The European Union attempted this through INSTEX in 2019 to trade with Iran without dollars, but its limited scope revealed that adaptation is often a defensive posture rather than a strategic offensive one. Furthermore, non-architectural adaptations include the use of commodity-backed currencies (gold) and decentralized finance (crypto), which bypass traditional banking rails entirely. However, these methods carry high transaction costs and volatility risks. The mechanism relies on "networked sovereignty," where states leverage existing bilateral trade relationships to create a new web of payment settlements that do not rely on the hegemon's central bank or clearinghouses.

Scope Conditions: This adaptation is viable only when three conditions are met: first, the target state must have sufficient foreign exchange reserves in non-dollar assets (euros, yuan, gold) to facilitate bilateral settlement; second, there must be a critical mass of trading partners willing to accept parallel systems without fear of secondary sanctions; third, the global network topology must contain enough "weak links" or chokepoints that can be bypassed. If the hegemon controls the majority of global reserves (as with the USD's ~60% share in M2 money stock per COFER data), adaptation is limited to niche markets rather than broad systemic replacement. The scope condition also depends on the political will of intermediaries; for instance, Indian banks may process transactions for Russia via SPFS but may avoid doing so if U.S. regulators threaten their correspondent accounts. Consequently, adaptation is often partial and fragmented rather than total systemic replacement.

Observable Implications: Observable indicators of this dynamic include a measurable increase in bilateral trade settlement agreements excluding the dollar, such as China-Russia oil trades settled in yuan or rubles post-2022. Another indicator is the volatility of alternative currencies; when CIPS usage spikes, it often correlates with a decline in SWIFT transaction volume for specific corridors. Furthermore, the emergence of crypto-assets as a settlement layer creates new regulatory challenges, observable through the rise of stablecoins pegged to non-dollar reserves in sanctioned jurisdictions. The fragmentation of the financial system is also visible in the "shadow banking" sector, where states use private blockchain networks or messaging apps (like Telegram-based payment systems) to move value. These implications suggest a trend toward a multipolar financial architecture, though one that remains deeply hierarchical with the U.S. dollar still at the apex of liquidity.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African Perspective: African scholars like Jean-Loup Amselle and Achille Mbembe argue that this adaptation is not merely technical but a matter of survival against structural violence. Bayart's concept of "politics of the belly" suggests that for Global South states, financial sovereignty is not an abstract legal right but a prerequisite for feeding populations; therefore, reliance on Western payment systems is seen as a form of colonial dependency that must be severed through whatever means necessary, even if it fragments global liquidity. The African Union's stance prioritizes food security over financial orthodoxy, viewing parallel systems as essential to prevent the weaponization of food imports (fertilizer, fuel) which are cleared via these networks. **Chinese Perspective:** Beijing views CIPS and SPFS partnerships as legitimate exercises in "financial sovereignty" rather than geopolitical aggression. The narrative emphasizes that no state should be forced to choose between economic development and national security, framing parallel architecture as a defensive measure against unilateral coercion. **Russian Perspective:** Moscow frames the creation of SPFS as a necessary response to Western hostility, justifying the bifurcation of financial infrastructure as a legitimate exercise of sovereign rights under international law. They argue that the West's refusal to grant equal access constitutes an illegal embargo rather than a standard sanction. **Western Perspective:** U.S. policymakers and think tanks (e.g., Atlantic Council) often describe parallel systems as inefficient and risky, arguing they fragment global liquidity and increase transaction costs for everyone. The Western view prioritizes the integrity of SWIFT and the rule-based order, viewing fragmentation as a threat to financial stability rather than an acceptable adaptation. **UN Perspective:** UN agencies emphasize that while sovereignty is respected, fragmentation must not violate humanitarian obligations. The Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures notes that parallel systems should not be used to circumvent sanctions regimes that target individuals or groups involved in human rights abuses, balancing the right to financial autonomy with the imperative of preventing illicit finance and funding terrorism.

SECTION 2.6 — KEY IDEA 5: The Distributional Question of Coercion

Bolded Causal Claim: Weaponized interdependence imposes asymmetric costs on third-party states, particularly those in the Global South, where the economic fallout from financial coercion against a primary target is redistributed through global supply chains and financial markets, disproportionately affecting food security and debt stability.

Mechanism: The distributional mechanism operates through price transmission and liquidity shock. When a major economy like Russia or Iran is sanctioned, its exports (oil, gas, wheat) are priced in dollars but paid for with non-dollar currencies that may be scarce elsewhere. This forces importing nations to pay premiums to secure supply, effectively transferring wealth from the Global South to the sanctioning hegemon or neutral intermediaries. For example, when U.S. sanctions restricted Russian oil sales after 2022, global prices shifted; while some states secured discounts, others faced higher costs due to insurance and shipping risks (the "Arctic route" premium). This is compounded by debt distress: African nations holding bonds in dollars face higher borrowing costs as investors flee riskier assets. The mechanism also involves "secondary sanctions," where non-targeted firms are penalized for transacting with the target, forcing them to exit markets regardless of their own compliance posture. This creates a "spillover effect" where the cost is borne by citizens in countries that never sanctioned the primary target but rely on global markets.

Scope Conditions: The severity of distributional costs depends on the degree of dependency on the sanctioned commodity or currency. States heavily reliant on Russian energy (like Turkey or Egypt) face higher inflationary pressure than those with diversified suppliers. Additionally, the scope is conditioned by the depth of the global financial system; if a large portion of trade is dollar-denominated, any disruption causes

systemic volatility affecting all non-dollar economies. The mechanism also depends on the political economy of the importing state; authoritarian regimes may absorb costs through subsidies (like Egypt's fuel subsidies) while democracies face electoral backlash from inflation. Furthermore, the condition of "humanitarian carve-outs" matters; if food and medicine are exempted from sanctions, distributional harm is mitigated. However, enforcement gaps often mean that essential goods are still blocked or delayed, exacerbating the cost for the vulnerable.

Observable Implications: Empirical evidence includes rising inflation rates in African nations post-2022, correlating with global energy price shocks and dollar volatility. The volume of local currency settlements (LCS) in BRICS+ countries has expanded, indicating a shift away from dollar dependency as a response to distributional harm. Another observable metric is the increase in debt restructuring requests by low-income countries facing higher interest rates due to U.S. Treasury bond issuance dominance. Furthermore, the "cost of compliance" for multinational corporations is visible through reduced market access in sanctioned regions, leading to layoffs and wage stagnation in third-party countries. The distributional question also reveals a divergence in wealth accumulation: while the sanctioning state may achieve security goals, its allies often face higher prices, creating internal friction within alliances.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African Perspective: Drawing on Mamdani and Grovogui, African scholars argue that the distributional costs of sanctions are a form of "structural violence" that disproportionately impacts the poor. The African Development Bank (AfDB) data highlights how fertilizer shortages from sanctioned Russian exports directly threaten food security, leading to malnutrition rates that cannot be offset by diplomatic rhetoric. For Africa, the question is not about abstract financial sovereignty but about the right to survival; sanctions that disrupt global fertilizer markets are viewed as an existential threat that overrides geopolitical calculations. **Chinese Perspective:** Beijing frames distributional costs as a consequence of Western hegemony and advocates for "de-dollarization" to mitigate these harms. The narrative suggests that a multipolar currency system would distribute risks more evenly, preventing any single state from imposing economic warfare on others. **Russian Perspective:** Moscow attributes the distributional harm to Western monopoly power over global finance, arguing that their sanctions regime transfers wealth from the Global South to the U.S. Treasury. They posit that breaking this dependency is necessary to restore a fairer global order where costs are not externalized onto peripheral states. **Western Perspective:** The United States and EU typically argue that sanctions are targeted and that distributional costs are unintended side effects they seek to minimize through humanitarian exemptions. However, critics within the West note that "smart sanctions" often fail due to network effects, meaning that civilian populations in third countries still suffer from supply chain disruptions, challenging the claim of minimal collateral damage. **UN Perspective:** The UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures emphasizes that distributional harms violate the right to food and health under international law. The UN argues that sanctions regimes must include rigorous human rights impact assessments before implementation to ensure that the costs do not fall disproportionately on vulnerable populations in non-targeted states.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY) The African perspective on weaponized interdependence does not merely accept the premise that financial networks are neutral infrastructure; rather, it reconstructs them as a continuation of colonial extraction mechanisms. This vantage point contributes a critical epistemological correction: sovereignty is not an abstract legal status but a material capacity to control economic flows, which

has been systematically eroded by the architecture of the US dollar and SWIFT. Where Western theories often treat sanctions as tools of "coercive diplomacy," African scholarship frames them as instruments of "necro-economics" that determine who can access life-sustaining resources (Mbembe 2003; Grovogui 1995). This perspective reveals that the distributional costs borne by the Global South are not "collateral damage" but intentional features of a system designed to maintain hegemony.

Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics provides the foundational theoretical lens for understanding financial exclusion in Africa. Necropolitics describes the power to dictate who may live and who must die, extending beyond physical violence to economic suffocation. When a state is excluded from SWIFT or frozen by asset freezes, its population enters a state of suspended animation where food security becomes a matter of survival rather than policy (Mbembe 2013). This perspective occludes the Western claim that sanctions are "smart" and targeted; instead, it argues that in an interdependent world, targeting a central bank inevitably targets the population's access to fertilizer, fuel, and medicine. The African contribution is the insistence on "food sovereignty" rather than "food security." Food security implies receiving aid or market goods from outside; food sovereignty implies control over local production and distribution (Nkrumah 1970). Weaponized interdependence undermines sovereignty by making African economies dependent on US-controlled payment rails, rendering them vulnerable to external coercion.

The theoretical lineage here draws heavily from dependency theory and structuralism, updated for the digital age. Walter Rodney's analysis of how capital accumulation in the metropole requires underdevelopment in the periphery (Rodney 1972) finds its modern expression in financial sanctions. When the US freezes assets or restricts dollar clearing, it effectively weaponizes the historical asymmetry of trade relations. This is not a neutral enforcement of rules but an application of power through infrastructure. Francis Ng'etich and others argue that this dynamic reproduces colonial hierarchies where the Global North sets the terms of engagement (Bayart 2013). Bayart's work on the "political economy of aid" suggests that sanctions are merely a more aggressive form of structural adjustment, imposing austerity through exclusion rather than conditionality.

A critical distinction emerges when analyzing evasion and adaptation. Western observers often view parallel systems like CIPS or SPFS as purely strategic alternatives. The African perspective views them as necessary acts of resistance to maintain sovereignty against external coercion (Mamdani 2016). For African scholars, the choice between the dollar and local currency is not just economic but political: it is a choice between subordination and autonomy. The creation of BRICS+ payment mechanisms is not merely trade diversification; it is an assertion of the right to define one's own financial destiny. This aligns with Amílcar Cabral's argument that liberation requires the construction of new institutions, not just the rejection of old ones (Cabral 1973).

The distributional question is central to this perspective. The cost of sanctions falls disproportionately on the most vulnerable: smallholder farmers who cannot access fertilizer due to frozen supply chains, and consumers facing inflation spikes from fuel shortages. This is analyzed through the lens of human rights law as interpreted in African contexts (Tamale 2018). The Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures highlights this, but African scholarship goes further by questioning the legitimacy of the sanctions regime itself. If a sanction regime violates the right to food and health under international law, then participation in it is complicit in human rights violations (Aning 2020). This perspective challenges the Western notion that economic pressure is a legitimate tool of statecraft when it results in civilian suffering.

Furthermore, the African vantage point reveals what the other four perspectives miss: the internal dynamics of the Global South. The West focuses on US interests; China on strategic autonomy; Russia on survival; the UN on humanitarian carve-outs. Africa focuses on *interdependence itself* as a trap. The "network theory"

proposed by Farrell and Newman (2019) describes how centrality creates power, but African scholars argue that this centrality was never built for equality; it was built for extraction. The network is designed to keep the periphery dependent. When a state like Iran or Russia is sanctioned, the West claims to punish them, but in reality, the system punishes the entire network of developing nations that rely on those states for trade. This "third-country effect" is not an accident; it is a structural feature of the dollar hegemony (Grovogui 2018).

Finally, this perspective offers a normative alternative: the right to self-determination in economic affairs. The African Union's push for local currency settlement and the expansion of AfCFTA are not just trade agreements but constitutional attempts to build sovereignty outside the Western-dominated financial order. This is distinct from the Chinese narrative of "non-interference" because it explicitly links sovereignty to human survival and development rights. It challenges the UN to move beyond humanitarian exemptions toward a fundamental restructuring of global financial governance. The African perspective concludes that weaponized interdependence is not a bug of the system but its operating feature, and that true security requires breaking the dependency on the dollar, not just managing it.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective The Chinese perspective treats weaponized interdependence as a strategic vulnerability to be neutralized through financial sovereignty and multipolarity. Beijing views the US-dominated financial architecture, particularly SWIFT and USD clearing, not merely as a network but as a tool of geopolitical containment. This view is rooted in the principle of "non-interference" and the defense of national sovereignty against external coercion (Drezner 1999). For China, sanctions are not legitimate diplomatic tools but acts of economic warfare that violate the norms of international trade. Consequently, the Chinese response focuses on building parallel infrastructure to ensure resilience.

Key mechanisms in this perspective include the development of CIPS (Cross-Border Interbank Payment System) and local currency settlement agreements within BRICS+. The logic is straightforward: if the US can weaponize the dollar, China must build a system that cannot be weaponized against it. This is not merely about trade; it is about ensuring that China's economic integration does not expose it to unilateral coercion. The Chinese perspective contributes the concept of "financial sovereignty" as a prerequisite for national security. It argues that interdependence should be based on mutual benefit rather than hierarchy, though in practice, this often means building alternative systems to avoid US reach.

However, this perspective occludes the distributional costs borne by third parties. While China advocates for local currency settlement, it does not explicitly address how this shifts risks to non-aligned states or smaller economies that lack the capacity to manage multi-currency clearing. The Chinese narrative focuses on strategic autonomy and resilience, often framing sanctions as a breach of international law rather than a systemic issue requiring structural reform. This occlusion is evident in the reluctance to acknowledge the humanitarian impact of sanctions regimes unless directly threatened themselves.

The evidence for this perspective includes China's rapid expansion of trade in local currencies with Russia, Iran, and African nations following 2022. The creation of CIPS demonstrates a commitment to reducing reliance on US clearing houses. However, strong objections exist: critics argue that building parallel systems creates fragmentation that reduces overall global efficiency. Furthermore, while China promotes "win-win" cooperation, its own trade practices have been accused by Western observers of state-led industrial policy that distorts markets (Atlantic Council sanctions tracker). The Chinese perspective thus contributes a model of resilience but occludes the potential for reduced global liquidity and increased transaction costs in a fragmented world.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective The Russian perspective frames weaponized interdependence as "economic warfare" and a direct attack on national sovereignty. Following the 2022 sanctions, Moscow views the exclusion from SWIFT and asset freezes not as diplomatic pressure but as an existential threat requiring total mobilization of domestic industry and alternative financial channels (Nephew 2018). This view is rooted in a realist understanding of international politics where power dictates security. For Russia, the US dollar is not a neutral medium of exchange but a weaponized asset that can be used to strangle an adversary.

The mechanism of adaptation here is the creation of parallel financial architecture: SPFS (System for Financial Messages) and the use of gold or crypto as settlement mediums. The Russian argument is that reliance on Western finance was always a vulnerability, and true security requires autarky in critical sectors. This perspective occludes the long-term economic costs of isolationism, such as technology stagnation and inflation, framing them as necessary sacrifices for survival. It also occludes the suffering of Russian civilians under price controls and rationing, prioritizing regime stability over domestic welfare in the short term.

The evidence includes Russia's pivot to trading with China, India, and Central Asia using non-dollar currencies. This demonstrates a successful evasion strategy but highlights the limits of adaptation: without access to advanced Western technology (semiconductors, chips), industrial growth is constrained regardless of currency choice. Strong objections include the risk that this fragmentation creates a "two-tier" global economy where only major powers can afford isolationist strategies. The Russian perspective contributes a stark warning about the dangers of financial hegemony but occludes the moral imperative to protect human rights from economic coercion.

2.7.4 Western Perspective The Western perspective, primarily US and EU, views sanctions as a legitimate tool of "coercive diplomacy" within the rule-based international order. The core claim is that weaponized interdependence can be managed through "smart sanctions" that target elites rather than populations (Farrell & Newman 2019). This view relies on the premise that financial networks are neutral infrastructure that can be regulated to serve democratic values. The mechanism is secondary sanctions: using US law to penalize third parties who trade with sanctioned entities, thereby extending reach beyond territorial borders (Drezner 1999).

However, this perspective increasingly acknowledges its own failures. Critics within the West note that "smart sanctions" often fail due to network effects; cutting off a bank in Iran or Russia inevitably disrupts supply chains for food and fuel in third countries like India or Iraq. The Atlantic Council sanctions tracker documents these unintended consequences, leading to self-critique on collateral damage. The Western view also emphasizes humanitarian carve-outs, arguing that exemptions are necessary to protect civilians. This occludes the fact that exemptions are often bureaucratic hurdles that still result in delays and shortages for vulnerable populations.

The evidence includes the 2018-19 maximum pressure campaign on Iran and its effects on third countries like India (oil imports) and Iraq (electricity payments). Western policymakers argue these are unintended side effects, but critics point out they were foreseeable given the centrality of the dollar clearing system. Strong objections include the claim that unilateral sanctions violate international law and undermine multilateralism. The Western perspective contributes a framework for humanitarian protection but occludes the structural reality that the financial architecture itself is inherently coercive when one currency dominates global trade.

2.7.5 UN Perspective The UN perspective, articulated through the Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures, emphasizes that distributional harms violate fundamental human rights under international

law. The core claim is that sanctions regimes must include rigorous human rights impact assessments before implementation to ensure costs do not fall disproportionately on vulnerable populations in non-targeted states. This view treats financial coercion as a potential violation of the right to food and health (UN Human Rights Council).

The mechanism here is legal: the UN General Assembly resolutions calling for an end to unilateral coercive measures that violate international law. The perspective argues that sovereignty includes the right to economic development without external interference, provided human rights are respected. This occludes the political reality that major powers often ignore these resolutions when it suits their strategic interests. The evidence includes reports from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) tracking the impact of sanctions on civilian populations in Syria, Iran, and Venezuela.

Strong objections include the argument that the UN lacks enforcement power; without compliance from major financial centers like New York or London, resolutions remain symbolic. The UN perspective contributes a normative framework for human rights protection in finance but occludes the structural limitations of international law against state power. It calls for a shift from "smart sanctions" to "humanitarian-first" regimes, arguing that security cannot come at the cost of basic survival rights.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Shows sanctions as transnational terms-of-trade, food, fuel, fertilizer, and debt shocks that constrain Southern sovereignty	Can underweight the security aims of sanctioning states and the agency of targeted regimes	Non-alignment, developmental sovereignty, humanitarian priority, and resistance to external economic coercion	AfDB analyses of food, fuel, fertilizer, and debt pressures; African diplomatic hedging and abstentions under material constraint	Western: spillovers are not the intent of sanctions, and aggression must be deterred

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Identifies financial centrality as structural power and explains incentives for de-dollarization and parallel payment rails	Downplays China's own reliance on dollar liquidity and its selective use of economic leverage	Financial sovereignty, multipolarity, non-interference, and incremental institutional alternatives	CIPS expansion, yuan settlement growth, BRICS local-currency initiatives, cautious avoidance of secondary-sanctions exposure	Western: de-dollarization remains partial and the dollar still dominates reserves and trade
Russian	Documents adaptation, capital controls, SPFS, CIPS linkage, and shadow-economy workarounds under pressure	Obscures the causal role of the invasion and the domestic costs of militarization and repression	Sovereign equality, anti-unilateralism, retaliation legitimacy, and state resilience	Post-2022 Russian payment-system adaptations and trade rerouting	African/UN: adaptation does not justify aggression, and global spillovers harm civilians
Western	Explains coercive mechanism, targeting logic, alliance coordination, and policy intent; includes self-critique on overuse	Underestimates third-country costs, overcompliance, and long-term fragmentation of financial governance	Coercive diplomacy, rule of law, targeted sanctions, human-rights conditionality	OFAC designations, SWIFT exclusions, central-bank asset freezes, sanctions-tracker data	African/UN: extraterritorial enforcement coerces non-targeted actors and weakens legitimacy

UN	Provides humanitarian carve-outs, proportionality standards, civilian protection, and legal framing for unilateral measures	Lacks enforcement power against major financial centers; resolutions often remain symbolic	Multilateral legality, human rights, humanitarian priority, and limits on civilian harm	Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures; UNODC reports on civilian impacts	Western: without compliance from New York and London, norms cannot constrain state power

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The 2022 sanctions against Russia following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine illustrate how financial centrality is converted into coercive power and how a targeted state adapts. Within days, G7 and EU actors froze a large share of Russia's central-bank reserves and excluded selected Russian banks from SWIFT, while also restricting technology and energy-related finance. The case is analytically useful because it combines a classic chokepoint intervention with an unusually rapid attempt to build parallel financial infrastructure.

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the sanctions worked through compliance incentives: risk-averse bankers, lawyers, and corporate officers de-risked Russian counterparties beyond the legal minimum, while Russian citizens faced inflation, capital controls, and restricted access to foreign currency. At the state level, the Central Bank of Russia, the Finance Ministry, state energy firms, and Western treasuries and central banks were the principal actors; Russia raised interest rates, imposed capital controls, and redirected trade, while the United States and European Union coordinated designations and exemptions. At the systemic level, the episode tested dollar hegemony, SWIFT's role as a network hub, and the post-Cold War security order; it accelerated debates about multipolarity without immediately displacing the dollar. At the transnational level, correspondent banking chains, multinational firms, commodity traders, diaspora remittances, and humanitarian organizations transmitted both coercion and spillover costs across borders.

Mechanism. The mechanism is Farrell and Newman's chokepoint effect amplified by secondary sanctions. SWIFT is not itself a payment system, but its messaging standard and network position make it a coordination device for correspondent banking; exclusion raises transaction costs and uncertainty. Dollar clearing through New York adds a second chokepoint because most global trade and reserve management still depends on access to US financial infrastructure. The freeze of central-bank assets attacked Russia's macroeconomic buffer, while export controls and financial sanctions aimed to degrade military-industrial capacity. The panopticon effect mattered too: because transactions are visible through compliance systems, private actors over-complied, extending state coercion through market discipline. Russia's countermeasures—SPFS messaging, CIPS linkage, yuan invoicing, gold accumulation, crypto channels, and shadow-fleet logistics—were attempts to reroute around these chokepoints. The result was not immediate collapse but a bifurcated adaptation: Russia retained energy revenues during the initial price spike, yet faced long-term constraints in aviation, semiconductors, and advanced manufacturing.

Perspective reconstruction. From an African vantage, the 2022 sanctions are legible as another instance in which financial decisions taken in the North become terms-of-trade and debt shocks in the South. African economies dependent on imported wheat, fuel, and fertilizer faced price spikes and tighter dollar liquidity, while AfDB analyses documented rising food insecurity and fiscal pressure; many African governments

therefore treated non-alignment as a material necessity rather than mere diplomatic hedging. The case also resonates with longer African critiques of external economic coercion, from Nkrumah's neo-colonialism to Rodney's underdevelopment thesis, because it shows how control over payment rails can discipline states without formal colonial rule. At the same time, African perspectives must acknowledge that Russia's invasion itself disrupted Black Sea grain exports, so not all cost can be attributed to sanctions. The African view contributes a distributional lens that the other four often underweight, but it can understate the security aims of Ukraine's partners.

From a Chinese perspective, the case confirms that financial centrality is a strategic weapon and that dependence on dollar clearing creates vulnerability. Beijing's response has been cautious: it has expanded CIPS and yuan settlement while avoiding full exposure to secondary sanctions, suggesting that de-dollarization is incremental and interest-driven rather than revolutionary. Chinese analysts often frame the sanctions as accelerating multipolarity, but the continued dominance of the dollar in reserves and trade shows that alternatives remain partial.

From a Russian perspective, the sanctions are economic warfare waged by an adversarial coalition, and adaptation is presented as evidence of sovereign resilience. Moscow's creation of parallel payment channels, capital controls, and import-substitution programs demonstrates state capacity under pressure, while its rhetoric blames Western measures for global inflation and food insecurity. This perspective explains the mechanics of evasion but often obscures the causal role of the invasion and the domestic costs of militarization.

From a Western perspective, the sanctions are coercive diplomacy designed to raise the cost of aggression, degrade Russia's war capacity, and signal commitment to Ukraine. Policymakers emphasize targeted design, humanitarian exemptions, and coordination among allies, while self-critique focuses on overcompliance, third-country spillovers, and the risk of overusing financial tools. This perspective best captures intent and institutional design, but it can understate how extraterritorial enforcement coerces non-targeted actors.

From a UN perspective, the case raises questions of proportionality, civilian protection, and the legality of unilateral coercive measures. UN actors have emphasized humanitarian carve-outs, food and energy access, and the need to prevent sanctions from undermining basic rights, while noting that major powers often ignore resolutions when strategic interests are at stake. The UN perspective supplies normative guardrails but lacks enforcement against dominant financial centers.

Adjudication. The Western perspective best explains the immediate coercive mechanism: it accurately identifies how SWIFT exclusion, reserve freezes, and secondary sanctions were designed to constrain Russia's fiscal and military capacity. However, it misses the transnational distributional costs and the long-term incentive structure for parallel financial architecture, which the African and Chinese perspectives foreground. The African perspective best explains who bears the cost and why Global South states resist alignment, but it can underweight Russian agency and the security rationale of Ukraine's supporters. The Chinese perspective best explains systemic incentives for de-dollarization, yet it risks overstating the pace of change and understating China's own stake in dollar liquidity. The Russian perspective explains adaptation but functions partly as legitimation of aggression. The UN perspective is indispensable for humanitarian limits but cannot by itself explain power. On balance, the case is best explained by a synthesis in which Western mechanism analysis is retained, African distributional analysis is added, and Chinese systemic analysis is used to qualify claims about durability; no single perspective is sufficient.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. Distinguish primary, secondary, and extraterritorial sanctions in the 2018-19 Iran maximum-pressure case, and identify whether US power in this episode operated mainly through law, markets, or military threat.

2. Trace the causal chain from US withdrawal from the JCPOA to India's cessation of Iranian oil imports and Iraq's electricity-payment arrears; identify the chokepoint and the point at which private actors, not states, became the effective enforcers.

3. Apply the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to explain why the same US policy produced different outcomes in India and Iraq.

4. Reconstruct how the African/Global South, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would each evaluate the case, including what each perspective reveals and what it occludes.

5. Compare India and Iraq as cases of differential vulnerability: why was coercion more complete in Indian oil imports and more destabilizing in Iraqi electricity supply?

6. Specify scope conditions and falsifiers: under what conditions would secondary sanctions fail to coerce third countries, and what evidence would show that they did fail?

MODEL ANSWER

The 2018-19 maximum-pressure campaign against Iran is a canonical case of weaponized interdependence because the coercive effect on third countries was produced less by direct US-Iran bilateral measures than by the extraterritorial reach of US financial law. After the United States withdrew from the JCPOA and reimposed sanctions, secondary sanctions threatened foreign persons and firms with exclusion from US markets and the dollar-based financial system if they continued to transact with Iran. This converts US centrality in clearing, correspondent banking, and dollar liquidity into coercive power: the chokepoint is not a physical strait but the institutional architecture through which most international payments are cleared and most trade is financed. Farrell and Newman's framework helps explain why the threat need not be executed to be effective; the panopticon effect means that private actors, uncertain about enforcement but aware of catastrophic downside risk, self-censor and de-risk. Nephew's analysis of sanctions design underscores that modern sanctions are calibrated to exploit this anticipatory behavior, while Drezner's earlier work reminds us that sanctions effectiveness depends on target vulnerability and sender credibility, not merely on legal authority.

India's oil imports illustrate the mechanism. New Delhi had strategic and commercial reasons to maintain Iranian crude purchases, and it initially benefited from temporary waivers. Yet after waivers expired in 2019, Indian refiners and banks faced the prospect that any Iran-related transaction could trigger US penalties, loss of dollar access, or exclusion from US markets. The result was not simply a negotiated bilateral concession by India to Washington, but a compliance cascade through refiners, insurers, shippers, and state-owned banks. India diversified toward other suppliers because the cost of maintaining the Iran channel exceeded the benefit once private financial intermediaries withdrew. Iraq presents a harder case: Iranian electricity and

gas imports were embedded in Iraq's power system, and payment channels were constrained by sanctions-related restrictions and banking de-risking. Arrears and supply interruptions followed, translating a financial dispute into domestic electricity shortages and political instability. The contrast matters: coercion was more complete where substitutes existed, as in Indian crude sourcing, and more destabilizing where infrastructure dependence was high, as in Iraqi power.

The levels of analysis clarify why the same policy had different effects. At the individual level, compliance officers, bank risk committees, and corporate counsel became the operational enforcers of US policy; their incentives favored over-compliance because the cost of a false negative, a sanctions violation, far exceeded the cost of a false positive, lost business. At the state level, India and Iraq made different calculations: India could absorb diversification costs and preserve broader US ties, while Iraq faced immediate energy-security and fiscal constraints. At the systemic level, dollar centrality and payment messaging created the coercive architecture; even where alternative currencies existed, the marginal cost of exiting the dollar channel was high. At the transnational level, shipping, insurance, marine finance, and commodity trading transmitted pressure across jurisdictions, so that a US legal threat became a global market signal.

Perspective reconstruction shows why the case is contested. The Western perspective frames maximum pressure as coercive diplomacy intended to change Iranian nuclear and regional behavior, while also generating self-critique about humanitarian costs, overreach, and the erosion of trust in diplomatic agreements. The Russian perspective interprets such measures as economic warfare and uses them to justify building parallel payment systems and closer ties with sanctioned states. The Chinese perspective treats extraterritorial sanctions as an infringement on financial sovereignty and a reason to accelerate de-dollarization, local-currency settlement, and alternative clearing arrangements. The African and broader Global South perspective emphasizes distributional asymmetry: states not party to the US-Iran dispute bear costs through fuel prices, fertilizer markets, food insecurity, debt stress, and constrained development finance. The UN perspective, including the work of special procedures on unilateral coercive measures, stresses that humanitarian carve-outs for food, medicine, and essential services often fail in practice because banks over-comply and payment channels collapse, so legal exemptions do not guarantee access.

Adjudication requires separating effectiveness from legitimacy. On effectiveness, the evidence supports a conditional conclusion: secondary sanctions coerced third-country behavior in 2018-19, especially where private actors faced high US market exposure and where substitutes were available. On legitimacy, the same mechanism is more contested because it imposes costs on non-targeted populations and undermines the principle that sanctions should be targeted, proportionate, and subject to humanitarian safeguards. Early's work on third-party sanctions suggests that coercion of bystanders is not an accidental byproduct but a structural feature of financial statecraft. The strongest counterargument to the effectiveness claim is that coercion may be temporary and self-undermining: as targeted and third countries invest in alternative payment systems, non-dollar settlement, and barter or gold workarounds, the sender's network advantage erodes. Falsifiers would include sustained India-Iran trade despite US threats, functioning humanitarian payment channels with minimal arrears, or evidence that maximum pressure accelerated rather than constrained Iran's nuclear program. The case therefore supports the narrower theoretical claim that weaponized interdependence is powerful but path-dependent: it works through network centrality and private anticipation, and its durability depends on whether the targeted network remains indispensable.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description

In 2023, the United States expanded secondary sanctions against non-Russian entities accused of facilitating Russia's war economy, including banks, shipping intermediaries, and commodity traders in third countries. Several Global South economies that had increased trade with Russia after 2022 faced heightened compliance costs, delayed payments, and de-risking by correspondent banks. Some governments argued that the measures were necessary to close sanctions loopholes; others argued that they imposed extraterritorial obligations on states not party to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and disrupted legitimate trade, energy imports, and development finance. The case is analytically useful because it separates the question of whether secondary sanctions change behavior from the question of who bears their costs, and because it tests whether alternative payment systems and non-dollar settlement can reduce US leverage over time. It also raises the problem of over-compliance: private banks may refuse even legally permitted transactions, producing humanitarian and commercial effects that exceed the stated scope of sanctions. Analysts disagree over whether such measures strengthen coercive diplomacy or accelerate the fragmentation of global finance.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts

- **Mechanism:** Identify the specific channel through which US sanctions threats alter third-country behavior—legal, financial, or market—and specify the scope conditions under which that mechanism fails.

- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how the African/Global South, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would each evaluate the 2023 expansion, stating what each perspective contributes and what it occludes.

- **Historical analogue:** Compare this case to a prior episode of secondary sanctions or financial coercion, such as the 2018-19 Iran maximum-pressure campaign or the 2014 Russia sanctions, and state what is similar, what differs, and what the analogy cannot explain.

- **Falsifiers:** List two observable developments that would weaken your explanation and two that would strengthen it.

(c) Self-check

Self-check: Did you distinguish description of the 2023 sanctions expansion from explanation of its effects, prediction about future de-dollarization, and prescription about whether the policy should continue?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: In the 2018-19 Iran maximum-pressure case, what best explains why India halted Iranian oil imports after waivers expired?

A. The United States threatened direct military action against Indian refineries.
B. Secondary sanctions threatened foreign firms with loss of US market access and dollar-clearing privileges, producing anticipatory compliance by private actors.
C. Iran refused to continue selling oil to India at discounted prices.
D. UN Security Council sanctions made all Iranian oil purchases illegal for UN member states.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses

- **A:** This option conflates financial coercion with military coercion. The mechanism in the case was not a threat of force against Indian infrastructure but the extraterritorial reach of US financial law and the risk of exclusion from dollar markets.

- **C:** This option reverses causality. Iran sought buyers for its oil; Indian refiners and banks withdrew because compliance risk and loss of dollar access made the Iran channel unsustainable, not because Iran refused to sell.

- **D:** This option misstates the legal basis. The 2018-19 measures were primarily US sanctions reimposed after withdrawal from the JCPOA, not a new UN Security Council prohibition binding all member states; it overstates multilateral authority and understates unilateral financial leverage.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — SWIFT message traffic by currency (approximate share of value)

Currency	~2015	~2020	~2023	Reading
USD	~45%	~40%	~42%	Stable-high; the clearing currency of first resort
EUR	~29%	~37%	~36%	Rose with euro-area integration, then plateaued
GBP	~8%	~6%	~7%	Stable minor share
JPY	~3%	~3%	~3%	Stable minor share
CNY	~2%	~2%	~3%	Modest rise despite RMB internationalization push
Other	~13%	~12%	~9%	Compressed by USD/EUR dominance

Source: SWIFT RMB Tracker and BIS Triennial Survey (approximate; SWIFT does not publish a complete, consistent currency breakdown, so treat these as indicative orders of magnitude, not precise series).

Table 2 — USD share of global foreign-exchange reserves (IMF COFER, %)

Year	USD	EUR	CNY	Other (JPY, GBP, gold, etc.)
2000	~71	~18	~0	~11
2010	~62	~26	~0	~12

Year	USD	EUR	CNY	Other (JPY, GBP, gold, etc.)
2015	~66	~20	~1	~13
2020	~60	~21	~2	~17
2023	~58	~20	~2.5	~19.5

Source: IMF Currency Composition of Official Foreign Exchange Reserves (COFER). Shares sum to ~100% of allocated reserves; unallocated reserves are excluded.

Table 3 — Estimated impacts of selected sanctions episodes

Case	Metric	Estimate	Source / caveat
Russia 2022	GDP growth	−2.1% (2022)	IMF; confounded by energy-price windfall and import compression
Russia 2022	Frozen central-bank assets	~USD 300 billion	G7/EU statements; legal status of seizure still contested
Iran 2018–19 (maximum pressure)	Crude oil exports	~2.5 mb/d → ~0.5 mb/d	EIA; partial recovery via shadow fleet
Iran 2018–19	GDP contraction	~−6% to −7%	IMF/World Bank estimates
Global South 2022	Wheat price peak	+~40% vs. pre-war	FAO; driven by Black Sea disruption plus sanctions uncertainty
Africa 2022–23	Fertilizer import cost	Sharp increase; several states faced 2–3× price spikes	AfDB analyses

Table 4 — Parallel and local-currency financial architecture (status, approximate)

Initiative	Sponsor	Status	Volume / reach
CIPS (Cross-Border Interbank Payment System)	China	Operational since 2015	Handles a growing share of China's cross-border RMB payments; still small vs. SWIFT
SPFS (System for Transfer of Financial Messages)	Russia	Operational, limited	Mostly domestic Russian banks; limited foreign participation
INSTEX	EU (France/Germany/UK)	Defunct (2019–2023)	Negligible transaction volume; failed to bypass US secondary sanctions

Initiative	Sponsor	Status	Volume / reach
India–Russia oil trade settlement	India/Russia	Operational 2022–23	Rupee/dirham/other non-dollar settlement; large imbalances, rupee accumulation problem
BRICS Pay / proposed common settlement	BRICS	Under discussion	Not operational; no agreed unit of account
Gold and crypto workarounds	Various actors	Episodic	Used for evasion; high friction, traceability varies

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Looking at Tables 1 and 2 together, describe the trajectory of USD dominance in global finance from 2000 to 2023. Is the evidence more consistent with (a) a structural collapse of dollar hegemony, (b) a slow, contested diversification, or (c) stability with marginal erosion? Justify with two specific data points and note what the data cannot show.

2. **Level of analysis.** Weaponized interdependence is sometimes described as a "systemic" phenomenon and sometimes as a "state" phenomenon. Using the tables, identify at least two levels of analysis at which the data operate (individual/bank, state, systemic, transnational), and explain why the COFER series is a systemic-level indicator while the India–Russia rupee settlement is a state-level adaptation.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives would read Tables 3 and 4: (a) African — cost-bearing and food/fuel/fertilizer shocks; (b) Chinese — de-dollarization opportunity and CIPS growth; (c) Russian — sanctions as economic warfare and SPFS; (d) Western — coercive diplomacy plus self-critique; (e) UN — humanitarian carve-outs and the Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures. Which perspective best explains the wheat-price and fertilizer rows, and why?

4. **Interpretation.** Does the BRICS/local-currency data in Table 4 support the claim that sanctions on Russia in 2022 "broke" dollar dominance? Adjudicate between the "acceleration" thesis (sanctions sped up pre-existing diversification) and the "rupture" thesis (sanctions created a new non-dollar order), citing the CIPS, SPFS, and INSTEX rows.

5. **Limitation.** Identify three specific limitations of these data for testing claims about weaponized interdependence: one concerning measurement (what SWIFT/COFER do not capture), one concerning causal identification (why the Russia GDP figure does not isolate sanctions), and one concerning perspective bias (whose costs are and are not counted in Table 3).

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Chokepoint Network" (hand-drawn graph)

What to draw. A hub-and-spoke network on an A4 page. Draw one large central circle (≈6 cm diameter) labeled **"SWIFT / CHIPS / USD clearing"**. Around it, draw eight to ten smaller circles (≈2 cm) representing

peripheral nodes: label them **US Treasury**, **Federal Reserve**, **Major US banks**, **EU banks**, **Asian banks**, **Iran (2012)**, **Russia (2022)**, **Global South importer**, **Commodity trader**, **Correspondent bank**. Draw straight lines from each peripheral node to the central hub. Thicken the lines into the hub to suggest traffic concentration.

Labels to place. On the central hub, write **"CHOKEPOINT"** in red. Above the hub, draw a stylized eye (an oval with a pupil) labeled **"PANOPTICON: transaction visibility"**. On two peripheral nodes (Iran, Russia), draw a red "X" or a broken line to indicate exclusion. Add a small legend box: solid line = normal traffic; broken line = sanctioned/excluded.

Perspective overlay to annotate. In the margin, write two short annotations: (Western) "Efficiency + compliance leverage: the hub lowers transaction costs and enforces rules." (African) "Vulnerability: peripheral nodes cannot route around the hub; exclusion is collective punishment of non-targets." Draw a dashed arrow from the African annotation to the Global South importer node.

Visual 2 — "Sanctions Escalation Ladder" (hand-drawn vertical ladder)

What to draw. A vertical ladder with six rungs, bottom to top, drawn as horizontal bars connected by two vertical rails. Label each rung from bottom to top: (1) **Diplomatic protest**, (2) **Targeted / "smart" sanctions** (individuals, entities), (3) **Sectoral sanctions** (energy, finance, defense), (4) **Comprehensive sanctions** (trade embargo), (5) **Secondary sanctions** (extraterritorial reach), (6) **Financial exclusion** (SWIFT cutoff, central-bank asset freeze). Draw an arrow on the left rail pointing upward labeled "Escalation."

Labels to place. On the right side, place two timeline markers with leader lines: a dot on rung 2–3 labeled **"Iran 2012 (EU oil embargo + SWIFT)"** and a dot on rung 6 labeled **"Russia 2022 (SWIFT + ~$300bn freeze)"**. At the top, write **"Ceiling: military force"** in grey. At the bottom, write **"Floor: diplomacy"**.

Perspective overlay to annotate. Annotate rung 5 (secondary sanctions) with a bracket and the note: **"Coerces third countries (India, Iraq) without their consent — the extraterritorial mechanism."** Annotate rung 6 with: **"UN perspective: humanitarian carve-outs required; Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures."** Add a small African-perspective note at the bottom: **"Costs fall on food/fuel/fertilizer importers not on the ladder."**

Visual 3 — "Distributional Cost Map" (hand-drawn world map)

What to draw. A simplified world map (continents as rough outlines). Shade the Global South (Africa, parts of Latin America, South/Southeast Asia, Middle East) in a gradient: light yellow = low cost exposure, deep orange/red = high cost exposure (food, fuel, fertilizer). Shade the US and EU in light blue (sanctioning states). Shade Russia in grey (target). Draw thick arrows from Russia/Ukraine grain regions and from Gulf fertilizer regions toward Africa and South Asia, with a red "X" or break symbol on the arrows to indicate disrupted flows. Draw a separate thin arrow from the US/EU toward the Global South labeled "humanitarian carve-outs (partial)."

Labels to place. Legend: **Red/Orange = cost-bearing (food, fuel, fertilizer, debt)**; **Blue = sanctioning states**; **Grey = target state**. Title: **"Who bears the cost of weaponized interdependence?"** Add three callout boxes: (Africa) "AfDB: fertilizer 2–3× price spikes"; (South Asia) "India: oil import disruption, rupee settlement"; (Middle East) "Iraq: electricity payments blocked."

Perspective overlay to annotate. In the margin, write the five perspective one-liners: African — "Costs are

externalized to non-targets"; Chinese — "Opportunity for de-dollarization"; Russian — "Economic warfare"; Western — "Coercive diplomacy with self-critique"; UN — "Humanitarian carve-outs and due process." Draw a bracket grouping the African and UN notes as "cost-bearing / protective" perspectives.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue column (prompts)

Cue (question / keyword)	Notes (answer + source log)
What is weaponized interdependence?	The use of economic networks (trade, finance, data) as instruments of coercion by states that occupy central (hub) positions. Farrell & Newman (2019, *International Security*; 2023, *Underground Empire*).
Panopticon effect	Central nodes gain visibility into transactions across the network; information asymmetry favors the hub. Scope: financial messaging, clearing.
Chokepoint effect	Central nodes can deny access to the network; exclusion is the coercive tool. Scope: SWIFT, CHIPS, correspondent banking.
SWIFT's role	Messaging network, not payment settlement; but exclusion from SWIFT raises transaction costs and signals risk. Iran 2012, Russia 2022.
Dollar clearing / CHIPS	Actual settlement in USD requires access to US correspondent banks and Fedwire; this is the deeper chokepoint than SWIFT messaging.
Smart vs. comprehensive sanctions	Smart: targeted individuals/entities/sectors; comprehensive: broad trade/financial embargo. Drezner (1999) on sanctions paradox; Nephew (2018) on design.
Secondary sanctions	Extraterritorial application of US law to non-US persons; coerces third countries (India oil, Iraq electricity). Early (2015) on evasion/busting.
Extraterritorial reach	US law (IEEPA, CAATSA) + dollar clearing nexus = jurisdiction over global transactions.
Evasion: SPFS / CIPS / INSTEX	Russia's SPFS (limited), China's CIPS (growing), EU's INSTEX (failed). Gold, crypto as workarounds.
Distributional costs	Food, fuel, fertilizer, debt in Global South; AfDB analyses; wheat +~40% peak 2022.
African perspective	Sanctions externalize costs to non-targets; food/fuel/fertilizer/debt; demands carve-outs and voice.

Cue (question / keyword)	Notes (answer + source log)
Chinese perspective	De-dollarization, financial sovereignty, CIPS, bilateral local-currency settlement.
Russian perspective	Sanctions as economic warfare; SPFS; parallel architecture; "fortress Russia."
Western perspective	Coercive diplomacy; self-critique on overuse, humanitarian harm, dollar-erosion risk.
UN perspective	Humanitarian carve-outs; Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures; due process.
Falsifiers	USD reserve share collapse; successful large-scale non-dollar settlement; sanctions with zero third-country spillover; humanitarian carve-outs fully effective.

Source log (selected)

- Farrell, H. & Newman, A. (2019). "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion." *International Security* 44(1).
- Farrell, H. & Newman, A. (2023). *Underground Empire: How America Weaponized the World Economy*. Henry Holt.
- Drezner, D. (1999). *The Sanctions Paradox: Economic Statecraft and International Relations*. Cambridge UP.
- Nephew, R. (2018). *The Art of Sanctions: A View from the Field*. Columbia UP.
- Early, B. (2015). *Busted Sanctions: Explaining Why Economic Sanctions Fail*. Stanford UP.
- Atlantic Council sanctions tracker (ongoing).
- IMF COFER; SWIFT RMB Tracker; AfDB analyses; FAO food price index.

Summary (3–5 sentences)

Weaponized interdependence describes how states occupying central positions in economic networks—especially the US in dollar clearing and SWIFT—convert structural centrality into coercive power through panopticon (visibility) and chokepoint (exclusion) effects. The 2012 Iran and 2022 Russia cases show escalation from targeted sanctions to financial exclusion, with secondary sanctions extending US reach to third countries such as India and Iraq. Evasion efforts (CIPS, SPFS, INSTEX, gold, crypto) have produced parallel architecture but not yet a systemic alternative, as COFER data show slow USD erosion rather than collapse. The distributional costs fall disproportionately on the Global South through food, fuel, fertilizer, and debt channels, generating African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives that disagree on legitimacy, efficacy, and remedy. The data support a "slow diversification" reading, not a "dollar collapse" reading, but measurement and causal-identification limits remain severe.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Imagine a town where every shop, bank, and household must use one central switchboard to make payments. The switchboard operator can see every transaction (that is the

panopticon) and can cut off anyone's line (that is the chokepoint). If the operator is a powerful country, it can punish a rival by cutting its line—and because everyone else also needs the switchboard, the operator can threaten them too if they keep trading with the rival. That is weaponized interdependence: power comes not from owning the goods but from sitting at the center of the network everyone must use. The 2022 Russia case is the clearest example: Russia was cut off from SWIFT and had roughly $300 billion of central-bank reserves frozen, and other countries felt pressure to stop buying Russian oil or face US penalties.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. (a) I initially conflated SWIFT (messaging) with CHIPS/Fedwire (settlement); the lesson distinguishes them—SWIFT exclusion raises costs and signals risk, but dollar clearing is the deeper chokepoint. (b) I under-specified the African perspective: it is not merely "costs exist" but a claim about externalization and voice, grounded in AfDB food/fuel/fertilizer/debt analyses. (c) I treated "de-dollarization" as a single trend; the data show it is fragmented—CIPS grows, SPFS stalls, INSTEX failed, BRICS Pay is not operational. (d) I did not yet specify the falsifiers that would change the conclusion.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading Farrell and Newman (2019, 2023): confirmed that panopticon and chokepoint are network-structural effects, not just policy choices, and that they depend on hub centrality and the absence of ready substitutes. Re-reading Drezner (1999) and Nephew (2018): confirmed that "smart" sanctions are designed to reduce humanitarian harm but that comprehensiveness and secondary reach often reintroduce broad costs. Re-reading Early (2015): confirmed that evasion is systematic and that sanctions-busting networks (front companies, re-flagging, alternative messaging) are a predictable adaptation. Re-reading the AfDB analyses and FAO data: confirmed the food/fuel/fertilizer/debt channel as the primary African cost vector. The COFER and SWIFT figures support "slow diversification, not collapse."

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. Analogy: a single dominant railway hub through which all freight must pass; the hub owner can inspect cargo (panopticon) and close the yard (chokepoint), and can threaten shippers who route to a rival. Limits: (i) railways are physical and slow to reroute, whereas financial networks can in principle be re-wired faster—yet in practice network effects and trust make rerouting hard; (ii) the analogy implies a single owner, whereas financial centrality is a public-private hybrid (US state + private banks + SWIFT cooperative); (iii) the analogy omits the legal dimension—extraterritorial US law, not just network position, does much of the coercive work; (iv) the analogy cannot capture the distributional asymmetry: railway closure hurts the hub's customers, but financial exclusion's worst costs fall on third parties (Global South importers) who are not parties to the dispute.

Step 5 — Rewrite. Weaponized interdependence is the conversion of structural centrality in economic networks into coercive power, operating through two mechanisms: the panopticon effect (visibility into transactions) and the chokepoint effect (the ability to deny access). The US occupies the central hub in dollar clearing and SWIFT, which it used against Iran (2012) and Russia (2022), escalating from targeted sanctions to financial exclusion and secondary sanctions that coerce non-targeted states such as India and Iraq. Evasion has produced partial alternatives—CIPS grows, SPFS and INSTEX faltered, BRICS Pay is not operational—so the data show slow diversification of reserves and settlement, not a collapse of dollar dominance. The costs are distributed asymmetrically: food, fuel, fertilizer, and debt burdens fall on the Global South, which is why African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives diverge on legitimacy, efficacy, and remedy. The conclusion is falsifiable: a sustained collapse of the USD reserve share, a functioning large-scale non-dollar settlement system, or sanctions with no third-country spillover would each overturn it.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L18	Definition	What is weaponized interdependence?	Farrell and Newman (2019) argue that states can convert positions of centrality in global economic networks into coercive leverage; the effect depends on network asymmetry and the target's difficulty in finding substitutes. It is a structural power argument, not merely a sanctions list.	The African perspective stresses that network coercion is often experienced downstream as food, fuel, fertilizer, and debt shocks rather than as a bilateral diplomatic dispute.
L18	Mechanism	How does the panopticon effect operate?	A central node can observe, record, and condition access to transactional flows, turning information visibility into enforcement capacity; the coercion lies partly in surveillance and compliance anticipation. Its strength depends on data concentration and legal reach.	Western security discourse often treats visibility as risk management, while many Global South actors read it as extraterritorial surveillance.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L18	Mechanism	What is the chokepoint effect?	Control over a critical node allows a sender to deny or condition access to an entire network, as when financial messaging or clearing access is restricted. The effect weakens if the target can reroute through substitutes.	Russian discourse frames chokepoints as economic warfare; Chinese discourse frames them as arguments for financial sovereignty.
L18	Application	What happened in the 2012 Iran SWIFT episode?	Under US and EU pressure, SWIFT disconnected designated Iranian banks, disrupting oil payments and trade finance; Iran adapted through barter, gold, and intermediary channels, so exclusion was costly but not total.	The episode illustrates how financial centrality becomes coercive power while also generating incentives for alternative payment systems.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L18	Application	What was central to the 2022 Russia sanctions package?	G7 and EU measures immobilized a large share of Russia's foreign-exchange reserves and excluded selected Russian banks from SWIFT, while Russia responded with capital controls, ruble-support measures, and accelerated parallel financial planning.	Russian framing treats reserve immobilization as confiscation; Western framing treats it as lawful coercive diplomacy.
L18	Comparison	How do smart and comprehensive sanctions differ?	Smart sanctions target elites, assets, sectors, or transactions; comprehensive sanctions restrict broad trade and financial flows. Drezner (1999) warns that sanctions often fail to change target behavior even when they impose substantial costs.	UN and humanitarian actors prefer narrowly scoped measures with carve-outs, while critics note that even targeted measures can spill over to civilians.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L18	Mechanism	How do secondary sanctions coerce non-targeted states?	US law and market access threats penalize third parties that transact with sanctioned actors, so firms and banks in non-targeted states often over-comply to protect dollar access. The mechanism is extraterritorial leverage, not direct bilateral pressure.	India's oil-import adjustments and Iraq's electricity-payment difficulties show how third countries bear compliance costs despite not being the primary target.
L18	Evasion	What are SPFS, CIPS, and INSTEX?	Russia's SPFS, China's CIPS, and the EU's INSTEX were attempts to reduce dependence on US-centered financial infrastructure; their impact has been limited by liquidity, trust, network effects, and counterpart willingness.	Chinese and Russian perspectives treat them as sovereignty projects; Western analysts often treat them as partial and costly workarounds.
L18	Evasion	How do gold and crypto workarounds function?	Targets and intermediaries use gold, barter, cryptocurrency, and third-country routing to bypass restrictions; these methods raise transaction costs, reduce transparency, and can increase compliance risk.	African and UN perspectives highlight concerns about illicit financial flows, informalization, and humanitarian payment frictions.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L18	Distributional	Who bears the costs of weaponized interdependence?	Costs often fall on civilians, import-dependent economies, remittance recipients, and third-country firms, while elites and state institutions may adapt through alternative channels. The distribution is therefore not identical to the target list.	AfDB analyses emphasize food, fuel, fertilizer, and debt pressures in African economies; UN actors emphasize civilian protection.
L18	Source	What is Farrell and Newman's core contribution?	Farrell and Newman (2019, 2023) theorize global economic networks as sites of coercive power, distinguishing information advantages (panopticon) from access denial (chokepoint). Their work links market structure to state power.	The theory is often read in the West as strategic analysis, but African and Global South scholars ask whose costs are rendered invisible by network-centric framing.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L18	Source	What is Drezner's sanctions paradox?	Drezner (1999) argues that sanctions are frequently imposed for political signaling and domestic reasons, yet often fail to compel target policy change while still generating economic and humanitarian costs.	The paradox supports Global South critiques that sanctions can be performative coercion with unevenly distributed harm.
L18	Debate	Is de-dollarization imminent?	Sanctions have increased interest in local-currency settlement and alternative payment systems, but dollar dominance persists because of liquidity, depth, trust, and network effects; change is gradual and contested.	Chinese and Russian actors push de-dollarization; African actors often hedge rather than fully exit dollar markets.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L18	Reconstruction	How does the UN perspective frame unilateral sanctions?	The UN perspective emphasizes humanitarian carve-outs, proportionality, civilian protection, and the work of the Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures, warning that broad sanctions can harm non-target populations.	This perspective centers human rights and humanitarian law rather than sender-state strategic goals.
L18	Occlusion	What does Western self-critique acknowledge?	Western analysts increasingly acknowledge that sanctions can strengthen target regimes, fragment global economic governance, impose costs on allies, and accelerate alternative financial architectures.	This self-critique partially overlaps with Russian, Chinese, and African critiques but usually retains coercive diplomacy as a legitimate tool.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Skill or Concept	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of Mastery	Next Action
Define weaponized interdependence and distinguish panopticon from chokepoint effects		Can state both mechanisms without conflating information advantage with access denial	Re-read Farrell and Newman (2019) and redraw the network diagram

Skill or Concept	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of Mastery	Next Action
Explain SWIFT/dollar clearing as coercive infrastructure		Can trace how messaging, correspondent banking, and legal jurisdiction combine	Reconstruct the Iran 2012 and Russia 2022 sequences from memory
Distinguish smart, comprehensive, and secondary sanctions		Can identify target, scope, and extraterritorial mechanism in a case	Apply the distinction to the Iran maximum-pressure case
Analyze evasion and adaptation strategies		Can evaluate SPFS, CIPS, INSTEX, gold, and crypto by liquidity and trust	Compare one alternative system with SWIFT on three criteria
Reconstruct all five perspectives		Can state each perspective's contribution and occlusion in 3–5 sentences	Write a one-paragraph reconstruction for the African perspective first
Interpret sanctions data without overclaiming		Can separate trend, level of analysis, and causal attribution	Revisit the Data Lab tables and mark unsupported inferences

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which mechanism in this lesson did you initially treat as an outcome rather than a process, and how would you now describe its causal chain?
2. Which perspective did you find most difficult to steel-man, and what evidence would be needed to make that reconstruction more credible?
3. What is one falsifier that would weaken your current conclusion about whether sanctions are coercively effective in a given case?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Sanctions reliably change target-state behavior.	Sanctions often fail to compel policy change even when they impose high costs; success depends on target vulnerability, sender resolve, and available alternatives.	Drezner (1999); adaptation in Iran and Russia cases.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
SWIFT exclusion equals total financial isolation.	Exclusion raises costs and delays payments but does not eliminate all channels; targets use correspondent workarounds, barter, gold, and alternative systems.	SPFS, CIPS, INSTEX, and gold/crypto workarounds.
Smart sanctions avoid civilian harm.	Targeted measures reduce but do not eliminate spillovers, especially in import-dependent economies and humanitarian payment systems.	UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures; AfDB food, fuel, fertilizer, and debt analyses.
De-dollarization is imminent.	Interest in alternatives has grown, but dollar dominance remains strong due to liquidity, depth, trust, and network effects.	COFER reserve-share trends and limited BRICS local-currency settlement volumes.
Secondary sanctions affect only the targeted state.	Extraterritorial penalties coerce third-country firms and governments, producing compliance costs and policy distortions in non-targeted states.	India oil imports and Iraq electricity payments under Iran maximum pressure.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Weaponized interdependence	Network centrality converted into coercive leverage	Farrell and Newman (2019, 2023)	Iran 2012; Russia 2022	Security efficiency vs. Global South costs	Target has viable substitutes or alternative networks	L6, L15–L17, L38
Panopticon effect	Information extraction and compliance anticipation from central nodes	Farrell and Newman (2019)	SWIFT messaging visibility	Surveillance/risk management vs. sovereignty	Data fragmentation or legal limits on access	L48

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Chokepoint effect	Denial or conditioning of access at critical network nodes	Farrell and Newman (2019)	SWIFT exclusions	Coercive diplomacy vs. economic warfare	Substitutability rises; chokepoint loses force	L19
Secondary sanctions	Extraterritorial penalties coercing third-party actors	Nephew (2018); Early (2015)	India oil imports; Iraq electricity payments	US legal reach vs. state sovereignty	Third parties can bypass US market without unacceptable cost	L38
Smart vs. comprehensive sanctions	Targeted restrictions vs. broad trade/finance embargoes	Drezner (1999)	Iran maximum pressure	Effectiveness vs. humanitarian harm	Target elite insulated; civilian costs dominate	L38
Evasion architectures	SPFS, CIPS, INSTEX, gold, crypto, third-country routing	Farrell and Newman (2023)	Russia, China, EU, Iran adaptations	Financial sovereignty vs. fragmentation	Low liquidity/trust stalls alternatives	L52–L53
Distributional costs	Food, fuel, fertilizer, debt, remittance, and firm-level spillovers	AfDB analyses; UN Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures	Global South importers	Coercive diplomacy vs. humanitarian protection	Robust carve-outs and payment channels reduce civilian harm	L19, L48

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Action	Timing
R1	Reconstruct the five key ideas from memory, then redraw the panopticon/chokepoint network diagram and label Iran 2012 and Russia 2022.	Same day, 20 minutes

Interval	Action	Timing
R2	Re-read Section 2.7 and write one steel-manned paragraph for each of the five perspectives, beginning with the African perspective.	24 hours, 45 minutes
R3	Work through the 2022 Russia sanctions worked example by levels of analysis: individual, state, systemic, and transnational.	72 hours, 60 minutes
R4	Complete the Iran maximum-pressure problem pair, comparing how secondary sanctions coerce non-targeted states such as India and Iraq.	1 week, 60 minutes
R5	Write the independent memo, run the description/explanation/prediction/prescription self-check, and revisit the Data Lab tables.	2 weeks, 90 minutes

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define weaponized interdependence and distinguish it from ordinary sanctions.
- ☐ I can explain the panopticon effect as an information-and-compliance mechanism.
- ☐ I can explain the chokepoint effect as an access-denial mechanism.
- ☐ I can trace how SWIFT and dollar clearing convert financial centrality into coercive power.
- ☐ I can compare the Iran 2012 and Russia 2022 cases without conflating them.
- ☐ I can distinguish smart, comprehensive, and secondary sanctions.
- ☐ I can explain the extraterritorial reach of US law in secondary sanctions.
- ☐ I can evaluate SPFS, CIPS, INSTEX, gold, and crypto as evasion strategies.
- ☐ I can identify who bears the costs of weaponized interdependence.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary, not as a regional add-on.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives fairly.
- ☐ I can use the comparison matrix to identify each perspective's contribution and occlusion.
- ☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to the Russia 2022 worked example.
- ☐ I can complete the Iran problem pair and model answer.
- ☐ I can interpret the Data Lab tables without overclaiming causality.
- ☐ I can state at least two falsifiers for a sanctions-effectiveness claim.
- ☐ I can complete the independent memo with all four required headings.
- ☐ I can pass the hinge question and explain each distractor.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Network theory and financial statecraft - Farrell, Henry, and Abraham L. Newman. 2019. "Weaponized Interdependence: How Global Economic Networks Shape State Coercion." *International Security*. - Farrell, Henry, and Abraham L. Newman. 2023. *Underground Empire: How America Weaponized the World Economy*.

Sanctions theory and design - Drezner, Daniel W. 1999. *The Sanctions Paradox: Economic Statecraft and International Relations*. - Nephew, Richard. 2018. *The Art of Sanctions: A View from the Field*. - Early, Bryan R. 2015. *Busted Sanctions: Explaining Why Economic Sanctions Fail*.

Tracking and evaluation - Atlantic Council. Sanctions tracker and related sanctions-analysis resources.

Humanitarian, African, and UN perspectives - African Development Bank (AfDB). Macroeconomic and food-security analyses on sanctions spillovers, debt, and import dependence (various years). - United Nations. Reports of the Special Rapporteur on unilateral coercive measures (various years). - International Monetary Fund. Currency Composition of Official Foreign Exchange Reserves (COFER) data.

End of Lesson 18. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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20. Energy, Critical Minerals, and Resource Geopolitics

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 19: Energy, Critical Minerals, and Resource Geopolitics
Module	Module 3: International Political Economy and Geoeconomics
Prerequisites	L15–L18 (IPE), L10 (Imperialism), L17 (World-Systems)
Interleaved links	Forward to L33 (Minerals in Africa), L38 (Energy Coercion), L46 (Hydrocarbons), L51 (Climate), L52–53
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, tables, worked example, problem pair, data lab, visuals, flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is whether the global energy transition restructures or merely relocates the material basis of international power. For roughly a century, hydrocarbons—above all petroleum—

constituted the foundational commodity of industrial civilization, military capability, and great-power rivalry. The 1973 OPEC embargo demonstrated that control over a single commodity could reconfigure alliances, trigger recessions, and force diplomatic realignments across the entire international system. The transition now underway—toward electrification, renewable generation, and battery storage—does not abolish this logic of material power; it translates it. Where the twentieth-century energy system concentrated leverage in a handful of producer states and consumed resources in industrial cores, the emerging system disperses geological endowment across many territories while hyper-concentrating the processing, refining, and manufacturing stages in a few—most notably China. The question that organizes this lesson is therefore not whether resources still matter, but which resources matter, at which stage of the value chain leverage actually resides, and whether the transition opens space for developmental autonomy or reproduces dependency under the sign of "green" modernity.

This puzzle sits at the intersection of three intellectual traditions that the student has already encountered. From international political economy (Lessons 15–18), the lesson inherits the problem of structural power: Susan Strange's distinction between relational power (the ability to get another actor to do what you want) and structural power (the ability to shape the frameworks within which others must operate) is directly applicable to a world in which control over lithium refining or cobalt processing shapes the feasible set of industrial policies available to states that lack such capacity. From the imperialism and world-systems traditions (Lessons 10 and 17), the lesson inherits the problem of unequal exchange and enclave extraction: the historical pattern in which peripheral territories export raw materials and import manufactured goods, capturing a fraction of the value their resources generate. The energy transition threatens to reproduce this pattern with new commodities, unless deliberate institutional interventions—resource nationalism, local content requirements, regional value-chain integration—alter the terms of trade. From the study of state formation and authoritarianism, the lesson inherits rentier state theory and the resource curse literature, which explain how resource rents distort fiscal contracts, weaken accountability, and finance conflict. The task is to determine whether these mechanisms, developed largely on hydrocarbon cases, travel to critical minerals, or whether the mineral economy—with its processing bottlenecks, its technology-intensive downstream stages, and its green-finance conditionalities—generates distinct political dynamics.

The African perspective is primary in this lesson because the continent is simultaneously the most resource-endowed and the most structurally disadvantaged party in the emerging mineral order. Africa holds approximately seventy percent of global cobalt production (concentrated in the Democratic Republic of Congo), dominant shares of platinum-group metals, manganese, and copper, and significant lithium and graphite reserves. Yet African states capture a small fraction of the value added in the battery and renewable-energy supply chains that depend on these materials. The DRC-Zambia battery initiative, announced in 2022, represents an attempt to move beyond raw export toward regional value-chain upgrading; Indonesia's 2020 nickel export ban (examined in the problem pair) provides a comparator case of resource nationalism in a non-African setting; Mexico's 2022 lithium nationalization illustrates a different institutional path. African scholarship—Walter Rodney's analysis of how extraction produced "the development of underdevelopment," Kwame Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism, Mahmood Mamdani's work on the bifurcated state, Achille Mbembe's theorization of necropolitics and the postcolony, Siba Grovogui's critique of international legal ordering—frames these developments not as technical supply-chain problems but as continuities in the political economy of extraction. The question from within this tradition is whether resource sovereignty can be exercised without triggering the familiar repertoire of external discipline: capital flight, sanctions, WTO dispute settlement, and the reclassification of nationalization as "expropriation" under investment treaties.

The theoretical stakes extend beyond the African case. Rentier state theory, as developed by Hazem Beblawi

and Giacomo Luciani, Terry Karl, and Michael Ross, posits that states deriving a large share of revenue from external rents (rather than from domestic taxation) experience weakened accountability, distorted labor markets, and heightened authoritarian durability. The resource curse literature—Richard Auty's original formulation, the Sachs-Warner cross-country findings, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler's work on conflict finance—adds mechanisms linking resource dependence to civil war, corruption, and poor growth performance. But these theories carry scope conditions that are frequently ignored: they were built on oil and gas cases, where rents are large, concentrated, and easily captured by central elites. Critical minerals may differ in important respects. The value of cobalt or lithium is not in the ore but in the processing and manufacturing stages; rents are therefore distributed across a longer chain, and the political economy of mineral states may be shaped as much by downstream industrial policy as by upstream extraction. Moreover, the energy transition introduces new governance actors—green-finance institutions, ESG (environmental, social, and governance) rating agencies, battery manufacturers with long-term offtake agreements—that did not exist in the hydrocarbon era. Whether rentier theory's mechanisms apply, and with what modifications, is an empirical and theoretical question that this lesson places at the center of analysis.

The five-perspective framework—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—reveals that the same material facts generate incompatible problem definitions. From the African vantage point, the central problem is sovereignty and value-chain upgrading: how to convert geological endowment into industrialization and fiscal autonomy. From the Chinese vantage point, the problem is supply-chain security and "win-win" development: state-backed firms secure offtake, build processing capacity, and frame engagement as mutual benefit, while critics see debt-trap dynamics and enclave extraction. From the Russian vantage point, the problem is commodity leverage: energy exports as a tool of geopolitical coercion, with the mineral transition threatening to erode a core instrument of state power. From the Western vantage point, the problem is supply-chain security and "friend-shoring": reducing dependence on Chinese processing through the Inflation Reduction Act, the Minerals Security Partnership, and the EU Critical Raw Materials Act. From the UN vantage point, the problem is governance: the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the Sustainable Development Goals (especially SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy), and the normative framework of responsible sourcing. Each perspective illuminates something the others occlude; none is sufficient alone. The lesson's adjudication task is to determine which perspective best explains a given case, on what evidence, and with what residual puzzles.

By the end of this lesson, the student should be able to perform five operations. First, trace causal mechanisms from geological endowment through extraction, processing, and manufacturing to political outcomes, across both hydrocarbon and mineral regimes, specifying the intermediate steps rather than asserting correlations. Second, evaluate resource nationalism strategies—export bans, nationalization, local content requirements, regional integration—using comparative evidence and identifying the conditions under which each succeeds or fails. Third, apply rentier state theory and the resource curse literature with explicit scope conditions, recognizing when mineral economies differ from hydrocarbon economies in ways that modify or invalidate standard predictions. Fourth, reconstruct all five perspectives on a given case, steel-manning each from within, and adjudicate among them on the basis of evidence rather than ideological preference. Fifth, produce a policy memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and that specifies falsifiers—observable conditions under which the memo's central claim would be disconfirmed. These operations are assessed through the worked example (the 1973 oil embargo), the problem pair (Indonesia's nickel export ban), the data lab (critical mineral reserves, production concentration, battery supply chains), and the independent memo.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer each question from memory before consulting notes. These draw on Lessons 10, 15, 16, 17, and 18.

1. In Lesson 15 (International Political Economy), Susan Strange distinguished between "relational power" and "structural power." Define each and give one example of structural power in the international financial system.
2. Lesson 17 (World-Systems Analysis) presents Immanuel Wallerstein's core-periphery-semiperiphery framework. Explain how "unequal exchange" operates between core and peripheral zones, and identify one mechanism by which peripheral states might attempt to escape peripheral status.
3. Lesson 10 (Imperialism) examines V. I. Lenin's argument about finance capital and the territorial division of the world. What is the relationship between monopoly capitalism and imperialist expansion in Lenin's account, and how does this differ from J. A. Hobson's earlier liberal critique?
4. Lesson 16 (Trade and Development) discusses the Prebisch-Singer thesis. State the thesis and explain its implication for commodity-exporting economies in the global South.
5. Lesson 18 (International Finance) covers the Triffin dilemma. Explain the dilemma and identify which state faced it, and why, under the Bretton Woods system.
6. Lesson 17 introduces David Harvey's concept of "accumulation by dispossession." Define the concept and explain how it applies to contemporary resource extraction in the global South.

1.2 Orientation Questions These questions frame the puzzles you will work through in this lesson. Do not answer them fully now; use them to guide your reading.

1. Does the energy transition reduce global resource dependency, or does it relocate dependency from hydrocarbon producers to mineral processors and battery manufacturers?
2. Under what conditions can a resource-rich state in the global South use export bans, nationalization, or local content requirements to capture value-added without triggering capital flight, sanctions, or WTO dispute settlement?
3. Is the "resource curse" a property of natural resources themselves, or of the institutional and political contexts in which they are extracted? Does the distinction between hydrocarbon rents and mineral-processing rents matter for the theory?
4. Which of the five perspectives—African resource sovereignty, Chinese state-backed supply chains, Russian commodity leverage, Western friend-shoring, or UN governance frameworks—best explains the current scramble for critical minerals, and what does each perspective fail to see?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach These terms will be used throughout the lesson. The definitions below are provisional; refined definitions will emerge in the core sections.

- **Rentier state**: A state that derives a substantial share of its revenue from external rents—typically resource exports or foreign aid—rather than from domestic taxation, with consequences for accountability and state-society relations.

- **Resource curse**: The observed tendency of resource-rich countries to experience slower growth, weaker institutions, and higher conflict risk than resource-poor countries, attributed to mechanisms including rent-seeking, Dutch disease, and enclave economies.
- **Dutch disease**: The phenomenon in which a resource boom appreciates the real exchange rate, rendering non-resource tradable sectors (manufacturing, agriculture) uncompetitive and shrinking the diversified economy.
- **Petrodollar recycling**: The process by which oil-exporting states deposit dollar earnings in Western financial institutions, which then lend to oil-importing states, creating a circular flow that financed both development and debt in the 1970s and 1980s.
- **Chokepoint**: A narrow geographic passage—such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, or the Strait of Malacca—through which a large share of global trade or energy flows passes, creating strategic vulnerability and military contestation.
- **Critical minerals**: Non-fuel minerals essential to modern technologies—especially clean energy, defense, and digital systems—whose supply is subject to high risk of disruption due to concentration of production or processing.
- **Rare earth elements (REEs)**: A group of seventeen metallic elements (including neodymium, dysprosium, and terbium) essential to permanent magnets, electronics, and defense systems, whose processing is heavily concentrated in China.
- **Value-chain upgrading**: The process by which a producer moves from low-value raw-material extraction to higher-value processing, manufacturing, or service activities within a global production network.
- **Friend-shoring**: The practice of relocating supply chains to countries that are geopolitical allies or partners, prioritizing security and political alignment over pure cost efficiency.
- **Green extractivism**: The expansion of mining and extraction justified by the needs of the energy transition, which may reproduce the social and environmental harms of conventional extractivism under a sustainability framing.
- **Offtake agreement**: A long-term contract in which a buyer commits to purchasing a specified quantity of a commodity from a producer, often used to finance mining or processing projects.
- **Local content requirement**: A policy mandating that a specified share of inputs, labor, or services in an extractive or industrial project be sourced domestically, intended to capture value-added and build industrial capacity.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

SECTION 2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to: (1) explain the causal mechanism through which a hydrocarbon supply interruption is converted into political leverage, using the 1973 embargo as the paradigmatic case rather than as a mere historical episode; (2) analyze petrodollar recycling and maritime chokepoints as

structural features that extend producer power beyond the point of extraction and into finance, shipping, and macroeconomic adjustment; (3) evaluate the scope conditions under which an "oil weapon" succeeds or fails, including spare capacity, import dependence, producer cohesion, consumer stockpiling, and the availability of alternative suppliers; (4) reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and United Nations interpretations of hydrocarbon geopolitics as internally coherent arguments, identifying what each reveals and what each occludes; and (5) apply these mechanisms to a new case by distinguishing descriptive claims about supply chains from explanatory claims about power, predictive claims about vulnerability, and prescriptive claims about policy. Mastery will be demonstrated through mechanism-focused short answers, perspective-reconstruction paragraphs, and case-based adjudication that explicitly states falsifiers. Students should also be able to identify the difference between a temporary price shock and a durable restructuring of global political economy, and to specify the observable implications that would confirm or disconfirm each. The lesson assumes familiarity with interdependence theory, world-systems analysis, and the imperial genealogy of resource extraction, but it does not require prior mastery of energy economics.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Hydrocarbon geopolitics: the "oil weapon" (1973), petrodollar recycling, chokepoints

Bolded Causal Claim: Hydrocarbon geopolitics is a form of structural power in which control over a fungible but geographically concentrated and infrastructurally bottlenecked commodity converts geological endowment into coercive leverage, macroeconomic disruption, and financial dependence; the 1973 embargo demonstrated that producers could weaponize not merely scarcity but the importer's embeddedness in a supply, shipping, and credit architecture that could not be reconfigured quickly.

Mechanism: The mechanism has four linked stages. First, supply restriction: a producer coalition reduces output or imposes an embargo, exploiting the short-run inelasticity of oil demand and the absence of immediate substitutes. Yergin's account of the 1973 crisis emphasizes that the shock was not only a price event but a reordering of expectations about who controlled the "commanding heights" of the industrial economy. Second, price transmission: because oil is priced in dollars and embedded in transport, agriculture, petrochemicals, and military logistics, a price increase propagates through cost structures faster than demand can adjust. Third, financial recycling: export revenues are not simply hoarded; they are deposited in international banks, invested in sovereign debt, or recycled through arms purchases and development finance, creating a credit circuit in which importers and third-world borrowers become dependent on producer-state liquidity. Spiro's study of petrodollar recycling argues that this circuit helped sustain US hegemony by channeling OPEC surpluses into dollar-denominated assets and Western financial markets. Fourth, chokepoint coercion: even where production is diversified, maritime passages such as Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, Suez, and Malacca concentrate flows; a threat to any one node raises insurance premiums, reroutes tankers, and imposes costs that can exceed the physical loss of supply. Klare's work on resource competition treats these passages as strategic terrain where geography and naval power intersect. The mechanism therefore operates through a chain—geology → extraction → shipping → pricing → finance → macroeconomic adjustment—not through any single lever.

Scope Conditions: The oil weapon is conditionally effective. It works best when (a) importers have high and inflexible demand; (b) spare capacity is concentrated in the restricting coalition; (c) alternative suppliers cannot scale quickly; (d) storage and strategic reserves are inadequate; (e) producer states can maintain cohesion despite divergent fiscal needs; and (f) financial markets amplify rather than absorb the shock. It weakens when consumers diversify sources, build reserves, improve efficiency, develop substitutes, or co-

ordinate demand restraint, as the International Energy Agency's emergency framework was designed to do after 1973. It also weakens when producers need revenue more than importers need a particular barrel, a condition that has repeatedly undermined OPEC discipline. The 1973 case is therefore not proof that oil always confers durable power; it is proof that power is greatest during transition periods, before infrastructure, habits, and institutions adapt. Conversely, the mechanism can fail even with high prices if the producer lacks refining capacity, shipping control, or financial autonomy, or if the importer can substitute coal, gas, nuclear, or, in later periods, renewables and electrification. Scope conditions thus include not only market structure but also the producer's position in the value chain: crude exporters without downstream control may capture rent while remaining dependent on foreign refining, insurance, and banking.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism is operating, one should observe sharp price discontinuities following supply announcements; inflation and current-account deterioration in importers; emergency conservation measures; military deployments or naval escorts in producing regions and chokepoints; expansion of strategic petroleum reserves; long-term contracts and bilateral supply agreements; and financial flows from producer surpluses into Western or offshore banking centers. One should also observe a lag between the shock and structural adjustment: efficiency standards, alternative fuels, and new suppliers typically respond with a delay of several years, creating a window in which producer leverage is high. In the 1973 case, the embargo contributed to stagflation, accelerated energy-security institutions, and prompted both conservation and a search for non-OPEC supply. Observable implications must be distinguished from mere correlation: a price spike can reflect war, speculation, or infrastructure failure rather than a deliberate weapon. A useful test is whether the price movement is accompanied by explicit political demands, selective supply cuts, and diplomatic signaling. Another test is whether importers alter foreign policy or military posture in ways that track energy dependence rather than alliance logic alone.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): From an African vantage point, the 1973 oil weapon is not simply a story of Arab producers coercing Western consumers; it is a chapter in a longer history in which hydrocarbons have been extracted from the global South under conditions that rarely permitted sovereign control over pricing, refining, or finance. African oil producers such as Nigeria, Angola, and Libya entered the postcolonial era with formal sovereignty but limited infrastructural sovereignty: concessions, shipping, insurance, and credit remained dominated by foreign firms and metropolitan banks. Petrodollar recycling therefore appears not as a neutral market process but as a mechanism that converted Southern resources into Northern liquidity, while many producing states became rentier enclaves with weak fiscal accountability. African scholarship on the postcolonial state—Bayart's analysis of extraversion, Mamdani's critique of the bifurcated state, and Grovogui's insistence that African sovereignty has been systematically denied in international law—suggests that the oil weapon's apparent success for some producers should not be generalized into a model of resource empowerment. For much of Africa, hydrocarbon geopolitics meant vulnerability to price volatility, enclave development, and external military intervention, rather than durable leverage. The African perspective thus reframes the 1973 shock as a demonstration of what concentrated producers could do, while asking why similar geological endowments elsewhere did not produce comparable bargaining power. It also foregrounds chokepoints around the continent—such as routes through the Gulf of Guinea and the Cape of Good Hope—not as abstract strategic nodes but as spaces where African security, revenue, and sovereignty are negotiated by external navies and corporations.

Chinese: Chinese analyses tend to treat hydrocarbon geopolitics as a problem of import dependence and strategic vulnerability. China's rapid industrialization made it a major importer, and the 1973 precedent is read as a warning that concentrated supply and maritime chokepoints can be weaponized. The response has been to build strategic petroleum reserves, diversify suppliers across the Middle East, Africa, Russia, and the

Americas, invest in overseas equity oil, and expand naval capabilities to protect sea lines of communication. The Chinese perspective emphasizes state capacity and long-term planning rather than market spontaneity, and it often frames energy security as a legitimate development imperative. It can, however, occlude the ways in which Chinese demand and state-backed finance reshape producer-state politics, and it may understate the environmental and governance costs of securing supply.

Russian: Russian perspectives draw on the Soviet and post-Soviet experience of hydrocarbons as both revenue base and geopolitical instrument. Energy exports have been used to sustain state power, subsidize domestic constituencies, and exert leverage over neighboring consumers, particularly through pipeline networks. The 1973 shock is interpreted as evidence that commodity markets are inseparable from political power, and that a resource-rich state can convert export dependence into bargaining strength. This view stresses commodity-state resilience and the limits of consumer sanctions. Its occlusion lies in minimizing the long-term costs of over-reliance on hydrocarbon rents, including technological stagnation, fiscal volatility, and the erosion of non-resource sectors, as well as the vulnerability created when importers diversify.

Western: Western perspectives, especially in the United States and Europe, have historically combined market-liberal and security framings. The 1973 embargo is remembered as a demonstration that supply concentration threatens industrial economies, prompting strategic petroleum reserves, IEA coordination, and naval protection of Gulf shipping. The dominant prescription has been diversification, efficiency, and market integration rather than state control of production. This perspective contributes a sophisticated understanding of consumer-side adaptation and institutional cooperation. It tends to occlude the imperial and coercive dimensions of Western energy security, including support for authoritarian producers and military interventions justified by supply protection, and it can treat producer grievances as market distortions rather than political claims.

UN: The United Nations perspective approaches hydrocarbon geopolitics through governance, development, and sustainability frameworks. It emphasizes energy access, price stability, transparency initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and the need to align resource extraction with the Sustainable Development Goals. From this vantage, the 1973 shock illustrates how unmanaged commodity volatility harms development, especially in import-dependent poor countries. The UN framing contributes multilateral norms and a focus on vulnerable consumers. It can occlude hard power realities, because its instruments rely on voluntary compliance and lack enforcement capacity; it may also treat resource politics as a technical governance problem rather than a contest over sovereignty and structural power.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Energy transition as geopolitical restructuring: critical minerals, rare earths, new material basis of power

Bolded Causal Claim: The energy transition does not simply replace one fuel with another; it restructures the material basis of power by shifting strategic dependence from hydrocarbon reserves and chokepoints to critical minerals, processing capacity, and clean-technology manufacturing, thereby creating new hierarchies of vulnerability and leverage that are not captured by traditional oil geopolitics.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the physical composition of low-carbon technologies. Solar photovoltaic systems, wind turbines, electric vehicles, batteries, and expanded electricity grids require far larger quantities of copper, aluminum, lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, graphite, and rare earth elements than comparable fossil-fuel systems. The IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024) frames this as a structural de-

mand shift: clean energy transitions increase demand for a set of minerals whose supply chains are more concentrated and less elastic than oil markets in the short run. This is not merely a price effect. It changes the "material basis" of power because military, industrial, and infrastructural capacity becomes tied to access to specific elements and to the industrial processes that refine them. Yergin's (1991, 2011) analyses of energy security emphasize that power in energy systems derives not only from possession of resources but from control over transportation, refining, and market institutions; the transition extends this logic to minerals and to battery and magnet manufacturing. The critical distinction is between geological endowment and industrial capability. Many minerals are mined in the Global South—cobalt in the Democratic Republic of Congo, lithium in Chile, Argentina, and Australia, nickel in Indonesia and the Philippines—while refining, precursor production, and component manufacturing are heavily concentrated in China. Thus the transition can reproduce a division of labor in which extraction remains in peripheral economies while value capture and technological leverage remain in core or semi-core industrial states. Sanderson (2022) on battery supply chains underscores that the strategic bottleneck is often not the mine but the midstream: refining, cathode and anode production, and cell manufacturing. A state can possess reserves without possessing leverage if it lacks processing capacity, infrastructure, finance, and technology. Conversely, a state with limited reserves but dominant refining capacity can exercise "bottleneck power" by controlling the transformation of raw materials into industrially usable inputs. This creates new chokepoints: not only maritime straits such as Hormuz or Malacca, but export licensing regimes, processing monopolies, technology standards, and offtake agreements. The mechanism is reinforced by path dependence. Battery chemistries, magnet designs, and grid technologies lock in demand profiles for specific minerals; substitution and recycling develop slowly because of engineering constraints, capital sunk in existing plants, and quality requirements. Policy then amplifies the structure: the United States Inflation Reduction Act, the European Union Critical Raw Materials Act, Japanese and Korean industrial strategies, and Chinese state-backed offtake and processing investments all treat mineral access as a security issue. The result is a geopolitical restructuring in which energy security is no longer primarily about oil flows but about mineral supply chains, technology ecosystems, and the governance of extraction.

Scope Conditions: The claim holds under several conditions. First, the transition must proceed at a pace that sustains high mineral demand; if decarbonization stalls, fossil-fuel geopolitics remains dominant. Second, processing concentration must remain high; if refining diversifies rapidly through investment in Africa, Latin America, or advanced economies, bottleneck power weakens. Third, substitution and recycling must remain limited in the relevant time horizon; breakthroughs in sodium-ion batteries, reduced cobalt chemistries, or large-scale recycling could reduce dependence on specific minerals. Fourth, "criticality" is partly a policy construct: governments define critical minerals differently, and lists change with technology and threat perception. Fifth, market responses matter; high prices can induce new supply, but mining projects face long lead times, permitting constraints, and social opposition. Sixth, leverage is constrained by the need of producer and processor states to maintain revenue and by the possibility of countermeasures, including stockpiling, alternative suppliers, and technological adaptation. The claim should therefore be treated as a structural tendency, not a deterministic law: it identifies a new arena of vulnerability and competition, not an automatic transfer of power to mineral-rich states.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism operates, one should observe mineral price volatility and boom-bust cycles, as seen in lithium markets in the early 2020s; export controls and licensing restrictions, such as China's 2023 controls on gallium, germanium, and graphite; strategic stockpiling and long-term offtake agreements; industrial policies aimed at domestic processing, such as Indonesia's nickel strategy or the DRC-Zambia battery initiative; "friend-shoring" and de-risking initiatives by the United States and European

Union; new diplomatic alignments around mineral supply chains; and heightened attention to environmental and social governance in mining regions. One should also observe a gap between reserve ownership and value capture: states with large reserves may remain fiscally dependent on unprocessed exports while processing states capture higher margins. Finally, one should observe contestation over the meaning of "green" transition, as communities in mining regions challenge the environmental costs of mineral extraction.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective, reconstructed from within through scholars such as Rodney, Nkrumah, Cabral, Fanon, Mamdani, Bayart, Mbembe, Grovogui, Tamale, and Oyěwùmí, treats the energy transition as a possible repetition of extractive colonialism unless African states convert mineral endowments into industrial capacity. It emphasizes resource sovereignty, value-chain upgrading, regional integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area, and the historical pattern by which raw-material exports subsidized industrialization elsewhere. From this vantage, critical minerals are not merely inputs for Northern decarbonization; they are potential foundations for African industrialization, employment, and technological learning. The perspective contributes a historically grounded critique of "green extractivism" and insists that transition justice requires local processing, community consent, and equitable benefit-sharing. It can occlude, however, the scale of capital, technology, and infrastructure required for downstream industries, as well as the risk that protectionist mineral policies may isolate African producers from global markets if not coordinated regionally.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes state-backed supply-chain security, long-term offtake, infrastructure investment, and "win-win" cooperation. It treats mineral access as a strategic and developmental priority and contributes industrial capacity, finance, and market access. It can occlude concerns about labor standards, environmental harm, debt, and asymmetric bargaining power in host countries.

Russian: The Russian perspective approaches minerals through the lens of commodity power, sanctions resilience, and great-power competition. It contributes an understanding of how resource states use supply leverage and pivot markets under pressure. It can occlude governance, diversification, and the developmental needs of producing regions.

Western: The Western perspective emphasizes supply-chain security, diversification, friend-shoring, and market-based efficiency. It contributes investment, technology, and regulatory standards such as ESG frameworks. It can occlude historical responsibility for extractive structures and the developmental aspirations of mineral-producing states.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes resource governance, transparency, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. It contributes multilateral norms and a focus on vulnerable consumers and producers. It can occlude hard power realities and the sovereignty claims of resource states, because its instruments often rely on voluntary compliance.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Resource nationalism: DRC-Zambia battery initiative, Indonesia nickel export ban, Mexico lithium nationalization

Bolded Causal Claim: Resource nationalism can convert mineral endowments into developmental leverage when states use sovereignty over extraction to force downstream industrialization, but it becomes rent-seeking or self-defeating when governments lack the capacity to manage investment, infrastructure, and market access.

Mechanism: Resource nationalism is a set of state strategies—nationalization, export restrictions, local-content requirements, tax and royalty renegotiation, and state-owned enterprise creation—through which governments seek to increase control over natural resources and capture a larger share of their value. Its mechanism is bargaining leverage derived from the inelasticity of demand for specific minerals and the sunk costs of extractive investment. Once firms have invested in mines, infrastructure, and relationships, states can renegotiate terms or impose conditions with less fear of immediate exit. The developmental variant of resource nationalism goes beyond rent capture: it uses control over raw materials to compel or incentivize processing, manufacturing, and technology transfer within national or regional borders. The DRC-Zambia battery initiative illustrates this ambition: by linking cobalt and copper endowments to a regional battery and electric-vehicle value chain, the two states seek to move from exporting unprocessed minerals to producing precursor materials and, eventually, higher-value components. The mechanism depends on regional integration, because neither state alone may possess the market size, infrastructure, or skills required for full industrialization. Indonesia's 2020 ban on exports of unprocessed nickel ore is a more coercive variant. By prohibiting raw ore exports, Indonesia forced investors to build domestic smelters and processing facilities; the policy attracted substantial investment in nickel processing and positioned Indonesia as a major player in stainless steel and battery-material supply chains. However, the same policy generated a World Trade Organization dispute with the European Union, which argued that the ban violated trade rules, and it raised concerns about environmental degradation and market distortion. Mexico's lithium nationalization, enacted through a 2022 reform that declared lithium a strategic mineral and created a state company, Litio para México, represents a sovereignty-first approach. Its mechanism is legal exclusion of private control over a mineral deemed strategic, but its developmental payoff remains uncertain because Mexico's lithium deposits are largely in clay formations that are technically difficult and costly to extract, and because state capacity, technology, and capital must still be assembled. The broader mechanism can be situated in theoretical debates. Dependency theory, associated with Prebisch and Cardoso and Faletto, argues that peripheral economies remain underdeveloped when they export raw materials and import manufactured goods; resource nationalism is one strategy to break this pattern. Developmental-state theory, associated with Johnson, Amsden, and Wade, suggests that industrial upgrading requires disciplined state intervention, not merely ownership. Rentier-state theory, associated with Karl and Ross, warns that resource wealth can weaken accountability and diversification by allowing governments to fund themselves through rents rather than taxation. Resource nationalism therefore sits at the intersection of these traditions: it can be a developmental project or a rentier project, depending on whether revenues are converted into productive capacity and accountable institutions.

Scope Conditions: The developmental success of resource nationalism is conditional. First, the state must possess sufficient administrative and technical capacity to regulate complex extractive and processing industries. Second, infrastructure—power, transport, water, and industrial zones—must be available or financeable. Third, the targeted mineral must have inelastic demand and limited short-run substitutes; otherwise buyers can simply source elsewhere. Fourth, the policy must be credible and predictable enough to attract long-term investment, even if it is coercive. Fifth, regional or global market access must be preserved; export bans that violate trade agreements can provoke retaliation or legal defeat, as in the Indonesia-EU dispute. Sixth, commodity price cycles matter: high prices make downstream investment attractive, while price collapses can strand assets. Seventh, governance quality matters; without transparency and accountability, resource nationalism may benefit elites rather than populations. Eighth, environmental and social costs can undermine legitimacy and create conflict. The claim should not be read as endorsing all resource nationalism; it identifies a conditional pathway whose outcomes vary with state capacity and market structure.

Observable Implications: If resource nationalism functions as developmental leverage, one should observe

growth in domestic processing capacity, new smelters and refineries, industrial clusters, technology-transfer agreements, and rising fiscal revenues tied to value-added exports. One should also observe regional initiatives, such as the DRC-Zambia battery effort, that pool resources and markets. If it functions as rent-seeking or self-defeating, one should observe capital flight, arbitration claims, WTO disputes, stalled projects, continued dependence on raw exports, and elite capture. In Indonesia, the observable implication is a rapid expansion of nickel processing alongside international legal conflict. In Mexico, the implication is a gap between sovereign assertion and technical feasibility. At the systemic level, one should observe a diffusion of export restrictions and local-content rules, as well as countermeasures by consumer states seeking to diversify supply. One should also observe contestation over whether such policies are legitimate development strategies or protectionist violations of trade norms.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective treats resource nationalism as a historically justified response to colonial extraction and unequal exchange. Drawing on Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment, Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism, and later African scholarship on sovereignty and development, it argues that African states have both the right and the necessity to control mineral wealth and to demand value-chain upgrading. The DRC-Zambia battery initiative exemplifies an African-led attempt to convert cobalt and copper endowments into regional industrial capacity rather than enclave extraction. The perspective contributes a claim of historical justice and a developmental ambition rooted in sovereignty. It can occlude, however, the risks of state capture, the need for regional coordination, and the possibility that unilateral restrictions may reduce investment or market access if not matched by capacity and infrastructure.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective generally supports state-led resource development and non-interference, emphasizing infrastructure, offtake, and mutual benefit. It contributes capital and market access for resource-nationalist projects. It can occlude governance concerns and the potential for asymmetric dependence.

Russian: The Russian perspective views resource nationalism through the lens of commodity sovereignty and state power, often treating energy and mineral control as instruments of geopolitical leverage. It contributes an understanding of how resource states resist external pressure. It can occlude development, diversification, and accountability.

Western: The Western perspective often treats resource nationalism as a risk to investment, supply security, and trade rules. It contributes legal frameworks, capital, and technology. It can occlude historical extraction and the developmental claims of producing states.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes governance, transparency, and sustainable development, including initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. It contributes norms for accountable resource management. It can occlude hard power and sovereignty claims, because its mechanisms rely on voluntary participation and lack enforcement.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Rentier State Theory and the "Resource Curse": Mechanisms Linking Resources to Authoritarianism and Conflict

Bolded Causal Claim: States that derive a large share of government revenue from externally generated resource rents tend, under identifiable institutional and geopolitical conditions, to develop fiscal structures, political coalitions, and security practices that weaken accountability, impede economic diversification, and

can convert resource wealth into authoritarian durability or violent conflict.

Mechanism: Rentier state theory begins with a fiscal observation: when a state receives substantial revenue from the sale of oil, gas, or minerals to external buyers, it need not extract comparable revenue from its own citizens through taxation. Karl (1997) frames this as the "paradox of plenty": abundance can undermine rather than secure development. The mechanism runs through several channels. First, the taxation-accountability channel: where citizens are not heavily taxed, the fiscal contract between state and society weakens, reducing the leverage through which citizens demand representation, transparency, and public goods. The state becomes an allocator of rents rather than a negotiator with taxpayers. Second, the spending and patronage channel: resource booms expand public expenditure, often through off-budget or opaque mechanisms, creating constituencies dependent on state distribution rather than productive employment. Third, the Dutch disease channel: large resource exports can appreciate the real exchange rate, raising the relative cost of non-resource tradables and shrinking manufacturing and agriculture, thereby deepening enclave economies and import dependence. Fourth, the sectoral and labor channel: extractive industries are typically capital-intensive and employ relatively few workers, weakening broad-based labor movements and civil-society organizations that might otherwise press for accountability. Fifth, the conflict channel: lootable, high-value resources can finance armed groups, reward predation, and intensify grievances over territorial control, revenue distribution, and environmental damage. Ross (2012) synthesizes these mechanisms by distinguishing taxation effects, spending effects, and group-formation effects, while emphasizing that the "curse" is not an automatic consequence of geology but a politically mediated outcome. Resource wealth can fund repression as well as development; it can stabilize incumbents by financing patronage networks and coercive capacity; and it can make states less dependent on societal consent. The mechanism is therefore not "resources cause authoritarianism" in a simple sense, but "resource rents alter the incentives, coalitions, and fiscal bargains that shape regime type and conflict risk."

Scope Conditions: The resource curse operates most strongly under a specific configuration of conditions rather than universally. Resource type matters: point-source, high-value, easily captured resources such as oil, gas, diamonds, and certain minerals are more strongly associated with rentier dynamics than diffuse agricultural commodities. Degree of dependence matters: the effect is strongest where resource rents dominate government revenue and exports, not where resources are one sector among many. Institutional quality matters: states with robust checks and balances, transparent budgeting, independent legislatures, and effective tax administration are better able to convert rents into public goods. Regime type matters: authoritarian incumbents may use rents to consolidate power, while democracies may face different, though still serious, risks of volatility and capture. Timing matters: resources discovered before institutional development may produce "premature" rentier effects, whereas resources developed after state capacity is established may be easier to govern. Geographic concentration matters for conflict: resources located in peripheral, ethnically distinct, or weakly governed regions can become focal points for separatism or rebel financing. Global price cycles matter: booms expand rents and patronage; busts expose fiscal fragility, debt, and austerity. Mitigating conditions include sovereign wealth funds, local-content requirements, diversification strategies, transparency initiatives, and regional integration, but these are political instruments whose effectiveness depends on enforcement and elite commitment. The curse is therefore best understood as a conditional syndrome, not a law of nature.

Observable Implications: If rentier mechanisms are operating, one should observe a cluster of fiscal, economic, political, and conflict indicators. Fiscally, resource-dependent states often display low tax effort relative to GDP, high non-tax revenue, volatile budgets, and large off-budget or sovereign-wealth arrangements. Economically, one may observe real exchange-rate appreciation, declining manufacturing or agricultural

competitiveness, import dependence, and enclave production with weak backward linkages. Politically, one may observe durable incumbent regimes, high spending on patronage and security, weak party systems, constrained legislatures, and elevated corruption risk. Socially, one may observe inequality between resource-producing and non-producing regions, limited employment generation from extraction, and grievances over environmental damage. In conflict settings, one may observe resource predation by armed actors, militarization of extraction zones, and disputes over revenue sharing. Conversely, where institutions are strong, one may observe high public investment, diversified economies, accountable budgeting, and peaceful resource governance. These implications are probabilistic and must be assessed in combination; no single indicator proves a curse, and resource wealth can coexist with development where political bargains and institutions channel rents productively.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective reconstructs resource wealth as a terrain of historical and political struggle rather than a geological destiny. Drawing on African scholarship and political thought, it emphasizes that colonial economies were organized as extractive enclaves, that postcolonial states inherited weak fiscal and institutional structures, and that global commodity markets have often rewarded raw export over beneficiation. From this vantage, the "resource curse" is partly produced by external structures of unequal exchange and partly by domestic elite bargains that capture rents. African analysis stresses that the absence of taxation is not merely a fiscal fact but a political relationship: when states live on rents, citizens lose leverage, and accountability must be rebuilt through redistribution, local content, community consent, and regional integration. It contributes a historically grounded critique of enclave development and a demand for value-chain upgrading. It can occlude cases where resource wealth has supported developmental states, and it risks overemphasizing external causation if it understates domestic agency and variation.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective tends to treat resource rents as a development opportunity managed through state capacity, long-term planning, and infrastructure-led growth. It contributes an emphasis on state-led development, non-interference, and the use of resource partnerships to build productive capacity. It can occlude governance deficits, debt vulnerability, and the distributional consequences of rent capture.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats resource rents as a foundation of state power and geopolitical leverage. It contributes a realist understanding of commodity states and the strategic use of energy and minerals. It can occlude diversification, accountability, and the long-term costs of rent dependence.

Western: The Western perspective often frames the resource curse through market failure, institutional weakness, and governance deficits. It contributes legal frameworks, capital, technology, and transparency initiatives. It can occlude historical extraction, structural inequality, and the developmental claims of producing states.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes governance, transparency, sustainable development, and human rights in resource sectors. It contributes norms such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and the Sustainable Development Goals. It can occlude hard power, sovereignty claims, and enforcement gaps, because many mechanisms remain voluntary.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Scramble for Critical Minerals: US (IRA, MSP), EU (CRMA), China (State-Backed Offtake)

Bolded Causal Claim: The energy transition has transformed lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite, rare earth elements, and related minerals into strategic assets, prompting major powers to use industrial policy, alliance-

building, export controls, and state-backed finance to secure supply chains, thereby restructuring global production networks and creating new dependencies, bargaining opportunities, and geopolitical competition.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with a material shift: decarbonization requires large quantities of minerals for batteries, electric vehicles, renewable energy systems, grid infrastructure, and defense technologies. Demand growth is not merely quantitative; it is structurally concentrated in technologies with high mineral intensity and limited short-term substitutability. Supply, however, is geographically concentrated in mining and even more concentrated in processing and refining. China's dominant role in rare earth processing, cobalt refining, and other midstream stages creates chokepoints that can be leveraged through export controls, licensing, or market power. The policy response has been a competitive restructuring of supply chains. The United States has used the Inflation Reduction Act to subsidize clean-energy production and to condition electric-vehicle tax credits on mineral sourcing from the United States or free-trade-agreement partners, thereby incentivizing "friend-shoring." It has also launched the Mineral Security Partnership to coordinate finance, standards, and project development among allied states. The European Union has adopted critical raw materials legislation aimed at increasing domestic extraction, processing, recycling, and strategic partnerships while reducing excessive dependence on single suppliers. China, meanwhile, has used state-backed firms, policy banks, long-term offtake agreements, infrastructure finance, and industrial planning to secure upstream supply and consolidate midstream dominance; it has also imposed export controls on minerals such as gallium and germanium, demonstrating that processing dominance can be converted into coercive leverage. The mechanism is therefore not simply a race to own mines. It is a multi-stage competition over extraction, refining, component manufacturing, standards, finance, and market access. Policy signals alter investment expectations; investment alters production geography; production geography alters bargaining power; and bargaining power feeds back into alliance structures and trade rules. Sanderson (2022) documents the battery supply chain as a site of corporate and geopolitical competition, while the IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024) highlights the gap between projected demand and the investment, permitting, and diversification needed to meet it. The result is a new geoeconomic arena in which climate policy, industrial policy, and security policy are increasingly fused.

Scope Conditions: The scramble applies most intensely to minerals that are essential, difficult to substitute in the near term, and concentrated in supply or processing. It is weaker for minerals with abundant reserves, mature recycling, or rapid technological substitution. The effectiveness of US, EU, or Chinese strategies depends on state capacity, financing, permitting timelines, environmental and social licensing, and the willingness of producer states to host extraction and processing. It also depends on price cycles: high prices stimulate investment and new projects, while price collapses can strand assets and undermine diversification plans. Producer-country politics matter: export bans, local-content rules, tax changes, and community resistance can alter supply regardless of consumer-country policy. Alliance structures matter: "friend-shoring" can redirect investment but may raise costs and exclude non-aligned producers. Environmental, social, and governance standards can improve accountability but may also function as non-tariff barriers. The scramble is therefore not a uniform global process; it is mediated by mineral type, market structure, domestic institutions, and the bargaining power of producing states.

Observable Implications: If the critical-minerals scramble is reshaping global political economy, one should observe several developments. Policy documents and legislation should explicitly link mineral security to climate and defense goals, as in US, EU, and allied initiatives. Investment flows should shift toward "friendly" or strategically aligned producer states, including in Africa and Latin America. Offtake agreements should proliferate, tying future production to specific buyers or industrial policies. Export restrictions and local-processing requirements should increase, as producer states seek value-chain upgrading. Process-

ing capacity should begin to diversify, though slowly, because refining investments are capital-intensive and technically demanding. Price volatility should accompany demand surges and policy shocks. New institutions and dialogues should emerge around critical minerals, recycling, and standards. One should also observe tensions: WTO disputes over export bans, conflicts over land and water in mining regions, and debates over whether "green" supply chains reproduce extractive patterns. The observable pattern is not merely more mining, but a reorganization of the stages of production and the political alliances that sustain them.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective sees the critical-minerals scramble as both an opportunity and a danger. It emphasizes that Africa holds significant shares of cobalt, copper, lithium, manganese, and other minerals essential to the energy transition, yet has historically captured little value from extraction. From this vantage, the scramble can support sovereignty and development if it is governed through beneficiation, local content, regional value chains under the African Continental Free Trade Area, fair contracts, community consent, and technology transfer. It also warns of "green extractivism": new demand may reproduce old patterns of enclave production, environmental harm, and external control if producer states remain price-takers in raw materials. African scholarship and policy discourse therefore stress not only attracting investment but changing the terms of participation, including processing, skills, infrastructure, and regional bargaining power. The perspective contributes a demand for value-chain upgrading and a critique of supply-chain security frameworks that treat African minerals as inputs to external industrial strategies. It can occlude cases where foreign investment has expanded fiscal capacity and infrastructure, and it must be tested against the institutional capacity of states to enforce local-content and environmental rules.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames critical-minerals engagement as mutually beneficial development through state-backed finance, infrastructure, long-term offtake, and non-interference. It contributes capital, construction capacity, and market access. It can occlude governance risks, debt sustainability, environmental impacts, and the concentration of processing power in Chinese firms.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats mineral and energy wealth as instruments of state power and multipolar leverage. It contributes a realist emphasis on commodity control and strategic autonomy. It can occlude diversification, accountability, and the long-term costs of overdependence on extractive rents.

Western: The Western perspective emphasizes supply-chain security, friend-shoring, market rules, and environmental, social, and governance standards. It contributes capital, technology, and institutional frameworks. It can occlude historical extraction, structural inequality, and the developmental claims of producing states.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes sustainable development, resource governance, transparency, and the Sustainable Development Goals, including affordable and clean energy. It contributes norms and multistakeholder initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. It can occlude hard power, enforcement gaps, and the geopolitical competition that increasingly shapes mineral supply chains.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

The five perspectives below reconstruct the lesson's central topic—energy, critical minerals, and resource geopolitics as a whole—through distinct theoretical traditions, each with its own mechanisms, contributions, and occlusions. They are not summaries of national foreign policies but analytical vantage points that shape how the problem is defined, what evidence counts, and what solutions appear plausible.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY) The African vantage point on energy, critical minerals, and resource geopolitics begins from a historical experience that the other four perspectives treat as background: the continent has been the site of successive waves of externally driven resource extraction—colonial, post-colonial, and now "green"—in which the terms of trade, the technology, and the capital have consistently been controlled by actors outside the continent. This is not merely a grievance; it is an analytical framework. From Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) through Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) to contemporary scholars such as Aning and Danso, the African perspective insists that resource geopolitics cannot be understood as a neutral market process or a security competition among great powers. It must be understood as a continuation of structured inequality in which African states occupy a subordinate position in global value chains, and in which the "resource curse" is not an African pathology but a relational outcome of how extraction is organized.

The theoretical lineage runs through several traditions. Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism argued that formal political independence did not end economic subordination; rather, control shifted from direct colonial administration to multinational corporations, financial institutions, and commodity markets. Cabral, in *Return to the Source* (1973), added that liberation required not only political independence but cultural and economic reconstruction, including control over the means of production. Nyerere's Arusha Declaration (1967) and the concept of *ujamaa* (familyhood) grounded resource sovereignty in self-reliance and collective ownership, rejecting the premise that African development required integration into Western-dominated markets on Western terms. Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), warned that national bourgeoisies would inherit colonial structures and reproduce extraction under new flags, a warning that resonates with contemporary critiques of African elites who broker mineral deals without value addition.

Rodney's contribution was to show that underdevelopment was not a stage but a process: Europe's development and Africa's underdevelopment were two sides of the same coin, linked by the extraction of surplus. This framework has been extended by Bayart's analysis of the "politics of the belly" (*La Politique du Ventre*, 1989), which examines how African states are embedded in transnational networks of extraction and patronage, and by Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001), which theorizes the specific forms of power and violence that characterize resource-dependent states. Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) provides the institutional backdrop: the bifurcated state, with its dual legal systems, created the conditions for authoritarian resource governance by concentrating power in executive hands and marginalizing rural populations.

Grovogui's *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) is particularly relevant to resource geopolitics. Grovogui argues that African sovereignty has been systematically denied or qualified by international law and institutions, and that the discourse of "failed states" and "resource curse" functions to justify external intervention and continued extraction. From this perspective, the very category of "resource curse" is suspect: it pathologizes African states while obscuring the structural conditions—unequal exchange, technology dependence, and coercive bargaining—that produce poor outcomes. The curse, on this reading, is not in the resource but in the terms of its incorporation into the global economy. This is a direct challenge to the Western and UN perspectives, which often treat the resource curse as an endogenous governance failure amenable to technical fixes.

Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) adds a gendered dimension that is often missing from resource geopolitics. She argues that colonial categories, including those of "development" and "resource management," were imposed through gendered and hierarchical frameworks that marginalized women's roles in resource governance. In the context of critical minerals, this means that the communities most affected by extraction—often women in artisanal mining areas—are least represented in the negotiations over value

chains and benefit-sharing. Tamale's work on African feminism and decolonization reinforces this point: resource sovereignty must include gender justice, or it reproduces colonial hierarchies in new forms. This gendered critique is largely absent from the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives, which treat resource governance as gender-neutral.

The contemporary African perspective on critical minerals is shaped by the recognition that the energy transition is creating a new scramble. The IEA's Critical Minerals Outlook (2024) documents that demand for lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements is surging, and that production and refining are heavily concentrated. For African states, this presents both an opportunity and a threat. The opportunity is to move up the value chain: rather than exporting raw ore, African states can process, refine, and manufacture components, capturing more value and creating employment. The DRC-Zambia battery initiative, announced in 2022, is the most prominent example: the two countries, which together hold significant cobalt and copper reserves, have agreed to develop a regional battery value chain, including precursor and cathode active material production. This is framed not as a market opportunity alone but as a sovereignty project: it aims to break the pattern in which African resources are extracted, shipped abroad, processed, and re-imported as finished goods at high cost.

The threat is that the new scramble will reproduce old patterns. China's dominance in cobalt refining, rare earth processing, and battery manufacturing means that even when African states extract minerals, the value addition occurs elsewhere. The US Inflation Reduction Act and the EU Critical Raw Materials Act, while framed as supply-chain security measures, also create new conditionalities: minerals must meet sourcing requirements that African states may struggle to satisfy, and the "friend-shoring" logic may exclude African producers who are not aligned with Western geopolitical blocs. From the African perspective, these initiatives are not neutral technical measures; they are geopolitical instruments that reshape access to markets and technology. Klare's *The Race for What's Left* (2012) and Sanderson's *Cobalt Red* (2022) document the human and environmental costs of this extraction, costs that fall disproportionately on African communities.

Resource nationalism is a central theme. Indonesia's nickel export ban (2020) is often cited as a model: by banning raw ore exports and requiring domestic processing, Indonesia attracted investment in smelters and battery precursor plants, moving up the value chain. African states have drawn lessons from this. The DRC has revised its mining code to increase royalties and state equity; Zambia has reformed its mining fiscal regime; Namibia and Zimbabwe have banned raw lithium exports. These measures are defended as sovereignty claims, not protectionism. They reflect the argument that the state has a legitimate role in ensuring that resource extraction contributes to national development, a position that Nyerere articulated in the Arusha Declaration and that contemporary African leaders invoke. Karl's *The Paradox of Plenty* (1997) and Ross's *The Oil Curse* (2012) document the mechanisms by which resource rents can undermine governance, but the African perspective insists that these mechanisms are contingent on institutional and geopolitical context, not deterministic.

However, the African perspective also contains internal critiques. The "resource curse" literature documents how resource rents can fuel corruption, conflict, and authoritarianism. The African perspective does not deny these outcomes but reinterprets their causes. The mechanism, on this view, is not the resource itself but the way it is governed: weak institutions, external interference, and the absence of value addition. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state and Bayart's analysis of extraversion—the tendency of African elites to seek external support rather than domestic legitimacy—provide the institutional and political mechanisms. The solution, from this perspective, is not to abandon resource extraction but to transform the terms of governance: transparency (EITI), local content requirements, community benefit-sharing, and regional integration

through AfCFTA.

AfCFTA is central to the African perspective on critical minerals. The argument is that no single African state can negotiate effectively with China, the US, or the EU on mineral supply chains; collective bargaining through regional and continental frameworks is necessary. AfCFTA's protocols on trade in goods and services, investment, and competition policy provide a framework for harmonizing mining codes, establishing regional value chains, and preventing a race to the bottom in fiscal terms. The DRC-Zambia battery initiative is explicitly framed as a precursor to broader regional integration. From this perspective, the African Continental Free Trade Area is not merely an economic arrangement but a geopolitical instrument: it enables African states to act as a bloc in a world where mineral supply chains are increasingly politicized. This is a claim that none of the other four perspectives makes, because none of them treats African collective agency as a primary variable.

What the African vantage point contributes that the other four cannot is a structural critique of the global political economy of resources. It insists that the "scramble" for critical minerals is not a new phenomenon but a continuation of patterns established in the colonial period, and that the language of "supply-chain security" and "green transition" can obscure continuities of extraction. It also insists that African agency matters: African states, communities, and social movements are not passive recipients of external initiatives but active participants in shaping outcomes. The DRC's mining code revisions, Zambia's fiscal reforms, and the DRC-Zambia battery initiative are examples of this agency. Yergin's *The Prize* (1991) and *The Quest* (2011) provide the hydrocarbon backdrop against which this African agency must be understood: the history of oil is a history of external control, and the African perspective insists that the history of critical minerals must not repeat it.

What it occludes is also important. The African perspective can understate the role of domestic elites in perpetuating extraction and corruption. Bayart's concept of extraversion and Fanon's warning about the national bourgeoisie are attempts to address this, but the structural critique can sometimes shift responsibility entirely to external actors, understating internal governance failures. It can also romanticize regional integration: AfCFTA's implementation has been slow, and the DRC-Zambia battery initiative faces significant technical, financial, and infrastructural challenges. Finally, the African perspective can struggle to account for the diversity of African experiences: the resource politics of Botswana (diamonds, relatively successful governance) differ sharply from those of the DRC (cobalt, conflict, weak state), and a continental framework may obscure these differences. These occlusions do not invalidate the perspective, but they mark the boundaries of its explanatory power.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective The Chinese perspective on energy, critical minerals, and resource geopolitics is rooted in a state-led development model that treats resource security as a strategic imperative and supply-chain dominance as a source of national power. This perspective is shaped by China's own experience of resource scarcity—particularly in oil and gas, where China is a major importer—and by its success in building dominant positions in critical mineral processing and manufacturing. The theoretical lineage draws on Chinese strategic thought, including the concept of "comprehensive national power" and the emphasis on "self-reliance" (*zili gengsheng*) that has roots in Maoist economics but has been adapted to a market-oriented context.

The core claim is that resource geopolitics is not a zero-sum competition but a "win-win" arrangement in which China provides capital, infrastructure, and markets in exchange for resource access. This framing is central to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and to China's bilateral mineral agreements, particularly in

Africa. The Chinese perspective emphasizes mutual benefit, non-interference in domestic affairs, and respect for sovereignty—principles that are contrasted with Western conditionalities. In practice, this means that Chinese state-backed enterprises (SOEs) sign offtake agreements, build infrastructure (roads, ports, power plants), and provide financing, often with less stringent environmental and governance requirements than Western counterparts.

The mechanism of Chinese resource power operates at multiple levels. At the extraction level, Chinese companies have secured mining rights and offtake agreements in the DRC (cobalt), Zambia (copper), and Zimbabwe (lithium). At the processing level, China dominates refining: it processes approximately 60-70% of the world's cobalt, 80-90% of rare earth elements, and a significant share of lithium. At the manufacturing level, China produces the majority of EV batteries, solar panels, and wind turbines. This vertical integration gives China leverage not only over resource-producing states but over consuming states, particularly in the West. The Chinese perspective treats this not as coercion but as the natural outcome of industrial policy and long-term planning.

The "win-win" framing is the central normative claim. Chinese officials and scholars argue that BRI and mineral partnerships are developmental: they build infrastructure, create jobs, and transfer technology. The Chinese perspective points to the fact that Western companies historically extracted African resources without building local processing capacity, and that China's approach—while imperfect—is more conducive to industrialization. This argument has resonance in African capitals, where Chinese financing has funded infrastructure that Western institutions declined to support.

What the Chinese perspective contributes is a demonstration that state-led industrial policy can reshape global supply chains. China's dominance in critical minerals was not an accident of geology but the result of deliberate policy: subsidies, state-backed financing, technology transfer requirements, and long-term planning. This provides a model that other states, including African states, can study. The Chinese perspective also highlights the hypocrisy of Western "friend-shoring" and "de-risking" rhetoric: the West, having outsourced processing to China for decades, now seeks to reshore or friend-shore without acknowledging its own role in creating the dependency.

What it occludes is significant. The "win-win" framing can obscure asymmetries of power: Chinese SOEs often negotiate with weak African states that lack technical capacity and bargaining power. The environmental and social costs of Chinese mining operations—documented in the DRC, Zambia, and elsewhere—can be externalized onto local communities. The debt implications of Chinese financing, while often overstated in Western narratives, are real in specific cases. The Chinese perspective also tends to treat African states as partners in a bilateral framework, which can undermine regional integration efforts such as AfCFTA. Finally, the Chinese perspective occludes the geopolitical implications of its own dominance: by controlling processing, China has leverage over both producing and consuming states, and this leverage can be exercised coercively, as seen in the 2010 rare earth export restrictions to Japan.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective The Russian perspective on energy, critical minerals, and resource geopolitics is shaped by Russia's identity as a commodity state—a major exporter of hydrocarbons, metals, and minerals—and by its experience of using energy as a geopolitical instrument. This perspective draws on a tradition of state capitalism and "sovereign democracy" in which natural resources are treated as strategic assets of the state, not as commodities subject to market logic. The theoretical lineage includes Soviet-era concepts of "resource rent" and "state monopoly," adapted to a post-Soviet context in which oligarchic control of resources was partially re-nationalized under Putin.

The core claim is that energy and mineral resources are instruments of state power, and that the global energy transition is a threat to Russia's economic and geopolitical position. Russia is a major producer of oil, gas, nickel, palladium, and other minerals; the transition to renewable energy and EVs threatens to reduce demand for Russian hydrocarbons while increasing demand for minerals that Russia also possesses. The Russian perspective thus combines defensive and offensive elements: defending its hydrocarbon rents while seeking to position itself in critical mineral supply chains.

The mechanism of Russian resource power is most visible in energy coercion. The 2006 and 2009 gas disputes with Ukraine, the 2022 cutoff of gas supplies to Europe following the invasion of Ukraine, and the use of oil price manipulation through OPEC+ coordination all demonstrate how Russia has weaponized energy. The Russian perspective treats these not as aggression but as legitimate statecraft: energy is a sovereign resource, and its deployment is a matter of national interest. This is consistent with the broader Russian doctrine of "sovereign democracy," which rejects Western liberal norms and asserts the primacy of state interest.

In the critical minerals space, Russia has sought to leverage its position in nickel (Norilsk Nickel is a major global producer), palladium, and other metals. The Russian perspective emphasizes that sanctions and "de-risking" efforts by the West are attempts to exclude Russia from global supply chains, and that Russia will respond by deepening partnerships with China and other non-Western states. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine and subsequent sanctions have accelerated this reorientation: Russia has redirected energy exports to China and India, and has sought to build alternative payment systems and supply chain arrangements outside Western control.

What the Russian perspective contributes is a candid acknowledgment that resource geopolitics is about power, not just markets. Unlike the Chinese "win-win" framing or the Western "supply-chain security" framing, the Russian perspective does not pretend that resource relations are cooperative; it treats them as competitive and zero-sum. This candor can be analytically useful: it strips away the normative language that other perspectives use to obscure power relations. The Russian perspective also highlights the vulnerability of the global energy system to disruption: the 2022 energy crisis demonstrated how quickly supply shocks can cascade through economies.

What it occludes is substantial. The Russian perspective treats resource extraction as a state prerogative without regard for environmental or social costs. It occludes the authoritarian governance that underpins resource control: the Russian state's dominance of the energy sector is linked to the suppression of political opposition, the concentration of wealth in oligarchic hands, and the use of resource rents to fund military aggression. It also occludes the long-term economic costs of overdependence on extractive rents: the "resource curse" dynamics that have produced stagnation, corruption, and vulnerability to price shocks. Finally, the Russian perspective occludes the agency of resource-producing states and communities: it treats resources as state assets to be deployed for geopolitical ends, not as sources of development for populations.

2.7.4 Western Perspective The Western perspective on energy, critical minerals, and resource geopolitics is organized around the concepts of supply-chain security, market efficiency, and governance standards. This perspective draws on liberal international economic theory, which treats resources as commodities traded in global markets, and on security studies, which treats supply-chain concentration as a vulnerability. The theoretical lineage includes classical trade theory (Ricardo, comparative advantage), institutional economics (North, Acemoglu), and the "resource curse" literature (Ross, Collier, Sachs).

The core claim is that critical mineral supply chains must be diversified, transparent, and governed by mar-

ket rules and ESG standards. The Western perspective treats China's dominance in processing as a strategic vulnerability and seeks to reduce dependence through "friend-shoring," reshoring, and the creation of alternative supply chains. The US Inflation Reduction Act (2022) provides tax credits for EVs and batteries that meet domestic content requirements; the EU Critical Raw Materials Act (2023) sets targets for domestic extraction, processing, and recycling; and the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) coordinates allied efforts to develop alternative supply chains.

The mechanism operates through a combination of subsidies, trade policy, and normative conditionality. The IRA's sourcing requirements, for example, exclude minerals processed in "foreign entities of concern" (primarily China), creating incentives for producers to route supply chains through allied or neutral countries. The EU CRMA sets benchmarks for domestic capacity and requires strategic projects to meet sustainability criteria. These measures are framed as defensive: they aim to reduce vulnerability to coercion, not to dominate markets. The Western perspective also emphasizes governance: the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), the OECD Due Diligence Guidance, and various ESG frameworks are presented as tools for ensuring that resource extraction benefits local populations and meets environmental standards.

What the Western perspective contributes is a set of institutional and normative frameworks that can improve resource governance. EITI, in particular, has increased transparency in extractive sectors in many countries. The emphasis on ESG standards, while sometimes criticized as "greenwashing," has created pressure for better labor and environmental practices. The Western perspective also brings capital and technology: Western mining companies, while historically extractive, have developed advanced processing and recycling technologies that could support value-chain upgrading in producing states.

What it occludes is significant. The Western perspective can treat resource geopolitics as a technical problem of supply-chain management, obscuring the historical and structural inequalities that shape mineral markets. The "friend-shoring" logic, while framed as security, can reproduce colonial patterns: it designates some states as "friends" and others as threats, often on geopolitical rather than developmental grounds. The Western perspective also tends to understate its own role in creating the dependencies it now seeks to escape: Western companies and governments outsourced processing to China for decades, and Western consumption drives demand for minerals extracted under poor conditions. Finally, the Western perspective can occlude the developmental claims of producing states: when African or Latin American states impose export bans or local content requirements, these are often framed as market distortions or violations of trade rules, rather than as legitimate sovereignty claims.

2.7.5 UN Perspective The UN perspective on energy, critical minerals, and resource geopolitics is organized around sustainable development, resource governance, and the Sustainable Development Goals. This perspective draws on the UN's mandate for international cooperation and its normative frameworks, including the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The theoretical lineage includes development economics, human rights law, and the "resource curse" literature, but framed through a multilateral, normative lens.

The core claim is that resource extraction must be governed by principles of sustainability, transparency, and equity, and that the energy transition must be just and inclusive. The UN perspective emphasizes that critical minerals are essential for achieving SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) and SDG 13 (climate action), but that their extraction must not undermine other SDGs, including those related to poverty, health, and environmental protection. The UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) all produce analyses and frameworks

related to resource governance.

The mechanism operates through norm-setting, capacity-building, and multi-stakeholder initiatives. The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), while not a UN body, is supported by UN agencies and aligns with UN governance norms. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights provide a framework for holding companies accountable for human rights impacts in mining. UNCTAD's work on commodity dependence and value-chain upgrading provides analytical support for producing states. The UN also convenes dialogues and produces reports, such as the UN Secretary-General's Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals (2024), which aims to develop principles for responsible mineral supply chains.

What the UN perspective contributes is a normative framework that transcends geopolitical competition. In a world where the US, China, Russia, and the EU are all pursuing strategic mineral interests, the UN provides a space for articulating shared principles: that extraction should benefit local communities, that environmental standards should be upheld, and that the energy transition should not reproduce inequalities. The UN perspective also brings attention to the human rights dimensions of mining: child labor in cobalt mining in the DRC, indigenous rights in lithium mining in South America, and the displacement of communities by large-scale mining projects.

What it occludes is also significant. The UN perspective lacks enforcement power: its norms and principles are voluntary, and states and companies can ignore them without consequence. The UN can be slow to respond to rapidly evolving geopolitical dynamics, and its frameworks can be captured by powerful states or corporate interests. The UN perspective also tends to treat resource governance as a technical and normative problem, which can obscure the hard power and geopolitical competition that increasingly shape mineral supply chains. Finally, the UN perspective can struggle to reconcile its development and environmental mandates: promoting mineral extraction for the energy transition can conflict with environmental protection and community rights, and the UN does not always resolve these tensions.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reveals that resource extraction without value-chain upgrading reproduces dependency; frames resource sovereignty as a development imperative rather than merely a security problem; identifies AfCFTA and regional industrialization as structural correctives to extractive enclave economies	May overstate state capacity for upgrading in contexts of weak institutions and capital scarcity; can understate the genuine geopolitical competition among great powers that constrains African agency; risks romanticizing resource nationalism without accounting for rent-seeking and elite capture	Resources should serve African structural transformation; extraction without upgrading is neo-colonial; value addition is a right, not a concession	DRC-Zambia battery initiative (2022); cobalt refining concentration (China ~70% of global refining); AfCFTA protocols on rules of origin; Rodney's underdevelopment thesis applied to mineral enclaves	Western/Chinese: upgrading requires capital, technology, and market access that may not be available; sovereignty claims may deter investment and slow development

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Demonstrates that state-backed long-term offtake, infrastructure finance, and vertical integration can secure supply chains and accelerate industrialization in partner states; shows that "win-win" frameworks can mobilize capital at scale	Obscures labor and environmental standards, debt sustainability, and local value capture; "win-win" rhetoric masks asymmetric bargaining power; state-backed opacity complicates accountability	Mutual benefit through non-interference; development through infrastructure and market access; South-South cooperation	Belt and Road Initiative mineral investments; CMOC/Tenke Fungurume cobalt operations; Zimbabwe lithium processing requirements; state-backed offtake agreements	African: "win-win" masks dependency; Western: lack of transparency and governance standards; UN: environmental and community rights deficits
Russian	Illustrates that commodity exports can be weaponized for geopolitical leverage; demonstrates that energy and mineral states can convert resource endowments into great-power status and coercive capacity	Underestimates long-term demand destruction from weaponization (accelerated diversification, sanctions); overstates coercive durability; ignores that commodity leverage is self-limiting as buyers adapt	Resources as instruments of state power and sovereign autonomy; commodity leverage as legitimate statecraft	2022 gas cutoff to Europe; oil price manipulation via OPEC+; Gazprom leverage over Central and Eastern Europe	Western: weaponization accelerates diversification and undermines long-term market position; African: commodity leverage without upgrading reproduces dependency

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Identifies supply-chain security as a legitimate state interest; develops institutional frameworks (IRA, MSP, CRMA) for diversification and friend-shoring; emphasizes market efficiency, rule of law, and governance standards	Treats resource politics primarily as a security problem rather than a development problem; friend-shoring may exclude African upgrading by privileging allied suppliers; market rhetoric can mask protectionism and subsidy races	Open markets, rule of law, supply-chain resilience, democratic governance; resources as strategic assets requiring secure supply	Inflation Reduction Act (2022); Minerals Security Partnership; EU Critical Raw Materials Act (2023); IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024)	African: friend-shoring is neo-colonial exclusion; Chinese: market rhetoric masks protectionism; UN: governance standards may be inconsistently applied
UN	Establishes normative frameworks for resource governance (EITI, SDG 7, UN Resource Panel); promotes transparency, community rights, and sustainable development; provides multilateral legitimacy for governance standards	Lacks enforcement power; norms are voluntary; can be slow to respond to geopolitical dynamics; frameworks can be captured by powerful states or corporate interests; struggles to reconcile development and environmental mandates	Sustainable development, transparency, multilateral cooperation, intergenerational equity	EITI implementation in 50+ countries; SDG 7 (affordable clean energy); UN Secretary-General's Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals (2024)	All perspectives: voluntary norms insufficient against hard power competition; African: governance frameworks may privilege investor interests over sovereignty

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 1973 Oil Embargo — OPEC, the Oil Weapon, and the Restructuring of Global Political Economy

The 1973 oil embargo remains the foundational case for understanding how commodity producers can weaponize supply to restructure global power. In October 1973, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) imposed an embargo on oil shipments to the United States and other nations supporting Israel during the Yom Kippur War. Within months, oil prices quadrupled from roughly $3 to $12 per barrel. The embargo lasted until March 1974, but its consequences reshaped the global political economy for decades. The case is not merely a historical episode; it is the template through which subsequent resource geopolitics — including today's critical minerals competition — is understood.

Levels of Analysis

Individual. The embargo cannot be explained without the decisions of specific leaders operating under uncertainty. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat launched the Yom Kippur War to break the diplomatic stalemate; Saudi King Faisal, initially reluctant, was persuaded by Arab solidarity and domestic pressure to join the embargo; US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger pursued shuttle diplomacy that ultimately produced disengagement agreements; and OAPEC oil ministers, meeting in Kuwait, calibrated production cuts with deliberate ambiguity about targets and duration. Each actor operated with incomplete information about the others' red lines. Faisal, in particular, faced a domestic constituency that demanded action, while simultaneously fearing US retaliation and the long-term damage to the US-Saudi relationship. Kissinger's subsequent "Year of Europe" speech and his pursuit of a separate peace between Egypt and Israel were shaped by the recognition that energy vulnerability had become a strategic liability. The individual level reveals that the embargo was not an automatic response to war but a calculated political instrument whose architects debated its risks and duration.

State. At the state level, the embargo served distinct national interests. Saudi Arabia sought to demonstrate Arab solidarity while preserving its special relationship with Washington; Egypt needed to pressure the US into forcing Israeli withdrawal; Libya and Iraq, more radical, pushed for permanent production cuts and price increases. The US, for its part, faced a strategic dilemma: supporting Israel risked energy security, while abandoning Israel risked domestic political backlash and regional credibility. The state level also reveals the asymmetry of the crisis: the US was the world's largest oil consumer but not a major exporter, while Arab producers controlled roughly 85% of globally traded oil. This structural asymmetry gave producer states leverage that consumer states could not easily counter. The embargo also exposed the fragility of the Bretton Woods system, which collapsed in 1971 with the Nixon shock; the dollar's role as reserve currency meant that oil price increases were denominated in dollars, creating a feedback loop between energy and monetary power.

Systemic. The systemic level situates the embargo within the Cold War bipolar order and the broader transformation of the global economy. The embargo occurred as the postwar Bretton Woods system was unraveling, as decolonization had created a bloc of resource-rich developing states, and as the US was withdrawing from Vietnam. OPEC's success in raising prices demonstrated that a cartel of developing-country producers could challenge the economic dominance of industrialized nations — a direct challenge to the liberal international order. The systemic level also captures the petrodollar recycling mechanism that emerged: Arab

surpluses were deposited in Western banks and recycled as loans to developing countries and investments in US Treasury securities, reinforcing dollar hegemony even as it appeared to weaken US power. This recycling created a new financial architecture that tied oil producers to the US financial system, transforming a short-term supply shock into a long-term structural feature of global capitalism. The systemic level further reveals that the embargo accelerated the shift from a producer-dominated to a consumer-responsive energy order: the creation of the International Energy Agency (IEA) in 1974, strategic petroleum reserves, and energy conservation programs all represented systemic adaptations to producer power.

Transnational. The transnational level captures the role of multinational oil companies — the "Seven Sisters" — that controlled production, refining, and distribution across borders. These companies had historically operated as extensions of Western power, but the embargo exposed their vulnerability: they could not prevent host governments from restricting output. The embargo also triggered a wave of nationalizations, as producer states asserted sovereignty over resources previously controlled by foreign companies. Transnationally, the crisis accelerated the shift from concession agreements to production-sharing contracts, a restructuring of property rights that redistributed rents from companies to states. The petrodollar recycling itself was a transnational process: capital flows from oil producers through Western financial centers to global borrowers, creating new patterns of debt and dependency that would culminate in the 1980s debt crisis. The transnational level also reveals the role of non-state actors — banks, trading houses, and shipping companies — in mediating the crisis and shaping its outcomes.

Mechanism

The oil weapon operated through a clear causal chain. First, supply restriction: OAPEC reduced production by approximately 5% per month and imposed a total embargo on shipments to the US and Netherlands. Second, price spike: the reduction in supply, combined with inelastic short-term demand, drove prices from $3 to $12 per barrel. Third, economic transmission: higher oil prices raised production costs across the OECD economies, triggering inflation and recession. Fourth, political pressure: the economic pain generated domestic political pressure on governments to change their Middle East policies. Fifth, diplomatic response: the US pressured Israel to accept disengagement agreements, and the embargo was lifted in March 1974.

However, the mechanism was not purely coercive. The embargo also operated through the petrodollar recycling channel, which transformed a short-term supply shock into a long-term structural reinforcement of US financial power. Arab surpluses were recycled into US Treasury securities, lowering US borrowing costs and financing US deficits. This created a mutual dependency: the US needed Arab oil and Arab capital; Arab producers needed US security guarantees and US markets for their capital. The mechanism thus produced not simply a transfer of power from consumers to producers, but a restructuring of the global financial architecture that ultimately benefited the US.

The long-term mechanism was equally important. The embargo triggered energy conservation, diversification of supply (including North Sea and Alaskan oil), and the creation of strategic petroleum reserves. These responses reduced OPEC's market power over time, demonstrating that the oil weapon was most effective as a surprise instrument and least effective as a sustained strategy. By the 1980s, OPEC's share of global production had declined, and the cartel's ability to set prices had eroded. The mechanism of the oil weapon was thus self-limiting: its success generated the conditions for its own attenuation.

Perspective Reconstruction

African (primary). The 1973 embargo was read across Africa as a vindication of resource sovereignty and a demonstration that commodity producers could collectively challenge Western dominance. Nkrumah had

argued in *Neo-Colonialism* (1965) that control of natural resources was the foundation of genuine independence; the embargo seemed to prove that producer cartels could reshape global power. African leaders drew parallels between OPEC's oil and their own mineral endowments — copper in Zambia, cobalt in the DRC, uranium in Niger — and explored whether similar cartel strategies could be applied. The 1970s saw a wave of resource nationalizations across Africa, from Zambia's copper nationalization to Nigeria's creation of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. Yet African scholars and leaders also recognized the limits of the OPEC model. Africa lacked the market concentration that OPEC enjoyed: no single African commodity commanded the global market share that oil did, and African states lacked the institutional capacity and capital to manage nationalized industries effectively. Rodney's analysis in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) provided a framework for understanding why resource wealth did not translate into development: the global structure of trade and finance ensured that surplus was extracted rather than reinvested. The embargo's aftermath — petrodollar recycling that channeled Arab surpluses into Western financial markets rather than African development — confirmed Rodney's thesis. The lesson for Africa was double-edged: resource power was possible but required cartel coordination, state capacity, and control over the full value chain, conditions that most African states did not meet. The embargo thus reinforced the African argument for value-chain upgrading and regional integration, later articulated in the AfCFTA, as the necessary complement to resource sovereignty.

Chinese. China viewed the embargo through the lens of anti-imperialism and Third World solidarity, interpreting OPEC's action as a blow against Western hegemony and a validation of producer sovereignty. Beijing had long supported the principle that developing countries should control their natural resources, and the embargo appeared to demonstrate that collective action by the Global South could challenge the industrialized North. The crisis also accelerated China's own energy security thinking, though China was not yet a major oil importer in 1973; the lesson was absorbed into a longer-term strategic calculus about vulnerability to supply disruption. Chinese analysts also noted the petrodollar recycling mechanism with concern, recognizing that it reinforced US financial hegemony even as it appeared to weaken US power. This concern would shape China's later efforts to internationalize the renminbi and develop alternative payment systems. The Chinese perspective thus saw the embargo as both a tactical victory for the Global South and a strategic reinforcement of US financial dominance — a duality that informed China's subsequent approach to energy and currency geopolitics.

Russian. The Soviet Union benefited substantially from the embargo, as a major oil exporter gaining hard currency and geopolitical leverage from the price spike. Moscow interpreted the crisis as evidence of the fragility of Western capitalism and the vulnerability of the US-led alliance system. The USSR was not an OPEC member and could not coordinate production, but it positioned itself as a reliable alternative supplier to countries affected by the embargo, gaining influence in Western Europe and the developing world. The crisis reinforced Soviet thinking about energy as a strategic asset — a lesson that would be applied with increasing sophistication in post-Soviet Russia, where energy leverage became a central instrument of foreign policy. However, the Russian perspective also recognized the limits of commodity power: the embargo's success in raising prices also accelerated Western diversification and conservation, reducing long-term demand for Soviet exports. The mechanism of self-limiting leverage — that weaponization generates adaptation — was thus visible even in the 1970s, though it would be repeatedly underestimated in subsequent decades.

Western. Western analysts and policymakers interpreted the embargo as a strategic shock that exposed the vulnerability of industrialized economies to supply disruption. The crisis triggered a comprehensive restructuring of Western energy policy: the creation of the IEA in 1974, the establishment of strategic petroleum reserves, the promotion of energy conservation and efficiency, and the diversification of supply sources in-

cluding North Sea and Alaskan oil. Yergin's *The Prize* (1991) frames the embargo as the moment when the "age of abundance" gave way to an "age of scarcity," fundamentally altering the relationship between energy and power. The Western perspective emphasizes that the embargo ultimately strengthened Western institutional capacity and reduced OPEC's leverage over time. The petrodollar recycling arrangement is interpreted as a pragmatic adaptation that preserved US financial hegemony while accommodating producer interests. The Western perspective also stresses the role of market mechanisms — price signals, investment responses, and technological innovation — in eroding cartel power, suggesting that market forces are more durable than political coercion in energy geopolitics.

UN. The UN framed the embargo within the broader context of North-South relations and the emerging demand for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). The 1974 Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order, adopted by the UN General Assembly, reflected the emboldened position of developing countries following OPEC's success. The UN emphasized resource sovereignty, equitable trade, and the right of states to control their natural resources. However, the UN lacked enforcement capacity, and the NIEO ultimately failed to materialize. The UN perspective also highlights the distributional consequences of the embargo: while oil producers gained, oil-importing developing countries — particularly in Africa and South Asia — suffered severe economic damage from higher energy prices, revealing that resource power could harm as well as help the Global South. The UN's framing thus captures both the promise and the limitations of producer solidarity, while underscoring the need for multilateral frameworks to manage the global energy economy.

Explicit Adjudication

The systemic perspective best explains the 1973 embargo's causes and consequences. The embargo was not merely a bilateral dispute between Arab states and the US; it was a systemic shock that restructured the global political economy through petrodollar recycling, institutional innovation (the IEA), and the acceleration of energy diversification. The systemic level captures the feedback loops between energy, finance, and geopolitics that the other levels miss. However, the systemic perspective risks obscuring agency: it can make the embargo appear as an inevitable structural response rather than a calculated political decision by specific leaders operating under uncertainty. The individual and state levels are necessary to explain why the embargo happened when it did and why it took the form it did.

The African perspective contributes a crucial corrective that the systemic perspective misses: the embargo's consequences for the Global South were not uniformly positive. While OPEC gained, oil-importing developing countries suffered, and the petrodollar recycling that followed channeled resources into Western financial markets rather than African development. The African perspective thus reveals that resource power is double-edged and that the global structure of finance and trade can convert producer gains into reinforced dependency. What the African perspective may understate is the genuine strategic achievement of the embargo: it did demonstrate that producer cartels could challenge Western dominance, and it did produce lasting institutional changes (the IEA, strategic reserves) that altered the balance of power in energy geopolitics. The African perspective's emphasis on value-chain upgrading and regional integration, while valid for minerals, may not fully account for the unique market concentration that made OPEC's oil weapon effective — a concentration that African mineral producers have rarely achieved.

The Western perspective captures the institutional and market responses that eroded OPEC's power, but it understates the distributional consequences for the Global South and treats the embargo primarily as a security problem rather than a development challenge. The Chinese and Russian perspectives, while contributing important insights about anti-imperialism and commodity leverage, are less directly relevant to the 1973

case than to subsequent energy geopolitics. The UN perspective captures the normative framing but lacks analytical precision on mechanisms.

In sum, the 1973 embargo is best understood as a systemic shock whose effects were mediated by state strategies, individual decisions, and transnational corporate and financial dynamics. The African perspective most accurately identifies the double-edged nature of resource power and the structural constraints on producer solidarity, but it may understate the embargo's genuine achievements in demonstrating that commodity producers could challenge Western dominance. The case remains the template for understanding resource geopolitics: it shows that the oil weapon is most effective as a surprise, that its success generates adaptation that erodes its power, and that the restructuring it produces can reinforce as well as challenge existing hierarchies.

2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Describe the policy and its stated objective.** Indonesia's 2020 ban on exports of unprocessed nickel ore was presented as a downstreaming strategy: force or incentivize domestic processing so that Indonesia captures more value from a mineral central to stainless steel and, increasingly, EV batteries. Identify the immediate policy lever, the targeted supply-chain stage, and the political coalition behind it.

2. **Specify the causal mechanism.** Explain how an export ban changes relative prices, investment incentives, and rent distribution. Who gains (smelters, battery-precursor firms, workers, regional governments), who loses (miners, foreign buyers, consumers), and what complementary conditions (energy, infrastructure, skills, environmental regulation) determine whether the mechanism actually produces industrial upgrading rather than smuggling or rent-seeking?

3. **Place the case at multiple levels of analysis.** Analyze it at the individual/firm level (mining companies, Chinese and Western processors, Indonesian conglomerates), the state level (industrial policy, resource nationalism, bureaucratic capacity), the systemic level (WTO rules, US–China rivalry, EV transition), and the transnational level (battery supply chains, offtake agreements, global price formation).

4. **Reconstruct all five perspectives.** Show how an African resource-sovereignty lens, a Chinese state-backed supply-chain lens, a Russian commodity-leverage lens, a Western supply-security lens, and a UN governance/SDG lens each interpret the same ban differently. What does each perspective see clearly, and what does it occlude?

5. **Choose and justify a historical analogue.** Compare Indonesia's nickel ban either to the 1973 oil embargo (resource control as geopolitical restructuring) or to earlier waves of resource nationalism (e.g., 1970s copper or oil nationalizations). State the respects in which the analogue illuminates the case and the respects in which it misleads.

6. **Define falsifiers.** What evidence, if observed over the next five to ten years, would show that the ban failed as development policy? Consider downstream capacity, employment quality, fiscal revenue, environmental damage, WTO retaliation, investment diversion, and distribution of rents between foreign firms and domestic citizens.

MODEL ANSWER

Indonesia's 2020 nickel export ban is best understood as both a development strategy and a WTO-inconsistent trade measure; these are not mutually exclusive categories, and adjudicating the case requires separating the policy's intent, its mechanism, its legal status, and its distributional and environmental consequences. At the state level, the ban is a classic downstreaming instrument: by prohibiting the export of unprocessed ore, Indonesia raises the effective cost of exporting raw material and lowers the relative cost of domestic processing, thereby redirecting investment toward smelters, ferronickel, and battery-precursor plants. The mechanism is not automatic. It depends on whether domestic energy is cheap and reliable, whether ports and industrial zones exist, whether firms can access technology and skilled labor, and whether regulators can prevent illegal ore exports. Where these complementary conditions are weak, the ban may produce smuggling, informal processing, or simply a transfer of rents to whichever foreign firms already control capital and technology. Where they are strong, it can shift Indonesia from an extractive enclave toward a processing and manufacturing node in the EV battery chain.

The case also operates at multiple levels of analysis. At the firm level, mining companies lose direct export revenue while processors and battery-material firms gain privileged access to ore; Chinese firms have been especially prominent in building Indonesian smelting capacity, which means the ban's developmental benefits may be partially captured by foreign capital even when physical production occurs domestically. At the systemic level, the ban collides with WTO disciplines, particularly the general prohibition on quantitative restrictions. A WTO panel found Indonesia's measure inconsistent with its obligations, and Indonesia appealed, leaving the dispute in a state of practical unresolvedness because of the paralyzed Appellate Body. This does not make the ban meaningless; it means Indonesia accepted, or at least risked, a legal cost in exchange for an industrial-policy gain. At the transnational level, the ban reshapes EV supply chains by making Indonesia a more important node in nickel processing, while also pushing buyers to seek alternative suppliers or to invest in Indonesian capacity.

The five perspectives reconstruct the same policy differently. An African resource-sovereignty perspective sees the ban as an assertion that mineral wealth should not leave the continent or country in raw form; it resonates with arguments for value-chain upgrading, regional processing, and AfCFTA-linked industrialization. But it also warns that sovereignty over extraction does not guarantee sovereignty over technology, finance, or environmental outcomes. A Chinese perspective tends to read the ban as compatible with state-backed supply-chain development: if Chinese firms build and operate Indonesian smelters, both sides can claim gains, though the distribution of rents and control may be asymmetrical. A Russian perspective emphasizes commodity leverage: even a non-hydrocarbon mineral can become a bargaining chip when global demand is concentrated and supply is politically managed. A Western perspective is split between supply-security concerns, which favor diversified and friend-shored processing, and trade-liberalization commitments, which treat export bans as market-distorting. A UN perspective foregrounds governance, transparency, environmental standards, and the Sustainable Development Goals, asking whether the ban improves public revenue, community welfare, and ecological outcomes or merely relocates harm.

Historically, the ban is closer to resource nationalism than to the 1973 oil embargo. The oil weapon was external coercion aimed at restructuring global political economy through price and supply shocks; Indonesia's ban is domestic industrial policy using export control to force upstream-downstream linkage. The analogue is useful insofar as both show that resource control can alter global bargaining power, but misleading if it implies that Indonesia possesses oil-style systemic leverage. Nickel is important, but it is not the central energy commodity of the global economy, and buyers can substitute, recycle, or develop alternative chemistries

over time.

The most defensible adjudication is therefore conditional. The ban is a WTO violation in legal terms and a plausible development strategy in economic terms. It should be judged a success only if it produces durable domestic processing capability, broad-based employment and fiscal gains, manageable environmental costs, and a gradual reduction in dependence on foreign-controlled technology. It should be judged a failure if it merely raises rents for foreign processors, damages ecosystems, provokes retaliation without compensating gains, or leaves Indonesia locked into a low-value segment of the battery chain. In short, the policy's value lies not in the ban itself but in whether the state can convert temporary resource leverage into long-term industrial capability.

2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In 2022–2023, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia signed agreements to develop a joint battery and electric-vehicle value chain, including precursor manufacturing, supported by AfCFTA ambitions and external partners. The initiative responds to the fact that the DRC produces a large share of global cobalt while Zambia has copper and emerging processing capacity, yet both remain concentrated at the extraction end of the battery supply chain. It aims to move from ore export to precursor and eventually cell production, capturing more value, creating industrial employment, and reducing vulnerability to commodity price swings. Obstacles include energy deficits, infrastructure gaps, governance risks, financing constraints, and competition from established Asian processing hubs. The case also raises questions about environmental standards, community consent, and the distribution of rents among states, firms, and citizens.

(b) Required memo headings (prompts).

Mechanism: Identify the causal chain from the policy lever (regional industrial agreement, infrastructure investment, offtake arrangements) to the intended outcome (value-chain upgrading); specify scope conditions, intermediate variables, and observable implications.

Perspective reconstruction: Reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would each interpret the DRC–Zambia initiative; state what each sees clearly and what it occludes.

Historical analogue: Compare the initiative to one prior case of resource-based industrialization or regional value-chain upgrading; justify the comparison and identify where it breaks down.

Falsifiers: List the evidence that would show the initiative failed—e.g., no durable processing capacity, foreign capture of rents, environmental harm, weak fiscal gains, or collapse of regional coordination.

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description (what happened), explanation (why), prediction (what would follow if the mechanism holds), and prescription (what should be done)?

2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which statement best captures the rentier-state mechanism linking resource wealth to authoritarianism?

A. Resource wealth automatically causes democracy by funding education, welfare, and broad-based public services.
B. Resource rents reduce the state's need to tax citizens, weakening fiscal bargaining and accountability

while enabling patronage and authoritarian consolidation.
C. Resource wealth causes authoritarianism solely through foreign intervention and external manipulation.
D. Resource wealth has no systematic political effect because competitive markets price resources efficiently.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnosis:
- **A** mistakes revenue for accountability; it ignores the taxation-bargaining mechanism and assumes public spending automatically produces democratic responsiveness.
- **C** overstates the external cause; foreign intervention can matter, but the rentier mechanism operates primarily through domestic fiscal structure and elite rent management.
- **D** treats resource wealth as a neutral market outcome; it ignores how concentrated rents reshape state-society relations, regime incentives, and conflict dynamics.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Selected critical-mineral reserve concentration (approximate, USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries, 2024)

Mineral	Leading reserve holders (approx. share of identified reserves)	Notes for interpretation
Lithium	Chile ~33%; Australia ~22%; Argentina ~13%; China ~11%; United States ~4%; Canada ~4%	Reserves are more geographically dispersed than oil, but "reserves" depend on price, technology, and reporting standards; Bolivia's large resources are often not counted as reserves.
Cobalt	DRC ~50%+; Australia ~14%; Indonesia ~5%; Cuba ~5%; Philippines ~2%; Russia ~2%; Canada ~2%	Reserve concentration is extreme in one state, but refining concentration is even more extreme in China.
Nickel	Indonesia ~42%; Australia ~18%; Brazil ~12%; Russia ~6%; New Caledonia ~5%; Philippines ~4%; China ~3%	Laterite deposits in Indonesia and the Philippines dominate; sulphide deposits in Russia, Canada, and Australia matter for battery-grade processing.
Graphite (natural)	Turkey ~24%; China ~21%; Brazil ~20%; Mozambique ~7%; Madagascar ~7%	Graphite is the largest battery input by mass; synthetic graphite adds a separate, energy-intensive supply chain.
Rare earth oxides	China ~34%; Vietnam ~17%; Brazil ~16%; Russia ~8%; India ~5%; Australia ~4%; United States ~1%	"Rare earths" are not rare in crustal abundance; concentration reflects processing economics and environmental regulation.

Mineral	Leading reserve holders (approx. share of identified reserves)	Notes for interpretation
Copper	Chile ~20%; Peru ~12%; Australia ~10%; DRC ~8%; Russia ~8%; United States ~5%	Copper is the cross-cutting mineral for electrification; its supply chain is less concentrated than cobalt or REEs but still geopolitically salient.

Table 2 — Production and processing concentration (approximate, 2023–2024)

Stage / commodity	Leading producer or processor (approx. share)	Secondary actors	Analytical reading
REE mining	China ~60–70%	United States ~10–15%; Australia ~8%; Myanmar ~8%	Mining is concentrated but not monopolized; Myanmar's role is politically fragile and often under-regulated.
REE separation and processing	China ~85–90%	Malaysia (Lynas-related processing); limited US/EU capacity	The bottleneck is midstream chemistry, not geology; this is where "weaponization" is most plausible.
Cobalt mining	DRC ~70%	Indonesia ~5%; Russia ~4%; Australia ~3%	Mining concentration creates exposure to conflict, child labor allegations, and artisanal supply-chain opacity.
Cobalt refining	China ~70–75%	Finland; Canada; limited others	Refining concentration converts DRC mining dominance into Chinese industrial leverage.
Primary gallium production	China ~98%	Negligible non-Chinese primary output	Gallium is a near-monopoly case; export controls in 2023 demonstrated how a small-volume mineral can disrupt semiconductor supply chains.

Stage / commodity	Leading producer or processor (approx. share)	Secondary actors	Analytical reading
Lithium processing (chemicals)	China ~60–70%	Chile; Argentina; Australia (spodumene)	Mining is dispersed; conversion to battery-grade lithium carbonate/hydroxide is concentrated.
Nickel mine production	Indonesia ~50%	Philippines ~10%; Russia ~6%; New Caledonia ~?; Australia ~4%	Indonesia's export ban and downstreaming policy shifted global nickel flows and prices.
EV battery cell manufacturing	China ~70–75%	South Korea ~10%; Japan ~6%; Europe and North America growing	Cell manufacturing is the high-value stage; it is not the same as mineral endowment.

Table 3 — EV battery supply chain by stage

Stage	Core inputs / activities	Geographic concentration	Main vulnerability
1. Mining	Lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite, manganese, copper	DRC (cobalt); Indonesia (nickel); Chile/Argentina/Australia (lithium); China (graphite)	Resource nationalism, conflict, labor abuses, environmental damage, reserve nationalism
2. Refining / processing	Conversion to battery-grade chemicals and metals	China dominant in lithium chemicals, cobalt refining, REE separation, graphite anode material	Chokepoint leverage, export controls, energy cost, waste and pollution
3. Cathode and anode manufacturing	NMC, LFP, graphite anodes, silicon additives	China, South Korea, Japan; Europe and US expanding	Technology licensing, IP, scale economies, capital intensity
4. Cell manufacturing	Electrode coating, assembly, electrolyte, quality control	China dominant; South Korea and Japan significant; US/EU catching up	Capital intensity, yield rates, skilled labor, subsidy competition
5. Pack integration and vehicle assembly	Battery packs, BMS, thermal management, vehicle platforms	China, Europe, North America, Japan, South Korea	Market access, tariffs, standards, consumer demand, charging infrastructure

Stage	Core inputs / activities	Geographic concentration	Main vulnerability
6. Recycling and second life	Black mass, hydrometallurgy, pyrometallurgy, direct recycling	Nascent; China and Europe leading; US emerging	Collection logistics, economics at low volumes, hazardous waste regulation, design-for-recycling

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Compare the hydrocarbon era with the critical-mineral era. Oil reserves and production were concentrated in a cartelizable set of states, especially OPEC members, and the 1973 embargo demonstrated that supply restriction could restructure global politics. Critical minerals, by contrast, are more dispersed in the ground but more concentrated in processing. What does this imply for the feasibility of an "oil weapon" equivalent in minerals, and which stage of the battery supply chain is the most credible locus of leverage?

2. **Level of analysis.** Take Indonesia's 2020 nickel export ban. At the individual level, which leaders, firms, and communities gained or lost? At the state level, what was the Indonesian government's developmental objective and its WTO exposure? At the systemic level, how did the ban alter global nickel prices, Chinese investment, and EV supply-chain geography? At the transnational level, how did firms, investors, and civil-society actors respond across borders? Which level explains the most variance, and what is lost by privileging only that level?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on critical-mineral geopolitics in 4–6 sentences each, in that order. The African account must begin from resource sovereignty and value-chain upgrading, not from Western supply security. The Chinese account must treat state-backed offtake as development strategy as well as leverage. The Russian account must connect commodity-state logic to energy and mineral rents. The Western account must distinguish supply-chain security from neo-colonial extraction. The UN account must connect EITI, SDG 7, and the energy transition to governance and human rights.

4. **Interpretation.** Does China's dominance in REE processing and cobalt refining constitute (a) a latent "weapon," (b) an industrial-policy success that others could emulate, or (c) a normal market outcome produced by cost, scale, and environmental regulation? Use the data above plus the 2023 gallium/germanium export controls and the 2010 rare-earth dispute with Japan as evidence. What would falsify each interpretation?

5. **Limitation.** The USGS and IEA data capture formal reserves and reported production, but they do not fully capture artisanal and small-scale mining, informal cobalt circuits in the DRC, environmental liabilities, reserve reclassification after price shocks, or the political risk embedded in "friendly" suppliers. Which of these omissions most seriously biases policy conclusions, and how would you triangulate with African scholarship, firm-level supply-chain audits, and UN governance data?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Hydrocarbon and Critical-Mineral Chokepoint Map"

Draw a simplified world map on A3 or a large whiteboard. Sketch the outlines of North America, South America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Australia; do not attempt political detail. Draw thick blue arrows for major hydrocarbon flows: Persian Gulf to East Asia through the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca; Russia to Europe through pipelines and the Baltic/Black Sea; US Gulf Coast LNG to Europe and Asia. Draw thick green arrows for critical-mineral flows: DRC and Zambia to global battery markets; Indonesia to China and Korea; Chile and Argentina to China, Korea, and Japan; Australia to China; China's REE and graphite exports to Japan, Korea, Europe, and North America. Mark chokepoints with red "X" symbols and labels: Hormuz, Malacca, Bab el-Mandeb, Suez, Panama, Cape of Good Hope, and the Taiwan Strait. Add a small legend in the bottom right: blue = hydrocarbons, green = critical minerals, red X = chokepoint. Annotate perspective overlays in the margins: African (green) — "value addition, not extraction corridors"; Chinese (blue) — "BRI logistics and state-backed offtake"; Russian (black) — "commodity leverage and sanctions evasion routes"; Western (red) — "supply security and friend-shoring"; UN (purple) — "maritime security, SDG 7, and governance." The visual teaches that chokepoints are not only geographic; they are also institutional, because refining and finance can be more constraining than straits.

Visual 2 — "EV Battery Supply Chain Funnel with Concentration Labels"

Draw a horizontal funnel or staged pipeline from left to right. Stage 1, "Mining," is the widest box and contains icons or labels: Li, Co, Ni, graphite, Mn, Cu. Stage 2, "Refining/Processing," is narrower and labeled "China-dominant." Stage 3, "Cathode/Anode," is narrower still. Stage 4, "Cell Manufacturing," is narrower. Stage 5, "Pack + Vehicle," is narrower. Stage 6, "Recycling," is drawn as a curved arrow looping from Stage 5 back to Stage 1, but thinner to show its immaturity. Inside each box, write approximate concentration labels from Table 2: mining "DRC cobalt ~70%," "Indonesia nickel ~50%"; refining "China REE ~85–90%," "China cobalt ~70–75%"; cells "China ~70–75%." Use color coding: green for African resource states, blue for Chinese processing, red for Western assembly markets, black for Russian commodity leverage, purple for UN governance. Add a vertical "value added" arrow on the right, rising from mining to cells, with a note: "Value capture rises downstream; rent and risk rise upstream." The visual teaches that the same mineral can be geopolitically weak at the mine and strategically powerful at the refinery or cell plant.

Visual 3 — "Rentier State and Resource Curse Causal Loop"

Draw a large circle in the center of the page. Place six nodes around it, connected by clockwise arrows: (1) "Concentrated resource rent," (2) "State revenue without broad taxation," (3) "Weakened fiscal contract with citizens," (4) "Patronage and clientelism," (5) "Authoritarian resilience or conflict," (6) "Underinvestment in diversification," which loops back to (1). Add an inner arrow from (1) to "Dutch disease / exchange-rate appreciation," then to "Non-resource tradables shrink," then back to (6). Add a dashed arrow from (5) to "External intervention or sanctions," and a dashed arrow from (2) to "Sovereign wealth fund / stabilization fund" as a possible break in the loop. Label the center "Rentier mechanism (Karl; Ross)." Annotate perspective overlays: African (green) — "extraversion, statecraft, and the politics of the belly (Bayart; Mamdani)"; Chinese (blue) — "state capacity and infrastructure-led development"; Russian (black) — "commodity state and sanctions adaptation"; Western (red) — "institutions, property rights, and diversification"; UN (purple) — "EITI, SDG 16, and resource governance." The visual teaches that the resource curse is not a property of rocks; it is a fiscal and political mechanism that can be interrupted by institutions, taxation, and diversifica-

tion.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (question / keyword)	Notes (with source log)
What is the "oil weapon," and what did 1973 change?	The 1973 Arab oil embargo showed that supply restriction could be used as coercive leverage, not merely as commercial policy. It accelerated petrodollar recycling, US-Saudi security bargains, and a rethinking of energy security. Source: Yergin (1991, 2011).
What are chokepoints in resource geopolitics?	Chokepoints include straits, pipelines, ports, refining hubs, and financial clearing systems. A chokepoint is a node where disruption is cheap for the attacker and costly for the defender. Source: Klare (2012); Yergin (2011).
What is petrodollar recycling?	Oil revenues earned by producers were recycled through Western banks and sovereign investments, linking energy rents to global finance and US Treasury markets. It tied resource rents to monetary and security orders. Source: Yergin (1991).
What is energy transition geopolitics?	The shift from fossil fuels to electrification changes the material basis of power: from oil and gas reserves to lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite, copper, and REEs. New dependencies replace old ones; they do not eliminate dependency. Source: IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024); Klare (2012).
What is resource nationalism?	Resource nationalism is state assertion of control over extraction, processing, or export of natural resources, often through bans, taxes, nationalization, or local-content rules. Cases: DRC-Zambia battery initiative, Indonesia nickel export ban, Mexico lithium nationalization. Source: Sanderson (2022); IEA (2024).
What is rentier state theory?	A rentier state derives a large share of revenue from external rents rather than domestic taxation, weakening the fiscal contract and accountability. Source: Karl (1997).

Cue (question / keyword)	Notes (with source log)
What is the resource curse?	The resource curse is the observed association between resource wealth and poor development outcomes, authoritarianism, or conflict; it operates through fiscal, exchange-rate, institutional, and conflict mechanisms. Source: Ross (2012); Karl (1997).
What is Dutch disease?	Resource exports appreciate the real exchange rate, shrinking non-resource tradables such as manufacturing and agriculture. It is one mechanism, not the whole curse. Source: Ross (2012).
What is the African perspective on mineral geopolitics?	African scholarship stresses resource sovereignty, value-chain upgrading, extraversion, and the political economy of the state; AfCFTA is framed as a platform for regional industrialization, not only market access. Sources: Grovogui; Mbembe; Bayart; Mamdani; Rodney; Nkrumah; Nyerere; Cabral; Fanon; Aning; Danso; Tamale; Oyěwùmí.
What is the Chinese perspective?	China treats mineral supply chains as state-backed industrial strategy: offtake agreements, processing dominance, infrastructure, and "win-win" development rhetoric. It emphasizes capacity building but is criticized for opacity and asymmetry. Source: IEA (2024); Sanderson (2022).
What is the Western perspective?	Western policy frames mineral geopolitics as supply-chain security, de-risking, friend-shoring, and resilience; it often underestimates how its own consumption and corporate sourcing shape extraction. Source: IEA (2024); Klare (2012).
What is the UN perspective?	The UN perspective links minerals to SDG 7, EITI, human rights, environmental governance, and just transition; it seeks transparency and benefit-sharing but has limited enforcement. Source: IEA (2024); Ross (2012).
What is the Russian perspective?	Russia treats energy and commodities as instruments of state power, sanctions adaptation, and geopolitical leverage; its commodity-state model is rent-dependent and vulnerable to price and technology shocks. Source: Yergin (2011); Klare (2012).

Source log: Yergin (1991, 2011); Karl (1997); Ross (2012); Klare (2012); IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024); Sanderson (2022); USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries (2024); African scholarship: Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, Oyěwùmí.

Summary: Energy and critical-mineral geopolitics are not simply about who owns resources; they are about which stages of the supply chain create leverage, how rents reshape states, and how the energy transition reorganizes global power. The 1973 oil embargo revealed the coercive potential of concentrated supply, while contemporary mineral data show that processing and manufacturing can be more constraining than geology. Resource nationalism, rentier mechanisms, and great-power competition all operate through these chokepoints, but their effects depend on institutions, perspective, and level of analysis. African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN frameworks each illuminate different parts of this system and obscure others.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Countries used to fight and bargain over oil because a few places had most of it and could turn off the tap. Now they also fight and bargain over minerals needed for batteries, wind turbines, and electronics. The trick is that having the rock in the ground is not the same as knowing how to refine it, make batteries, or recycle them. Some countries sell raw materials cheaply and buy expensive finished goods; others control the factories and keep the profits. When a government depends on resource money instead of taxes, it may answer to buyers and elites rather than citizens, which can make politics less accountable. The energy transition does not end resource politics; it moves it from oil wells to mines, refineries, and battery plants.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure whether I can distinguish "reserves" from "resources" without looking up USGS definitions. I also blurred the difference between mining concentration and processing concentration, which is the central analytical distinction in this lesson. I need to verify the exact shares for cobalt refining and gallium production before using them in an exam answer. I have not yet explained why Indonesia's nickel ban is simultaneously a development strategy and a WTO problem. I also need to be clearer about whether rentier theory predicts authoritarianism or merely makes it more likely.

3. **Reread verification.** Rechecking the data: China's dominance is strongest in processing, separation, and cell manufacturing, not necessarily in mining; DRC dominates cobalt mining but not refining; Indonesia dominates nickel mining after its downstreaming policy; gallium is an extreme near-monopoly case. Rechecking theory: Karl and Ross describe mechanisms and probabilities, not iron laws; Dutch disease is one channel among several; rentier effects depend on institutions, regime type, and time horizon. Rechecking perspectives: African sovereignty claims are not reducible to anti-Westernism; Chinese "win-win" claims are not reducible to deception; Western security claims are not reducible to imperialism; Russian commodity leverage is not reducible to irrational aggression; UN governance claims are not reducible to technocracy.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** Think of the battery supply chain like a river: the mine is the headwater, the refinery is the dam, the battery plant is the turbine, and the car is the electricity delivered to a house. Whoever controls the dam can decide how much water reaches the turbine, even if they do not own the headwater. The analogy helps show why processing concentration matters more than reserve concentration. Its limit is that rivers are natural and fixed, whereas supply chains are built by firms, states, subsidies, and regulations; a dam can be bypassed by new investment, recycling, or substitution, but only over years and at high cost.

5. **Rewrite.** Resource geopolitics in the energy-transition era is best understood as a contest over stages, not just stocks. Hydrocarbon power rested on concentrated reserves and chokepoints such as Hormuz

and Malacca; critical-mineral power rests on a chain in which mining is often dispersed, refining and manufacturing are concentrated, and recycling is still immature. The 1973 oil embargo demonstrated that supply restriction can restructure global political economy, but a mineral equivalent would most likely operate through processing or export controls rather than through a simple embargo on raw ore. Rentier theory explains why resource rents can weaken accountability and diversification, yet it is a conditional mechanism, not a destiny. African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each identify real features of this system—sovereignty, state capacity, leverage, security, and governance—while each also risks obscuring the others. The policy problem is therefore not to "secure" minerals in the abstract, but to decide which stage of the chain to build, under what rules, and with whose participation.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L19	definition	What is the "oil weapon" and when was it first deployed at scale?	The "oil weapon" refers to the use of petroleum supply restrictions as coercive leverage in international politics; its canonical deployment was the 1973 OAPEC embargo, which quadrupled oil prices and triggered stagflation in import-dependent economies. The mechanism works through inelastic short-run demand and concentrated supply.	African states largely experienced the 1973 shock as price-takers with limited leverage; the embargo nonetheless catalyzed early resource-nationalist thinking in OPEC's African members (Algeria, Libya, Nigeria).

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L19	mechanism	How does petrodollar recycling transmit oil rents into global financial markets?	After the 1973 price surge, OPEC surpluses were deposited in Western banks, which re-lent them to developing-country borrowers, creating a debt-recycling circuit that linked oil rents to sovereign debt crises by the 1980s. The mechanism is a balance-of-payments and credit-channel transmission.	From an African vantage, petrodollar recycling deepened external debt dependency; Rodney's underdevelopment thesis reads this as a structural extraction of surplus.
L19	definition	What are critical minerals and why does the energy transition revalue them?	Critical minerals are non-fuel minerals essential to clean-energy technologies (lithium, cobalt, nickel, rare earths) whose supply concentration and lack of substitutes make them strategically vital; the transition from hydrocarbons to electrification shifts the material basis of power from fuel reserves to mineral endowments and processing capacity.	African deposits (DRC cobalt, Zimbabwe lithium) are revalued, but without processing capacity the rent capture remains offshore.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L19	mechanism	What is the resource curse and what are its principal causal channels?	The resource curse denotes the paradox that resource-rich states often grow slower and govern worse; principal channels include rentierism (state funded by rents not taxes, weakening accountability), Dutch disease (currency appreciation crowding out tradables), and conflict financing (lootable resources funding rebellion).	Mamdani and Bayart stress that the "curse" is mediated by colonial state structures and elite bargains, not geology alone.
L19	theory	State rentier theory: what does Karl (1997) argue about petro-states?	Karl argues that oil booms produce "petro-states" whose fiscal structure—revenue from rents rather than taxation—weakens state-society accountability, centralizes power, and distorts institutional development; the effect is path-dependent and hard to reverse.	African petro-states (Nigeria, Angola) illustrate the thesis but also its limits: civil society and federal structures mediate outcomes.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L19	application	What was Indonesia's 2020 nickel export ban and what was its stated purpose?	Indonesia banned raw nickel exports in 2020 to force domestic processing and capture value-added in the EV battery supply chain; it triggered a WTO dispute (EU complaint) while attracting Chinese and other investment in smelters.	From a Global South perspective, the ban is a legitimate industrial-policy tool; from a WTO-rules perspective, it violates export-restriction disciplines.
L19	comparison	How do the US IRA and EU CRMA differ in approach to critical minerals?	The US Inflation Reduction Act uses tax credits and friend-shoring to incentivize domestic/ally processing; the EU Critical Raw Materials Act sets domestic extraction/processing targets and strategic project lists. Both aim at de-risking from China but differ in fiscal scale and regulatory method.	African suppliers seek to leverage both frameworks for value-chain upgrading rather than raw export.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L19	source	What does Ross (2012) identify as the "oil curse" mechanism?	Ross argues petroleum wealth tends to produce authoritarianism, reduced economic growth, and civil war risk, operating through taxation (rents replace taxes), spending (patronage), and group (ethnic/sectarian) channels.	The thesis is contested in Africa: Botswana's diamond management and Norway's oil fund show institutional mediation.
L19	debate	Is resource nationalism development strategy or WTO violation?	Proponents frame export bans and nationalization as sovereign industrial policy to capture value-added; critics (WTO panels, trading partners) frame them as discriminatory restrictions violating GATT Article XI and TRIMs. The adjudication depends on whether development gains outweigh rule erosion and retaliation.	African and Indonesian voices stress policy space; Western legalist voices stress rules-based trade.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L19	reconstruction	How does the Chinese perspective frame critical-mineral supply chains?	China frames its mineral and processing dominance as market-driven comparative advantage and "win-win" cooperation, emphasizing infrastructure-for-resources deals and state-backed offtake; it occludes concerns about coercion, environmental harm, and strategic leverage.	African partners must weigh infrastructure gains against debt and value-capture asymmetries.
L19	occlusion	What does the Western "supply-chain security" frame occlude?	The friend-shoring/de-risking frame occludes the historical role of Western firms in extractive enclaves, the environmental costs shifted to producer states, and the possibility that producer-country industrial policy (not just ally sourcing) is legitimate.	African scholars (Grovogui, Mbembe) read "security" as a re-inscription of imperial resource access.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L19	adjudication	How should one adjudicate between resource sovereignty and WTO compliance?	Adjudication requires weighing the development gains of value-chain upgrading against the systemic costs of eroding trade rules and provoking retaliation; evidence includes post-ban FDI in processing, WTO panel rulings, and terms-of-trade effects. Neither pure sovereignty nor pure compliance is costless.	The African perspective privileges policy space; the UN perspective privileges multilateral rules plus capacity building.
L19	visual	What does the EV battery supply chain by stage reveal about power?	The chain runs mining (DRC cobalt, Indonesia nickel) → refining (China dominant) → cathode/precursor → cell manufacturing → pack assembly; power concentrates at refining and cell stages, so mining states capture least value.	Value-chain upgrading (DRC-Zambia battery initiative) targets the refining/cell gap.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L19	application	What is the DRC-Zambia battery initiative?	A 2022 agreement to develop a regional battery value chain from cobalt/copper, aiming to move from raw export to precursor and cell production; it exemplifies African resource sovereignty and AfCFTA-linked industrialization.	It tests whether regional integration can overcome scale and infrastructure deficits.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Skill / Knowledge Area	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of Mastery (self-assessed)
Hydrocarbon geopolitics: oil weapon, petrodollar recycling, chokepoints		
Energy transition and critical-mineral revaluation		
Resource nationalism: Indonesia, DRC-Zambia, Mexico		
Rentier state theory and resource curse mechanisms		
Scramble for critical minerals: US, EU, China policies		
Worked example: 1973 oil embargo reconstruction		
Problem pair: Indonesia nickel ban adjudication		
Five-perspective reconstruction (all five)		
Data lab: reserves, concentration, supply-chain stages		
Distinguishing description / explanation / prediction / prescription		

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives was hardest to steel-man from within, and what specifically resisted reconstruction (a premise, a normative commitment, or an evidentiary gap)?
2. In your adjudication of the Indonesia nickel case, did you initially conflate a descriptive claim (what happened to FDI) with a normative claim (what should be permitted)? If so, where?
3. What single piece of evidence—WTO panel ruling, post-ban smelter FDI data, or terms-of-trade movement—would most change your verdict, and in which direction?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"The 1973 embargo caused the oil price rise by itself."	The embargo was the trigger; the price quadrupling also reflected OPEC's unilateral pricing power, inelastic demand, and the collapse of the Bretton Woods fixed-rate system.	Yergin (1991); the embargo was lifted in March 1974 but prices remained elevated.
"The resource curse is an iron law of geology."	It is a conditional regularity mediated by institutions, state structure, and elite bargains; Botswana and Norway are counter-cases.	Ross (2012); Karl (1997).
"China's mineral dominance is purely market-driven."	State-backed offtake, subsidized processing, and strategic stockpiling are policy-driven; "win-win" framing occludes leverage.	IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024) on concentration.
"Resource nationalism always violates WTO law."	Export restrictions may be justified under GATT exceptions or pursued outside WTO disciplines; legality is case-specific and contested.	Indonesia nickel WTO dispute (EU complaint, 2021).
"Friend-shoring solves supply-chain vulnerability."	It relocates concentration among allies without addressing processing bottlenecks or producer-country value capture; it may provoke retaliation.	Sanderson (2022) on supply-chain concentration.
"Critical minerals will simply replace oil as the new 'curse'."	The material basis changes (stock vs. flow, recyclability, geographic dispersion), so mechanisms differ; not all minerals are equally lootable or rentier-producing.	IEA (2024) on recycling and substitution potential.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Oil weapon; petrodollar recycling; chokepoints (Hormuz, Malacca, Bab el-Mandeb)	Supply restriction → price spike → inflation/stagflation; rent recycling → debt crises	Yergin (1991, 2011) on oil history; Klare (2012) on resource scramble	1973 OAPEC embargo; 1979 Iranian revolution; 1990 Gulf War	Was 1973 a structural break or cyclical shock?	Prices fall back to pre-embargo levels within 12 months; no stagflation	L10 imperialism; L17 world-systems; L38 energy coercion
Critical minerals; rare earths; energy transition	Electrification shifts power from fuel reserves to mineral endowments + processing capacity	IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024)	China's share of REE refining; DRC cobalt; Indonesia nickel	Is transition a new scramble or development opportunity?	Substitution/recycling eliminates mineral bottlenecks	L33 minerals in Africa; L51 climate
Resource nationalism	Export bans → forced domestic processing → value-added capture; nationalization → state control	Sanderson (2022) on supply chains	Indonesia 2020 nickel ban; Mexico lithium nationalization; DRC-Zambia battery initiative	Development strategy vs. WTO violation	No post-ban processing FDI; WTO panel rules against with no appeal	L46 hydrocarbons; L52-53
Rentier state; resource curse	Rents replace taxes → weakened accountability; Dutch disease; conflict financing	Karl (1997); Ross (2012); Mamdani; Bayart	Nigeria, Angola petro-states; Botswana counter-case	Curse as iron law vs. institutional mediation	Resource-rich state with strong institutions grows faster than non-resource peers	L10; L17

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Scramble for critical minerals	US IRA tax credits; EU CRMA targets; China state-backed offtake	Farrell & Newman (weaponized interdependence)	MSP (Minerals Security Partnership); EU strategic projects	Friend-shoring vs. producer-country industrial policy	Ally sourcing eliminates all concentration risk	L33; L38

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (same day, 15 min):** Re-read the five Key Ideas' bolded causal claims and mechanisms; recite the 1973 embargo sequence from memory without notes.
- **R2 (next day, 30 min):** Reconstruct all five perspectives on the Indonesia nickel case in 3–5 sentences each; check against Section 2.7.
- **R3 (day 3, 45 min):** Complete the Data Lab tables from memory (reserves, concentration, supply-chain stages); verify against Section 2A.
- **R4 (week 1, 60 min):** Write a 300-word adjudication of the Indonesia case distinguishing description, explanation, prediction, and prescription; compare to the model answer.
- **R5 (month 1, 90 min):** Re-derive the rentier-state mechanism and its scope conditions; apply to a new case (e.g., Zimbabwe lithium) and test falsifiers.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can state the 1973 oil embargo's mechanism, actors, and consequences without notes.
☐ I can explain petrodollar recycling as a credit-channel transmission.
☐ I can define critical minerals and explain why the transition revalues them.
☐ I can trace the EV battery supply chain by stage and locate power concentration.
☐ I can explain Indonesia's 2020 nickel ban and its dual framing.
☐ I can state Karl's (1997) rentier-state argument and its scope conditions.
☐ I can state Ross's (2012) three channels of the oil curse.
☐ I can compare US IRA, EU CRMA, and China's state-backed offtake.
☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives on resource geopolitics.
☐ I can identify what each perspective occludes.
☐ I can adjudicate the Indonesia case with explicit falsifiers.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I can interpret the Data Lab tables (reserves, concentration, supply chain).
☐ I can apply the rentier mechanism to a new case.
☐ I can name the strongest counterargument to resource nationalism.
☐ I can link this lesson to L10, L17, L33, L38, L46, L51–53.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Hydrocarbon geopolitics and oil history - Yergin, D. (1991). *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power*. Simon & Schuster. - Yergin, D. (2011). *The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World*. Penguin. - Klare, M. T. (2012). *The Race for What's Left: The Global Scramble for the World's Last Resources*. Metropolitan Books.

Rentier states and the resource curse - Karl, T. L. (1997). *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*. University of California Press. - Ross, M. L. (2012). *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations*. Princeton University Press.

Critical minerals and supply chains - IEA. (2024). *Critical Minerals Outlook 2024*. International Energy Agency. - Sanderson, H. (2022). *The Rare Earths Problem* (or equivalent supply-chain analysis). [Attributed generally; verify exact title before citation.]

African and Global South perspectives - Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture. - Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press. - Bayart, J.-F. (1993). *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. Longman. - Nkrumah, K. (1965). *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. Thomas Nelson.

Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives - Farrell, H., & Newman, A. L. (2019). Weaponized interdependence. *International Security*, 44(1), 42–79. - Tsygankov, A. P. (2016). *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*. Rowman & Littlefield. - UNCTAD. (2023). *Economic Development in Africa Report: The Potential of Africa to Capture Technology-Intensive Global Supply Chains*. United Nations.

End of Lesson 19. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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21. Strategic Thought and Coercion: Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, Schelling

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 20: Strategic Thought and Coercion: Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, Schelling
Module	Module 4: Security Studies and Warfare
Prerequisites	L5 (realism), L11 (interwar), L12 (Cold War)
Interleaved links	Forward to L21 (nuclear), L22 (conventional), L23 (asymmetric), L24 (cyber), L25 (maritime/space)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, tables, worked example, problem pair, data lab, dual-coded visuals
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple to state and extraordinarily difficult to resolve: **why do states and non-state actors so often fail to get what they want through threats, even when they possess overwhelming material superiority, and why do the theories that dominate international relations scholarship predict this failure so poorly when applied outside the North Atlantic core?** The question is not merely empirical. It is theoretical, because the answer depends on which strategic tradition one inhabits. The vocabulary of coercion that most graduate students inherit—deterrence, compellence, bargaining, resolve, audience costs, focal points—was forged in a specific intellectual lineage running from Carl von Clausewitz through Thomas Schelling, and it carries with it a set of ontological commitments about what war is, what politics is, and what a "state" is that are not shared by the strategic traditions of Beijing, Moscow, Tehran, or the hybrid security orders of the African continent. This lesson exists to make that lineage visible, to reconstruct the alternatives on their own terms, and to equip the student to adjudicate between them rather than to default to the Western framework as if it were the natural language of strategy.

The lesson sits at a pivotal node in the curriculum. It builds directly on Lesson 5 (realism), which established the structural logic of anarchy and the distribution of capabilities; on Lesson 11 (interwar), which traced the collapse of collective security and the appeasement debates that first forced strategists to think seriously about the credibility of threats; and on Lesson 12 (Cold War), which institutionalized deterrence as the organizing concept of superpower rivalry. Those three lessons supplied the structural and historical scaffolding. This lesson supplies the *theoretical* machinery: the concepts that allow one to move from "states compete for power" to "this specific threat, issued at this specific moment, with this specific audience, will or will not produce compliance." Without that machinery, the student can describe Cold War crises but cannot explain why the Cuban Missile Crisis ended in withdrawal rather than war, or why the 1990–91 coercive diplomacy sequence failed to compel Saddam Hussein to leave Kuwait before force was applied. The lesson also prepares the ground for Lessons 21 through 25, each of which examines a domain of warfare—nuclear, conventional, asymmetric, cyber, maritime and space—and each of which presupposes a theory of coercion that this lesson makes explicit and contestable.

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to do four things that are genuinely difficult and that most practitioners and scholars do only partially. First, she will be able to reconstruct, from within, five distinct strategic traditions—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—and to state what each contributes to the understanding of coercion and what each systematically occludes. Second, she will be able to apply the Clausewitzian trinity, the Sun Tzu relational-strategic logic, and the Schelling bargaining model to the same case and to specify the mechanism by which each predicts a different outcome. Third, she will be able to distinguish description from explanation, prediction from prescription, and to identify the falsifiers that would cause her to abandon a given theoretical commitment. Fourth, she will be able to recognize that "strategic culture" is not a residual category for explaining deviations from rational-actor predictions but a constitutive feature of how actors define interests, costs, and credibility in the first place. These are not memorization tasks. They are analytical capacities that require the student to hold multiple theoretical frameworks in tension and to adjudicate between them on evidence.

The theoretical stakes are high because the three canonical figures around whom the lesson is organized do not merely disagree about tactics; they disagree about ontology. Clausewitz, in *On War* (1832), defines war as "an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will" and insists that war is "the continuation of political intercourse with the addition of other means." For Clausewitz, the political object determines the military objective, the military objective determines the means, and the whole enterprise is governed by a trinity

of passion (the people), chance (the commander and army), and reason (the government). War is thus an instrument, but an instrument of a peculiar kind: one in which friction, uncertainty, and the independent will of the adversary make outcomes probabilistic rather than deterministic. The culminating point of victory—the moment at which the attacker's strength is exhausted and the defender's counterattack becomes viable—is a concept that follows directly from this instrumental logic. Sun Tzu, writing in a radically different strategic culture, inverts much of this. The *Art of War* treats war not as the continuation of politics but as a failure of politics, or at best as a last resort whose ideal outcome is victory without battle. The relational-strategic tradition emphasizes deception, positional advantage, and the manipulation of the adversary's perceptions and alliances rather than the application of force. Attrition is criticized not because it is costly but because it is stupid: it destroys the very object one seeks to possess. Schelling, in *Arms and Influence* (1966), performs a different kind of inversion. He argues that the most important use of force is not to destroy but to coerce—to manipulate the adversary's expectations about future costs. The distinction between brute force and coercion, between deterrence and compellence, between the threat that keeps an adversary from acting and the threat that makes an adversary undo what he has done, becomes the organizing framework of Cold War strategic thought and, through it, of contemporary IR theory.

The African perspective is not a regional illustration of these debates; it is a challenge to their premises. The post-colonial critique, developed by scholars such as Siba Grovogui, Achille Mbembe, and Jean-François Bayart, begins from the observation that the Clausewitzian state—the rational, unitary actor with a monopoly of legitimate violence—was never the African reality and was imposed as a normative ideal through colonialism. African security orders are hybrid: they combine state military forces with militias, traditional authorities, religious networks, and transnational criminal economies. Coercion in such orders is not primarily interstate bargaining but a continuous, multi-actor process in which the "state" is one competitor among many. This vantage point reveals what the Western framework occludes: that the distinction between war and peace is itself a Western construct, that "resolve" is not a property of governments but of social coalitions, and that the very concept of "compellence" assumes a clarity of political objectives that post-colonial states rarely possess. The African tradition also draws on liberation-strategy thinkers—Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah—who theorized coercion not as bargaining between states but as the mobilization of populations against colonial and neo-colonial domination. Their insights are not footnotes to Clausewitz; they are alternative foundations.

The methodological commitment of this lesson is that no tradition is treated as the default. Each is reconstructed from within, with its strongest arguments and its characteristic blind spots, and each is subjected to the same evidentiary standards. The student is expected to move between levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, transnational—recognizing that a theory adequate at one level may fail at another. The worked example (the Cuban Missile Crisis) and the problem pair (the 1990–91 Gulf War coercive diplomacy sequence) are chosen precisely because they are cases in which the dominant Western framework appears to succeed and then appears to fail, forcing the student to ask whether the framework is adequate or whether the apparent success is an artifact of case selection. The data lab, drawing on SIPRI military expenditure data, COW interstate war frequency, and ICB crisis bargaining outcomes, provides the empirical discipline that prevents theoretical debate from becoming merely rhetorical. The lesson's ultimate ambition is to produce a student who can enter a strategic debate—whether in a seminar room, a policy office, or a conflict zone—and identify not only what is being argued but which tradition's premises are being silently assumed, and at what cost.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer each question from memory before reading the lesson. These draw on Lessons 5, 11, and 12.

1. **(L5)** In Waltz's structural realism, what are the two core assumptions about the international system that generate the security dilemma, and how does the security dilemma differ from a prisoner's dilemma in terms of information and intentionality?
2. **(L5)** Mearsheimer's offensive realism predicts that great powers will seek hegemony. What is the scope condition that limits this prediction, and what evidence from the interwar period (L11) would a critic cite to challenge it?
3. **(L11)** The appeasement debates of the 1930s turned on competing assessments of Hitler's intentions. How did the "guilty men" critique and the "realist" defense of appeasement differ in their implicit theories of credibility and resolve?
4. **(L12)** During the Cold War, what was the difference between "massive retaliation" and "flexible response," and which strategic theorist's framework (covered in this lesson) most directly influenced the shift from one to the other?
5. **(L12)** The Cuban Missile Crisis is often cited as a triumph of deterrence. What are two alternative interpretations—one emphasizing luck and one emphasizing misperception—that challenge the "rational bargaining" reading?
6. **(L5/L12)** How does the concept of "audience costs" (Fearon 1994) connect the domestic-political level of analysis to the systemic level, and what is the strongest critique of its empirical validity?

1.2 Orientation Questions

These questions frame the lesson's central puzzle. Do not answer them yet; hold them in mind as you read.

1. If war is "the continuation of politics by other means," why do so many wars fail to achieve their political objectives, and does this failure indicate a flaw in Clausewitz's framework or in its application?
2. Can a state "win without fighting," and if so, is the victory achieved through coercion (Schelling) or through the restructuring of the adversary's preferences (Sun Tzu)? What evidence would distinguish the two mechanisms?
3. Why did the United States fail to compel Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait through threats alone in 1990, despite overwhelming military superiority and a broad coalition, and what does this failure imply about the limits of compellence?
4. Does the African experience of hybrid security orders and non-state coercion refute the Clausewitzian model, or does it reveal that the model was always a special case applicable only to consolidated European states?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Provisional definitions to be refined through the lesson.

1. **Coercion** — The use of threats (and sometimes limited force) to manipulate an adversary's cost-benefit calculus so that he chooses to comply; distinct from brute force, which seeks to destroy the adversary's capacity to resist.

2. **Deterrence** — A threat issued to prevent an adversary from taking an action he has not yet taken; the threat must be credible and the adversary must believe compliance is preferable to defiance.
3. **Compellence** — A threat issued to make an adversary undo an action already taken or to take an action he does not wish to take; generally harder than deterrence because it requires the adversary to accept visible defeat.
4. **Friction** — Clausewitz's term for the cumulative effect of uncertainty, chance, physical exhaustion, and human fallibility that makes war plans deviate from reality; the gap between theory and practice.
5. **Culminating point of victory** — The moment in an offensive campaign at which the attacker's strength is exhausted and further advance becomes counterproductive; beyond this point, the defender's counterattack becomes viable.
6. **Trinity (Clausewitz)** — The three elements of war: passion (the people), chance (the commander and army), and reason (the government); no single element can dominate without distorting the whole.
7. **Relational strategy (Sun Tzu)** — A strategic approach that emphasizes the manipulation of relationships, alliances, and perceptions rather than the direct application of force; victory is achieved by making the adversary's position untenable before battle.
8. **Focal point (Schelling)** — A solution to a coordination or bargaining problem that is salient to all parties because of its prominence, uniqueness, or cultural significance; enables tacit bargaining without explicit communication.
9. **Audience costs** — The domestic political price a leader pays for backing down from a public threat; Fearon (1994) argues that audience costs make threats more credible by raising the cost of non-compliance for the threatening state.
10. **Costly signal** — A signal whose cost is differentially borne by actors with different types of resolve or capability; because only resolved actors can afford to send it, the signal is credible.
11. **Strategic culture** — The set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and symbols that shape how a strategic community defines interests, perceives threats, and evaluates the use of force; not a residual category but a constitutive framework.
12. **Hybrid security order** — A security environment in which state military forces coexist and compete with non-state armed actors, traditional authorities, and transnational networks; characteristic of many post-colonial states, particularly in Africa.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives By the end of this lesson, you will be able to: (1) **Explain** Clausewitz's claim that war is a continuation of politics by other means, specifying how political purpose, military means, and friction interact in his trinity; (2) **Analyze** the mechanisms through which an offensive reaches its culminating point and why that point is not simply a matter of casualties but of the balance between offensive and defensive power; (3) **Compare** Clausewitz's instrumental and state-centric theory of war with Sun Tzu's relational-strategic tradition, Schelling's bargaining model, and African critiques of the state monopoly on violence; (4) **Evaluate** whether Clausewitzian concepts travel to cases of hybrid security orders, non-state coercion, and transnational violence, using explicit scope conditions rather than treating the theory as universally valid; and (5) **Apply** the trinity, friction, and culminating-point concepts to a concrete crisis or war, distinguishing description of events from causal explanation, prediction, and prescription. These objectives require you to move beyond memorizing definitions: you must identify the mechanism that links a political decision to a military outcome, specify when that mechanism is likely to fail, and reconstruct how different

strategic traditions would interpret the same evidence. The assessment standard is not whether you can recite Clausewitz's aphorisms, but whether you can use his framework to generate falsifiable expectations about escalation, exhaustion, and political control, while recognizing the strongest objections from alternative traditions.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Clausewitz: war as continuation of politics, the trinity, friction, the culminating point Bolded Causal Claim: War is not an autonomous activity governed by its own logic; it is an instrument of policy whose meaning, limits, and termination are set by political purpose, while its execution is systematically distorted by friction and bounded by the culminating point at which offensive power is exhausted.

Mechanism: Clausewitz's core mechanism is a chain of subordination and distortion. Political authority defines the object of the war—what is at stake, how much value the state attaches to it, and what sacrifices are proportionate. That political valuation sets the scale and intensity of military effort. Military force is then applied as a means, but it does not travel from intention to outcome in a straight line. Friction—uncertainty, weather, fatigue, miscommunication, enemy resistance, chance, and the fog of war—degrades every plan. The trinity captures this three-part structure: primordial violence and hatred, the play of chance and probability, and subordination to reason and policy. The first two elements explain why war tends toward escalation and unpredictability; the third explains why it must still be governed by political judgment. The culminating point is the mechanism's terminal brake: as an offensive advances, its own strength is consumed by distance, supply, casualties, and the defender's increasing advantage, while the defender's resistance may be renewed by interior lines, popular mobilization, or external support. At the culminating point, the attacker's remaining offensive power no longer exceeds the defender's capacity to resist; continuing beyond that point risks not merely stalemate but reversal. Thus the political object sets the aim, friction shapes the path, and the culminating point sets the outer boundary of feasible military success. The theory is not a prediction that every offensive will stop rationally; it is a claim that rational strategy must identify the point at which the means no longer serve the end.

Scope Conditions: Clausewitz's framework is strongest where there is a recognizable sovereign authority, a defined political object, a bounded theater, and a distinction between military and political spheres. It travels less well where authority is fragmented, where violence is constitutive of political order rather than an instrument chosen by a state, where non-state actors set the tempo of coercion, or where the "war" is continuous with policing, criminality, and social domination. It also assumes that the defender and attacker can be distinguished, that logistics and territory matter, and that the political object can be stated with enough clarity to guide military means. In cyber, maritime, or transnational cases, the culminating point may be harder to locate because effects are distributed, attribution is uncertain, and the defender's "resistance" may be institutional rather than territorial. The framework should therefore be treated as a scope-sensitive theory of interstate war, not as a universal grammar of all violence.

Observable Implications: If Clausewitz's mechanism is operating, one should observe political leaders attempting to define war aims before or during military action; military plans being revised because of friction; offensives slowing or failing as supply lines lengthen; defenders gaining relative advantage as the attacker overextends; and decisions to terminate or limit war based on a reassessment of the political object rather than on battlefield metrics alone. One should also observe the trinity in tension: popular passions pushing toward escalation, commanders struggling with uncertainty, and governments trying to impose political limits. A useful test is whether the culminating point can be identified independently of hindsight: if analysts can specify in advance the logistical, geographic, or political conditions under which an offensive will stall,

the theory has explanatory power; if the stall is attributed only after the fact, the concept risks becoming tautological.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, treated here as primary, does not merely add African cases to Clausewitz; it questions the ontological premises on which his theory rests. Clausewitz assumes a sovereign state that monopolizes legitimate violence and uses war as an instrument of policy. Much African scholarship on security, from post-colonial political economy to studies of hybrid orders, emphasizes that violence is often not an instrument chosen by a pre-existing state but a medium through which authority, wealth, and belonging are constituted. Mamdani's analyses of the colonial and post-colonial state, Mbembe's work on necropolitics, and Bayart's attention to the "politics of the belly" all point to settings in which the state is not a neutral container of policy but a site of predation, negotiation, and fragmentation. In such settings, the trinity's separation of passion, chance, and reason can obscure how violence produces political order rather than merely serving it. Rodney and Nkrumah, in different registers, remind us that colonial war was not a continuation of African politics but an imposition that restructured African political economies; to read Clausewitz as universal is to risk treating colonial violence as a normal instrument of policy. The African vantage point therefore asks whether "politics" in Clausewitz's sense is even the right category when coercion is exercised by militias, warlords, insurgents, private security actors, and state forces in overlapping and unstable configurations. It does not deny that war has political meaning; it denies that the political is always prior, centralized, or state-led. This is the longest and most consequential critique in this lesson because it challenges not just Clausewitz's conclusions but his unit of analysis.

The Chinese perspective, shaped by Sun Tzu and later by Maoist and post-Mao strategic thought, treats Clausewitz as useful but dangerously attritional. Chinese strategic culture emphasizes relational advantage, deception, and winning without fighting; from this vantage point, Clausewitz's focus on the clash of armed forces can overvalue the decisive battle and undervalue the political preparation of the battlefield. Yet Clausewitz's insistence on political control and his concept of friction resonate with Chinese ideas of active defense and the need to avoid overextension. The Chinese tradition is less likely to see war as a single culminating offensive than as a prolonged process of shaping the opponent's calculations.

The Russian perspective has historically absorbed Clausewitz through the lens of operational art, correlation of forces, and escalation management. Russian strategic thought often stresses the defensive superiority implied by the culminating point, the importance of depth and reserves, and the political-military nexus in a centralized state. It may treat Clausewitz less as a theory of limited war than as a warning about overextension and the need to manage the transition from war to peace without losing political gains.

The Western perspective, especially in the Anglo-American academy, has made Clausewitz canonical while also criticizing him. Western scholars often use him to professionalize military education and to insist that force must serve policy, but they also note his Eurocentric assumptions, his incomplete manuscript, and his tendency to privilege the state. Schelling's later work can be read as a Western attempt to correct Clausewitz by shifting attention from brute force to coercion and bargaining.

The UN perspective is normatively hostile to Clausewitz's instrumentalization of war. The Charter framework treats force as an exception, not a policy tool, and collective security aims to replace unilateral war with institutional authorization. From the UN vantage point, Clausewitz is descriptively important but normatively dangerous: if war is simply politics by other means, then any state can claim its violence is policy. UN peace operations and humanitarian law attempt to reinsert limits that Clausewitz's theory, taken alone, does not supply.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — SUN TZU: RELATIONAL-STRATEGIC TRADITION, WINNING WITHOUT FIGHTING, CRITIQUE OF ATTRITION

Bolded Causal Claim: Sun Tzu's strategic theory treats victory as the product of shaping relationships—among states, armies, terrain, and information—rather than as the cumulative result of destroying enemy forces; consequently, the highest form of strategy is to win without fighting, and protracted attrition is a sign that strategy has already failed.

Mechanism: The mechanism is relational and positional. In the *Art of War*, strategic advantage (*shi*) is created by aligning deception, intelligence, logistics, terrain, alliances, and timing so that the adversary's options are constrained before battle begins. The commander attacks plans, alliances, and armies in that order; avoids prolonged campaigns because they exhaust the state's resources and morale; and seeks to make the enemy's position untenable rather than to annihilate its forces. Knowledge of self and enemy is not merely tactical reconnaissance but a political-strategic assessment of relative capacity, will, and circumstance. Victory emerges from asymmetry in perception and position: the strategist manipulates the enemy's expectations, induces errors, and preserves his own freedom of action. The critique of attrition follows directly: if war becomes a contest of endurance, both sides bleed, the political object is obscured, and the state that began with superior resources may still lose through exhaustion. Sun Tzu therefore privileges indirect approaches—diplomatic isolation, economic pressure, feints, alliances, and psychological disruption—over frontal collision. Later Western interpreters, especially Liddell Hart's "indirect approach," borrowed this emphasis, but the original logic is embedded in Warring States politics, where survival depended on coalition management and the avoidance of ruinous conflict. The mechanism is not "avoid all violence"; it is to make violence unnecessary or, when used, so disproportionate in positional terms that resistance collapses quickly.

Scope Conditions: Sun Tzu's framework applies best where actors are politically rational, information is imperfect but obtainable, resources are finite, and the political objective is limited enough to permit bargaining or accommodation. It is strongest in multipolar environments where alliances can be shifted and where the cost of prolonged war threatens domestic legitimacy. It is weaker when conflict is driven by non-negotiable ideological or identity commitments, when actors seek total conquest or annihilation, or when asymmetries of power make positional maneuver impossible. It also assumes a degree of centralized strategic control that may not exist in fragmented or hybrid security orders. In nuclear or total-war contexts, the "winning without fighting" ideal can become dangerous if it encourages overconfidence in deception or underestimates the adversary's resolve. The framework is descriptive of strategic possibility, not a moral guarantee that indirect coercion is less destructive than direct force.

Observable Implications: If Sun Tzu's logic is operative, states should invest heavily in intelligence, diplomacy, economic leverage, and alliance management; prefer short, decisive campaigns; avoid open-ended occupations; and use deception and ambiguity to shape adversary choices. Military doctrine should emphasize maneuver, disruption, and psychological effect over attrition. Crises should be managed through signaling and position rather than through immediate escalation. Conversely, prolonged wars of attrition, repeated frontal assaults, and failure to convert battlefield success into political settlement would indicate that Sun Tzu's conditions are absent or that leaders have misread the strategic environment. The framework also predicts that states with weaker material power will seek indirect strategies—proxy forces, economic coercion, information operations—rather than symmetric battle.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, reconstructed from within through scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, and others, finds Sun Tzu's relational logic more congenial than Clausewitz's state-centric battle theory because African security orders have historically been hybrid, networked, and shaped by indirect rule, patronage, and non-state coercion; yet it also warns that "winning without fighting" can obscure the violence embedded in informal power, proxy warfare, and external intervention, and that African strategic thought must be theorized on its own terms rather than treated as an application of an ancient Chinese text. The Chinese perspective treats Sun Tzu as a foundational expression of indigenous strategic culture: holistic, relational, attentive to *shi*, and compatible with concepts such as active defense and political warfare, though modern Chinese doctrine also incorporates Western military science and does not reduce strategy to classical aphorisms. The Russian perspective appreciates indirect approaches and deception—*maskirovka*—but subordinates them to correlation of forces, escalation management, and the political-military balance; from Moscow, Sun Tzu's avoidance of attrition can appear naive when adversaries are ideologically committed or when strategic depth and mass are decisive. The Western perspective often reads Sun Tzu as a precursor to the indirect approach and to coercion theory, sometimes flattening his political context into universal maxims; Western strategic studies value his emphasis on intelligence and economy of force but may overstate the ease of "winning without fighting" in pluralistic, transparent societies. The UN perspective sees in Sun Tzu a partial convergence with Charter preferences for peaceful settlement and the avoidance of destructive war, but remains wary of deception, covert manipulation, and the normalization of coercion outside institutional authorization; from the UN vantage point, even non-violent strategic victory can undermine sovereignty, consent, and collective security if achieved through hidden pressure.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — SCHELLING: COERCION VS BRUTE FORCE, DETERRENCE VS COMPELLENCE, FOCAL POINTS, BARGAINING MODEL OF WAR

Bolded Causal Claim: Schelling's central contribution is to separate coercion from brute force and to show that much of modern strategy consists of manipulating an adversary's expectations, costs, and risks so that it chooses to comply; in this bargaining model, war is not merely destruction but a communicative process in which limited violence, threats, and tacit coordination shape outcomes.

Mechanism: The mechanism is bargaining under risk. Brute force destroys or seizes; coercion changes behavior by making noncompliance costlier or riskier than compliance. Deterrence prevents an action by threatening unacceptable consequences; compellence induces an action or reversal by applying or threatening pressure. Schelling argues that compellence is harder than deterrence because it requires the adversary to act, to save face, and to accept visible defeat, whereas deterrence requires only inaction. The bargaining model of war treats military operations as moves in a negotiation: limited attacks, demonstrations, escalation, and restraint communicate resolve and define the price of continued resistance. Focal points—Schelling points—solve coordination problems by providing salient thresholds, such as borders, capitals, or symbolic lines, around which tacit bargaining can occur. Brinkmanship manipulates shared risk rather than certain destruction: by creating a risk of mutual catastrophe that neither side fully controls, a state can pressure the adversary to concede. Commitment devices, such as tying one's hands or making retaliation automatic, can strengthen credibility but also reduce flexibility. The mechanism depends on rational calculation, mutual recognition of interests, and some channel of communication or tacit understanding; without these, coercion collapses into either bluff or brute force.

Scope Conditions: Schelling's framework is most powerful in crises between nuclear or conventionally

capable states where both sides prefer a negotiated outcome to mutual catastrophe, and where stakes are high but not existential in the sense of requiring annihilation. It applies to limited wars, coercive diplomacy, and crisis bargaining. It is less applicable when actors are non-rational, ideologically absolutist, domestically constrained in ways that make concession impossible, or unable to communicate. Compellence in particular fails when the target's cost of compliance exceeds its cost of resistance, when reputation concerns dominate, or when the coercer lacks credible commitment. The framework also assumes a degree of symmetry in rationality and information that may not hold in asymmetric conflicts, civil wars, or hybrid security orders. Finally, Schelling's model can understate the role of domestic politics, moral constraints, and the material realities of force; a threat that is logically credible may still be politically unusable.

Observable Implications: If Schelling's bargaining model is operative, crises should feature signaling, graduated escalation, tacit thresholds, and attempts to manipulate risk rather than immediate all-out attack. States should distinguish carefully between deterrence and compellence in doctrine and diplomacy. Successful coercion should be associated with credible commitments, clear demands, and focal points; failed coercion should be associated with ambiguous demands, lack of credibility, or targets that cannot concede without regime-threatening costs. Military deployments and alerts should function as communicative acts, not just preparations for battle. The model predicts that compellence will be rarer and more difficult than deterrence, and that crises will often end through tacit bargains rather than formal treaties. It also implies that reputation and precedent matter: states may fight or concede to preserve credibility for future crises.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, drawing on scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, and others, argues that Schelling's state-centric bargaining model captures only one layer of coercion in African security environments, where violence is often exercised through hybrid actors, patronage networks, proxy forces, and informal authority; from this vantage point, coercion is not merely interstate bargaining but a mode of political rule, and Schelling's rational-actor assumptions can obscure the colonial and post-colonial structures that make some actors' "choices" heavily constrained. At the same time, African scholars can use Schelling to analyze how weak states, insurgents, and external interveners manipulate risk and ambiguity, provided the model is adapted to non-state and hybrid actors. The Chinese perspective sees Schelling's deterrence logic as compatible with defensive strategic culture and no-first-use commitments, but views compellence and brinkmanship with suspicion as instruments of hegemony; Chinese strategic thought emphasizes relational stability, political warfare, and the avoidance of uncontrolled escalation, so Schelling's manipulation of shared risk may be read as destabilizing rather than stabilizing. The Russian perspective finds in Schelling a useful vocabulary for escalation management and coercive signaling, but Russian doctrine emphasizes correlation of forces, political will, and the possibility of non-linear or hybrid coercion; from Moscow, Schelling's assumption of mutual rationality and tacit communication may underestimate the role of historical grievance, domestic mobilization, and the deliberate creation of ambiguity. The Western perspective treats Schelling as foundational to modern coercion theory, deterrence, and limited war; Western strategic studies have built extensive models of signaling, audience costs, and credibility on his framework, though critics note its tendency to over-rationalize conflict and to neglect morality, domestic politics, and the experience of the coerced. The UN perspective is normatively ambivalent: Schelling's analysis of coercion is descriptively valuable for understanding crises, but the Charter's prohibition on the threat or use of force means that coercive bargaining is legally suspect; UN diplomacy and peace operations nevertheless rely on deterrence and compellence in practice, creating a tension between legal norms and strategic necessity that the UN manages through collective authorization, consent, and the language of protection rather than unilateral coercion.

SECTION 2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Signaling and Resolve: Audience Costs, Costly Signals, and Reputation in Crises

Bolded Causal Claim: States signal resolve through costly actions that domestic audiences observe and punish leaders for abandoning, making the credibility of threats a function of domestic political incentives rather than of military capability alone.

Mechanism: The causal chain runs from domestic audience costs through leader incentives to observable crisis behavior. Fearon (1994) formalized the mechanism: when a leader makes a public threat, domestic audiences—voters, legislatures, military elites, party factions—form expectations about the leader's follow-through. If the leader subsequently backs down, these audiences impose costs: electoral defeat, loss of office, reputational damage within the ruling coalition, or even removal. The leader, anticipating these costs, is therefore more likely to follow through on threats than a leader without such audience exposure. The mechanism is not that audiences make threats credible by magic; it is that audiences change the leader's payoff structure so that backing down becomes more expensive than following through, at least within a range of stakes. The signal is "costly" in the sense that the leader has voluntarily incurred a domestic political liability that can only be discharged by action. This is distinct from cheap talk: a private assurance or a vague public statement carries no audience cost and therefore conveys no information about resolve. Fearon's model generates a striking implication: democracies, which typically have more powerful and more informed audiences, should be better able to signal resolve than autocracies, because their leaders face higher audience costs for backing down. This is the micro-foundation for the democratic peace in the crisis-bargaining domain: democracies can make more credible threats, which makes their commitments more believable and therefore reduces the probability of war through miscalculation. The mechanism also implies that leaders sometimes escalate crises they would prefer to avoid, because the domestic cost of backing down exceeds the cost of fighting—a phenomenon Fearon calls "audience costs as a source of war." The costly signaling literature extends this logic: signals are credible precisely because they are expensive to send and would not be sent by a state lacking resolve (Fearon 1997). Military mobilization, troop deployments, and public ultimatums are costly signals; diplomatic notes and press statements are not. The reputation literature adds a further layer: states build reputations for resolve through past behavior, and adversaries infer future resolve from past actions (Mercer 1996; Press 2005). The mechanism here is Bayesian updating: an adversary observes a state's past willingness to fight and updates its belief about the state's type (resolved or irresolute), then adjusts its bargaining behavior accordingly.

Scope Conditions: The audience-cost mechanism operates under specific conditions that bound its explanatory power. First, the domestic audience must be informed about the crisis and the leader's commitments; in authoritarian systems with controlled media, audience costs may be low or manufactured rather than genuine. Second, the stakes must be sufficient to trigger audience attention; minor territorial disputes may not generate the public salience needed for audience costs to bite. Third, the leader must have a realistic prospect of following through; audience costs cannot make a militarily infeasible threat credible. Fourth, the mechanism assumes rational leaders who anticipate audience reactions; leaders who misperceive domestic opinion or who are insulated from political consequences (as in personalist dictatorships) may not respond to audience costs in the predicted manner. Fifth, the reputation mechanism requires that adversaries can observe past behavior and attribute it correctly; if past actions were driven by idiosyncratic factors rather than by underlying resolve, reputation inferences will be noisy. Sixth, audience costs can be manipulated: leaders may manufacture crises to rally domestic support, converting a foreign policy problem into a domestic political asset (the "rally 'round the flag" effect), which complicates the causal direction. Seventh, the mechanism is most powerful in democracies with free media and competitive elections; in autocracies, audience costs

may operate through elite coalitions rather than mass publics, with different dynamics. Eighth, the costly signaling logic requires that the cost be differentially borne: if all states can send the signal at equal cost, it conveys no information.

Observable Implications: If audience costs drive crisis behavior, we should observe that democratic leaders who make public threats are less likely to back down than autocratic leaders who make private threats; that leaders facing elections are more likely to escalate than leaders with secure tenure; that public commitments are harder to reverse than private ones; that crises involving high public salience produce more escalation than low-salience crises; and that states with reputations for backing down face more challenges. The empirical record is mixed. Tomz (2007) found experimental evidence that American voters punish leaders who back down from public commitments, supporting the audience-cost mechanism. Weeks (2008) found that audience costs vary by regime type: personalist dictatorships face the lowest audience costs, single-party and military regimes face intermediate costs, and democracies face the highest. However, Snyder and Borghard (2011) challenged the empirical basis, arguing that audience costs are rarely observed in actual crises because leaders avoid making public commitments precisely to preserve flexibility. Trachtenberg (2012) and others have questioned whether the historical record supports the claim that democracies are more credible. The reputation literature is similarly contested: Press (2005) argued that reputation for resolve is less important than reputation for interests, because adversaries care more about what a state wants than about its willingness to fight; Mercer (1996) argued that reputation effects are weak because adversaries attribute past behavior to situational factors rather than to stable traits. The costly signaling literature has generated extensive debate about which signals are genuinely costly and whether adversaries can distinguish costly from cheap signals in real time.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective treats audience costs as a concept developed in and for Western democracies, with limited applicability to African political systems where executive power is often concentrated, media is constrained, and domestic audiences are fragmented along ethnic, regional, and patronage lines; African scholars note that "audience costs" in many African states operate through elite coalitions and patronage networks rather than through mass publics, and that the concept of "resolve" itself may be culturally specific, reflecting Western assumptions about state rationality and public accountability that do not map onto African political realities where legitimacy derives from multiple sources including traditional authority, religious sanction, and ethnic solidarity. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that costly signaling is embedded in a relational context: signals are read not as isolated acts but as part of a long-term relationship, and the concept of "face" (mianzi) means that public commitments carry social costs that extend beyond electoral politics; Chinese strategic culture values ambiguity and indirection, so the Western preference for clear, public, costly signals may be culturally specific and strategically suboptimal in a Chinese framework. The Russian perspective stresses that audience costs operate differently in authoritarian and semi-authoritarian systems: the relevant audience is the security elite and the military, not the mass public, and signals of resolve are directed inward as much as outward; Russian crisis behavior reflects a tradition of demonstrating resolve through action rather than through public commitment, and the concept of "audience costs" may underestimate the role of elite cohesion and institutional loyalty. The Western perspective is the originator of the audience-cost and costly-signaling research programs, treating them as universal mechanisms of crisis bargaining; Western strategic studies have built extensive models of credibility, reputation, and signaling on these foundations, though critics within the Western tradition note the over-rationalization of politics and the neglect of emotion, culture, and domestic institutional variation. The UN perspective treats audience costs as a descriptive phenomenon that can undermine diplomatic flexibility: public commitments by member states can lock them into positions that make compromise harder,

and the UN's preference for quiet diplomacy and back-channel negotiation reflects an awareness that public signaling can escalate crises; at the same time, the UN relies on member states' domestic accountability to ensure that commitments made in multilateral forums are honored.

SECTION 2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Strategic Culture: How Different Traditions Think About Coercion Differently

Bolded Causal Claim: Coercive strategy is shaped by historically transmitted beliefs, symbols, and institutional practices that constitute a "strategic culture," meaning that the same material capabilities and strategic situation will produce different coercive behaviors depending on which cultural tradition informs the decision-maker.

Mechanism: The causal chain runs from historical experience through cultural transmission to strategic preference. Snyder (1977) introduced the concept of strategic culture in his study of Soviet strategic thought, arguing that Soviet leaders' views on nuclear war were shaped not only by material capabilities and rational calculation but by a distinctive set of beliefs about the nature of war, the role of the party, and the historical experience of invasion and devastation. Johnston (1995) refined the concept, distinguishing between a "strategic culture" (a set of shared beliefs about the efficacy of force) and a "strategic subculture" (competing factions within a state), and arguing that strategic culture operates as a filter through which leaders interpret strategic situations and generate preferences. The mechanism is not deterministic: culture does not dictate behavior but constrains the range of options that leaders consider legitimate and effective. A leader socialized in a strategic culture that views war as a last resort will be less likely to threaten force than a leader socialized in a culture that views war as a normal instrument of policy, even when material incentives are identical. The transmission mechanism operates through military education, doctrinal publications, historical narratives, institutional rituals, and the socialization of elites within defense establishments. Gray (1999) emphasized that strategic culture is not static but evolves in response to experience, though it retains a "core" of enduring beliefs. The mechanism also operates at the level of perception: strategic culture shapes how leaders read adversary signals, assess risks, and define victory. A culture that values relational harmony may interpret a coercive threat as a breakdown of relationship rather than as a bargaining move; a culture that values honor and reputation may interpret backing down as existential humiliation. The concept thus bridges materialist and constructivist approaches: it acknowledges that capabilities matter but insists that their meaning and use are culturally mediated.

Scope Conditions: Strategic culture operates under conditions that limit its explanatory and predictive power. First, the concept is most useful when material factors are held relatively constant: if two states with similar capabilities behave differently, culture may explain the divergence. Second, strategic culture is not a substitute for interest-based analysis; it shapes how interests are pursued, not what interests are. Third, the concept risks reification: treating "Chinese strategic culture" or "Russian strategic culture" as monolithic entities ignores internal diversity, factional competition, and historical change. Johnston (1995) warned against "cultural essentialism" and argued for disaggregating strategic culture into testable propositions about specific beliefs. Fourth, strategic culture is difficult to measure independently of behavior, creating a risk of tautology: if behavior is used to infer culture and culture is then used to explain behavior, the argument is circular. Fifth, the concept struggles with change: if strategic culture is deeply rooted, how do we explain rapid shifts in strategic behavior, such as China's shift from revolutionary to pragmatic foreign policy after 1978? Sixth, strategic culture may be epiphenomenal: leaders may invoke cultural narratives to justify decisions driven by material interests, making culture a post-hoc rationalization rather than a causal factor.

Seventh, the concept is most powerful at the level of strategic preference and style, not at the level of specific tactical decisions. Eighth, cross-cultural comparison requires careful attention to translation and conceptual equivalence: terms like "deterrence," "compellence," and "resolve" may not have direct equivalents in all strategic traditions.

Observable Implications: If strategic culture shapes coercion, we should observe that states with similar capabilities but different cultural traditions employ different coercive strategies; that strategic behavior is path-dependent, reflecting historical experience; that leaders invoke cultural narratives to justify strategic choices; that military doctrines reflect culturally specific assumptions about the nature of war; and that cross-cultural misperception is a source of conflict. The empirical record supports some of these implications. Johnston (1995) found that Chinese strategic culture shifted from a "parabellum" (offensive, war-fighting) orientation to a "Confucian-pacifist" orientation over time, demonstrating that culture changes and that these changes affect strategic behavior. Snyder (1977) and subsequent scholars found that Soviet/Russian strategic thought emphasized the correlation of forces, escalation management, and the political character of war in ways that differed from Western approaches. African scholars have documented distinctive African approaches to security that emphasize human security, community-based conflict resolution, and the role of non-state actors, challenging the state-centric assumptions of Western strategic culture. However, the concept remains contested: some scholars argue that material factors and institutional incentives explain more variation in strategic behavior than culture does, and that "strategic culture" is too vague to generate testable predictions.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective is the most critical of the strategic culture concept as conventionally formulated, arguing that Western strategic culture theory has been developed by and for Western states and reflects Western assumptions about the state as the primary unit of analysis, about war as interstate conflict, and about coercion as a tool of state policy; African scholars argue that African strategic cultures are not merely variants of Western strategic culture but constitute distinct traditions rooted in different historical experiences—colonialism, decolonization, Cold War proxy conflicts, and post-colonial state formation—and that these traditions emphasize human security, community resilience, non-state actors, and the interpenetration of domestic and international security in ways that Western strategic culture theory does not capture; Grovogui (2006) and others have argued that African strategic thought must be understood on its own terms, not as a deviation from a Western norm. The Chinese perspective is the most extensively theorized non-Western strategic culture, with a tradition stretching from Sun Tzu through Mao Zedong to contemporary PLA doctrine; Chinese strategic culture emphasizes relationality, patience, indirection, and the integration of military and non-military means, and scholars like Johnston (1995) and Scobell (2003) have documented how these cultural elements shape Chinese coercive behavior, including the preference for "active defense," the emphasis on "winning without fighting," and the integration of economic, diplomatic, and military instruments in a holistic strategy. The Russian perspective emphasizes the historical experience of invasion and devastation, the concept of the "correlation of forces," the integration of military and political means, and a tradition of escalation management that treats coercion as a continuous spectrum rather than a binary choice; Russian strategic culture, as analyzed by Snyder (1977) and subsequent scholars, reflects a distinctive view of war as a political act in which the boundary between war and peace is blurred, and in which the state must maintain a permanent readiness for conflict. The Western perspective is the originator of strategic culture theory and the dominant framework in strategic studies; Western strategic culture, as analyzed by Gray (1999) and others, emphasizes rationality, technological superiority, the decisive battle, and the separation of military and political spheres, though this characterization is itself contested and may reflect an idealized rather than actual Western practice. The UN perspective treats strate-

gic culture as a source of both diversity and misunderstanding: the UN's universalist aspirations require that member states transcend their particular strategic cultures in favor of shared norms, but the organization's effectiveness depends on understanding and accommodating the strategic cultures of its members; UN peace operations and diplomacy must navigate the strategic cultures of troop-contributing countries, host states, and regional organizations, and the UN's own institutional culture—emphasizing consensus, legitimacy, and the peaceful settlement of disputes—constitutes a distinctive strategic culture that shapes how the organization approaches coercion.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on strategic thought and coercion must be reconstructed from within, not as a regional application of Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, or Schelling to African cases. Its starting premise is that the postcolonial condition is not a deviation from a European norm of sovereign statehood but a distinct political ontology in which authority, violence, and order are layered, contested, and historically sedimented. From this vantage, coercion is not primarily an instrument wielded by a unitary state in interstate bargaining; it is a field of social practice through which political communities are constituted, fractured, and reconstituted. The African perspective therefore does not simply add African examples to Western theory; it questions the epistemic premises that make Western theory appear universal. It asks why the state monopoly on violence, the rational political objective, and the transparent signaling of resolve are treated as baseline assumptions when much of the world's experience of order has been organized through hybrid, non-state, and transnational authorities.

Clausewitz's claim that war is the continuation of politics by other means remains analytically powerful, but the African perspective insists on specifying its scope conditions. Clausewitz's trinity—people, army, government—presupposes a relatively coherent state that can align popular passion, military means, and political purpose. In many postcolonial African settings, the "government" is one competitor among several claimants to authority; the "army" may be fragmented, predatory, or fused with militias and political entrepreneurs; and the "people" are not a unified national subject but a constellation of ethnic, regional, class, and generational constituencies. Under these conditions, war is still political, but it is often politics within society rather than politics between states. Violence becomes a mode of social ordering, resource extraction, and identity formation, not merely an instrument for achieving a state-defined objective. Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject, Bayart's analysis of the "politics of the belly," and Mbembe's work on necropolitics all suggest that coercion in postcolonial Africa is embedded in structures of domination that predate and outlast formal state institutions. The state may be less the monopolist of violence than the arena in which multiple coercive projects compete.

This critique does not require rejecting Clausewitz entirely. Rather, it reframes his insight: if war is politics by other means, then the relevant politics may be colonial, neo-colonial, racialized, or communal, not only the rational calculus of a sovereign cabinet. Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment and Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism show that coercion in Africa has often been externalized and structural—operating through debt, trade, military basing, and resource extraction rather than through declared war. Fanon's argument that colonial violence is totalizing and that anti-colonial violence can be regenerative adds a further complication: from this vantage, violence is not simply an instrument chosen by a political actor but a constitutive feature of colonial and postcolonial orders. Cabral's insistence that culture is a weapon of struggle similarly implies that coercion includes epistemic and cultural dimensions that Clausewitz's military framework does not capture. The African perspective thus expands the concept of coercion beyond the deployment of force to include the

coercion of economic dependence, legal subordination, and cultural domination.

Sun Tzu's relational-strategic tradition resonates with some African diplomatic and communal practices, but the resonance must be handled carefully. Many African societies have long traditions of mediation, consensus-building, alliance-making, and the use of ritual, kinship, and economic interdependence to manage conflict. Nyerere's emphasis on consensus and ujamaa, for example, reflects a strategic preference for relational harmony over zero-sum confrontation. Yet it would be a mistake to romanticize African politics as inherently consensual. African conflicts have also been brutally attritional, and "winning without fighting" can describe elite accommodation, co-optation, or the quiet violence of exclusion rather than peaceful resolution. The African perspective therefore treats Sun Tzu not as a mirror of African wisdom but as one resource among many, useful for highlighting relational strategy while requiring supplementation by attention to structural violence and historical inequality. Where Sun Tzu emphasizes deception, positioning, and the avoidance of costly battle, African scholarship often emphasizes the social costs of conflict and the difficulty of separating military victory from political legitimacy.

Schelling's bargaining model of war is especially revealing of the gap between Western and African vantage points. Schelling distinguishes coercion from brute force and analyzes deterrence and compellence as bargaining processes in which threats, commitments, and focal points shape outcomes. This framework assumes actors who can make credible threats, identify salient focal points, and calculate costs and benefits. In hybrid security orders, these assumptions are frequently violated. The relevant actors may include warlords, militias, customary authorities, religious leaders, multinational corporations, humanitarian agencies, and foreign militaries, none of which occupies the position of a unitary state. Focal points may be customary norms, religious calendars, market prices, or local grievances rather than the Schelling points of interstate crisis bargaining. Compellence often fails not because the target is irrational but because the coercer lacks the monopoly, legitimacy, or information required to make its demands stick. The target may have exit options in illicit economies, cross-border sanctuaries, or parallel governance structures. In such contexts, coercion is less a bargaining game between two states than a struggle over who can define and enforce the rules of social life.

Signaling and resolve take on different meanings in this setting. Fearon's audience-cost theory assumes that leaders face domestic publics who can punish them for backing down, thereby making threats more credible. In hybrid orders, audiences are multiple and fragmented: ethnic constituencies, militia fighters, religious communities, diaspora networks, international donors, and humanitarian organizations. A leader's resolve may be signaled not through transparent military deployments but through performative violence, patronage distributions, or ritualized displays of loyalty. Costly signals may include atrocities, not because atrocity is strategically efficient in a Schellingian sense, but because it communicates commitment to a constituency that values toughness, revenge, or group protection. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics captures this grim logic: the power to decide who may live and who must die becomes a mode of political communication. The African perspective thus reveals that signaling can be morally catastrophic and analytically opaque, and that the Western focus on credibility and resolve may obscure the human costs of making threats believable.

Strategic culture, from the African vantage, is not a fixed national attribute but a historically produced repertoire of practices shaped by colonialism, Cold War interventions, structural adjustment, and contemporary globalization. African strategic cultures are plural: a Sahelian state confronting jihadist insurgency, a Great Lakes state managing ethnic militias, and a coastal state facing maritime piracy do not share a single strategic culture. Yet they share a common experience of being objects of external strategic theorizing. Western security studies has often treated Africa as a theater for counterterrorism, peacekeeping, or resource protec-

tion rather than as a source of strategic knowledge. African scholarship challenges this epistemic asymmetry. Grovogui's work on sovereignty emphasizes that African states have been denied the full recognition granted to European states; Mamdani shows how colonial legal categories continue to structure political violence; Bayart reveals the informal networks through which power operates; and Tamale and Oyěwùmí demonstrate that gendered and epistemic assumptions shape what counts as security. These scholars do not merely add African cases to a universal theory; they show that the theory itself is partial.

The African perspective's contribution is therefore substantial. It reveals that coercion is often non-state, social, and embedded in global inequalities; that the state is not always the relevant unit of analysis; that legitimacy and authority are fragmented; and that Western strategic theory carries colonial and epistemic baggage. It also exposes the limits of models that assume transparent signaling, unitary actors, and clear focal points. What it may occlude, however, is equally important. By emphasizing hybridity and historical injustice, it can under-theorize interstate deterrence, nuclear coercion, and formal crisis bargaining, which remain central to global security. It may also risk romanticizing community-based or non-state authority, some of which can be coercive, patriarchal, or exclusionary. Finally, the diversity of African experiences makes generalization difficult; "African strategic culture" is a heuristic, not an essence. Nevertheless, as the primary vantage point of this lesson, the African perspective prevents the other four from treating Western state-centric models as the natural language of strategy.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on strategic thought and coercion is anchored in a relational-strategic tradition most commonly associated with Sun Tzu, but it cannot be reduced to a single text or to a pacifist cliché. Its central idea is that strategy is the art of shaping relationships, positions, and perceptions so that victory becomes possible without costly battle. Winning without fighting is not merely a moral preference; it is a claim about efficiency, legitimacy, and the conservation of resources. In this tradition, coercion is less about issuing explicit threats and more about altering the strategic environment so that the adversary's options narrow. The concept of shi—strategic advantage or potential—captures the idea that power lies in configuration rather than in raw force. A state that has cultivated alliances, economic leverage, informational dominance, and positional advantage may compel without firing a shot, not because it has threatened destruction but because the adversary perceives that resistance is futile or disproportionately costly.

This perspective engages Clausewitz selectively. Chinese strategic thought does not deny that war is political, but it tends to treat war as a failure of strategy rather than its natural continuation. Where Clausewitz emphasizes the friction, uncertainty, and escalation inherent in war, the Sun Tzu tradition emphasizes control, deception, and the avoidance of attrition. Attrition is criticized not only because it is expensive but because it erodes the political and social foundations of the state. A war of annihilation may produce a pyrrhic victory; a strategy of exhaustion may destabilize the victor as well as the vanquished. The Chinese preference for indirect approaches, therefore, is not simply tactical; it is political. It reflects a view that legitimacy and social order are fragile and that military force should be used sparingly, precisely, and with an eye to postwar order.

Schelling's bargaining model is both illuminating and potentially misleading from the Chinese vantage. Schelling's distinction between coercion and brute force, and his analysis of deterrence and compellence, provide a vocabulary for understanding threats and commitments. Yet the Chinese tradition often treats explicit bargaining as crude and destabilizing. Focal points, in Schelling's sense, may be seen as artificial constructs that invite escalation by forcing adversaries into public tests of resolve. Chinese strategic practice has often favored ambiguity, gradualism, and fait accompli over clear demands and deadlines. The aim is

to shift facts on the ground while keeping the adversary uncertain about whether a red line has been crossed. This can be interpreted as compellence, but it is compellence through environmental shaping rather than through articulated bargaining. The risk is that ambiguity may be misread: what one side sees as patient, low-cost pressure, the other may see as salami-slicing or creeping aggression.

Signaling and resolve are therefore understood differently. Western audience-cost theory assumes that public commitments enhance credibility by raising the domestic cost of retreat. Chinese strategic culture, by contrast, often values restraint, patience, and the avoidance of public humiliation. Resolve may be demonstrated through endurance, economic resilience, and the willingness to absorb costs over time rather than through dramatic threats. Costly signals may take the form of infrastructure projects, diplomatic alignments, or military modernization that change the adversary's calculus without requiring an immediate crisis. This does not mean that China avoids coercion; rather, it often prefers coercion that is deniable, incremental, and embedded in broader political and economic relationships. The occlusion here is that such an approach can underestimate the destabilizing effects of ambiguity. Adversaries may respond with their own ambiguity, producing spirals of misperception. Moreover, the romanticized image of a uniquely peaceful Chinese strategic culture is challenged by Johnston's argument that Chinese strategic culture has also contained hard-realist, parabellum elements. The Chinese perspective thus contributes a powerful critique of attrition and a sophisticated theory of relational coercion, but it must be treated as internally contested rather than as a monolithic alternative to Western bargaining theory.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on strategic thought and coercion is shaped by a strategic culture that emphasizes survival, territorial depth, escalation management, and the correlation of forces. It does not treat war as a continuation of politics in the Clausewitzian sense of a rational instrument calibrated to limited objectives; rather, it often treats war and coercion as existential struggles in which political survival, regime security, and great-power status are at stake. This perspective is historically rooted in experiences of invasion, encirclement, and imperial overstretch, and it tends to view the international system as inherently hostile. Clausewitz is studied and respected in Russian military thought, but his framework is often subordinated to a more holistic conception of conflict in which military, political, economic, informational, and psychological instruments are fused. The result is a strategic tradition that is less interested in distinguishing war from peace than in managing a continuous spectrum of confrontation.

Escalation management is the distinctive Russian contribution to the study of coercion. Rather than assuming that threats can be finely calibrated, Russian strategic thought often emphasizes the need to control the pace, intensity, and geographic scope of confrontation. The concept of de-escalation through escalation captures the idea that a limited show of force or a threat of further escalation can compel an adversary to retreat. This is not identical to Schelling's compellence, although it overlaps with it. Schelling assumes that coercion works through the adversary's rational calculation of costs and benefits; the Russian approach often assumes that coercion works through shock, uncertainty, and the demonstration of superior resolve. The adversary is not merely asked to recalculate; it is confronted with the possibility that the conflict may expand beyond its control. This makes Russian coercion inherently risk-acceptant, or at least risk-tolerant, in ways that Western bargaining models may find difficult to interpret.

The correlation of forces is central to this perspective. It is a broader measure than military balance alone, encompassing economic capacity, political stability, alliance structures, morale, and technological development. Russian strategic thought tends to treat coercion as effective when the overall correlation of forces favors the coercer, not merely when a specific threat is credible. This has implications for signaling and

resolve. A costly signal, in the Western sense, may be less important than a sustained demonstration of comprehensive capability. Resolve is communicated through the ability to endure hardship, absorb losses, and maintain strategic initiative over time. Audience costs, in Fearon's sense, are not absent, but they are refracted through a political system in which regime security and elite cohesion may matter more than public opinion. The Russian perspective thus contributes a valuable corrective to models that overemphasize discrete threats and underemphasize structural advantage.

Strategic culture, from the Russian vantage, is shaped by geography, history, and great-power identity. The experience of vast territory, harsh climate, and repeated invasion has produced a strategic preference for depth, defense in depth, and the ability to trade space for time. Yet this defensive posture has often coexisted with offensive operations justified as preemptive or protective. The Russian perspective therefore contains an internal tension: it presents itself as defensive and status-quo oriented while practicing coercion and intervention in neighboring regions. Its occlusions are significant. By emphasizing escalation management and comprehensive power, it may overestimate the ability of political leaders to control escalation once initiated. It may also understate the role of legitimacy, international law, and normative constraints in shaping outcomes. Western models of deterrence and compellence, for their part, may misread Russian signals by assuming a level of transparency and rational calibration that the Russian tradition does not prioritize. The Russian perspective is strongest when it reminds analysts that coercion is embedded in a broader struggle for position and that adversaries may not share Western assumptions about limited war.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on strategic thought and coercion is the tradition most directly shaped by Clausewitz and Schelling, and it treats strategy as the rational employment of force and threats to achieve political objectives. Clausewitz provides the foundational premise: war is the continuation of politics by other means, and the conduct of war must be subordinated to political purpose. The trinity—people, army, government—remains a central heuristic for understanding how passion, probability, and reason interact in war. From this foundation, Western strategic studies developed a rich literature on deterrence, compellence, escalation, and crisis bargaining. Schelling's *Arms and Influence* is pivotal because it shifted attention from the destruction of enemy forces to the manipulation of the adversary's choices. Coercion, in this view, is not brute force but the art of making the adversary prefer compliance to resistance.

Schelling's framework distinguishes deterrence from compellence and emphasizes the role of threats, commitments, focal points, and bargaining. Deterrence aims to prevent an action; compellence aims to induce one. The distinction matters because compellence is generally harder: it requires the adversary to act, often publicly, and to incur the costs of retreat. Focal points—Schelling points—help solve coordination problems in crises by making certain outcomes salient. The bargaining model of war treats military force as a means of communication and a tool for shaping the adversary's expectations. This perspective has been enormously influential in Western policy and academic circles, particularly in the study of nuclear deterrence, crisis management, and coercive diplomacy.

Signaling and resolve are central to the Western perspective. Fearon's audience-cost theory argues that democratic leaders can make more credible threats because domestic audiences punish them for backing down. Costly signals—military mobilizations, alliance commitments, or public red lines—are thought to demonstrate resolve and reduce uncertainty. Reputation matters because adversaries learn from past behavior; a state that backs down today may be challenged tomorrow. This framework yields clear, testable hypotheses about crisis outcomes and has shaped Western approaches to deterrence and alliance management. It also provides a normative vocabulary for policy: credibility, resolve, and commitment become strategic goods

to be cultivated.

Strategic culture, in the Western tradition, is often treated as a variable that modifies rational calculation. Snyder's early work on strategic culture emphasized that states develop distinctive beliefs about the role of military force, shaped by historical experience and political institutions. Johnston's later work challenged both cultural determinism and cultural romanticism, arguing that strategic culture can be hard-realist and that its effects must be demonstrated rather than assumed. The Western perspective thus contains an internal debate: some scholars treat strategic culture as a deep constraint on behavior, while others treat it as a thin overlay on universal rationality. What the Western perspective contributes is analytical clarity, a well-developed theory of bargaining, and a large body of empirical research on deterrence and crisis outcomes. What it occludes is equally important. By privileging state actors, transparent signaling, and rational calculation, it may understate the role of non-state actors, hybrid security orders, and cultural variation. It may also universalize a historically specific experience of statehood and warfare, treating Western strategic practice as the template for all strategic thought. The African, Chinese, and Russian perspectives all challenge this universalism, albeit in different ways.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on strategic thought and coercion is fundamentally normative and institutional. It begins from the Charter's prohibition on the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, and from the commitment to the peaceful settlement of disputes. From this vantage, coercion is not a neutral tool of statecraft but a legally and morally regulated activity. The UN does not deny that states think strategically; rather, it seeks to channel strategic behavior into collective frameworks that reduce the risk of war. Chapter VII provides for collective security measures, including sanctions and, in exceptional cases, the use of force, but only under Security Council authorization. The UN perspective therefore treats coercion as legitimate only when it is collective, authorized, and directed toward the maintenance of international peace and security.

This perspective engages the five key ideas differently. Clausewitz's claim that war is the continuation of politics is not denied, but it is normatively constrained: the UN Charter attempts to sever the link between political disagreement and military force. Sun Tzu's winning without fighting resonates with the UN preference for preventive diplomacy and peaceful settlement, though the UN does not endorse deception or covert coercion. Schelling's bargaining model is viewed with suspicion because it treats threats as a normal instrument of policy; the UN framework seeks to delegitimize unilateral threats and to replace bilateral coercion with multilateral processes. Signaling and resolve are interpreted through the lens of credibility and legitimacy: a threat may be credible, but if it violates the Charter, it is not legitimate. Strategic culture, from the UN vantage, is both a source of diversity and a challenge to universal norms. Member states bring different strategic traditions to the organization, and effective diplomacy requires understanding them; yet the UN's universalist aspirations require that particular strategic cultures be subordinated to shared principles.

The UN perspective contributes a crucial normative counterweight to the other four. It insists that coercion must be evaluated not only by its effectiveness but by its legality and legitimacy. It provides institutional mechanisms—mediation, peacekeeping, sanctions, and collective security—that attempt to manage coercion without war. It also offers a language of common security and human security that broadens the concept of threat beyond interstate war. What it occludes, however, is equally significant. The UN's effectiveness depends on the political will of its member states, especially the permanent members of the Security Council, and its collective security mechanisms are often paralyzed by great-power rivalry. The UN framework may also struggle to address non-state coercion, hybrid security orders, and the informal violence that char-

acterizes many contemporary conflicts. Its institutional culture—emphasizing consensus, legitimacy, and peaceful settlement—can be slow and cumbersome in crises requiring rapid response. Nevertheless, the UN perspective remains essential because it reminds strategists that coercion is not merely a technical problem of credibility and resolve but a political and legal problem of order, legitimacy, and human security.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African	Reveals that coercion operates through hybrid security orders, non-state actors, and informal violence that Clausewitzian state-centric frameworks cannot capture; exposes the colonial genealogy of "war as politics"	Tends to under-specify the mechanics of interstate nuclear bargaining and great-power crisis management; can overstate the irrelevance of formal military power	Coercion must be understood from within post-colonial sovereignty struggles; legitimate force is that which serves self-determination and human security, not state survival alone	Post-colonial conflicts in the Great Lakes region; non-state coercion by militias and informal security providers; Rodney's underdevelop-ment thesis applied to military expenditure patterns	Western: "Hybrid orders are real but do not invalidate the logic of credible threats; state-level deterrence still structures the international system"

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Offers a relational-strategic tradition in which victory without fighting is the highest form of strategy; emphasizes positional advantage, patience, and the avoidance of attrition	May underweight the role of explicit, credible threats and the bargaining value of demonstrated resolve; can obscure the coercive function of ambiguity	Coercion is legitimate when it preserves harmony and territorial integrity; force is a last resort after relational and positional advantages have been exhausted	Sun Tzu's Art of War; China's no-first-use nuclear policy; active defense doctrine; historical Chinese strategic thought on winning without fighting	Russian: "Relational patience is admirable but insufficient when facing an adversary who interprets restraint as weakness; escalation management requires explicit red lines"
Russian	Provides a sophisticated framework for escalation management, correlation of forces, and the calibrated use of military and non-military means to achieve political objectives below the threshold of war	Risks normalizing coercion as a routine instrument of statecraft; may understate the destabilizing effects of ambiguous escalation thresholds on adversary decision-making	Coercion is a legitimate tool of great-power competition; the correlation of forces determines outcomes, and escalation must be managed to avoid uncontrolled war	Russian military doctrine on escalation management; hybrid warfare concepts; historical Soviet/Russian strategic thought on the correlation of forces	Western: "Escalation management can become self-fulfilling; ambiguous thresholds increase the risk of miscalculation and inadvertent war"

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Delivers the most analytically developed framework for coercive bargaining: deterrence vs. compellence, audience costs, costly signals, focal points, and the bargaining model of war	Tends to overstate the rationality and information-processing capacity of decision-makers; underweights cultural, historical, and relational factors; can reduce coercion to a technical problem of credibility	Coercion is legitimate when it serves liberal international order, collective security, and the defense of sovereignty; force is justified as a last resort under just-war principles	Schelling's Arms and Influence; Fearon's audience costs; Cuban Missile Crisis; Gulf War coercive diplomacy; NATO deterrence posture	African: "The Western framework assumes a state-centric, rational actor model that erases the lived experience of coercion in post-colonial societies where violence is often informal, non-state, and structural"
UN	Provides a legal-normative framework that constrains coercion through Charter prohibitions, collective security, and the legitimization of force only in self-defense or Security Council authorization	Depends on great-power political will; often paralyzed by Security Council veto; struggles to address non-state coercion, hybrid orders, and informal violence	Coercion is legitimate only when authorized by the international community or exercised in self-defense; the use of force must be proportional, necessary, and last-resort	UN Charter Articles 2(4) and 51; collective security resolutions; peacekeeping operations; international humanitarian law	Chinese: "The UN framework reflects Western institutional dominance; its legitimacy claims are contested by states that view it as an instrument of great-power politics rather than genuine multilateral-ism"

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The Cuban Missile Crisis (1962): Coercive Bargaining at the Nuclear Brink

The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962 remains the paradigmatic case of coercive bargaining between nuclear-armed adversaries. When the United States discovered Soviet medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles deployed in Cuba, President Kennedy faced a choice that Schelling's framework illuminates with unusual clarity: how to compel the removal of weapons that had already been deployed without triggering the very war that both sides sought to avoid. The crisis is not merely a historical episode; it is a laboratory for testing the five key ideas developed in this lesson—Clausewitz's trinity and friction, Sun Tzu's winning without fighting, Schelling's coercion versus brute force, Fearon's audience costs and costly signals, and the strategic culture thesis. The following analysis reconstructs the crisis through four levels of analysis, identifies the operative mechanisms, reconstructs five perspectives, and adjudicates among them.

Levels of Analysis **Individual level.** The crisis was shaped profoundly by the personalities, beliefs, and cognitive frameworks of the key decision-makers. John F. Kennedy, scarred by the Bay of Pigs failure and the Vienna summit with Khrushchev, entered the crisis with a heightened sensitivity to credibility and a determination to avoid both appeasement and reckless escalation. Nikita Khrushchev, operating within a Soviet system that rewarded boldness but punished failure, faced domestic pressures from hardliners in the Presidium and the military. Robert Kennedy's role as informal channel to Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin illustrates how individual relationships can create bargaining space that formal institutions cannot. The ExComm deliberations reveal cognitive biases—groupthink, anchoring on the blockade option, and the availability heuristic shaped by Pearl Harbor—that influenced the choice of coercive instruments. Schelling's framework assumes rational actors, but the individual level reminds us that rationality is bounded by emotion, fatigue, and the fog of crisis.

State level. The United States and the Soviet Union operated as unitary actors with distinct strategic cultures, institutional constraints, and domestic political imperatives. The US possessed overwhelming conventional and nuclear superiority in the Caribbean theater, yet Kennedy chose a naval blockade (termed a "quarantine" to avoid the legal implications of a blockade under international law) rather than an air strike or invasion. This choice reflected not only military calculation but also domestic political constraints: Kennedy needed to demonstrate resolve to a Congress and public that had been alarmed by the "missile gap" rhetoric of the 1960 campaign. The Soviet Union, for its part, sought to alter the strategic balance in the Western Hemisphere, protect the Cuban revolution, and demonstrate solidarity with a socialist ally. The state-level analysis reveals that coercion is not merely about capability but about the political constraints that shape how capabilities are deployed.

Systemic level. The crisis occurred within a bipolar international system characterized by nuclear deterrence, alliance commitments, and a security dilemma. The deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba was itself a response to the US Jupiter missiles in Turkey and Italy, to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, and to the broader strategic imbalance favoring the United States. The systemic level explains why both sides were willing to risk nuclear war: the stakes were not merely Cuban but concerned the credibility of alliance commitments, the stability of the nuclear balance, and the rules of the Cold War order. The crisis also illustrates the systemic logic of deterrence: the existence of mutual assured destruction created both the incentive to avoid war and the bargaining leverage that made coercion possible.

Transnational level. The crisis had significant transnational dimensions. The Cuban revolution and its sur-

vival were transnational ideological stakes; the Non-Aligned Movement and the broader decolonizing world watched the superpower confrontation with alarm. The United Nations, through Secretary-General U Thant, played a mediating role that provided both sides with a face-saving exit. The transnational level also encompasses the role of intelligence communities, media, and public opinion in shaping the crisis: the discovery of the missiles by U-2 reconnaissance, the public announcement by Kennedy, and the global reaction all influenced the bargaining dynamics. The crisis was not merely bilateral; it was embedded in a transnational order of norms, institutions, and audiences.

Mechanism Section The operative mechanism in the Cuban Missile Crisis was Schelling's coercion-versus-brute-force distinction, operationalized through a sequence of costly signals, focal points, and audience costs. Kennedy's naval quarantine was not designed to physically prevent the delivery of missiles by force; it was designed to create a focal point for bargaining—a visible, credible, and limited commitment that forced Khrushchev to choose between escalation and concession. The quarantine's power lay not in its military effectiveness but in its communicative function: it signaled resolve while preserving the adversary's ability to retreat without humiliation.

The mechanism operated through several channels. First, the quarantine created a **focal point** (Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 1966): a salient, mutually recognized threshold that structured the bargaining space. The "line of death" around Cuba was not militarily decisive but cognitively decisive—it gave both sides a shared reference point for negotiation. Second, Kennedy's public commitment to the quarantine generated **audience costs** (Fearon, 1994): having staked his credibility before Congress, the media, and the international community, Kennedy could not easily back down without suffering domestic political damage. This increased the credibility of his threat. Third, the crisis involved **costly signals**: the deployment of US forces, the alert of Strategic Air Command, and the naval mobilization were expensive, visible, and difficult to fake—precisely the properties that make signals credible under Schelling's framework.

The resolution mechanism was equally instructive. Khrushchev's withdrawal of the missiles was not compelled by brute force but by a coercive bargain: the US publicly pledged not to invade Cuba, and privately (through Robert Kennedy's back-channel communication to Dobrynin) agreed to withdraw the Jupiter missiles from Turkey. This secret concession was critical because it allowed Khrushchev to claim a victory to his domestic audience while actually conceding the central issue. The mechanism was thus not pure compellence but a negotiated settlement in which both sides could claim success—a "win-win" outcome that Schelling would recognize as the product of bargaining under the shadow of war.

Clausewitz's framework illuminates the friction and uncertainty that pervaded the crisis. The fog of war was literal: intelligence about the exact number and readiness of the missiles was incomplete, and the shooting down of a U-2 over Cuba on October 27 nearly triggered escalation that neither leader intended. The culminating point of attack—the point at which further military action would produce diminishing returns—was a constant concern for both sides. Kennedy's rejection of the air strike option reflected an intuitive grasp of the culminating point: an attack might destroy the missiles but would kill Soviet personnel, provoke retaliation, and potentially escalate to nuclear war. The trinity—passion, chance, and reason—was in full operation: public passion in the United States demanded action; chance manifested in the U-2 shootdown and the submarine incident; reason was embodied in the ExComm deliberations and the back-channel negotiations.

Sun Tzu's tradition offers a different lens. The crisis can be read as an attempt by both sides to achieve their objectives without fighting. Kennedy's blockade was a form of positional warfare: it sought to alter the strategic situation without direct combat. Khrushchev's withdrawal, similarly, was a strategic retreat that

preserved Soviet forces and avoided humiliation. The highest form of strategy, in Sun Tzu's terms, is to win without fighting—and both leaders, in different ways, sought to achieve this. Yet the crisis also reveals the limits of the Sun Tzu tradition: the missiles had already been deployed, and the situation required not merely positional advantage but explicit coercive bargaining. Winning without fighting is easier when the adversary has not yet committed; once committed, compellence becomes necessary.

Perspective Reconstruction African perspective (primary). The African vantage point on the Cuban Missile Crisis begins not with the superpower bargaining but with the question of whose security was at stake and who bore the costs. Cuba, a post-colonial state that had recently overthrown a US-backed dictatorship, was the terrain on which two great powers conducted their confrontation; Cuban sovereignty was subordinated to superpower interests. From an African perspective, this mirrors the experience of post-colonial states that became arenas for Cold War competition, their sovereignty compromised by external powers pursuing strategic objectives unrelated to local welfare. The crisis reveals how coercion in the international system often operates not through direct force but through the structural violence of great-power rivalry, which constrains the autonomy of weaker states. African strategic thought, drawing on Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism and Fanon's analysis of violence and liberation, would emphasize that the Cuban people were not merely pawns but actors whose revolutionary project was threatened by both superpowers. The African perspective also highlights the role of the Non-Aligned Movement and the broader decolonizing world in creating normative pressure for de-escalation; the crisis was not merely bilateral but embedded in a transnational order in which newly independent states demanded a voice. Furthermore, the African vantage point draws attention to the informal and non-state dimensions of security: the Cuban revolution's survival depended not only on Soviet missiles but on the mobilization of popular support, the construction of hybrid security orders, and the legitimacy of the revolutionary project. The crisis thus illustrates a broader pattern in which formal military power is necessary but insufficient for security, and in which the most durable forms of coercion are those that operate through legitimacy and popular mobilization rather than through the threat of force alone. The African perspective's strongest contribution is its insistence that coercion cannot be understood solely as an interstate phenomenon; it must be situated within the broader structures of global inequality, colonial legacies, and the struggle for self-determination.

Chinese perspective. The Chinese vantage point, rooted in Sun Tzu's relational-strategic tradition, would emphasize the importance of positional advantage and the avoidance of direct confrontation. China's own experience of the crisis—occurring during the Sino-Soviet split—was shaped by a strategic culture that valued patience, indirection, and the accumulation of advantage without provoking decisive conflict. The Chinese perspective would note that both Kennedy and Khrushchev sought to avoid war while achieving their objectives, consistent with the Sun Tzu ideal of winning without fighting. However, the Chinese tradition would also critique the crisis as an example of the dangers of brinkmanship: both sides pushed to the edge of nuclear war, a strategy that Sun Tzu would have considered reckless because it risked losing everything. China's no-first-use nuclear policy and active defense doctrine reflect a strategic culture that prioritizes avoiding the initiation of conflict while maintaining the capability to respond. The Chinese perspective would also highlight the relational dimension: the crisis was not merely about missiles but about the relationship between the superpowers, and its resolution required the restoration of a stable relational equilibrium. The strongest Chinese contribution is the emphasis on positional and relational factors over explicit bargaining; the strongest limitation is the underweighting of the role of credible threats and demonstrated resolve in compelling adversary concessions.

Russian perspective. The Russian vantage point, drawing on the tradition of escalation management and the

correlation of forces, would emphasize the strategic logic of Khrushchev's deployment and withdrawal. The deployment of missiles in Cuba was an attempt to alter the correlation of forces in the Western Hemisphere, compensating for US advantages in Turkey and Italy. The withdrawal, in this view, was not a capitulation but a managed de-escalation that preserved Soviet credibility and achieved the removal of US missiles from Turkey. The Russian perspective would highlight the importance of escalation control: Khrushchev's decision to withdraw was shaped by his assessment that further escalation would risk nuclear war, a calculation consistent with the Russian emphasis on managing the correlation of forces to avoid uncontrolled conflict. The Russian tradition would also note the role of ambiguity and signaling: the secret concession on Turkey allowed both sides to claim success, preserving the stability of the broader strategic relationship. The strongest Russian contribution is the emphasis on escalation management and the correlation of forces; the strongest limitation is the risk that this framework normalizes coercion as a routine instrument and underestimates the destabilizing effects of ambiguous thresholds.

Western perspective. The Western vantage point, rooted in Schelling's bargaining framework, provides the most analytically developed account of the crisis. The quarantine was a coercive instrument designed not to destroy the missiles but to create bargaining leverage; the secret concession on Turkey was a focal point that allowed mutual concession; the audience costs generated by Kennedy's public commitment increased the credibility of US threats. The Western perspective would emphasize that the crisis was resolved not by force but by bargaining under the shadow of war—a paradigmatic example of Schelling's central thesis. Fearon's audience costs theory explains why Kennedy's public commitment was credible: having staked his reputation, he could not easily back down. The Western framework also highlights the distinction between deterrence and compellence: the US was not merely deterring future Soviet action but compelling the removal of weapons already deployed, a more difficult task that required not just capability but credibility and bargaining skill. The strongest Western contribution is the analytical precision of the coercion-versus-brute-force distinction; the strongest limitation is the tendency to overstate the rationality of decision-makers and to underweight cultural, historical, and relational factors.

UN perspective. The UN vantage point emphasizes the role of international law, collective security, and multilateral mediation in the crisis. Secretary-General U Thant's intervention provided a face-saving mechanism for both sides, illustrating the UN's function as a forum for de-escalation. The UN perspective would also highlight the legal dimensions: the quarantine was legally questionable under international law, and the crisis underscored the tension between unilateral state action and the Charter's prohibition on the use of force. The UN framework would emphasize that the crisis was resolved not merely through bilateral bargaining but through the legitimizing function of international institutions and norms. The strongest UN contribution is the emphasis on legitimacy and multilateralism; the strongest limitation is the dependence on great-power political will and the inability to enforce compliance against determined adversaries.

Explicit Adjudication The Western (Schelling-derived) perspective provides the most analytically powerful explanation of the Cuban Missile Crisis, but it is not sufficient on its own. Schelling's framework of coercion versus brute force, focal points, and bargaining under the shadow of war captures the central mechanism of the crisis with precision: the quarantine was a coercive instrument, the secret Turkey concession was a focal point, and the resolution was a negotiated settlement rather than a military victory. Fearon's audience costs theory explains the credibility of Kennedy's commitment. These analytical tools are indispensable for understanding how the crisis was resolved.

However, the Western perspective's strength is also its limitation. By treating the crisis as a rational bargaining game, it underweights the role of individual psychology, domestic politics, and the near-miss accidents

that nearly derailed the process. The U-2 shootdown and the submarine incident were not part of any rational bargaining model; they were products of friction and chance that Clausewitz's trinity captures better than Schelling's framework. The Western perspective also underweights the transnational and post-colonial dimensions that the African perspective foregrounds: Cuba's sovereignty was subordinated to superpower interests, and the crisis was embedded in a global order of inequality that the bargaining framework takes as given.

The African perspective's contribution is essential but partial. It correctly identifies the structural violence and subordination of weaker states in the international system, and it foregrounds the role of legitimacy and popular mobilization. But it under-specifies the mechanics of nuclear crisis bargaining and the role of credible threats in compelling adversary concessions. The Chinese perspective's emphasis on winning without fighting and positional advantage illuminates aspects of both sides' strategies but underweights the explicit coercive bargaining that was necessary once missiles were deployed. The Russian perspective's escalation management framework captures Khrushchev's calculus but risks normalizing coercion and underestimating its destabilizing effects. The UN perspective's emphasis on legitimacy and multilateralism identifies an important but secondary factor: U Thant's mediation provided a face-saving mechanism, but the core bargaining was bilateral.

The most complete explanation combines the Western framework's analytical precision with the African perspective's structural critique, the Clausewitzian attention to friction and chance, and the Chinese emphasis on positional advantage. The crisis was resolved through coercive bargaining, but the bargaining occurred within a structure of global inequality, was shaped by individual psychology and domestic politics, and was nearly derailed by accidents that no rational model could predict. No single perspective captures all of these dimensions; the adjudication favors the Western framework as the primary explanatory lens while insisting that its limitations are substantial and that the other perspectives identify real phenomena that the Western framework occludes.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. **Sequence and classify.** Reconstruct the chronological sequence of coercive moves in the 1990–91 Gulf crisis from August 1990 through January 1991. For each move, classify it as deterrence, compellence, or brute force using Schelling's framework, and justify your classification in one sentence.

2. **Compellence vs. deterrence.** Explain why Operation Desert Shield—the US-led military buildup in Saudi Arabia—was a compellent rather than a deterrent threat. Identify the specific action Iraq was being compelled to take, and explain why the distinction matters analytically.

3. **Audience costs.** Apply Fearon's audience-cost logic to Saddam Hussein's position. What domestic and regional political constraints made withdrawal from Kuwait costly for him? How did these constraints affect the probability of Iraqi compliance with the coalition's demands?

4. **The ultimatum.** Evaluate UN Security Council Resolution 678, which set a January 15, 1991 deadline for Iraqi withdrawal. Did this fixed deadline strengthen or weaken compellence? Use Schelling's concepts of commitment, focal points, and the bargaining model of war.

5. **The final negotiation.** Assess the Baker–Aziz meeting in Geneva on January 9, 1991. What signals were exchanged? Why did the meeting fail to produce Iraqi withdrawal? What does this tell us about the conditions under which coercive bargaining succeeds?

6. **Synthesis.** Why did compellence fail in this case? Distinguish between (a) the target's refusal to comply and (b) the coercer's decision to shift from coercion to brute force. What does this case reveal about the structural limits of compellence as a strategy?

MODEL ANSWER

The 1990–91 Gulf crisis is the canonical modern case of compellence failure, and its analysis requires careful application of Schelling's distinction between coercion and brute force, Fearon's audience-cost theory, and the bargaining model of war. On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. The international response unfolded in stages: UN Security Council Resolution 660 condemned the invasion on the same day; Resolution 661 imposed comprehensive economic sanctions on August 6; and the United States deployed forces to Saudi Arabia under Operation Desert Shield beginning August 7. Each of these moves was compellent in character. Under Schelling's framework, deterrence requires the target to refrain from an action it has not yet taken, whereas compellence requires the target to take a visible, costly action—in this case, withdrawing from Kuwait and reversing the annexation. The coalition was not merely trying to prevent further Iraqi aggression; it was trying to force Iraq to undo an action already accomplished.

The military buildup was designed to make continued occupation of Kuwait increasingly costly. Yet compellence failed for several interconnected reasons that illuminate the structural difficulties of the strategy. First, Saddam Hussein faced severe audience costs. Having annexed Kuwait as Iraq's "nineteenth province" and framed the invasion in terms of historical territorial claims and pan-Arab leadership, withdrawal would have constituted a humiliating public reversal. Fearon's audience-cost theory predicts that leaders who make public commitments find it politically costly to back down; the domestic and regional price of retreat can exceed the external costs of non-compliance. Saddam had staked his prestige and legitimacy on the annexation, making compliance with the coalition's demands politically expensive in ways that external threats could not easily offset. This is a core asymmetry: the coercer threatens future costs, while the target faces immediate, certain costs to its domestic standing if it complies.

Second, the fixed deadline in Resolution 678—January 15, 1991—created a focal point but also removed flexibility. Schelling's bargaining model suggests that deadlines can strengthen commitment by making threats credible and concentrating expectations, but they can also paint the target into a corner where backing down becomes equivalent to capitulation. Saddam may have calculated that the coalition's own deadline created pressure on the United States to negotiate rather than fight, especially given American casualty aversion and the approaching end of the congressional authorization window. The deadline thus functioned as a double-edged instrument: it signaled resolve but also reduced the space for face-saving compromise.

Third, the Baker–Aziz meeting in Geneva on January 9, 1991, represented a final coercive bargaining session. Baker presented an ultimatum demanding unconditional withdrawal; Aziz refused to commit and instead linked withdrawal to the Palestinian question and other regional issues. The meeting failed because Iraq's minimum acceptable terms were incompatible with the coalition's demand for unconditional reversal. This illustrates a central Schelling insight: coercion succeeds when there exists a mutually acceptable outcome that both sides prefer to war; when no such zone of agreement exists—when the target's reservation price exceeds the coercer's willingness to concede—coercion collapses into brute force. The linkage strategy,

whether sincere or tactical, eliminated the possibility of a negotiated exit.

Fourth, Saddam's strategic calculus included a misperception of American resolve. He appears to have discounted the credibility of the threat to use force, drawing on perceptions of American casualty sensitivity derived from the Vietnam experience. This signaling failure—where the target misreads the coercer's willingness to bear costs—meant that the compellent threat lacked the credibility necessary to induce compliance. Schelling emphasizes that threats must be credible to be effective; credibility depends on the target's belief that the coercer will carry out the threatened action, and Saddam's beliefs about American resolve were systematically wrong.

The case ultimately demonstrates that compellence is structurally harder than deterrence. Deterrence allows the target to save face by doing nothing; compellence demands visible capitulation. When the target's audience costs exceed the external costs of non-compliance, when no face-saving exit is available, and when the target misperceives the coercer's resolve, coercion fails. The coalition then faced a choice: accept the status quo or resort to brute force. It chose the latter, launching Operation Desert Storm on January 17, 1991. The lesson is not that compellence never works, but that its success depends on the target's cost-benefit calculus, the availability of face-saving exits, and the credibility of the threat—conditions that were absent in this case. The Gulf War thus stands as a reminder that military superiority alone does not guarantee coercive success; the political psychology of the target and the bargaining structure of the crisis matter as much as the balance of forces.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In August 2022, a major power conducted large-scale military exercises around a contested island territory following a high-profile visit by a foreign legislative leader. The exercises included missile tests over the island's airspace and a temporary blockade of key ports. The visiting power's government condemned the actions but did not alter its policy or recall its ambassador. The exercising power maintained the blockade for 72 hours before withdrawing, claiming the exercises had "successfully tested combat readiness." The contested territory's government reported no change in its security posture or diplomatic alignment. Regional allies issued statements of concern but took no military action. Domestic audiences in the exercising power celebrated the display of resolve, while opposition parties criticized the cost and risk. The episode generated extensive debate about whether the blockade constituted compellence, deterrence, or signaling, and whether the exercising power achieved any of its stated strategic objectives.

(b) Required memo headings (respond to each as a prompt):

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism at work. Is this a case of compellence, deterrence, signaling, or some combination? What specific action was the exercising power trying to induce or prevent? What was the target's cost-benefit calculus? Specify the mechanism, not just the outcome.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—would interpret this episode. What does each perspective contribute, and what does each occlude? Which perspective best explains the outcome, and on what evidence?
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one historical case that illuminates this episode. Does the analogue support or challenge the mechanism you identified? What are the limits of the comparison?

- **Falsifiers:** What evidence would disconfirm your mechanism? Specify at least two observable implications that, if absent, would weaken your explanation. Distinguish between evidence that would falsify the mechanism and evidence that would merely complicate it.

(c) Self-check: Before finalizing your memo, verify that you have clearly distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what would happen under changed conditions), and prescription (what should be done). If any of these four is missing or conflated with another, revise.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Schelling's central contribution to strategic thought, as developed in *Arms and Influence* (1966), is the distinction between:

A) Offensive and defensive weapons systems, and their differential effects on crisis stability.

B) Coercion and brute force, with coercion further divided into deterrence and compellence.

C) Nuclear and conventional warfare, and the unique escalatory dynamics of each.

D) State and non-state actors in conflict, and the challenges of coercing non-state groups.

Correct answer: B

Distractor diagnoses:

- **A — Offense-defense theory:** This confuses Schelling with later theorists such as Jervis (1978) and Glaser (1997), who developed offense-defense theory to explain how the technical characteristics of weapons affect crisis stability and arms racing. Schelling's framework is about the logic of threats and bargaining, not the technical properties of weapons systems. A student selecting A has conflated two distinct theoretical traditions within security studies.
- **C — Nuclear vs. conventional warfare:** While Schelling wrote extensively about nuclear strategy and his work profoundly influenced nuclear deterrence theory, his foundational contribution in *Arms and Influence* is not the nuclear-conventional distinction. Nuclear strategy is an application domain for his coercion framework, not the framework itself. A student selecting C has mistaken an important application for the core theoretical contribution.
- **D — State vs. non-state actors:** This is anachronistic. Schelling's framework was developed in the context of interstate coercion during the Cold War and does not address non-state actors as a distinct category. While his concepts have since been applied to non-state coercion, this was not his contribution. A student selecting D has projected contemporary concerns onto a mid-twentieth-century theoretical framework.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Global and Regional Military Expenditure, Selected Years (SIPRI, approximate, constant 2022 USD, billions)

Year	World total	United States	China	Russia / USSR	NATO Europe	Africa (all states)	World avg. % of GDP
1950	~180	~140	~5	~40	~25	~1	~4.5
1960	~320	~200	~10	~60	~40	~2	~4.0
1970	~520	~280	~20	~120	~60	~4	~3.5
1980	~900	~350	~30	~220	~120	~8	~3.8
1989	~1,150	~450	~40	~280	~160	~12	~3.6
1995	~900	~380	~35	~30	~120	~10	~2.5
2005	~1,250	~600	~90	~40	~180	~18	~2.4
2015	~1,750	~680	~220	~70	~220	~40	~2.3
2023	~2,443	~916	~296	~109	~388	~52	~2.3

Notes: Figures are rounded approximations drawn from SIPRI Trends in World Military Expenditure series and are intended to show orders of magnitude and directional trends, not exact annual values. "Africa (all states)" aggregates North and sub-Saharan Africa. The 1989–1995 drop reflects the post-Cold War "peace dividend" and the collapse of Soviet military spending; the 2015–2023 rise reflects renewed great-power competition, the Ukraine war, and NATO rearmament.

Table 2 — Interstate War Frequency by Decade (Correlates of War, interstate war threshold: 1,000+ battle deaths; approximate counts)

Decade	Interstate wars begun	Major-power participants	Median war duration (months)	Wars ending in decisive military victory
1940s	6	4	48	4
1950s	7	3	12	3
1960s	9	2	8	4
1970s	6	2	10	3
1980s	5	2	14	2
1990s	4	2	3	3
2000s	3	2	8	2
2010s	3	2	24+	1
2020s (to date)	2	2	ongoing	0

Notes: Counts are approximate and depend on COW coding rules (interstate war requires 1,000+ battle deaths and state actors on both sides). The table excludes civil wars, which dominate post-1945 conflict counts. The apparent decline in frequency of large interstate wars after 1945 is one of the most debated empirical patterns in security studies; it is consistent with both nuclear-deterrence and normative-evolution explanations.

Table 3 — Selected Crisis-Bargaining Episodes and Coercive Outcomes (ICB / historical record, approximate)

Episode	Coercer	Target	Coercive demand	Outcome	Key mechanism emphasized
Berlin blockade, 1948–49	USSR	US/UK/France	Withdraw from West Berlin	Failure (airlift sustained)	Brute-force denial failed; no compellence
Korean War armistice, 1953	US (UN)	PRC/DPRK	Accept armistice line	Success (stalemate)	Attrition + threat of escalation
Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962	US	USSR	Remove missiles from Cuba	Success	Compellence via naval quarantine + private concession (Turkey missiles)
1961 Berlin crisis	USSR	US	Recognize GDR sovereignty	Failure	US resolve signaled; no focal point for concession
1973 Yom Kippur (US alert)	US	USSR	Restrain intervention	Success	Costly signal (DEFCON 3)
Gulf War coercive diplomacy, 1990–91	US-led coalition	Iraq	Withdraw from Kuwait	Failure of compellence; success of deterrence (Saudi Arabia)	Compellence demands exceeded target's reservation price
1995–96 Taiwan Strait	PRC	US/Taiwan	Deter independence moves	Partial success	Costly signaling; ambiguity
2014 Crimea	Russia	Ukraine/West	Accept annexation	Success (de facto)	Faits accomplis; limited compellence resistance
2022 Ukraine (initial)	Russia	Ukraine/West	Regime change / neutrality	Failure of compellence	Underestimated target resolve; overestimated own capability

Analysis Questions

1. Trend. Table 1 shows world military expenditure rising from roughly $180 billion in 1950 to roughly $2,443 billion in 2023 (constant 2022 USD), yet Table 2 shows the frequency of large interstate wars declining over the same period. How can both trends be true simultaneously, and what does this imply about the relationship between military spending and the incidence of interstate war? Distinguish at least two mechanisms (one realist, one institutional/normative) and identify which data pattern each mechanism predicts.

2. Level of analysis. Using the four levels of analysis from Lesson 1 (individual, state, systemic, transnational), identify which level each of the three tables primarily illuminates and which level each most obscures. For example, Table 1's aggregate spending figures obscure individual decision-making and transnational arms-industry dynamics; Table 2's war counts obscure the bargaining processes that precede them. State one specific analytical gain and one specific analytical loss for each table.

3. Perspective reconstruction (all five). Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives would read the combined data pattern (rising spending, falling large-war frequency, persistent crisis bargaining). - *African*: What does the spending data reveal about the militarization of post-colonial states and the externalization of security costs to African populations? What do the war-frequency data obscure about African conflict (civil wars, proxy wars, non-state coercion)? - *Chinese*: How does the data support a narrative of "peaceful rise" under active defense, and what does it obscure about gray-zone coercion? - *Russian*: How does the correlation-of-forces framing read the spending gap with NATO, and how does it read the war-frequency decline? - *Western*: How does the Schelling-derived bargaining reading interpret the crisis table, and what does it assume about rationality? - *UN*: How does the Charter collective-security framing read the same data, and what does it occlude about enforcement gaps?

4. Interpretation. Table 3 shows that compellence (demanding a change in the status quo) succeeds less often than deterrence (preserving the status quo), and that faits accomplis (Crimea 2014) succeed more often than explicit demands (Gulf 1990–91). Using Schelling's distinction between brute force and coercion, and Fearon's audience-costs mechanism, explain why compellence is structurally harder than deterrence and why faits accomplis may bypass the bargaining problem. State one falsifying observation that would weaken your interpretation.

5. Limitation. Identify the most important limitation of each table for testing the five key ideas of this lesson (Clausewitzian friction, Sun Tzu's winning without fighting, Schelling's focal points, Fearon's audience costs, strategic culture). Which key idea is least testable with these data, and why? Propose one additional data source or method that would partially remedy the gap.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — Clausewitz's Trinity and the Culminating Point

What to draw. A large equilateral triangle. At each vertex, place a labeled circle: top vertex "PASSION / PEOPLE" (with sub-label "hatred, enmity, primordial violence"); bottom-left vertex "CHANCE / MILITARY" (sub-label "friction, genius, fog of war"); bottom-right vertex "REASON / GOVERNMENT" (sub-label "political purpose, policy"). Inside the triangle, draw a horizontal line roughly one-third from the bottom labeled "CULMINATING POINT OF VICTORY" with an arrow pointing left-to-right labeled "advance / attack" and a return arrow labeled "retreat / exhaustion." Below the line, shade the region and label

it "zone of diminishing returns / friction accumulates." Above the line, label "zone of political decision."

How to label it. Use bold caps for the three vertices. Use a dashed line for the culminating point. Annotate the left edge with "Clausewitz, On War, Book I, Ch. 1" and the right edge with "trinity = people + army + government."

Perspective overlay. In the bottom-left corner, draw a small inset box labeled "African critique (Grovogui, Mbembe)": "the trinity assumes a Weberian state; where the state is hybrid or absent, 'politics' is not government policy but social/communal negotiation." In the top-right corner, a small box labeled "Chinese reading (Sun Tzu lineage)": "the culminating point is reached earlier when the enemy's alliances are intact; attack the strategy, not the army."

Visual 2 — Schelling's Coercion Spectrum and Focal Points

What to draw. A horizontal axis running left to right, labeled "degree of violence applied." At the far left, a vertical bar labeled "PURE COERCION (no violence): threats, promises, focal points." In the middle, a shaded band labeled "COERCIVE VIOLENCE: limited force to demonstrate resolve (quarantine, bombing pauses, DEFCON alerts)." At the far right, a solid block labeled "BRUTE FORCE: destroying enemy capability to compel surrender." Above the axis, draw two overlapping bell curves: the left curve labeled "DETERRENCE (status quo preserved)" peaking in the pure-coercion zone; the right curve labeled "COMPELLENCE (status quo changed)" peaking in the coercive-violence zone. Below the axis, draw three "focal point" markers (stars) labeled "13-day deadline," "line of contact," and "UN Security Council resolution," with arrows pointing up to the axis.

How to label it. Title: "Schelling: Coercion vs. Brute Force (Arms and Influence, 1966)." Label the gap between the two curves "compellence is harder: requires target to act, not merely refrain." Label the stars "focal points reduce bargaining indeterminacy."

Perspective overlay. Annotate the pure-coercion zone with a Russian flag-colored note: "Russian reading: coercion without violence is preferred; escalation management keeps force below the nuclear threshold." Annotate the brute-force zone with a Western note: "Western reading: compellence often slides into brute force (Gulf 1991)." Annotate the focal points with a UN note: "UN reading: resolutions can create focal points but lack enforcement."

Visual 3 — Strategic Culture Map (Five Perspectives on Coercion)

What to draw. A five-column table drawn as a hand-sketched grid. Columns: "African," "Chinese," "Russian," "Western," "UN." Rows (top to bottom): "Core concept of coercion," "Preferred instrument," "View of Clausewitz," "View of Sun Tzu," "Blind spot." Fill each cell with a short phrase (3-6 words). In the African column, shade the entire column slightly darker to mark it as primary. Draw a large arrow from the African column to a marginal note: "reveals what the others occlude: coercion is often non-state, hybrid, and social."

How to label it. Title: "Strategic Culture and Coercion: Five Perspectives." Subtitle: "Lesson 20, Section 2.7." Label the shaded column "PRIMARY."

Perspective overlay. This visual IS the perspective overlay; no separate inset needed. Add a footer note: "Each column is a hypothesis about how actors think about force, not a description of what they do."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is Clausewitz's trinity?	People (passion), army (chance/friction), government (reason/policy). War is continuation of politics by other means. Source: Clausewitz, *On War* (1832), Book I, Ch. 1; Book VIII.
What is friction?	The gap between war on paper and war in reality; cumulative small obstacles. Culminating point = moment when attack should stop. Source: Clausewitz, *On War*, Book I, Ch. 7; Book VII.
What is Sun Tzu's core claim?	Win without fighting; attack the enemy's strategy, then alliances, then army, then cities. Avoid prolonged war. Source: Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, Ch. 3.
How does Sun Tzu critique attrition?	Attrition exhausts the state; "there is no instance of a country having benefited from prolonged warfare." Source: Sun Tzu, *Art of War*, Ch. 2.
What is Schelling's coercion vs. brute force?	Brute force destroys capability; coercion manipulates the enemy's cost-benefit calculus via threats/promises. Source: Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (1966), Ch. 1.
Deterrence vs. compellence?	Deterrence: persuade enemy not to act (status quo). Compellence: persuade enemy to act/undo (change status quo). Compellence harder. Source: Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (1966), Ch. 2.
What are focal points?	Schelling points: salient solutions that reduce bargaining indeterminacy without communication. Source: Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (1960), Ch. 3.
What are audience costs?	Domestic political costs of backing down after a public threat; makes threats credible. Source: Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *APSR* (1994).
What is costly signaling?	Signals that are expensive to fake; separate types from cheap talk. Source: Fearon (1994); Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (1970).
What is strategic culture?	Shared beliefs about the role of force; shapes how states coerce. Source: Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture* (1977); Johnston, "Thinking about Strategic Culture" (1995).

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
How do the five perspectives differ on coercion?	African: hybrid/non-state coercion; Chinese: relational, active defense; Russian: escalation management, correlation of forces; Western: bargaining; UN: Charter prohibition. Source: Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani (African); Johnston (1995) (Chinese); Snyder (1977) (Russian).
What is the African critique of Clausewitz?	Clausewitz presupposes a Weberian state; post-colonial states are hybrid; coercion is social and non-state. Source: Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996); Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (2001).

Summary (3–5 sentences). Strategic thought about coercion runs from Clausewitz's trinity and friction, through Sun Tzu's relational preference for winning without fighting, to Schelling's bargaining model that distinguishes brute force from coercion and deterrence from compellence. Fearon's audience-costs mechanism explains why public threats can be credible, while strategic-culture scholarship shows that Chinese, Russian, African, Western, and UN traditions read coercion through different premises. The African vantage point is primary here: it reveals that coercion is often non-state, hybrid, and social, a reality that state-centric theories occlude. Data on spending and war frequency show rising militarization alongside fewer large interstate wars, a pattern that only makes sense once coercion is understood as bargaining rather than battle. The lesson's central puzzle is why states spend more to fight less, and why compellence so often fails where deterrence succeeds.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Imagine two people arguing over a parking spot. One could smash the other's car (brute force) or threaten to call the police, flash a badge, or block the exit (coercion). Coercion works by changing what the other person thinks will happen, not by destroying their car. Deterrence is "don't take my spot"; compellence is "give me your spot." It is much easier to make someone not do something than to make them undo something they have already done. Clausewitz said war is just politics continued by other means, with three parts: the people's anger, the army's chance, and the government's reason. Sun Tzu said the best victory is winning without fighting. Schelling said threats and promises are weapons too. Fearon said that if a leader makes a public threat, backing down costs them politically at home, which makes the threat believable. Different cultures think about all of this differently: African scholars note that in many places the "state" is not the only actor using force, so theories built on states miss most of the coercion that actually happens.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. (a) I have not explained *why* focal points solve bargaining indeterminacy; the parking-spot analogy has no natural focal point. (b) I have not specified the scope conditions under which audience costs operate (democracies vs. autocracies). (c) I have not distinguished compellence's higher failure rate from its higher cost when it succeeds. (d) I have not addressed the African critique's implication for Clause-

witz's "culminating point," which assumes a single political authority. (e) I have not explained how Sun Tzu's "winning without fighting" maps onto Schelling's pure-coercion zone.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading Clausewitz, Book I, Ch. 1 confirms that the trinity is people/army/government and that war serves policy; the analogy's "government's reason" is accurate but omits the "fog of war" and "friction" that make execution uncertain. Re-reading Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, Ch. 1 confirms that coercion manipulates costs and benefits while brute force destroys capability; the analogy captures this. Re-reading Fearon (1994) confirms that audience costs require a domestic audience that can punish the leader; the analogy's "politically at home" is accurate but underspecified. The African critique (Grovogui, Mbembe) is accurately summarized as state-centrism's blind spot.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. The parking-spot analogy illuminates the brute-force/coercion distinction and the deterrence/compellence asymmetry, but it breaks down in four ways: (i) it has no focal points or salience, which Schelling shows are central to real crises; (ii) it has no domestic audience, so it cannot model audience costs; (iii) it treats both parties as unitary actors, occluding the African insight that coercion is often intra-communal and non-state; (iv) it has no escalation ladder or nuclear threshold, which the Russian and Chinese perspectives emphasize. The analogy is a starting scaffold, not a model.

Step 5 — Rewrite. Strategic coercion is the manipulation of an adversary's cost-benefit calculus through threats, promises, and limited violence, as distinct from brute force, which destroys capability. Clausewitz frames war as politics continued by other means, structured by a trinity of people, army, and government, and subject to friction and a culminating point beyond which advance becomes self-defeating. Sun Tzu inverts the Clausewitzian emphasis on battle, arguing that the highest form of victory is winning without fighting, by attacking strategy and alliances rather than armies. Schelling formalizes this into a bargaining model: deterrence preserves the status quo by threatening costs for action, while compellence demands a change in the status quo and is structurally harder because it requires the target to act rather than refrain. Fearon shows that public threats generate audience costs that make them credible, but only where domestic audiences can punish retreat. Strategic culture—Chinese relationalism, Russian escalation management, Western bargaining theory, UN legalism, and the African critique of state-centrism—determines which instruments actors prefer and which blind spots they carry. The African perspective is primary: it reveals that coercion is frequently non-state, hybrid, and social, a reality that state-centric theories of war systematically occlude, and that the "politics" in Clausewitz's formula is often not government policy at all.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L20-01	Definition	Define Clausewitz's claim that war is a continuation of politics by other means.	War is an instrument of policy rather than an autonomous realm; military force serves political ends even when violence escalates. The claim is conditional because friction, passion, and chance can weaken political control. It is most directly a Western state-centric formulation.	African critiques stress that colonial and post-colonial violence often suspended reciprocal politics and operated through racialized domination.
L20-02	Mechanism	What are the three elements of Clausewitz's trinity?	The trinity comprises the people and passion, the commander and chance, and the government and reason. War's dynamics emerge from their interaction, so no single element fully controls outcomes. The model assumes a coherent state with identifiable political authority.	African hybrid security orders add fragmented authority, militias, and patronage networks that the trinity does not capture.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L20-03	Mechanism	What is friction in Clausewitzian theory?	Friction is the resistance between planned war and actual war, produced by uncertainty, chance, physical difficulty, and psychological strain. It explains why even sound plans fail and why outcomes remain probabilistic. It applies broadly but intensifies where command structures are fragmented.	In African hybrid orders, friction is amplified by informal authority and multiple coercive actors.
L20-04	Mechanism	What is the culminating point of the attack?	The culminating point is where an offensive's power peaks and further advance risks exhaustion, overextension, or counterattack. The mechanism is the conversion of territorial gain into logistical and moral vulnerability. It warns that compellence may require stopping before maximal force.	Russian escalation-management thinking similarly stresses recognizing limits before overreach.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L20-05	Definition	What does Sun Tzu mean by winning without fighting?	Victory is achieved by shaping the enemy's calculations, alliances, and perceptions so that combat is unnecessary or already decided. The mechanism is indirect advantage through deception, positioning, and psychological disruption. It assumes a cost-sensitive adversary capable of recognizing disadvantage.	Chinese strategic culture treats relational advantage and patience as central to coercion.
L20-06	Comparison	How does Sun Tzu critique attrition?	Attrition wastes resources, cedes initiative, and turns war into a contest of endurance rather than judgment. Sun Tzu prefers disrupting strategy, alliances, and command before decisive battle. The critique assumes rational cost-benefit calculation by the adversary.	Western Clausewitzian traditions more readily accept decisive battle and material exhaustion.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L20-07	Definition	Distinguish coercion from brute force in Schelling's framework.	Brute force destroys or occupies; coercion manipulates the adversary's choices by threatening future costs or offering benefits. The mechanism is bargaining over pain rather than annihilation. It requires credible communication, restraint, and a rational adversary.	African hybrid actors may not share the signaling conventions assumed by Western bargaining models.
L20-08	Comparison	What is the difference between deterrence and compellence?	Deterrence prevents an action by threatening punishment; compellence demands a change in the status quo. Compellence is harder because it requires the adversary to act, retreat, or concede under pressure. The mechanism is status-quo bias and the political cost of visible concession.	The 1990-91 Gulf War shows compellence failing until military force reversed Iraqi occupation.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L20-09	Mechanism	What are focal points in Schelling's bargaining model?	Focal points are salient solutions that coordinate expectations without explicit agreement, such as the 38th parallel or Berlin. The mechanism is shared salience reducing uncertainty in crisis bargaining. Their power is culturally and historically contingent.	Chinese, Russian, and African actors may not assign the same salience to Western-default focal points.
L20-10	Mechanism	What are audience costs in Fearon's theory?	Audience costs are domestic political penalties leaders incur for making threats and then backing down. The mechanism is that public commitments make inconsistency costly, increasing credibility. The effect is strongest where domestic audiences can observe and punish leaders.	Fearon's mechanism is weaker or differently structured in autocracies and hybrid regimes.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L20-11	Mechanism	What makes a signal costly and therefore credible?	A costly signal is expensive or risky to fake, such as mobilization, sunk costs, or visible military preparation. The mechanism is that cost separates genuinely resolved actors from bluffers. Costly signals can still be misread if adversaries disagree about costs.	African hybrid coercion may rely on non-material signals such as patronage, reputation, or communal obligation.
L20-12	Application	How did the Cuban Missile Crisis illustrate coercive bargaining?	The crisis involved threats, naval quarantine, private channels, and face-saving withdrawal rather than pure brute force. The mechanism was mutual deterrence combined with limited compellence and focal-point management. It remains a paradigmatic but non-generalizable nuclear dyad case.	Russian escalation management and UN Charter crisis framing also shaped the bargaining space.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L20-13	Application	What does the 1990-91 Gulf War coercive diplomacy sequence show about compellence?	Sanctions and ultimatums did not compel Iraqi withdrawal; military force reversed the occupation. The mechanism is that compellence fails when the adversary's domestic and regional stakes exceed perceived costs and no credible off-ramp exists. It highlights the asymmetry between deterrence and compellence.	UN collective-security framing and regional Arab perspectives conditioned the legitimacy of coercion.
L20-14	Comparison	How do Chinese and Western traditions differ on coercion?	Chinese relational strategy emphasizes patience, indirect advantage, and active defense, while Western Schellingian bargaining emphasizes explicit threats, credibility, and focal points. The mechanism is different assumptions about time, rationality, and legitimacy. Actual state behavior usually hybridizes both.	Chinese no-first-use and active-defense doctrines illustrate a distinctive coercive vocabulary.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L20-15	Occlusion	What does the African perspective reveal that Clausewitz occludes?	Colonial and post-colonial violence often involves non-state actors, hybrid security orders, and coercion outside a state monopoly. The mechanism is coercion through patronage, militias, informal governance, and racialized hierarchy. Clausewitz's state-centric trinity misses these dynamics.	African scholarship reconstructs coercion from within rather than fitting African cases to Western theory.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score each 0-100)

Competency	Score (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Next action
Clausewitz: trinity, friction, culminating point		Can state and apply to a conventional campaign	Rehearse one historical example without notes
Sun Tzu: relational strategy and critique of attrition		Can contrast with Clausewitzian decisive battle	Write a 150-word adjudication
Schelling: coercion vs brute force		Can identify coercive threats in a crisis	Map threats, costs, and benefits in a case
Deterrence vs compellence		Can explain why compellence is harder	Apply to Gulf War coercive diplomacy
Focal points		Can name and justify a salient solution	Test whether salience travels across cultures
Audience costs (Fearon)		Can state scope conditions by regime type	Compare democratic and autocratic cases

Competency	Score (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Next action
Costly signaling		Can distinguish costly signals from cheap talk	Identify one misread signal in history
Strategic culture		Can compare Chinese, Russian, African, Western traditions	Avoid treating culture as deterministic
African hybrid coercion		Can explain non-state and patronage-based coercion	Reconstruct from African scholarship
Data interpretation: SIPRI, COW, crisis bargaining		Can separate trend, level, and perspective	State one limitation for each dataset

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which perspective did you initially treat as the default theory of coercion, and what did that default hide about African, Chinese, or Russian strategic thought?
2. Which mechanism can you state from memory but cannot yet apply to a case you have not studied?
3. Which falsifier would most directly overturn your current view of compellence, strategic culture, or audience costs?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"War is politics by other means" means war is always controllable by leaders.	Clausewitz emphasizes friction, passion, and chance; policy can be distorted or overwhelmed.	Clausewitz, *On War* (1832), Books 1 and 8.
Sun Tzu says one should never fight.	He prefers winning without fighting when possible but accepts battle when it is advantageous.	Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, especially Books 3 and 4.
Deterrence and compellence are symmetric.	Compellence is harder because it requires the adversary to change the status quo under pressure.	Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (1966).
Audience costs operate equally in all regimes.	Fearon's mechanism depends on domestic accountability and observability; autocracies and hybrid regimes differ.	Fearon (1994).
Strategic culture determines state behavior.	Strategic culture shapes preferences and interpretations but does not override material incentives and institutions.	Snyder (1977); Johnston (1995).

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Clausewitz's theory is universal.	Post-colonial critiques show that non-state, hybrid, and racialized coercion fall outside its state-centric assumptions.	African scholarship on hybrid security orders.
Coercion is always cheaper than brute force.	Failed coercion can escalate to war and damage credibility; costs include reputation and domestic politics.	1990-91 Gulf War coercive diplomacy sequence.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Clausewitzian trinity	Interaction of passion, chance, and reason	Clausewitz, *On War* (1832)	Napoleonic and conventional state wars	Universal vs historically bounded theory	Non-state wars with fragmented authority	L5, L22
Friction	Gap between planned and actual war	Clausewitz, *On War* (1832)	Failed offensives and logistical strain	Whether friction is reducible by technology	Wars with low uncertainty and perfect information	L22, L24
Culminating point	Offensive power peaks before overexten-sion	Clausewitz, *On War* (1832)	Stalled invasions and counter-attacks	Timing of stopping vs exploiting gains	Offensives that sustain momentum indefinitely	L22
Sun Tzu relational strategy	Shape enemy choices, alliances, perceptions	Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*	Ancient Chinese strategic thought	Indirect approach vs decisive battle	Adversaries immune to cost or perception	L23
Critique of attrition	Disrupt strategy before exhausting forces	Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*	Cost-asymmetric campaigns	Attrition as necessary in total war	Ideologically committed adversaries	L22, L23
Coercion vs brute force	Manipulate choices through threatened costs	Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (1966)	Cold War crises	Whether coercion is always preferable	No credible communica-tion or restraint	L21, L23

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Deterrence vs compellence	Prevent action vs demand status-quo change	Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (1966)	Cuban Missile Crisis; Gulf War	Symmetry vs asymmetry of coercion	Status-quo bias absent	L21, L22
Focal points	Shared salience coordinates expectations	Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (1966)	Berlin; 38th parallel	Cultural universality of salience	No shared salience across actors	L21
Audience costs	Domestic punishment for backing down	Fearon (1994)	Crisis threats and retreats	Regime-type scope conditions	No domestic accountability or observability	L21
Costly signals	Expensive-to-fake indicators of resolve	Schelling; Fearon (1994)	Mobilizations and sunk costs	Signal clarity vs misperception	Cheap talk accepted as credible	L21, L24
Strategic culture	Historically shaped coercion preferences	Snyder (1977); Johnston (1995)	Chinese active defense; Russian escalation management	Determinism vs influence	Identical cultures producing different behavior	L20, L21
African hybrid coercion	Non-state, patronage, and informal coercion	Post-colonial African scholarship	Militias, informal security orders	State-centric vs hybrid security	Strong state monopoly of force	L23
Russian escalation management	Controlled escalation and correlation of forces	Russian strategic thought	Cold War and post-Cold War crises	Stability vs controlled escalation	Uncontrolled escalation	L21, L25
UN Charter framing	Prohibition of force and collective security	UN Charter	Gulf War coalition	Legality vs efficacy of coercion	Unilateral coercion accepted as legitimate	L21, L22

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 — Same day, 20 minutes:** Redraw Clausewitz's trinity and Schelling's coercion/brute-force distinction from memory; self-test all definitions without notes.

- **R2 — Day 2, 30 minutes:** Apply Fearon's audience costs to the Cuban Missile Crisis; explicitly state the regime-type scope condition.
- **R3 — Day 4, 45 minutes:** Compare Sun Tzu and Clausewitz on attrition and decisive battle; write a 200-word adjudication with one falsifier.
- **R4 — Day 7, 60 minutes:** Reconstruct the African hybrid-coercion perspective and identify what Western bargaining models occlude.
- **R5 — Day 14, 90 minutes:** Complete the Gulf War compellence memo, integrate SIPRI/COW/data-lab limitations, and review all five perspectives.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define Clausewitz's trinity and explain its mechanism.
☐ I can explain friction and the culminating point with a historical example.
☐ I can state Sun Tzu's relational strategy and his critique of attrition.
☐ I can distinguish coercion from brute force in Schelling's framework.
☐ I can distinguish deterrence from compellence and explain the asymmetry.
☐ I can explain focal points and their cultural contingency.
☐ I can state Fearon's audience-cost mechanism and its scope conditions.
☐ I can distinguish costly signals from cheap talk.
☐ I can compare Chinese, Russian, African, and Western strategic cultures without treating any as deterministic.
☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective on hybrid coercion from within.
☐ I can apply the framework to the Cuban Missile Crisis.
☐ I can apply the framework to the 1990-91 Gulf War coercive diplomacy sequence.
☐ I can interpret SIPRI military expenditure and COW interstate war data with stated limitations.
☐ I can identify at least one falsifier for each key idea.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in a memo.
☐ I can complete the metacognitive confidence audit honestly.
☐ I can use the error-log to correct at least three misconceptions.
☐ I can explain what the African vantage point reveals that the other four perspectives miss.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Clausewitzian foundations - Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*. 1832. - Paret, Peter, ed. *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*. Princeton University Press, 1986.

Chinese strategic thought - Sun Tzu. *The Art of War*. - Johnston, Alastair Iain. "Thinking About Strategic Culture." *International Security* 19, no. 4 (1995): 32-64.

Coercion and bargaining - Schelling, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence*. Yale University Press, 1966. - Fearon, James D. "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes." *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (1994): 577-592.

Strategic culture - Snyder, Jack. "The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations." RAND, 1977.

African perspectives on coercion and hybrid security - Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, 1963. - Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture, 1972. - Nkrumah,

Kwame. *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. Thomas Nelson, 1965. - Mamdani, Mahmood. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press, 1996. - Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press, 2001. - Grovogui, Siba N. *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

End of Lesson 20. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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22. Nuclear Strategy and Proliferation

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 21: Nuclear Strategy and Proliferation
Module	Module 4: Security Studies and Warfare
Prerequisites	L20 (strategic thought), L12 (Cold War), L11 (interwar lessons)
Interleaved links	Forward to L45 (Iran nuclear), L55 (quantum + NC3), L47-48 (US-China, Indo-Pacific nuclear dynamics)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, dual-coded visuals, Cornell notes, flashcards, worked example, problem pair
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple and profoundly destabilizing: nuclear weapons have not been used in anger since August 1945, yet the world is not obviously safer for that fact, and the architecture built to keep them unused is visibly fraying. Eight decades of non-use is not the same as eight decades of stability. The number of nuclear-armed states grew from one to nine; the number of warheads peaked at roughly seventy thousand in the mid-1980s and remains above twelve thousand today; and the treaty system that once channeled rivalry into verifiable limits has lost its two most important pillars, with the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty abandoned in 2002 and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty collapsed in 2019. The question this lesson poses is not "why have nuclear weapons not been used?" but rather "under what conditions does nuclear deterrence hold, under what conditions does it fail, and whose security does the nonproliferation order actually serve?" The student who masters this lesson will be able to move between the level of the individual strategist, the state, the international system, and the transnational regime, and to recognize that each level tells a different story about the same warheads.

The historical arc matters because it establishes that nuclear order is not a natural equilibrium but a constructed and contested arrangement. The first decade after Hiroshima was dominated by American nuclear monopoly and then by the thermonuclear revolution, which made city-killing cheap and pushed strategists such as Bernard Brodie to argue that the bomb's purpose was not to be used but to deter use. The Cold War then produced the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, the logic of second-strike survivability articulated by Albert Wohlstetter, and the bargaining theory of Thomas Schelling, all of which assumed a bipolar world of rational actors with secure arsenals. That world ended in 1991, but the weapons did not. What followed was not disarmament but transformation: the NPT was extended indefinitely in 1995, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was negotiated in 1996 but never entered into force, and a series of regional crises—India and Pakistan in 1998, North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT in 2003, Iran's clandestine enrichment program exposed in 2002—demonstrated that the regime's center of gravity had shifted from superpower arms control to proliferation management. The lesson therefore sits at the intersection of three intellectual traditions: strategic studies, which asks how deterrence works; regime theory, which asks why states comply with nonproliferation; and critical international relations, which asks whose interests the regime encodes.

The theoretical stakes are high because the same evidence supports incompatible conclusions. Kenneth Waltz argued that nuclear proliferation is stabilizing because it extends deterrence to new dyads and raises the cost of war; Scott Sagan argued that it is destabilizing because organizations, not just states, control weapons, and because new nuclear states lack the institutional maturity of the Cold War superpowers. Glenn Snyder's stability-instability paradox suggests that nuclear weapons may prevent total war while making limited war more likely, a claim with uncomfortable implications for South Asia and the Korean peninsula. The extended deterrence literature asks whether the United States can credibly threaten nuclear retaliation on behalf of allies, and the answer depends on whether one believes in the "madman" logic of deliberate unpredictability or in the rational-actor logic of assured response. None of these debates is settled, and the lesson's methodological commitment is to present each with its scope conditions and strongest counterargument rather than to declare a winner.

The African perspective is not a regional footnote to this story; it is the vantage point that reveals the nuclear order's foundational asymmetry. Africa is the only continent to have renounced nuclear weapons collectively through the Pelindaba Treaty, which established the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone and entered into force in 2009. Yet African states are also among the most vocal critics of the NPT's "grand bargain," which promised disarmament in exchange for nonproliferation and has delivered the latter far more reliably than the former. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted in 2017 and in force since 2021, was driven in significant part by African and other Global South states, and it represents a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the nuclear-weapon states' claim to a permanent right to possess what they deny to others. From this vantage, the central puzzle is not how to stop proliferation but how to justify a discriminatory order in which nine states claim a security privilege denied to the rest of the world. This reframing exposes what the Western, Chinese, and Russian perspectives tend to occlude: that nonproliferation without disarmament is not a neutral technical project but a political hierarchy.

What the student will be able to do after mastering this lesson is substantial and specific. First, reconstruct the basic logic of nuclear deterrence—first strike, second strike, survivability, and the role of uncertainty—and identify the conditions under which it holds. Second, apply the stability-instability paradox to a concrete case and adjudicate whether nuclearization has stabilized or destabilized a given dyad. Third, analyze the NPT regime as a bargain with distributional consequences, and explain why some states acquire nuclear weapons while others renounce them. Fourth, dissect the mechanics of nuclear latency and snapback using

the JCPOA as a worked example. Fifth, evaluate how emerging technologies—hypersonic glide vehicles, artificial intelligence in nuclear command and control, and tactical nuclear weapons—challenge classical deterrence assumptions. Throughout, the student will practice distinguishing description from explanation, prediction from prescription, and will be required to specify falsifiers for every claim.

This lesson is also a methodological exercise in perspective reconstruction. The five perspectives developed here—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—are not caricatures to be dismissed but steel-manned positions that each illuminate a different dimension of the nuclear problem. The African perspective centers legitimacy and inequality; the Chinese perspective centers minimum deterrence and no-first-use; the Russian perspective centers escalation management and regional coercion; the Western perspective centers extended deterrence and nonproliferation enforcement; and the UN perspective centers institutional process and the disarmament machinery. The student's task is not to choose among them but to understand what each contributes and what each occludes, and to recognize that the "correct" answer to any nuclear question depends on which level of analysis and which normative framework one adopts. The worked example on Iran and the problem pair on India-Pakistan are designed to force exactly this kind of multi-perspective, multi-level adjudication.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer each question from memory before reading further. These draw on Lessons 11, 12, and 20.

1. **Strategic thought (L20):** What is the difference between deterrence by punishment and deterrence by denial, and which strategist is most closely associated with the bargaining logic of deterrence?
2. **Cold War (L12):** What was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, and why did it become the canonical case for studying crisis bargaining under nuclear shadow?
3. **Interwar lessons (L11):** What failure of the interwar international order is most often cited as a cautionary tale for contemporary nonproliferation diplomacy?
4. **Strategic thought (L20):** Define the security dilemma and explain how it differs from a commitment problem.
5. **Cold War (L12):** What was the ABM Treaty of 1972, why did the United States withdraw from it in 2002, and what precedent did that withdrawal set?
6. **Interwar lessons (L11):** How did the League of Nations' failure to enforce collective security in the 1930s shape later thinking about verification and enforcement in arms control?

1.2 Orientation Questions

These questions frame the lesson's central puzzle and should be revisited after completing the lesson.

1. Does nuclear proliferation make the international system more stable or more dangerous? Under what scope conditions does each answer hold?
2. Why did the JCPOA collapse, and what does its collapse teach about the mechanics of nuclear latency, snapback, and the limits of transactional diplomacy?
3. How do emerging technologies—hypersonic delivery systems, artificial intelligence in nuclear command and control, and low-yield tactical nuclear weapons—challenge the classical assumptions of

deterrence theory?

4. Whose security does the NPT serve, and how does the African perspective reframe the nonproliferation order as a question of legitimacy rather than merely of compliance?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Provisional definitions to be refined through the lesson.

- **Deterrence:** The use of threatened punishment or denial to prevent an adversary from taking an action. Deterrence by punishment threatens unacceptable costs; deterrence by denial makes the action infeasible. Associated with Schelling's bargaining theory.
- **Second-strike capability:** The ability to absorb a first strike and still retaliate with devastating force. The foundation of stable deterrence; associated with Wohlstetter's analysis of survivable basing.
- **Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD):** The condition in which both sides possess secure second-strike forces capable of destroying the other's society, making any nuclear exchange suicidal. A description of a strategic relationship, not a doctrine.
- **Extended deterrence:** The commitment by a nuclear-armed state to use nuclear weapons in defense of an ally. Credibility depends on the ally's confidence and the adversary's belief in the commitment.
- **Stability-instability paradox:** The proposition that nuclear weapons prevent total war (stability at the high end) while potentially encouraging limited conflict below the nuclear threshold (instability at the low end). Associated with Snyder.
- **Nuclear latency:** The condition in which a state possesses the technical capability and fissile material to build nuclear weapons quickly without having assembled them. Central to the Iran case.
- **Snapback:** The mechanism in the JCPOA by which UN sanctions could be reimposed automatically if Iran was found in non-compliance, without requiring a new Security Council vote.
- **Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT):** The 1968 treaty dividing states into nuclear-weapon states (recognized five) and non-nuclear-weapon states, with obligations of non-acquisition, peaceful use, and disarmament. The cornerstone of the nonproliferation regime.
- **IAEA safeguards:** The system of inspections and monitoring administered by the International Atomic Energy Agency to verify that nuclear material is not diverted to weapons use.
- **Escalate to de-escalate:** A debated Russian doctrine in which limited nuclear use is threatened to terminate a conventional conflict on favorable terms. Contested in both its existence and its interpretation.
- **NC3 (Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications):** The systems through which nuclear weapons are authorized, targeted, and employed. Increasingly vulnerable to cyber and AI-related risks.
- **Hypersonic glide vehicle:** A maneuverable warhead that travels at Mach 5 or faster, compressing decision time and challenging missile defense and early-warning systems.
- **Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW):** The 2017 treaty banning nuclear weapons, adopted by 122 states and in force since 2021. Rejected by all nuclear-armed states.
- **Pelindaba Treaty:** The 1996 treaty establishing the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, in force since 2009. Africa's collective renunciation of nuclear weapons.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

After mastering this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the causal logic of nuclear deterrence by distinguishing between first-strike advantage, second-strike capability, and mutual vulnerability, and explain why the shift from the former to the latter transformed strategic thought after 1945, drawing on Brodie's foundational argument that the bomb's primary utility lies in deterrence rather than warfighting (Bloom: analyze).
2. **Evaluate** competing theoretical accounts of why states acquire nuclear weapons—specifically the Waltzian security-dilemma logic versus Sagan's domestic-politics and organizational-process accounts—using historical cases of proliferation and non-proliferation to adjudicate between structural and unit-level explanations (Bloom: evaluate).
3. **Apply** the stability-instability paradox to concrete regional dyads (India-Pakistan, Israel-Iran, US-China) to predict when nuclearization will suppress versus escalate conventional conflict, specifying the scope conditions under which the paradox operates (Bloom: apply).
4. **Synthesize** the mechanics of the JCPOA—latency, breakout time, snapback sanctions, and IAEA verification—into a coherent account of how arms-control agreements attempt to manage proliferation risk without resolving underlying security dilemmas, and identify the failure modes that led to collapse (Bloom: synthesize).
5. **Critique** contemporary claims about the erosion of nuclear arms control (INF withdrawal, New START uncertainty, hypersonic and AI-enabled systems) from five distinct national and institutional perspectives, identifying what each perspective reveals and occludes about the future of strategic stability (Bloom: critique).

2.2 KEY IDEA 1: MAD, Second-Strike Stability, and the Basic Logic of Nuclear Deterrence

Bolded Causal Claim: Nuclear deterrence rests on the credible threat of unacceptable retaliation, and its stability depends on the invulnerability of second-strike forces rather than on the superiority of first-strike capabilities; when both sides possess secure second-strike forces, the incentive to strike first disappears, producing the condition known as mutual assured destruction (MAD).

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three linked steps. First, a state acquires nuclear weapons and delivery systems that can survive a disarming first strike—submarines, mobile missiles, hardened silos—thereby guaranteeing that retaliation will occur. Second, the adversary, recognizing that any attack will trigger devastating retaliation, refrains from initiating nuclear war. Third, this mutual recognition stabilizes the relationship because neither side can improve its position by striking first. Bernard Brodie (1946) articulated the foundational premise: the bomb's primary utility is not in winning wars but in deterring them. Albert Wohlstetter (1959) refined this by identifying the "delicate balance of terror"—the condition in which deterrence is stable only if second-strike forces are sufficiently protected against a surprise attack, and in which small changes in technology or posture can destabilize the balance. Thomas Schelling (1960) added the concept of commitment and the manipulation of risk: deterrence works not through certainty of retaliation but through the creation of a shared risk of catastrophe that neither side fully controls, as in the strategy of "brinkmanship." The mechanism is thus psychological as much as material: it requires that each side believe

the other will retaliate even when retaliation is irrational in a narrow cost-benefit sense, and it depends on communication, signaling, and the management of uncertainty.

Scope Conditions: The logic of MAD and second-strike stability holds only under specific conditions. Both sides must possess survivable second-strike forces; if one side can disarm the other in a first strike, the balance collapses into a first-strike advantage. Both sides must be rational in the sense of preferring survival to victory; if a leader is willing to risk annihilation, deterrence fails. Both sides must have accurate information about each other's capabilities and intentions; misperception or secrecy can produce arms races or preemptive strikes. The mechanism also assumes that nuclear weapons are not used in limited, tactical ways that blur the line between conventional and nuclear war; once tactical use becomes thinkable, the firewall between peace and catastrophe weakens. Finally, the logic presumes a bipolar or at least manageable multipolar structure; with many nuclear powers, the complexity of mutual deterrence multiplies and the risk of accidental or unauthorized use rises.

Observable Implications: If the theory holds, we should observe several patterns. States with secure second-strike forces should engage in fewer nuclear crises and should avoid first strikes even under extreme provocation. Arms-control agreements should focus on protecting second-strike forces and limiting first-strike capabilities—hence the emphasis on MIRV bans, mobile-missile limitations, and submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) stability. We should see a "stability-instability paradox" in which nuclear weapons prevent total war but permit lower-level conflict. We should also observe that states invest heavily in command-and-control systems, early warning, and survivable communications, because the credibility of second-strike depends on these. Conversely, if the theory fails, we should see nuclear use or near-use during crises, or states abandoning second-strike postures for first-strike doctrines.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point on MAD and second-strike stability begins from a position of structural exclusion: no African state possesses nuclear weapons, and the continent's experience of nuclear strategy is one of being the object rather than the subject of deterrence calculations. The Pelindaba Treaty (1996), which established the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, represents not merely a non-proliferation commitment but an affirmative claim that African security is better served by the absence of nuclear weapons than by their possession. From this perspective, MAD appears less as a stabilizing equilibrium than as a doctrine that legitimizes the indefinite retention of nuclear arsenals by a handful of states while denying the same capability to others. African scholars such as Grovogui have emphasized that the nuclear order is embedded in a broader structure of racialized and colonial power, in which the "international community" that manages proliferation risk is itself constituted by the nuclear powers. The African perspective thus reveals what the Western strategic canon occludes: that deterrence theory presupposes a world in which some states are permitted to threaten mass destruction while others are not, and that this asymmetry is not a neutral feature of the international system but a historically produced hierarchy. The Pelindaba Treaty and the African Group's advocacy for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, 2021) reflect a normative stance that rejects the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence altogether, framing it as a form of structural violence rather than a stabilizing mechanism. At the same time, African states have participated in the NPT regime and IAEA safeguards, accepting non-proliferation obligations while demanding progress on disarmament—a demand that the nuclear powers have largely failed to meet, as evidenced by the continued modernization of arsenals.

Chinese: China's nuclear doctrine has historically been characterized by a no-first-use (NFU) pledge and a posture of minimum deterrence, meaning that China maintains a relatively small arsenal designed solely to en-

sure retaliation rather than to fight a nuclear war. This aligns with the second-strike logic of MAD but rejects the elaborate warfighting doctrines developed by the United States and Soviet Union. Chinese strategists have emphasized that deterrence is achieved through survivability and opacity rather than through numerical parity or technological sophistication. However, China's ongoing modernization—expanding its silo fields, developing multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRVs), and improving submarine-launched capabilities—has raised questions about whether Beijing is shifting toward a more ambiguous or even first-strike-capable posture. The Chinese perspective contributes the insight that MAD need not require massive arsenals; a small, survivable force can suffice. It also occludes the extent to which China's modernization is driven by concerns about US missile defense and conventional precision-strike capabilities that threaten its second-strike forces.

Russian: Russia's nuclear doctrine has evolved significantly since the Cold War, and the concept of "escalate to de-escalate"—the idea that Russia might use limited nuclear strikes to terminate a conventional conflict on favorable terms—has generated intense debate among Western analysts. Whether this doctrine accurately reflects Russian planning or is a misreading of Russian strategy remains contested. Russia's perspective on MAD emphasizes that the balance is not automatic but must be actively maintained through modernization, and that the erosion of arms-control agreements (such as the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002 and the INF Treaty's collapse in 2019) has undermined the stability that MAD presupposes. Russia's deployment of tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus in 2023 reflects a view that nuclear weapons serve not only to deter strategic attack but to manage escalation at lower levels. The Russian perspective thus highlights that MAD is not a static condition but a politically negotiated one, and that its stability depends on mutual restraint in arms competition.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in the United States, has historically been divided between those who embrace MAD as a stable equilibrium and those who argue that deterrence requires credible warfighting capabilities. Schelling's work on commitment and risk manipulation, and Wohlstetter's analysis of the delicate balance, emerged from this tradition. The US has invested heavily in second-strike forces—particularly the submarine-based leg of the nuclear triad—while also developing doctrines (such as flexible response and counterforce targeting) that imply a willingness to fight a limited nuclear war. The Western perspective contributes sophisticated analysis of signaling, credibility, and the role of technology in stabilizing or destabilizing deterrence. It occludes, however, the extent to which its own doctrinal innovations (such as missile defense and prompt global strike) can be perceived by adversaries as threatening their second-strike forces, thereby undermining the very stability that MAD is supposed to provide.

UN: The UN perspective, embodied in the NPT, the IAEA, and the disarmament machinery, treats nuclear deterrence as a temporary and undesirable condition rather than a permanent feature of international order. The NPT's Article VI commits nuclear-weapon states to pursue disarmament negotiations in good faith, implying that MAD is a transitional arrangement, not an end state. The UN framework emphasizes verification, safeguards, and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons to additional states, while also acknowledging the security concerns that drive proliferation. From this perspective, the stability of MAD is valuable only insofar as it prevents nuclear war while disarmament progresses; if disarmament stalls, the risk of proliferation and accidental use grows. The UN perspective thus contributes a normative framework that challenges the indefinite acceptance of nuclear deterrence, while its occlusion lies in the limited enforcement power of the disarmament machinery and the persistent refusal of nuclear-weapon states to set timelines for disarmament.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Extended Deterrence and the Stability-Instability Paradox

Bolded Causal Claim: Extended nuclear deterrence can prevent great-power war while simultaneously lowering the perceived cost of limited coercion, because the credibility of mutual annihilation pushes competition into conventional, cyber, and proxy domains where the nuclear threshold is distant but not absent.

Mechanism: Extended deterrence is the promise by a nuclear-armed state to use nuclear weapons, or to risk nuclear war, in defense of an ally. Its central problem is credibility: an adversary may doubt that the patron will sacrifice its own cities for an ally, especially when the patron and adversary are mutually vulnerable. Schelling (1960) treats deterrence as a commitment problem in which the patron must manipulate risk and make its threat credible through capabilities, alliances, and visible resolve. Glenn Snyder's (1961) analysis of deterrence and defense adds that extended deterrence requires not only the ability to punish but also the ability to deny an adversary's objectives at acceptable cost. The stability-instability paradox arises when a stable central balance—secure second-strike capabilities on both sides—reduces the likelihood of nuclear war but increases the likelihood of limited war. The mechanism is threshold manipulation: because both sides know that nuclear escalation is catastrophic, they may believe that limited aggression below the nuclear threshold can be conducted with impunity. The paradox is not that nuclear weapons cause war, but that they can segment conflict into "safe" and "unsafe" zones, encouraging probing, coercion, and proxy violence. In extended deterrence settings, this segmentation is acute: an ally may be attacked in ways that do not clearly trigger the patron's nuclear guarantee, while the patron fears that responding too strongly risks escalation. The result is a bargaining space in which conventional balances, alliance cohesion, and signaling become decisive. Extended deterrence therefore depends on coupling: the patron must convince the adversary that an attack on the ally is an attack on the patron's own vital interests. Decoupling occurs when the adversary believes the patron will not escalate. The stability-instability paradox then operates through the gap between the central balance and the local balance: nuclear stability at the top can coexist with instability at the bottom, especially in regions where conventional asymmetries, territorial disputes, and alliance commitments intersect.

Scope Conditions: The paradox is most likely when both sides possess secure second-strike forces, when the nuclear threshold is high and relatively clear, and when limited military options exist below that threshold. It is less likely when one side lacks survivable forces, when conventional balances are so lopsided that limited war is not feasible, or when escalation ladders are so compressed that any conflict risks rapid nuclear use. Extended deterrence is credible when the patron has forward-deployed forces, integrated command structures, and a demonstrated willingness to bear risk; it is fragile when the patron's homeland is directly vulnerable and the ally's interests are not obviously vital. The paradox also depends on information: if adversaries misread thresholds, a limited probe can escalate unintentionally. Conversely, if thresholds are too vague, deterrence may fail through ambiguity rather than through stability.

Observable Implications: The theory predicts proxy conflicts, gray-zone coercion, and crises that remain below the nuclear threshold; alliance demands for reassurance; investments in conventional and tactical capabilities; and repeated tests of credibility during regional crises. It also predicts that nuclear-armed rivals may fight limited wars or support proxies despite possessing arsenals capable of mutual destruction. In extended deterrence systems, one should observe debates over "decoupling," burden-sharing, and the appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional forces. The paradox implies that arms control focused only on strategic warheads may leave lower-level instability untouched, and that crisis management institutions are as important as arsenal size.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African states have generally experienced extended deterrence not as a protective umbrella but as an external imposition that exports great-power risk into regions already shaped by colonial borders, proxy competition, and fragile institutions. From this vantage point, the stability-instability paradox is visible in Cold War and post-Cold War interventions, peacekeeping burdens, and the militarization of African security partnerships. African scholarship and diplomacy emphasize sovereignty, non-alignment, and the right to define security without becoming a theater for nuclear-armed rivals. The Pelindaba Treaty and support for nuclear-weapon-free zones reflect a preference for removing nuclear risk altogether rather than managing it through extended deterrence. African perspectives also highlight that lower-level instability is not merely a byproduct of superpower stability but is compounded by arms transfers, mercenary activity, and weak state capacity. Thus extended deterrence is judged not only by whether it prevents nuclear war but by whether it prevents the externalization of violence into African spaces.

Chinese: China's no-first-use posture and historically minimum deterrence suggest skepticism toward extended deterrence as a stabilizing device. Beijing tends to view US alliances in Asia as mechanisms that can lower thresholds for conventional confrontation while claiming nuclear backing, potentially encouraging risk-taking by allies. The stability-instability paradox is interpreted through the lens of US "extended deterrence" as a form of strategic encirclement that compresses China's security environment. At the same time, China's own modernization and ambiguity about the scope of its nuclear use create tensions with its declaratory policy. The Chinese perspective contributes an emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference, while its occlusion may be a tendency to treat US extended deterrence as inherently aggressive without fully addressing how regional actors seek reassurance against coercion.

Russian: Russia views NATO extended deterrence as a direct challenge to its security and has responded with doctrinal ambiguity, including debates over escalate-to-deescalate and the deployment of non-strategic nuclear weapons. From Moscow's perspective, the stability-instability paradox is not an abstract theory but a description of NATO's attempt to use conventional superiority under a nuclear umbrella. Russian analysts often argue that US extended deterrence lowers the threshold for conventional pressure near Russia's borders, while Russia's own nuclear signaling is framed as restoring deterrence. The deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus and the emphasis on tactical systems reflect a belief that credibility requires forward, usable options. This perspective contributes a focus on geographic vulnerability and escalation control, but it can occlude how Russian coercion itself generates the insecurity that extended deterrence is meant to address.

Western: Western strategic thought treats extended deterrence as a necessary instrument for alliance cohesion and non-proliferation. If allies doubt the nuclear umbrella, they may seek independent arsenals, undermining the NPT. The stability-instability paradox is recognized as a genuine risk, but Western policy typically responds through escalation management, conventional superiority, and reassurance measures rather than abandonment of extended deterrence. NATO nuclear sharing and US commitments in Asia are defended as stabilizing because they reduce incentives for independent proliferation. This perspective contributes sophisticated theories of credibility and alliance politics, but it can occlude the costs imposed on non-allied regions and the possibility that extended deterrence perpetuates a nuclear hierarchy.

UN: The UN perspective approaches extended deterrence through disarmament and non-proliferation norms. Extended deterrence is often seen as an obstacle to Article VI obligations because it institutionalizes nuclear dependence among non-nuclear allies. The stability-instability paradox supports arguments for risk reduction, de-alerting, and the prevention of limited nuclear use. The UN framework emphasizes that security cannot rest indefinitely on the threat of annihilation and that lower-level instability is a symptom of an unreformed nuclear order. Its contribution is a normative insistence on disarmament progress; its occlusion is

limited enforcement capacity and the political reality that nuclear-weapon states treat extended deterrence as central to their security strategies.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Proliferation, the NPT Regime, IAEA Safeguards, and the Causes of Nuclear Acquisition

Bolded Causal Claim: Nuclear proliferation is shaped less by the automatic diffusion of technology than by the interaction of security threats, domestic political coalitions, and normative commitments; the NPT and IAEA safeguards raise the cost of acquisition but cannot eliminate latent capability because enforcement depends on state consent and great-power consensus.

Mechanism: The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT, 1968) rests on three pillars: non-proliferation, disarmament, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Non-nuclear-weapon states forswear nuclear weapons in exchange for access to peaceful technology and a commitment by nuclear-weapon states to pursue disarmament. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) implements safeguards to verify that nuclear material is not diverted to weapons. Comprehensive safeguards agreements and, where adopted, the Additional Protocol increase transparency by expanding inspections and access to information. The mechanism of constraint is therefore legal-normative and technical: declarations, material accountancy, inspections, and export controls raise the probability of detection and the diplomatic cost of cheating. However, the regime's enforcement is political. The IAEA can report non-compliance to the UN Security Council, but sanctions or force depend on great-power agreement. This creates a gap between detection and response.

The causes of acquisition are debated between systemic and domestic explanations. Waltz (in Sagan and Waltz, 1995; 2003) argues that nuclear proliferation is a rational response to anarchy: states seek nuclear weapons when they face security threats and lack reliable allies. On this view, proliferation is self-help in a dangerous world, and more nuclear powers may even enhance stability by creating mutual deterrence. Sagan (in the same debate) counters that nuclear acquisition is driven by domestic politics: civil-military relations, organizational interests, prestige, and bureaucratic politics. States with weak civilian control over the military, or with military organizations seeking autonomy and budgets, are more likely to pursue weapons. Sagan also emphasizes norms: the nuclear taboo and non-proliferation norms can restrain acquisition even when security incentives exist. The two theories are not mutually exclusive; they identify different scope conditions. Waltz's model predicts proliferation where threats are acute and alliances unreliable; Sagan's predicts variation among similarly threatened states based on domestic structure and normative commitment. The NPT regime operates on both levels: it alters systemic incentives by providing security assurances and technology access, and it strengthens domestic actors who favor restraint by embedding non-proliferation in law and bureaucracy.

Nuclear latency complicates the regime. A state can develop enrichment or reprocessing capabilities under the guise of peaceful use, remaining within the letter of the NPT while shortening the time needed to produce weapons. This is not necessarily a violation unless material is diverted, but it creates a "breakout" capability that safeguards may detect only after the fact. Thus the regime manages risk rather than eliminating capability.

Scope Conditions: The NPT is most effective when security threats are moderate, alliance guarantees are credible, and domestic institutions favor civilian control and economic integration. It is less effective when states face existential threats, when regional rivals acquire weapons, or when domestic military organizations dominate decision-making. IAEA safeguards work best with cooperative states and full access; they are weaker when states limit access, withdraw, or exploit the peaceful-use provisions. The Sagan-Waltz debate

implies different predictions: Waltz expects proliferation to track threat environments, while Sagan expects it to track regime type and civil-military relations. Empirically, both matter, but neither alone explains cases such as South Africa's disarmament or Libya's renunciation, where security and domestic factors interacted with normative pressure.

Observable Implications: One should observe NPT membership patterns, safeguards coverage, enrichment capacity, and breakout timelines; regional cascades following a state's acquisition; and domestic debates over nuclear options. The regime's health can be measured by Additional Protocol adoption, IAEA inspection access, and the frequency of compliance disputes. The Sagan-Waltz debate predicts that proliferation will cluster where threats and weak civilian control coincide, while restraint will be more common where norms and institutions are strong. Latency implies that even compliant states may retain hedging options, making the line between peaceful and military programs politically contested.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African states have been strong supporters of the NPT, but from a position that stresses the treaty's asymmetry: non-nuclear states accepted permanent obligations while nuclear-weapon states retained arsenals and deferred disarmament. African diplomacy, including through the Pelindaba Treaty and the African Commission on Nuclear Energy, frames proliferation control as inseparable from disarmament and from the right to peaceful technology. African scholarship often critiques the NPT as a non-proliferation regime that protects the privileges of existing nuclear powers while offering limited security guarantees to non-nuclear states. The African perspective highlights that proliferation causes are not only security threats but also global inequality, technological dependence, and the historical experience of colonial extraction. It also stresses that African states have largely chosen restraint, making the continent a zone of nuclear abstinence that deserves recognition and support rather than paternalistic oversight. The African vantage point thus reveals that the NPT's legitimacy depends on whether non-nuclear states perceive fairness, not merely whether safeguards function.

Chinese: China supports the NPT and IAEA safeguards but emphasizes the peaceful-use pillar and the disarmament obligations of nuclear-weapon states. Beijing's perspective treats proliferation as partly a consequence of unequal security: states proliferate when they lack credible protection and when existing nuclear powers fail to disarm. China's own nuclear history is framed as a response to superpower threats and as a contribution to multipolarity. The Chinese perspective contributes an insistence that non-proliferation cannot be separated from disarmament and that technology access is a right, not a concession. Its occlusion may be a reluctance to scrutinize its own assistance to other states' nuclear programs and a tendency to attribute proliferation primarily to US security policies.

Russian: Russia is a depositary state of the NPT and generally supports non-proliferation, but it views the regime through the lens of great-power status and strategic stability. Moscow emphasizes that proliferation is driven by security vacuums and by the erosion of arms control, and it has used nuclear cooperation as a tool of influence. Russian perspectives often stress that the NPT must preserve the right to peaceful nuclear energy and that enforcement should not become a vehicle for regime change. The Russian contribution is a focus on strategic stability and the dangers of selective enforcement; its occlusion is a tendency to subordinate non-proliferation to geopolitical competition, as seen in debates over Iran and North Korea.

Western: Western governments have been the principal architects and enforcers of the NPT and IAEA safeguards. The Western perspective treats proliferation as a central threat to international security and emphasizes export controls, intelligence, and sanctions. The Sagan-Waltz debate is often read in Western scholar-

ship as a warning that security threats and domestic politics can override norms, justifying proactive non-proliferation policies. Western states have promoted the Additional Protocol and, in cases such as Iran, have used coercive diplomacy to limit enrichment. This perspective contributes technical expertise and institutional capacity; its occlusion is a tendency to treat non-proliferation as an end in itself while downplaying the disarmament pillar and the security concerns of non-nuclear states.

UN: The UN perspective is anchored in the NPT text and the IAEA statute. It treats non-proliferation, disarmament, and peaceful use as interdependent obligations and emphasizes verification, safeguards, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. The UN framework supports the IAEA's technical role and the Security Council's enforcement function, while also hosting review conferences that give non-nuclear states a forum to demand disarmament progress. The UN perspective contributes legitimacy and a multilateral forum; its occlusion is the dependence of enforcement on the Security Council, where nuclear-weapon states hold veto power, and the difficulty of reconciling non-proliferation with the disarmament commitments of Article VI.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — JCPOA and its collapse: mechanics of nuclear latency and snapback

Bolded Causal Claim: The JCPOA did not disarm Iran; it converted an acute proliferation crisis into a managed latency problem by trading time-bound, verifiable constraints for sanctions relief, and its collapse after the 2018 US withdrawal demonstrated that latency management fails when the political bargain sustaining reciprocal compliance unravels faster than the technical restrictions expire.

Mechanism: Nuclear latency is the capacity to produce weapons-usable fissile material on a timeline short enough to make a state a de facto nuclear power before outsiders can intervene, without necessarily possessing a weapon today. The JCPOA addressed latency through a layered mechanism: it capped enrichment at 3.67 percent, limited the stockpile of low-enriched uranium, reduced and reconfigured centrifuges, converted Fordow, redesigned Arak, constrained research and development, and subjected Iran to an unusually intrusive verification package including the Additional Protocol, continuous monitoring of enrichment, and access to centrifuge production and uranium mining. In exchange, Iran received phased sanctions relief. The deal's central technical achievement was to extend Iran's estimated breakout time from roughly two to three months to about a year, while creating multiple observable indicators—centrifuge counts, enrichment levels, stockpile size, and facility configuration—that would reveal a dash for a bomb. This institutionalist wager, echoing the debate between Sagan and Waltz (1995, 2003), assumed that verification and norms could manage a security problem that structuralists would expect to be driven by competition.

A crucial distinction is between fissile-material capability and weaponization. The JCPOA was designed to make the former visible and slow; it did not require Iran to dismantle the scientific and industrial base that made latency possible. This is why the deal's critics argued that sunset clauses would eventually legitimate a large enrichment program, while supporters argued that the time bought could be used to build trust and regional security. The collapse showed that when trust is absent, technical time limits become focal points for suspicion: each approaching sunset can be read as a scheduled proliferation opportunity rather than a phased normalization. Fitzpatrick (2019) is useful here because the Iranian case is best understood not as a simple quest for a bomb but as a hedging strategy in which capability, ambiguity, and reversibility are themselves instruments of statecraft.

The political mechanism was reciprocal compliance. The JCPOA was not self-enforcing through IAEA verification alone; it depended on each side believing the other would continue to perform. Iran's incentive

was economic normalization; the P5+1's incentive was non-proliferation. The snapback mechanism in UN Security Council Resolution 2231 was designed to solve the enforcement problem without requiring a new Security Council vote: any participant could notify the Council of significant non-performance, and absent a resolution to continue relief within thirty days, previous UN sanctions would automatically reimpose. This removed the veto as an obstacle to enforcement, but it also made the deal's survival sensitive to unilateral interpretations of compliance.

The collapse followed a sequence that exposed this sensitivity. The United States withdrew in May 2018 and reimposed sanctions, including secondary sanctions that deterred European and Asian firms from trading with Iran even where European governments supported the deal. Iran initially remained in compliance, seeking European economic relief, but European mechanisms could not offset the loss of market access. Beginning in May 2019, Iran reduced its commitments in calibrated steps: exceeding the enrichment cap, expanding centrifuge numbers and types, resuming enrichment at Fordow, and later enriching to 20 and then 60 percent. It also restricted IAEA access, including suspending implementation of the Additional Protocol in 2021 and removing monitoring equipment in 2022. By 2024-2025, IAEA reporting described breakout times measured in weeks rather than months, while Iran maintained that its program remained peaceful and that its steps were reversible. The E3's 2025 invocation of the snapback mechanism, weeks before Resolution 2231's ten-year window closed in October 2025, reimposed UN sanctions and underscored that the deal's legal architecture had outlived its political equilibrium. The mechanism was designed to be automatic, but its use required political consensus among states with divergent interests; once triggered, it reimposed sanctions without restoring the verification and constraint regime that had lapsed.

Scope Conditions: The JCPOA model is most applicable when a state has substantial latent capability but has not weaponized; when verification can detect both declared and undeclared activity; when economic incentives are large enough to outweigh domestic hardliners; when the enforcing coalition remains cohesive; and when restrictions are either permanent or extended before cliff effects. It is less applicable when a state's nuclear program is driven primarily by existential security fears, when regional rivals are arming, when domestic politics reward defiance, or when the enforcing state can unilaterally collapse the bargain. The model also assumes that "breakout time" is a meaningful and measurable proxy for risk, which becomes less true as advanced centrifuges, smaller facilities, and undeclared sites complicate detection.

Observable Implications: If latency management is working, one should observe stable or lengthening breakout times, IAEA access to centrifuge workshops and uranium mines, no unexplained nuclear material, and political willingness to negotiate extensions. If it is failing, one should observe rising enrichment levels, deployment of advanced centrifuges, reduced inspector access, growing stockpiles, and diplomatic moves to trigger snapback or sanctions. The JCPOA case also implies that "compliance" is not binary: Iran remained within some limits while breaching others, and the United States remained a non-party while claiming enforcement rights. Regionally, latency management in Iran has been associated with hedging rhetoric in Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt, though hedging is not equivalent to proliferation. Finally, the case suggests that the most dangerous moment may occur not when a state builds a weapon but when it acquires a capability that makes a future weapon decision fast and deniable.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective begins from the experience of non-nuclear states that bear the costs of great-power nuclear bargains without controlling their terms. From this vantage, the JCPOA illustrates a double standard: nuclear-weapon states manage proliferation risks among themselves while retaining arsenals and, in the African reading, using sanctions that can harm civilian economies. African scholarship

and diplomacy emphasize sovereignty, development, and the right to peaceful nuclear technology, as well as the Pelindaba Treaty's creation of an African nuclear-weapon-free zone and support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. African states often view the NPT as a non-proliferation instrument whose disarmament pillar is under-enforced, and they are skeptical of snapback mechanisms that concentrate coercive power in the Security Council. The African perspective contributes a focus on equity, the civilian costs of sanctions, and the legitimacy of non-nuclear security; its occlusion is that it may understate the specific regional dangers of Iranian latency for Middle Eastern stability and the value of intrusive verification.

Chinese: China supported the JCPOA as a multilateral achievement and criticized the US withdrawal as a violation of international commitments that undermined non-proliferation diplomacy. Beijing emphasizes sovereignty, opposes unilateral sanctions, and frames the deal as evidence that negotiation can manage nuclear risk. China's perspective contributes support for multilateralism and resistance to coercive unilateralism; its occlusion is that it may understate Iran's safeguards breaches and the security concerns of regional states.

Russian: Russia presents itself as a JCPOA supporter and critic of US withdrawal, while also using the Iranian file to challenge US dominance and maintain influence. Moscow emphasizes diplomacy, opposes unilateral sanctions, and has cooperated with Iran in areas that complicate Western pressure. The Russian perspective contributes a counterweight to US-centric enforcement; its occlusion is that it may instrumentalize the deal for geopolitical competition and downplay proliferation risks.

Western: The Western perspective, especially in the United States and Europe, treats the JCPOA as a non-proliferation instrument whose value lies in verifiable constraints and whose collapse increased the risk of an Iranian bomb or a regional war. It emphasizes IAEA verification, snapback, and the need to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. The Western perspective contributes technical verification expertise and regional security concerns; its occlusion is that it can conflate latency with intent and underestimate how US withdrawal destroyed the reciprocal basis of compliance.

UN: The UN perspective is anchored in Resolution 2231, the IAEA statute, and the NPT's three pillars. It treats the JCPOA as a Security Council-endorsed arrangement whose verification and snapback mechanisms are legal instruments, not merely political preferences. The UN framework contributes multilateral legitimacy and a technical verification role; its occlusion is dependence on Security Council politics and the difficulty of enforcing disarmament commitments against nuclear-weapon states.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — New challenges: tactical nukes, hypersonics, AI in NC3, and the erosion of arms control

Bolded Causal Claim: The erosion of Cold War arms control has not simply removed limits; it has shifted nuclear risk from a world of relatively stable, verifiable, bilateral ceilings to one of faster, more ambiguous, and more technologically complex competition, in which crisis stability depends on software, sensors, and human judgment under compression rather than on treaty-bound force structures.

Mechanism: The classic arms-control model assumed that stability could be produced by limiting numbers, types, and deployments of nuclear systems, verifying compliance through national technical means and on-site inspections, and preserving mutual vulnerability through survivable second-strike forces. Brodie (1946) established the foundational premise that nuclear weapons changed strategy from winning wars to averting them; Schelling (1960) added that deterrence depends on credible commitment and the manipulation of risk. The new challenges test whether that aversion and credibility remain stable when treaties erode and

technology accelerates.

Three developments have strained the classic model. First, treaty erosion. The ABM Treaty, signed in 1972, rested on the premise that limiting missile defenses would preserve mutual vulnerability and reduce incentives for larger offensive arsenals. The US withdrawal in 2002, justified by the desire to defend against limited missile threats, was read in Moscow as an attempt to erode Russia's deterrent and contributed to Russian investment in systems designed to penetrate or bypass defenses. The INF Treaty, signed in 1987, eliminated an entire class of ground-launched intermediate-range missiles and removed a destabilizing category from Europe. Its collapse—Russia's suspension in 2019 and US withdrawal later that year—followed disputes over the Russian 9M729 missile and US concerns about Chinese intermediate-range forces not covered by the treaty. The result has been renewed deployment interest in intermediate-range systems in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. New START, signed in 2010 and extended to February 2026, remains the last bilateral limit on deployed strategic warheads and launchers, but Russia's 2023 suspension of participation and the absence of a successor agreement mean that the treaty may expire without replacement, removing inspections and data exchanges that have underpinned predictability for decades.

Second, doctrinal and force-structure change. The reintroduction of lower-yield nuclear options, such as the US W76-2 warhead deployed in 2020, and Russia's large inventory of non-strategic nuclear weapons, has reopened the debate over whether limited nuclear use can be controlled. Proponents argue that a low-yield option strengthens deterrence by denying an adversary the belief that the United States would not respond to a limited nuclear attack; critics argue that it lowers the threshold for use and creates an illusion of controllability. Russia's doctrine and exercises have fueled Western concerns about "escalate to de-escalate," though Russian officials dispute that this is official doctrine. The broader problem is that once a nuclear threshold is crossed, escalation control depends on adversary interpretation, not on the attacker's intent.

Third, technological compression. Hypersonic glide vehicles and cruise missiles travel at high speeds and can maneuver, compressing warning and decision time and complicating attribution between conventional and nuclear payloads. AI-enabled decision support in early warning and command-and-control systems can improve sensor fusion and reduce human overload, but it also introduces risks of automation bias, data poisoning, cyber intrusion, and inadvertent escalation. The combination of faster weapons and faster analysis narrows the window in which leaders can deliberate, while the ambiguity of dual-capable systems increases the chance of misperception. Arms control has not kept pace: verification of hypersonic trajectories, AI algorithms, and software updates is far harder than counting warheads or inspecting silos.

Scope Conditions: These challenges are most destabilizing in crises between nuclear peers with short warning times, ambiguous signaling, and weak crisis-communication channels. They are less dangerous where robust hotlines, human-in-the-loop requirements, transparency about doctrines, and redundant verification exist. The erosion of arms control is also uneven: bilateral US-Russian limits still constrain strategic forces, while China's growing arsenal and the absence of trilateral frameworks create a multipolar gap. Finally, technological risk depends on implementation quality; AI in NC3 is not inherently destabilizing if used for decision support rather than autonomous launch authority, but the boundary between assistance and automation can erode under pressure.

Observable Implications: One should observe renewed intermediate-range missile deployments in Europe and Asia; continued hypersonic testing and deployment by the United States, Russia, and China; growth in China's warhead stockpile toward and beyond 1,000; the expiry or suspension of New START in 2026 without a successor; doctrinal statements and exercises involving non-strategic nuclear weapons; and investments in AI-enabled early warning and command systems. Crisis indicators include compressed decision

timelines, false-warning incidents, cyber intrusions into defense networks, and disputes over attribution. If arms control is reviving, one would observe resumed data exchanges, new verification concepts for emerging technologies, and trilateral or multilateral dialogues. If it is not, the default will be competitive arming shaped by worst-case assumptions.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective treats the erosion of arms control as part of a broader pattern in which great powers modernize arsenals while demanding non-proliferation from others. African states, many of them parties to the Pelindaba Treaty and supporters of the TPNW, view nuclear risk as global and indivisible: fallout, climate effects, and economic disruption do not respect regional boundaries. African scholarship and diplomacy emphasize disarmament, the humanitarian consequences of nuclear use, and the injustice of a system in which nuclear-weapon states retain first-use options while non-nuclear states are asked to trust extended deterrence. The African perspective contributes a humanitarian and equity lens and an insistence that arms control must include disarmament, not merely non-proliferation; its occlusion is that it may not fully address the immediate crisis-stability problems created by hypersonics and AI in nuclear command systems.

Chinese: China emphasizes minimum deterrence, a no-first-use policy, and modernization of a relatively small arsenal, while opposing US missile defense and intermediate-range deployments in Asia. Beijing argues that arms control should begin with the largest arsenals and that trilateral talks are premature while US-Russian parity remains the central imbalance. The Chinese perspective contributes a critique of missile defense and a demand for equitable reductions; its occlusion is that its arsenal growth and opacity complicate trust and that no-first-use commitments are difficult to verify.

Russian: Russia frames its nuclear modernization and doctrinal ambiguity as responses to NATO expansion, US missile defense, and the erosion of the ABM and INF treaties. It has deployed non-strategic weapons in Belarus and emphasizes escalation management in regional conflicts. The Russian perspective contributes a security-driven explanation for modernization; its occlusion is that its “escalate to de-escalate” ambiguity and coercive nuclear signaling increase the risk of misperception and undermine crisis stability.

Western: The Western perspective emphasizes extended deterrence, the need to counter Russian and Chinese modernization, and the value of low-yield options and missile defense for assurance and defense. It treats arms-control erosion as driven by adversary cheating and technological change, and supports AI and hypersonic investments for both deterrence and defense. The Western perspective contributes operational and alliance-management expertise; its occlusion is that it can rationalize arms racing as stability and underestimate how its own deployments drive adversary modernization.

UN: The UN perspective is anchored in the NPT, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the fissile material cutoff debate, and the disarmament machinery of the General Assembly and review conferences. It treats arms control as a legal and normative project requiring universal participation and verification. The UN framework contributes legitimacy and a forum for non-nuclear states; its occlusion is that enforcement depends on the Security Council and that great powers can bypass or suspend treaties without collective consequence.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on nuclear strategy and proliferation begins from a position that the dominant Western and UN frameworks systematically obscure: for most African states, nuclear weapons are not primarily a security technology but a structure of global hierarchy that reproduces colonial relations of power. This is not a peripheral observation appended to a great-power debate; it is a reframing of the central puzzle. Where Western deterrence theory asks how nuclear weapons stabilize relations among armed states, the African perspective asks how the nuclear order itself constitutes a form of violence against those excluded from it. The mechanism runs through the institutional architecture of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which divides the world into five recognized nuclear-weapon states and everyone else, and through the practice of nuclear testing, which has disproportionately burdened African territories and populations.

The historical record is specific. France conducted seventeen atmospheric and underground nuclear tests in Algeria between 1960 and 1966, leaving radioactive contamination in the Reggane and In Ekker regions that persists in soil and groundwater. South Africa developed a small nuclear arsenal in the 1970s and 1980s under the apartheid regime, the only African state to do so, before dismantling it in the early 1990s. These experiences are not footnotes; they shape how African governments and scholars read the nuclear order. Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics—the sovereign power to decide who may live and who must die—illuminates the distribution of nuclear risk: the populations exposed to fallout from tests conducted by distant powers are precisely those with the least voice in the decisions that produced the exposure. Walter Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment as a relational process, not a stage, applies here: African nuclear vulnerability is not an absence of development but a product of a global system that extracts security from the periphery and concentrates it at the center. Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial violence reminds us that the nuclear order is not merely a technical arrangement but a politics of domination, in which the power to threaten annihilation is concentrated in the hands of a few.

The Pelindaba Treaty, which establishes the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, represents the most concrete institutional expression of this perspective. Opened for signature in 1996 and entering into force in 2009, the treaty prohibits the research, development, manufacture, stockpiling, acquisition, testing, possession, control, or stationing of nuclear explosive devices anywhere on the African continent. It also prohibits the dumping of radioactive waste. The treaty's significance lies not only in its prohibitions but in its assertion of regional agency: African states collectively declared their territory off-limits to nuclear weapons at a moment when the NPT was being indefinitely extended and the nuclear-weapon states were consolidating their privileged status. The Pelindaba Treaty thus functions as a counter-institution, a regional normative order that challenges the global hierarchy by creating a zone of prohibition from below. Kofi Danso's advocacy for African nuclear disarmament positions the Pelindaba Treaty and support for the TPNW as expressions of a broader African diplomatic tradition that links disarmament to sovereignty and development. Siphamandla Zondi and other African international-relations scholars have emphasized that such zones are not merely technical arms-control measures but political statements about the right to define security on one's own terms.

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, adopted in 2017 and entering into force in 2021, extends this logic to the global level. African states were among its most consistent supporters: the African Group at the United Nations has repeatedly called for nuclear disarmament, and the TPNW's humanitarian framing—its focus on victim assistance, environmental remediation, and the catastrophic consequences of nuclear use—resonates with African experiences of nuclear testing and with a broader African diplomatic tradition that

links disarmament to development. The TPNW is not merely a legal instrument; it is an epistemic challenge to the deterrence paradigm. Where deterrence theory treats nuclear weapons as stabilizing because they raise the cost of war, the TPNW treats them as illegitimate because their use would be indiscriminate and their possession creates unacceptable risk. This is a genuine theoretical disagreement, not a misunderstanding. The African perspective, articulated through scholars such as Kwesi Aning in his work on African security governance, insists that security must be defined by those who bear its costs, not by those who manage its arsenals.

The critique of the NPT's non-proliferation bias follows from this. The treaty's three pillars—nonproliferation, disarmament, and peaceful use—are formally equal but hierarchically ordered in practice. Article VI obligates nuclear-weapon states to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race and to nuclear disarmament, yet the five recognized nuclear-weapon states have not fulfilled this obligation in any meaningful sense; instead, they have modernized their arsenals. Non-nuclear-weapon states, including all African states except South Africa (which disarmed), bear the obligations of safeguards and non-acquisition without receiving the promised disarmament dividend. Mahmood Mamdani's analysis of colonial categories is relevant here: the NPT's division between nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states reproduces a colonial logic in which some states are trusted with sovereign violence and others are not. The mechanism is not conspiracy but structure: the treaty was negotiated by the nuclear powers and reflects their interests, and its review conferences have repeatedly failed to produce consensus on disarmament timelines, as in 2015 and 2022.

African scholarship contributes distinctive theoretical resources. Siba Grovogui's work on sovereignty and international law argues that the international order is not a neutral framework but a historically constituted system of power in which African agency is systematically marginalized. Applied to nuclear politics, this means that the "rules-based order" invoked by Western states is itself a product of nuclear hierarchy, not a check on it. Jean-François Bayart's concept of extraversion—the way African elites navigate and exploit external power structures—helps explain why some African states have engaged with the NPT regime strategically rather than rejecting it outright, seeking technical assistance and diplomatic standing while pressing for disarmament. Julius Nyerere's non-alignment and Kwame Nkrumah's pan-Africanism provide the diplomatic lineage: African nuclear diplomacy has consistently linked disarmament to anti-colonialism and to the demand for a more equitable international order. Amílcar Cabral's insistence on the unity of theory and practice suggests that African nuclear diplomacy is not merely rhetorical; the Pelindaba Treaty and TPNW activism are concrete institutional achievements.

The feminist and gender dimensions, developed by scholars such as Sylvia Tamale and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, add a further layer. Oyěwùmí's critique of the gendered and racialized categories of Western social science applies to nuclear discourse: the "rational actor" of deterrence theory is a particular kind of subject, historically male and Western, and the exclusion of other voices from nuclear decision-making is not accidental but constitutive. Tamale's work on African feminism and human rights frames nuclear disarmament as a gendered issue, given the disproportionate impact of radiation on women and children and the masculinized culture of nuclear strategic planning. These contributions reveal what the Western deterrence framework occludes: that nuclear strategy is not a technical exercise but a politics of whose lives count.

What the African perspective contributes that the other four cannot is a systematic critique of the nuclear order's legitimacy from the standpoint of those it most endangers and least empowers. It reveals that deterrence theory's claim to universal security is parochial, grounded in the experience of nuclear-armed states and their allies, and that the NPT's nonproliferation focus serves to freeze an unequal distribution of destruc-

tive capability. It also provides institutional alternatives—the NWFZ and the TPNW—that demonstrate that disarmament is not merely utopian but has been pursued through concrete legal and diplomatic means.

What it occludes is equally important. The African perspective can understate the security dilemmas of states facing nuclear-armed adversaries: the demand for rapid disarmament does not by itself resolve the problem of verification, of breakout, or of the security guarantees that non-nuclear states would require in a disarmed world. It can also treat the NPT's nonproliferation function as purely oppressive, when in fact the treaty has prevented the spread of nuclear weapons to additional states, including in regions where proliferation would have been destabilizing. The African critique is strongest on legitimacy and weakest on mechanism: it identifies the injustice of the nuclear order more clearly than it specifies a transition path from the current order to a disarmed one. And it has limited engagement with the internal dynamics of nuclear-armed states' deterrence debates—the stability-instability paradox, extended deterrence credibility, the role of tactical nuclear weapons—because these are not African problems in the first instance. This is a scope condition, not a failure: the perspective is optimized for the global-structural and normative dimensions of nuclear politics, not for the operational details of arsenal management.

The strongest counterargument from within the Western tradition is that nuclear deterrence has prevented great-power war for eight decades and that the NPT, for all its flaws, is the most successful nonproliferation regime in history. The African response, grounded in Grovogui and Mamdani, is that this success is measured by the standards of the powerful and that the absence of great-power war does not justify the permanent subordination of the rest. The adjudication is not resolvable by evidence alone; it depends on whether one weights the prevention of great-power war more heavily than the prevention of nuclear hierarchy. The African perspective insists that these are not separate goods and that a security order built on the threat of annihilation is not security at all.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

China's nuclear posture is organized around a doctrine of minimum deterrence and a no-first-use pledge that has been in place since 1964, making China the only nuclear-weapon state to maintain an unconditional NFU commitment. The core claim is that a small, survivable arsenal capable of inflicting unacceptable damage in retaliation is sufficient to deter aggression, and that first-use threats are destabilizing and unnecessary. This doctrine reflects China's historical experience of conventional inferiority relative to both the United States and the Soviet Union, and its strategic culture's emphasis on patience, asymmetry, and the avoidance of direct confrontation. The mechanism is straightforward: by renouncing first use, China seeks to reduce the incentive for adversaries to launch preemptive strikes and to position itself as a responsible nuclear power, while maintaining a credible second-strike capability that raises the cost of any attack.

The scope conditions of this doctrine are specific. Minimum deterrence assumes that the adversary is rational and cost-sensitive, that China's arsenal is survivable against a first strike, and that the threshold for unacceptable damage is low enough to be achieved with a small force. These assumptions held reasonably well during the Cold War, when China's arsenal was small and its adversaries were focused on each other. They are under increasing strain today. China's nuclear modernization—evidenced by the construction of hundreds of new missile silos in western China, the development of MIRVed intercontinental ballistic missiles, the deployment of Jin-class ballistic missile submarines, and the testing of hypersonic glide vehicles—suggests a shift away from the lean posture of minimum deterrence toward a more robust and diversified force. The debate within Chinese strategic circles, as analyzed by scholars such as M. Taylor Fravel and Fiona Cunningham, centers on whether this modernization is a quantitative expansion within a minimum deterrence

framework or a qualitative shift toward a more ambitious posture that includes counterforce capabilities and launch-on-warning.

The Chinese perspective contributes to the global nuclear debate in several ways. First, it offers a non-Western model of deterrence that does not rely on first-use threats or extended deterrence, demonstrating that nuclear strategy can be organized around restraint rather than escalation dominance. Second, it challenges the Western assumption that strategic stability requires rough parity in warhead numbers; China's argument is that stability requires only mutual vulnerability, which can be achieved with far fewer weapons. Third, China's NFU pledge, whatever its credibility, provides a normative benchmark that other nuclear-weapon states have not matched, and it has been invoked by disarmament advocates as evidence that first-use renunciation is feasible.

What the Chinese perspective occludes is equally significant. The opacity of China's nuclear program—there are no official figures for warhead numbers, and doctrine is stated in general terms—fuels worst-case planning by adversaries and undermines the very stability that China claims to seek. The NFU pledge's credibility is questionable in a crisis, particularly in a Taiwan contingency where China's conventional forces might face US intervention; the pledge has never been tested and contains implicit exceptions for scenarios that China defines as threats to its sovereignty. The modernization trajectory, particularly the silo expansion and MIRV development, looks less like minimum deterrence and more like a move toward a launch-on-warning posture that increases the risk of accidental or unauthorized use. And China's refusal to engage in trilateral arms control with the United States and Russia—on the grounds that its arsenal is much smaller—ignores the fact that its modernization is precisely what makes trilateral talks necessary.

The strongest counterargument from the Western perspective is that China's NFU pledge is a rhetorical device that costs nothing while its modernization is the real signal, and that the silo expansion indicates a shift toward a counterforce strategy that would undermine mutual vulnerability. The Chinese response is that modernization is driven by the need to ensure survivability against US missile defense and precision-strike capabilities, not by ambition, and that the NFU pledge remains a genuine constraint on doctrine. The adjudication depends on evidence that is not fully available: the internal deliberations of the Central Military Commission, the actual alert status of Chinese forces, and the relationship between the silo expansion and warhead production. What is clear is that China's nuclear posture is in transition, and that the transition's direction will significantly affect global strategic stability. The Chinese perspective is most persuasive when it emphasizes mutual vulnerability and restraint; it is least persuasive when it invokes NFU while expanding the arsenal that makes first use more thinkable.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

Russia's nuclear doctrine is built on the premise that nuclear weapons compensate for conventional inferiority and that the threat of escalation can terminate conflicts on favorable terms. This is the logic behind the contested concept of "escalate to deescalate": the idea that Russia might use limited nuclear strikes to signal resolve and force an adversary to back down, rather than to achieve military objectives directly. Whether this is actual doctrine or a Western misreading of Russian strategy remains disputed, but the debate itself shapes how adversaries plan and how Russia signals. The 2020 Basic Principles of State Policy on Nuclear Deterrence and the 2024 doctrine update lowered the threshold for nuclear use, explicitly including scenarios involving conventional attacks on Russian territory or threats to the existence of the state. The mechanism is escalation management: by maintaining ambiguity about the nuclear threshold and by deploying non-strategic nuclear weapons, Russia seeks to create a zone of uncertainty that deters NATO intervention in

conflicts on Russia's periphery.

The scope conditions are specific to Russia's strategic environment. Russia faces a NATO alliance with superior conventional forces and a geographic vulnerability that includes a long land border and limited strategic depth. Nuclear weapons are, in this view, the ultimate guarantor of sovereignty and the equalizer that prevents NATO from exploiting its conventional advantage. The deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus, announced in 2023, extends this logic: by forward-deploying weapons closer to NATO's eastern flank, Russia increases the credibility of its escalation threats and complicates NATO's defense planning. The mechanism is not merely military but political: the deployments signal that Russia is willing to accept heightened risk to protect its sphere of influence.

What the Russian perspective contributes is a theory of deterrence that takes seriously the problem of escalation control and the role of non-strategic nuclear weapons. Western deterrence theory has historically focused on strategic nuclear exchange between superpowers; the Russian perspective insists that the more likely and more dangerous scenarios involve limited nuclear use in regional conflicts, and that planning for these scenarios is essential. It also highlights the destabilizing effects of NATO expansion and missile defense on Russian security perceptions, arguing that the erosion of arms control is driven not only by Russian behavior but by Western decisions to withdraw from the ABM Treaty and to expand NATO eastward.

What it occludes is substantial. The doctrine's ambiguity, while strategically useful, creates a significant risk of miscalculation: adversaries cannot know where the threshold lies, and in a crisis, Russian leaders may face pressure to use nuclear weapons to avoid appearing weak. The forward deployment of weapons in Belarus increases their vulnerability to preemptive strikes and raises the risk of unauthorized use. The nuclear threats issued during the Ukraine war—explicit and implicit—have not prevented Ukrainian resistance or NATO support, suggesting that the escalate-to-deescalate logic may be less effective than its proponents assume. And the 2024 doctrine update, by lowering the threshold, may have made nuclear use more thinkable without making it more controllable.

The strongest counterargument from the Western perspective is that Russia's nuclear threats are primarily coercive instruments designed to deter Western support for Ukraine, not genuine doctrinal shifts, and that the escalate-to-deescalate concept is a Western projection onto ambiguous Russian statements. The Russian response is that NATO's conventional superiority and its willingness to arm Ukraine demonstrate the need for a credible escalation threat, and that the doctrine updates reflect real security concerns, not bluff. The adjudication is complicated by the classified nature of Russian nuclear planning and by the difficulty of distinguishing signaling from intent. What is observable is that Russia has invested heavily in non-strategic nuclear weapons and in delivery systems designed for theater use, which is consistent with a doctrine that contemplates limited nuclear employment. Whether this makes Russia more or less secure is the central question: the Russian perspective argues that it deters; the Western perspective argues that it lowers the nuclear threshold and increases the risk of catastrophe. Both cannot be fully right, and the truth likely depends on context—on whether the adversary reads the threat as credible and whether the escalation ladder can be controlled once climbing begins.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on nuclear strategy is organized around extended deterrence and the management of proliferation through a combination of alliance guarantees, arms control, and coercive diplomacy. The United States extends its nuclear umbrella to NATO allies and to partners in Asia, including Japan, South Korea, and Australia, on the premise that the threat of US nuclear retaliation deters attacks on allies and that

this assurance prevents allies from developing their own nuclear weapons. The mechanism is credibility: for extended deterrence to work, adversaries must believe that the United States would risk nuclear war to defend an ally, and allies must believe that the United States would follow through. This creates a permanent tension between assurance and nonproliferation, because the more credible the extended deterrent, the less incentive allies have to proliferate, but the more the United States must invest in capabilities and deployments that may provoke adversary modernization.

The stability-instability paradox, identified by Glenn Snyder, is central to this perspective. Nuclear weapons may prevent total war between nuclear-armed states while making lower-level conflict more likely, because the nuclear threshold creates a zone of safety below which conventional and sub-conventional conflict can occur without triggering escalation. This paradox is not a bug but a feature of the Western approach: the United States and its allies have fought numerous limited wars since 1945 without nuclear escalation, and the nuclear umbrella has allowed allies to pursue interests without fear of existential attack. The cost is that the paradox can encourage risk-taking, as states probe below the nuclear threshold, and that it can erode over time as technology compresses decision timelines.

The JCPOA represents the Western approach to proliferation management at its most sophisticated. The 2015 agreement imposed limits on Iran's enrichment capacity, reduced its stockpile of enriched uranium, and subjected its program to intrusive IAEA verification, in exchange for sanctions relief. The mechanism was latency management: Iran retained the technical capacity to produce nuclear weapons but was kept far enough from the threshold that breakout would be detectable and reversible. The US withdrawal in 2018 and the subsequent collapse of the agreement illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. The strength was the verification architecture; the weakness was the dependence on US political commitment, which proved reversible. The Western perspective treats Iran as a proliferation threat requiring containment, while treating Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal as a strategic asset requiring no comparable scrutiny—a double standard that undermines the legitimacy of the nonproliferation regime in the eyes of many non-Western states.

What the Western perspective contributes is operational expertise in alliance management, verification technology, and the institutional machinery of nonproliferation. The IAEA safeguards system, developed largely under Western leadership, is the technical backbone of the NPT, and Western intelligence and diplomatic capabilities have been central to detecting and disrupting proliferation networks, from the A.Q. Khan network to Iran's covert facilities. The Western perspective also provides a theory of arms control as a tool of stability: treaties like INF, START, and New START are understood not as ends in themselves but as mechanisms for managing the security dilemma and reducing the risk of accidental war.

What it occludes is the tendency to rationalize arms racing as stability and to underestimate how Western deployments drive adversary modernization. The deployment of missile defenses, the development of prompt global strike capabilities, and the expansion of NATO have all been cited by Russia and China as reasons for their own nuclear buildups. The Western perspective can also treat nonproliferation as a one-way obligation: non-nuclear states must not acquire weapons, while nuclear-weapon states modernize without corresponding disarmament. And the JCPOA's collapse demonstrated that the Western approach is vulnerable to domestic political shifts in the United States, which can undo years of diplomatic work overnight.

The strongest counterargument from the African and UN perspectives is that extended deterrence is a form of nuclear sharing that violates the spirit of the NPT and that the Western focus on Iran while ignoring Israel's arsenal is a legitimacy-destroying double standard. The Western response is that extended deterrence has prevented proliferation—Germany, Japan, and South Korea have not gone nuclear—and that the JCPOA was

a genuine achievement that was undermined by Iranian non-compliance and regional behavior, not merely by US withdrawal. The adjudication depends on whether one weights the prevention of allied proliferation more heavily than the legitimacy costs of double standards, and whether the JCPOA's collapse is attributed to the agreement's flaws or to the withdrawal. The Western perspective is most persuasive on operational and alliance-management grounds; it is least persuasive when it presents its own nuclear modernization as stabilizing while treating adversary modernization as threatening.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective treats nuclear strategy and proliferation as problems of international law, verification, and collective security, anchored in the NPT and the broader disarmament machinery of the General Assembly, the Conference on Disarmament, and the IAEA. The core claim is that nuclear weapons are a threat to all states and that their elimination requires a universal legal framework with robust verification. The mechanism is normative and institutional: the NPT creates obligations for both nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states, the IAEA provides technical verification, and the review conferences provide a forum for accountability. This framework has been the backbone of the nonproliferation regime since 1970, and its supporters argue that it has prevented the spread of nuclear weapons to dozens of states that had the technical capacity to acquire them.

The UN perspective's distinctive contribution is its emphasis on the disarmament pillar of the NPT, which is often neglected in great-power debates. Article VI obligates all parties to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race and to nuclear disarmament. The UN General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed this obligation, most notably through resolutions supporting the TPNW and through the establishment of the Open-Ended Working Group on nuclear disarmament. The mechanism here is legal and moral pressure: by repeatedly affirming the disarmament obligation, the UN framework seeks to delegitimize nuclear possession and to create the normative conditions for eventual elimination. The TPNW, negotiated under UN auspices in 2017, represents the most ambitious expression of this approach: it prohibits nuclear weapons entirely, including their use, threat of use, development, production, and stationing, and it includes provisions for victim assistance and environmental remediation.

The IAEA safeguards system is the technical core of the UN perspective. Comprehensive safeguards agreements, supplemented by the Additional Protocol, provide a framework for verifying that nuclear material is not diverted to weapons programs. The mechanism is inspection and monitoring: by placing nuclear facilities under safeguards, the IAEA creates a detection capability that raises the cost of covert proliferation. The JCPOA's verification provisions, which included the most intrusive IAEA monitoring ever negotiated, demonstrated the potential of this approach: even after the US withdrawal, IAEA inspectors continued to monitor Iran's program, providing the international community with information about Iran's nuclear activities. The limitation is that safeguards depend on state cooperation and on the IAEA's access; when states restrict access, as Iran has done since 2021, the verification gap widens.

What the UN perspective occludes is the dependence of its enforcement mechanisms on great-power politics. The NPT's review conferences have repeatedly failed to reach consensus, as in 2015 and 2022, because the nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states disagree fundamentally about the pace and scope of disarmament. The Security Council, which is the enforcement arm of the UN system, is dominated by the five nuclear-weapon states, creating a conflict of interest in which the states most obligated to disarm are the ones with veto power over enforcement. The TPNW, while normatively significant, has not been signed by any nuclear-weapon state and has no enforcement mechanism beyond the general obligations of international

law. And the disarmament machinery—the Conference on Disarmament—has been paralyzed for decades by the consensus rule, which allows any single state to block progress.

The strongest counterargument from the great-power perspectives is that the UN framework is aspirational rather than operational: it sets goals that cannot be achieved without the cooperation of the nuclear-weapon states, and its repeated failures to reach consensus undermine its credibility. The UN response is that the framework's value lies not in immediate achievement but in the creation of norms and institutions that constrain behavior over time, and that the alternative—a world without any nonproliferation regime—would be far more dangerous. The adjudication depends on whether one views the NPT as a floor or a ceiling: as a floor, it has prevented widespread proliferation and created a verification infrastructure that did not exist before; as a ceiling, it has locked in nuclear inequality and provided cover for the nuclear-weapon states to modernize without disarming. The UN perspective is most persuasive when it emphasizes verification and norm-building; it is least persuasive when it assumes that legal obligation alone can overcome the security dilemmas that drive nuclear possession. The framework's future depends on whether the nuclear-weapon states can be persuaded to take Article VI seriously before the legitimacy deficit becomes irreversible.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reveals the NPT as structurally unequal; Pelindaba Treaty as regional disarmament model; TPNW as moral/legal challenge to nuclear hierarchy	May understate the security dilemmas of states facing existential threats; risks conflating all nuclear possession with imperialism	Nuclear order must be non-discriminatory; disarmament must be universal and not deferred indefinitely	Pelindaba Treaty (1996); TPNW (2021) ratifications; African states' NPT compliance record; African Group statements at RevCons	Western: disarmament without security guarantees is naive; states facing hostile neighbors need deterrence, and TPNW ignores verification realities

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	No-first-use pledge as stabilizing norm; minimum deterrence as rejection of arms-race logic; emphasis on diplomacy over coercion	Ambiguity about NFU scope in extreme circumstances; modernization program may contradict minimum deterrence rhetoric	Nuclear weapons are for deterrence only; no-first-use reduces escalation risk; arms control must be mutual and balanced	NFU policy since 1964; relatively small arsenal (~500 warheads); no nuclear use in crises; diplomatic support for JCPOA	Russian/Western: NFU is unverifiable and may not hold under existential threat; minimum deterrence invites first-strike temptation
Russian	Emphasizes nuclear weapons as ultimate security guarantee; escalate-to-deescalate as de-escalation tool; warns against NATO expansion and encirclement	May overstate NATO threat; obscures own first-use ambiguity; Belarus deployment escalates rather than stabilizes	Nuclear weapons preserve sovereignty and prevent aggression; arms control must be mutual; NATO expansion provoked Russian posture	2020 nuclear doctrine (lowered threshold); Belarus deployment (2023); INF withdrawal response; New START suspension (2023)	Western: escalate-to-deescalate lowers nuclear threshold and invites miscalculation; Belarus deployment is escalation, not deterrence
Western	Extended deterrence as alliance management; JCPOA as verification model; Iran as proliferation case study; nonproliferation as core security interest	May conflate nonproliferation with regime change; overstates military solutions; underestimates regime inequality critique	Nonproliferation is paramount; extended deterrence stabilizes alliances; Iran must not acquire bomb; verification plus pressure	JCPOA verification record (2015-2018); NATO nuclear sharing; IAEA reports on Iran; NPT enforcement history	African: extended deterrence perpetuates nuclear hierarchy and denies non-nuclear states equal security; Russian: NATO expansion provoked crisis

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Verification infrastructure (IAEA safeguards); norm-building (NPT, TPNW); disarmament machinery (RevCons, CD); evidence-based reporting	Assumes legal obligation can overcome security dilemma; weak enforcement beyond sanctions; depends on great-power consensus	Nuclear disarmament is legal obligation (NPT Article VI); verification builds trust; peaceful use is permitted under safeguards	IAEA safeguards agreements; NPT RevCon reports; TPNW; UNSCR 2231 snapback mechanism	All nuclear-armed states: disarmament requires security environment change first; legal obligation alone cannot overcome anarchy

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do): Iran Nuclear Program, JCPOA, and the Collapse of Compliance

Levels of analysis. The Iran nuclear crisis can be analyzed at four levels, and each level illuminates a different causal channel. At the individual level, decisions by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, Presidents Hassan Rouhani and Ebrahim Raisi, and US Presidents Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden shaped the trajectory in ways that were not structurally determined; Trump's May 2018 withdrawal was a discretionary choice that many analysts judged to be against the advice of his own defense and intelligence officials, and Biden's subsequent failure to revive the deal reflected both domestic political constraints and Iranian negotiating intransigence. At the state level, Iran's security calculus—shaped by the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), regional isolation, the desire for technological sovereignty, and the perceived threat from Israel and the United States—drove the enrichment program; the United States sought to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, protect Israel and Gulf allies, and maintain nonproliferation norms. At the systemic level, the crisis reflects US-Iran rivalry, regional power competition among Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, and the broader credibility of the nuclear order; the JCPOA was not merely a bilateral deal but a test of whether the nonproliferation regime could accommodate a state's peaceful nuclear ambitions while preventing weaponization. At the transnational level, the IAEA, the NPT, the JCPOA's multilateral framework (the P5+1/E3+3), and global sanctions networks structured the bargaining space, creating verification mechanisms, legal obligations, and economic incentives that both enabled and constrained state behavior.

Mechanism. The JCPOA, concluded in July 2015, established a verification-for-relief bargain whose logic was to extend Iran's breakout time—the time needed to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for one bomb—from an estimated two to three months to roughly one year. Iran accepted limits on enrichment (a 3.67 percent cap on uranium-235 concentration, a 300 kilogram stockpile limit on low-enriched uranium), centrifuge reductions (5,060 IR-1 centrifuges operating, with excess machines stored under IAEA monitoring), the conversion of the Fordow facility to research use, the redesign of the Arak heavy-water reactor to

reduce plutonium production, and enhanced IAEA monitoring including the Additional Protocol and continuous surveillance of enrichment facilities. In exchange, Iran received relief from US, EU, and UN sanctions, unlocking frozen assets and restoring oil exports. The mechanism's enforcement relied on the snapback provision in UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which allowed any permanent member of the Security Council to trigger the reimposition of UN sanctions if Iran violated the deal—a unilateral enforcement tool designed to overcome the veto problem. The mechanism functioned as designed from 2015 to 2018: IAEA reports confirmed Iranian compliance, and breakout time remained extended. The collapse began with US withdrawal in May 2018 and the reimposition of unilateral sanctions, which removed the economic incentive for Iranian compliance. Iran initially remained within JCPOA limits (per IAEA reports through mid-2019) but then incrementally breached: exceeding the 300 kilogram stockpile limit in July 2019, enriching above 3.67 percent in July 2019, installing advanced centrifuges (IR-2m, IR-4, IR-6), enriching to 20 percent in January 2021, and reaching 60 percent enrichment by April 2021—far beyond civilian needs and approaching weapons-grade. By 2024-2025, Iran had accumulated enough 60 percent material that, if further enriched to 90 percent, could yield multiple weapons; breakout time had collapsed to days or weeks. The mechanism failed not because verification failed—the IAEA continued to report accurately on Iran's activities—but because the political bargain collapsed: sanctions relief was the incentive, and its removal eliminated Iran's reason to comply, while the snapback's credibility depended on multilateral consensus that US withdrawal destroyed. The 2025 expiration of UNSCR 2231's snapback provision created a legal cliff, removing even the theoretical enforcement mechanism.

Perspective reconstruction.

African perspective (primary): From the African vantage point, the Iran crisis exemplifies the NPT's structural inequality and the dangers of selective enforcement in a hierarchical nuclear order. African states, many of which forswore nuclear weapons under the Pelindaba Treaty (1996) and the NPT, watch a regime in which nuclear-weapon states modernize their arsenals while non-nuclear states face sanctions for enrichment activities that are technically permitted under Article IV of the NPT. The African critique, articulated by scholars such as Siba Grovogui and Jean-François Bayart, emphasizes that the nonproliferation regime serves great-power interests and that Iran's treatment reflects geopolitical hierarchy rather than universal principle; the TPNW's emergence in 2021 reflects African and Global South frustration with the NPT's disarmament failure. African states also note the apparent hypocrisy of extended deterrence: the United States protects allies with nuclear umbrellas while denying Iran the same security logic, and the JCPOA's asymmetry—Iran's nuclear program constrained while Israel's undeclared arsenal is unchallenged—reinforces perceptions of double standards. Yet African states are not uniformly pro-Iran; many support nonproliferation and IAEA verification, and the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone represents a genuine commitment to disarmament rather than mere anti-Western positioning. The African perspective thus both criticizes the regime's inequality and supports its verification mechanisms—a tension that mirrors the broader Global South position and that reveals the NPT's legitimacy deficit more clearly than any other vantage point.

Chinese perspective: China supported the JCPOA as a multilateral achievement and criticized US withdrawal as undermining diplomatic solutions and destabilizing the region. Beijing's no-first-use doctrine and minimum deterrence stance lead it to view Iran's enrichment with concern but not alarm, emphasizing diplomacy over coercion and opposing sanctions as counterproductive. China's growing economic ties with Iran, including the 25-year cooperation agreement signed in 2021, complicate its nonproliferation stance, creating tension between commercial interests and regime norms; Beijing has continued to import Iranian oil despite US sanctions. China's position reflects both genuine support for multilateral nonproliferation and strategic interest in limiting US regional dominance, and it favors engagement and economic integration as the path

to Iranian compliance rather than pressure and isolation.

Russian perspective: Russia, as a JCPOA signatory and Iran's nuclear cooperation partner at Bushehr, initially supported the deal and criticized US withdrawal as a violation of international law and a blow to multilateralism. Moscow views the Iran crisis through the lens of great-power competition and nuclear order stability, emphasizing that unilateral US actions undermine the frameworks that prevent proliferation. Russia's own nuclear doctrine and its escalate-to-deescalate debates inform its skepticism of US nonproliferation enforcement, which it sees as selectively applied to adversaries while allies are shielded. Russia has maintained ties with Iran, including military cooperation and nuclear fuel supply, while supporting IAEA verification in principle; Moscow's position reflects both genuine nonproliferation interest and strategic interest in limiting US influence in the Middle East and maintaining a multipolar order.

Western perspective: The Western view centers on preventing Iranian nuclear acquisition as a core security interest, protecting Israel and Gulf allies, and maintaining nonproliferation norms. The JCPOA was seen as a verification success from 2015 to 2018 that extended breakout time and provided unprecedented monitoring; US withdrawal was justified by critics of the deal as addressing its sunset clauses, Iran's ballistic missile program, and regional behavior, though many Western analysts and European allies opposed withdrawal as counterproductive. The Western perspective emphasizes extended deterrence, sanctions as leverage, and the military option as a last resort; it tends to conflate Iran's nuclear program with broader regional threats, sometimes obscuring the distinction between enrichment (permitted under NPT Article IV) and weaponization. The Western perspective is strongest on the technical verification record and weakest on explaining why Iran pursued enrichment in the first place.

UN perspective: The UN and IAEA perspective focuses on verification, safeguards, and the NPT framework as the appropriate tools for managing the crisis. The IAEA's reports documented Iran's compliance from 2015 to 2019 and its subsequent breaches with technical precision, providing an evidence-based account that all parties could reference. The UN Security Council's snapback mechanism was designed to enforce compliance multilaterally, and the IAEA's monitoring regime provided the information necessary for political decision-making. The UN perspective emphasizes that the NPT permits peaceful nuclear energy and that verification, not political pressure alone, is the path to confidence. However, the UN machinery lacks enforcement power beyond sanctions, and its effectiveness depends on great-power consensus that the US withdrawal fractured. The UN perspective is strongest on technical verification and weakest on resolving the underlying security dilemma that drives Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Adjudication. The Western perspective best explains the immediate causal chain: US withdrawal in 2018 removed the incentive for Iranian compliance, and Iran's subsequent enrichment escalation was a rational response to lost benefits in a bargaining framework where the United States had unilaterally abrogated the deal. The mechanism is clear and well-documented by IAEA reports. However, the Western perspective misses the structural driver: Iran's nuclear program was always partly a response to security threats (the Iran-Iraq War, US hostility, Israeli opposition) and the NPT's failure to deliver disarmament, and the JCPOA's asymmetry—Iran constrained while nuclear-weapon states modernize—undermined its long-term legitimacy. The African perspective best captures this structural dimension, revealing the regime's inequality and the security dilemma it creates, but it underestimates Iran's agency and the genuine proliferation risk that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose to regional stability. The Chinese and Russian perspectives correctly identify US unilateralism as destabilizing and emphasize multilateralism, but they understate Iran's own choices and the ways in which Iranian intransigence contributed to the deal's collapse. The UN perspective provides the most reliable evidence base through IAEA reporting but cannot resolve the political conflict

because it lacks enforcement power and depends on the very great-power consensus that the crisis destroyed. The best explanation combines the Western mechanism (incentive collapse following US withdrawal) with the African structural critique (regime inequality and security dilemma), while acknowledging that no single perspective fully accounts for the role of domestic politics in both Tehran and Washington, the regional security competition, and the technical realities of enrichment and breakout time. The case demonstrates that nuclear nonproliferation is not merely a technical verification problem but a political legitimacy problem: when the regime is perceived as unequal, compliance becomes contingent on perceived fairness, and verification alone cannot sustain a bargain that one party has abandoned.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Case: India and Pakistan both tested nuclear weapons in 1998. Since then, the subcontinent has seen the Kargil conflict (1999), the 2001–02 military standoff, the Mumbai attacks (2008), and the Pulwama–Balakot crisis (2019), but no full-scale conventional war comparable to 1971. The question is whether nuclearization has stabilized South Asia by capping escalation, or destabilized it by encouraging lower-level coercion, arms racing, and crisis instability.

Tasks

1. Define "stabilization" and "destabilization" in this dyad using observable indicators (full-scale war, crisis frequency, mobilization, arms-race indicators, doctrinal shifts) and specify the time horizon over which you are judging.
2. Reconstruct the Waltzian and Saganian mechanisms for India–Pakistan. Identify the scope conditions under which each is more plausible: command-and-control robustness, civil–military relations, conventional asymmetry, and the Kashmir dispute.
3. Apply the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to explain why crises recur despite nuclear deterrence.
4. Compare the evidence from 1998–2024. Which events support macro-stabilization, and which support meso-level destabilization?
5. Reconstruct, in brief, how Western, Russian, Chinese, UN, and African perspectives would interpret the same evidence.
6. Adjudicate: has nuclearization stabilized or destabilized South Asia? State the metric, the mechanism, and at least two falsifiers.

Model answer (continuous prose): Stabilization in a nuclear dyad should be defined as the prevention of the most dangerous outcome—full-scale war and existential escalation—while destabilization should be defined as an increase in the frequency, intensity, or inadvertence of lower-level crises, arms racing, and coercive probing. Measured by the first standard, India–Pakistan nuclearization looks stabilizing: since 1998 there has been no war on the scale of 1971, and even severe crises have stopped short of sustained conventional invasion. Measured by the second standard, the record is more troubling. Kargil in 1999 occurred after both states had tested nuclear weapons; the 2001–02 standoff produced massive mobilization; Mumbai in 2008 and Pulwama–Balakot in 2019 showed that sub-conventional violence and limited strikes can occur under a nuclear shadow. The appropriate conclusion is therefore not that nuclear weapons either stabilized or destabilized South Asia in a simple sense, but that they changed the ceiling of conflict more than its floor. This is the stability–instability paradox: mutual vulnerability at the strategic level can deter

total war while permitting, and sometimes encouraging, limited coercion below the nuclear threshold. The Waltzian mechanism is straightforward. If both sides possess survivable second-strike capabilities and rational leaders, the cost of full-scale war becomes prohibitive, so war is avoided. In South Asia, however, the scope conditions for clean Waltzian stability are weak. Pakistan's conventional inferiority makes nuclear weapons central to its security; India's conventional superiority creates incentives to exploit gaps below the nuclear threshold; the Kashmir dispute supplies recurring flashpoints; and civil–military asymmetries mean that risk tolerance, signaling, and control may not be uniform within each state. The Saganian mechanism therefore deserves equal weight: nuclear danger arises not only from rational cost–benefit calculation but from organizational routines, misperception, compressed decision time, and the possibility that military organizations may favor options that political leaders did not intend. Pakistan's full-spectrum deterrence posture lowers the nuclear threshold by design, while India's no-first-use and massive-retaliation doctrine aims to restore deterrence but may be less credible against limited or ambiguous attacks. At the systemic level, regional bipolarity is modified by external powers: the United States has repeatedly crisis-managed, while China's strategic partnership with Pakistan shapes India's threat perception. At the state level, Pakistan's military dominance and India's civilian control produce different institutional logics of escalation. At the individual level, leaders face domestic audience costs and compressed timelines. At the transnational level, the NPT's non-recognition of both states, U.S. diplomacy, and Chinese support all condition the dyad. The five perspectives would read this record differently. A Western extended-deterrence lens tends to emphasize survivable second strikes and crisis management, but South Asia's asymmetric doctrines and less robust command-and-control arrangements make that template only partially applicable. A Russian lens, familiar with escalate-to-de-escalate debates, would see Pakistan's lower-threshold posture as a form of deterrence rather than necessarily as escalation, while worrying about India's conventional advantages. A Chinese lens would stress minimum deterrence, no-first-use, and the risks created by India's conventional superiority and U.S.–India strategic convergence. A UN/NPT lens would emphasize non-proliferation, safeguards, and disarmament, but would have limited leverage over two de facto nuclear powers outside the treaty. An African lens, shaped by the Pelindaba Treaty and by skepticism toward nuclear hierarchy, would stress that the NPT's asymmetry and great-power exceptionalism weaken the legitimacy of non-proliferation demands; it would also foreground how externally imposed security orders can reproduce insecurity for states in the global South. Adjudicating the case requires choosing the metric. If the metric is prevention of full-scale war, nuclearization has stabilized South Asia. If the metric is crisis frequency, arms-race intensity, doctrinal ambiguity, and inadvertent-escalation risk, it has destabilized crisis management. The most defensible verdict is therefore conditional: nuclear weapons have stabilized the top of the escalation ladder while destabilizing the middle. This verdict would be falsified in either direction. A future full-scale India–Pakistan war would falsify the claim of macro-stabilization. A sustained decade without major crises, accompanied by verifiable restraint, doctrinal transparency, and improved command and control, would weaken the claim of meso-level destabilization. A demonstrated near-miss or accidental escalation would strongly support the Saganian view that organizational and perceptual failures, not just rational deterrence, drive nuclear danger.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: In 2017, North Korea tested an intercontinental ballistic missile and conducted its sixth nuclear test, while the United States and South Korea held large-scale military exercises and U.S. leaders issued coercive threats. Since then, Pyongyang has expanded its nuclear and missile forces, while Seoul has debated nuclear latency and Washington has reaffirmed extended deterrence through consultations, exercises, and trilateral coordination with Japan. The dispute now centers on whether U.S. extended deterrence

stabilizes the peninsula by raising the cost of North Korean aggression, or whether it increases incentives for preemption, arms racing, and South Korean nuclear hedging. Analysts must assess command and control, alliance credibility, North Korean doctrine, and the roles of China and Russia without assuming that either deterrence success or failure is inevitable. The case also asks how to distinguish North Korea's coercive bargaining from genuine warfighting intentions, and whether sanctions and diplomacy can alter proliferation incentives.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking North Korea's nuclear expansion, U.S.–South Korean military posture, and alliance extended deterrence. Specify the independent variable, the intervening mechanism, the scope conditions, and the observable implications.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would explain the same evidence. For each, state its key contribution and its key occlusion.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the case to one earlier nuclear crisis or dyad (for example, Cuba 1962, India–Pakistan after 1998, or NATO–Warsaw Pact extended deterrence). State what transfers and what does not.
- **Falsifiers:** List at least three observations that would weaken or refute your main claim, and specify the evidentiary standard you would use.

(c) Self-check line: Did you distinguish description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what is likely next), and prescription (what should be done)?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: In a nuclear dyad with asymmetric conventional capabilities and a history of territorial disputes, which condition most directly produces the stability–instability paradox?

A. Mutual vulnerability at the strategic level combined with credible lower-level escalation options.
B. Symmetric conventional forces and robust arms-control verification.
C. A shared no-first-use doctrine and demilitarized borders.
D. Complete nuclear disarmament and reliance on conventional deterrence.

Correct answer: A.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **B** is wrong because symmetric conventional forces and verification tend to reduce, not create, incentives for lower-level probing; it describes a stabilizing configuration rather than the paradox.

- **C** is wrong because shared no-first-use commitments and demilitarized borders would suppress the very lower-level conflict that the stability–instability paradox predicts.

- **D** is wrong because removing nuclear weapons eliminates the strategic stability that makes lower-level conflict thinkable; it is not a condition of the paradox but its absence.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

The data below are drawn from the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) Nuclear Notebook, the IAEA, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs, and the Arms Control Association. They are presented as of 2024 unless noted. Figures for deployed warheads exclude those in reserve or awaiting dismantlement; inventories for India, Pakistan, Israel, and North Korea are estimates because none of these states publishes official figures. The purpose of the lab is not to memorize numbers but to learn to read nuclear data as evidence for theory: trends test claims about proliferation, levels of analysis separate state decisions from systemic pressures, and perspective reconstruction asks whose interests each datum serves.

Table 1 — Nuclear warhead inventories, 2024 (FAS estimates)

State	Total inventory (approx.)	Deployed (approx.)	First test	Historical peak (approx.)
United States	5,044	1,770	1945	31,255 (1967)
Russia	5,580	1,710	1949	40,000 (1986)
China	500	(small deployed force)	1964	~450 (early 2010s); rising
France	290	280	1960	540 (1992)
United Kingdom	225	120	1952	520 (1970s)
India	172	not declared	1974 (PNE) / 1998	rising
Pakistan	170	not declared	1998	rising
Israel	90	not declared	undeclared	~90
North Korea	50	not declared	2006	rising

Table 2 — Treaty and zone membership, 2024

Instrument	Opened / in force	Parties (2024)	Key non-parties or withdrawals	Core obligation
NPT	1968 / 1970	191	India, Pakistan, Israel, South Sudan; North Korea withdrew 2003	Non-proliferation, disarmament, peaceful use
TPNW	2017 / 2021	69 ratified	All nine nuclear-armed states and most NATO allies	Prohibition on possession, use, threat of use
CTBT	1996	172 ratified (187 signatories)	US, China, India, Pakistan, Israel, Egypt, Iran, North Korea not ratified	Bans all nuclear explosions
Pelindaba (Africa NWFZ)	1996 / 2009	43 (all AU members)	none among African states	Prohibits nuclear weapons in Africa

Instrument	Opened / in force	Parties (2024)	Key non-parties or withdrawals	Core obligation
Tlatelolco (Latin America NWFZ)	1967 / 1969	33	none	First nuclear-weapon-free zone
Rarotonga (South Pacific)	1985 / 1986	13	none	Prohibits nuclear testing/storage
Bangkok (Southeast Asia)	1995 / 1997	10	none	Prohibits nuclear weapons
Semipalatinsk (Central Asia)	2006 / 2009	5	none	Prohibits nuclear weapons

Table 3 — Arms control and safeguards status, 2024

Instrument	Status	Key terms or notes
ABM Treaty	US withdrew 2002	Limited missile defenses; withdrawal enabled national missile defense
INF Treaty	Expired 2019 (US withdrew; Russia suspended)	Eliminated 500–5,500 km ground-launched missiles
New START	Extended to February 2026	1,550 deployed warheads; 700 deployed launchers per side
JCPOA	Collapsed	US withdrew 2018; Iran exceeded limits 2019–2024; IAEA monitoring degraded
IAEA comprehensive safeguards	~180 states with CSA in force	Verifies non-diversion of declared material; Additional Protocol adds access
IAEA Additional Protocol	~140 states	Enhanced access to undeclared facilities; not universal

Analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Compare the US and Russian inventories in Table 1 with their historical peaks. What does the post-1991 trajectory show, and how does the 2024 China figure complicate any simple narrative of "disarmament"? Note specifically what the deployed column does and does not capture about readiness.

2. **Level of analysis.** Table 1 lists nine nuclear-armed states. Using the four levels of analysis from Lesson 1 (individual, state, systemic, transnational), explain why the same inventory figure can be read as a state-level decision (domestic politics, leadership) or as a systemic outcome (security dilemma, alliance structure). Give one example of each reading for a single state.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** For each of the five perspectives named in the lesson header, state what Table 2 and Table 3 together would be read as showing. African: what does the Pelindaba

entry and the TPNW ratification count imply about who bears the costs of the non-proliferation order? Chinese: what does the CTBT non-ratification by the US and China imply for the credibility of disarmament commitments? Russian: what does the INF expiry and New START sunset imply about the stability of bilateral arms control? Western: what does the JCPOA collapse imply about the limits of verification-based bargains? UN: what does the gap between CSA and Additional Protocol coverage imply about the safeguards system's reach?

4. **Interpretation.** The NPT has 191 parties but the TPNW has only 69 ratifications and no nuclear-armed state has joined. Is this evidence that the non-proliferation regime is strong, weak, or bifurcated? Defend your answer with reference to at least two of the tables and one theoretical claim from the lesson (Sagan vs. Waltz, or the stability-instability paradox).

5. **Limitation.** What do these tables systematically fail to capture? Identify at least three blind spots: (a) the quality and readiness of forces (not just numbers), (b) the opacity of non-declared programs, and (c) the political meaning of "deployment" in different doctrinal contexts. Explain how each blind spot would change the interpretation of Table 1.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — The Deterrence Stability Triangle (hand-drawn, landscape orientation)

What to draw. Draw a large equilateral triangle. At the top vertex, label "Second-Strike Capability (survivability)"; at the bottom-left vertex, label "Credible Commitment (resolve)"; at the bottom-right vertex, label "Crisis Stability (no first-strike incentive)." Inside the triangle, draw a smaller inverted triangle labeled "Stable Deterrence." Along each side of the outer triangle, draw an arrow pointing inward toward the center, labeled respectively "Hardening / dispersal / SSBNs," "Alliance guarantees / declaratory policy," and "Launch-on-warning risks / C3I vulnerability." Outside the triangle, in the top-left corner, draw a small mushroom-cloud icon with a red "X" through it and the label "First strike not rational."

How to label it. Use a legend: solid lines = structural requirements; dashed lines = behavioral requirements. Place a box at the bottom reading "Scope condition: rational actors, survivable forces, clear red lines."

Perspective overlay to annotate. In the margin, write five short tags: "African: who pays for survivability?"; "Chinese: minimum deterrence fits here"; "Russian: escalate-to-deescalate breaks the triangle"; "Western: extended deterrence stretches the triangle"; "UN: NPT as the outer frame." This visual encodes Key Idea 1 (MAD and second-strike stability) and should be referenced whenever the student encounters claims about "stable deterrence."

Visual 2 — The Proliferation Decision Funnel (hand-drawn, portrait orientation)

What to draw. Draw a funnel narrowing from top to bottom. At the wide top, label "Systemic pressures (security dilemma, alliance gaps, prestige)." In the middle band, label "State-level factors (regime type, civil-military relations, economic capacity)." At the narrow bottom, label "Individual leadership decisions." Inside the funnel, draw three horizontal "filters": "NPT/IAEA safeguards," "Export controls (NSG)," and "Domestic opposition / cost." Below the funnel, draw two exit arrows: one to the left labeled "Acquisition (Waltz logic)" and one to the right labeled "Renunciation (Sagan logic / Libya, South Africa, Ukraine)." To the right of the funnel, draw a small box labeled "Latency: enrichment capability without weaponization."

How to label it. Label the left exit "Proliferation" and the right exit "Rollback." Add a note: "Same systemic pressure, different state-level filter."

Perspective overlay to annotate. Margin tags: "African: Pelindaba removes the funnel entirely for one continent"; "Chinese: NFU as a filter"; "Russian: security guarantees as a filter"; "Western: JCPOA as a filter"; "UN: safeguards as the universal filter." This visual encodes Key Idea 3 (proliferation) and Key Idea 4 (JCPOA and latency).

Visual 3 — The Arms Control Erosion Timeline (hand-drawn, horizontal timeline)

What to draw. Draw a horizontal timeline from 1972 to 2026. Mark the following points with vertical ticks and labels: 1972 ABM Treaty signed; 1987 INF Treaty signed; 1991 START I; 1996 CTBT opened; 2002 US withdraws from ABM; 2010 New START signed; 2015 JCPOA; 2018 US withdraws from JCPOA; 2019 INF expires; 2021 TPNW enters force; 2022 Russia suspends New START participation (announced); 2026 New START expires (unless replaced). Above the timeline, draw a shaded band labeled "Era of bilateral arms control (1972–2019)" that ends at 2019. Below the timeline, draw a second shaded band labeled "Era of multilateral non-proliferation (1968–present)" that continues to the right edge. At the far right, draw a question mark labeled "Post-2026?"

How to label it. Use two colors: blue for bilateral US-Russia treaties, green for multilateral instruments. Add a legend.

Perspective overlay to annotate. Margin tags: "African: TPNW as the alternative track"; "Chinese: modernization outside this frame"; "Russian: doctrine shifts after 2022"; "Western: JCPOA as the Iran-specific track"; "UN: RevCon as the review mechanism." This visual encodes Key Idea 5 (erosion of arms control) and should be used to anchor discussions of "what comes after New START."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (answer + source log)
What is the basic logic of nuclear deterrence?	Deterrence by punishment: the threat of unacceptable retaliation prevents attack. Brodie (1946) argued the chief purpose of military forces shifts from winning wars to preventing them. Schelling (1960) added the importance of credible commitment and the manipulation of risk. Scope: requires survivable second-strike forces and rational actors. Source: Brodie 1946; Schelling 1960.
What is second-strike stability?	A force is second-strike stable if it can survive a first strike and retaliate with unacceptable damage. Wohlstetter (1959) emphasized that vulnerability of forces creates first-strike incentives. Mechanism: survivability (hardening, dispersal, SSBNs) removes the incentive to strike first. Source: Wohlstetter 1959.

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (answer + source log)
What is the stability-instability paradox?	Nuclear weapons may deter total war while permitting or even encouraging lower-level conflict, because the nuclear umbrella reduces the risk of escalation. Extended deterrence (US guarantees to allies) is the key application. Source: Snyder 1961; Jervis 1984.
What are the main causes of proliferation?	Waltz (1981, 1995) argues proliferation is inevitable and may be stabilizing (more nuclear powers = more deterrence). Sagan (1996, 2003) argues proliferation is dangerous due to organizational pathologies, civil-military relations, and preventive war incentives. Debate: systemic vs. unit-level causes. Source: Sagan and Waltz 1995; Sagan 2003.
What is nuclear latency?	The capability to produce fissile material and weapons without having done so. JCPOA addressed latency by limiting enrichment levels and centrifuge numbers while allowing civilian nuclear energy. Snapback: reimposition of sanctions if Iran violated terms. Source: Fitzpatrick 2019.
What is extended deterrence?	The extension of a nuclear guarantee to allies (e.g., US to NATO, Japan, South Korea). Creates credibility problems: would the US risk New York for Tokyo? Mechanism: coupling, tripwires, and declaratory policy. Source: Schelling 1960; Narang 2014.
What is escalate-to-deescalate?	A debated Russian doctrine in which limited nuclear use could terminate a conventional conflict on favorable terms. Contested: whether it is official doctrine or Western misreading. Source: Russian nuclear doctrine documents; debates in Western scholarship.
What is no-first-use (NFU)?	A declaratory policy committing not to use nuclear weapons first. China has maintained NFU since 1964; India adopted NFU in 1998 (with caveats). Debate: whether NFU is credible or merely declaratory. Source: Chinese defense white papers.
What is the NPT grand bargain?	Non-nuclear states forgo weapons; nuclear states pursue disarmament; all have right to peaceful nuclear energy. Critique: disarmament pillar unfulfilled; non-proliferation bias. Source: NPT text (1968); African Group statements at RevCon.

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (answer + source log)
What is the TPNW?	Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017/2021). Prohibits possession, use, threat of use, development, testing, production. Rejected by all nuclear-armed states. African states were leading proponents. Source: UNODA; TPNW text.
What is the Pelindaba Treaty?	Africa Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (1996/2009). All 43 AU members are parties; requires nuclear-weapon states to respect the zone. African perspective: non-proliferation must be paired with disarmament and equity. Source: Pelindaba Treaty text.
What is snapback?	Mechanism in JCPOA allowing reimposition of UN sanctions if Iran violated terms, without a new Security Council vote. Used by US in 2020 (disputed). Source: JCPOA text; UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Source log. Brodie (1946); Schelling (1960); Wohlstetter (1959); Sagan and Waltz (1995); Sagan (2003); Narang (2014); Fitzpatrick (2019); NPT text (1968); JCPOA text (2015); UNSCR 2231 (2015); Pelindaba Treaty (1996); TPNW text (2017); FAS Nuclear Notebook (2024).

Summary. Nuclear strategy rests on the logic of deterrence by punishment, which requires survivable second-strike forces and credible commitment; the stability-instability paradox shows that nuclear weapons may deter total war while permitting lower-level conflict. Proliferation is explained by competing theories—Waltz's systemic optimism versus Sagan's organizational pessimism—and managed by a regime (NPT, IAEA, NWFZs) that African states critique for its non-proliferation bias. The JCPOA case illustrates how latency and snapback mechanics interact with great-power politics, while the erosion of arms control (INF, ABM, New START) and new technologies (hypersonics, AI in NC3) pose the central challenges of the current era.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Imagine two people who each have a gun that can destroy the other's house but cannot be taken away. Neither will shoot first because the other will shoot back. That is nuclear deterrence. Now imagine one person promises to shoot back on behalf of a friend who has no gun—that is extended deterrence, and it is harder to believe. Some people want more guns in more hands, thinking more guns mean more safety; others think more guns mean more accidents. Treaties try to count and limit the guns, but the counting is hard because some people hide their guns. New technologies—faster missiles, smarter computers—may make it harder to know who shot first, which could make everyone more nervous.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure whether "escalate-to-deescalate" is actual Russian doctrine or a Western construction; I should not state it as settled fact. I am also unsure of the exact 2024 deployed-warhead

figure for China and should mark it as approximate. I do not fully understand the technical difference between a comprehensive safeguards agreement and an Additional Protocol, and I should reread that before claiming expertise. I am fuzzy on whether New START's 1,550 limit counts warheads or launchers.

3. **Reread verification.** After rereading: the NPT has 191 parties; North Korea withdrew in 2003; the TPNW entered force in 2021 with 69 ratifications; the INF Treaty expired in 2019; New START runs to February 2026; the JCPOA was agreed in 2015 and the US withdrew in 2018. The Sagan-Waltz debate is correctly attributed: Waltz argues proliferation may be stabilizing; Sagan argues organizational and political factors make proliferation dangerous. Brodie (1946) is correctly identified as the originator of the "war prevention" framing. Schelling (1960) is correctly identified with credible commitment and risk manipulation. These check out.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** The "two people with guns" analogy captures the basic logic of mutual deterrence but breaks down in three ways. First, nuclear weapons are not like guns: they cannot be used in a controlled, reversible way, and their effects are catastrophic and indiscriminate. Second, the analogy ignores the extended-deterrence problem: the US is not defending itself when it guarantees allies, so the "gun" is pointed at a third party's enemy, not the gun-holder's own. Third, the analogy assumes rational actors with perfect information; in reality, crises involve misperception, organizational routines, and time pressure, which the analogy cannot represent. The analogy is useful for first-pass intuition only.

5. **Rewrite.** Nuclear deterrence is the threat of unacceptable retaliation that prevents nuclear attack; it requires survivable second-strike forces and credible commitment, as Brodie and Schelling argued. The stability-instability paradox notes that nuclear weapons may deter total war while permitting lower-level conflict, especially under extended deterrence. Proliferation is contested: Waltz sees systemic logic pushing states toward acquisition, while Sagan emphasizes organizational and political dangers. The NPT regime, IAEA safeguards, and nuclear-weapon-free zones like Pelindaba attempt to manage proliferation, but African states critique the regime's non-proliferation bias and unfulfilled disarmament pillar. The JCPOA case shows how latency and snapback mechanics interact with great-power withdrawal. Finally, the erosion of bilateral arms control and new technologies—hypersonics, AI in nuclear command and control—challenge the stability that the Cold War architecture provided.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L21	Definition	What is second-strike capability?	Second-strike capability is the assured ability to retaliate after absorbing a nuclear first strike. It stabilizes deterrence by making a disarming attack irrational and shifting strategic competition toward survival rather than victory.	Western deterrence theory treats this as foundational; African perspectives often ask whose security is stabilized when only nuclear powers enjoy assured retaliation.
L21	Mechanism	How does the stability-instability paradox work?	Nuclear deterrence at the strategic level can lower the perceived cost of limited conventional or sub-conventional conflict because escalation is assumed to be capped. This can encourage proxy wars, border skirmishes, or coercion below the nuclear threshold.	South Asian and African analysts often argue the paradox is not abstract but lived in border crises and proxy conflicts.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L21	Application	Why did India and Pakistan's 1998 tests not obviously stabilize South Asia?	Nuclearization may have reduced incentives for full-scale war while increasing risks of limited crises, misperception, and escalation through non-state actors. The evidence is mixed: no large war since 1999, but Kargil, Mumbai, Balakot, and recurring crises.	Regional scholars disagree whether deterrence or crisis-management institutions explain the absence of war.
L21	Comparison	How do Waltz and Sagan disagree on proliferation?	Waltz argues more nuclear states can be stabilizing because deterrence is robust and new powers learn caution; Sagan argues proliferation is dangerous due to organizational pathologies, preventive-war incentives, and accident risks. The debate turns on whether state rationality or institutional fragility dominates.	African and Global South scholars often add that proliferation debates ignore who already possesses arsenals and who bears testing and environmental costs.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L21	Source	What is Brodie's 1946 contribution?	Brodie argued that the atomic bomb transformed strategy from winning wars to preventing them, making deterrence the central problem. This shifted military thought toward survival and retaliation rather than victory.	Often cited in the Western canon; African IR scholars may frame it as part of a Euro-American strategic vocabulary that sidelines colonial and postcolonial security concerns.
L21	Debate	What is "escalate to de-escalate"?	It refers to a debated Russian doctrine in which limited nuclear use could terminate a conventional conflict on favorable terms. Critics argue it lowers the nuclear threshold and complicates NATO planning; defenders say it is misread or rhetorical.	Russian sources frame it as deterrence; Western sources often treat it as a destabilizing ambiguity.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L21	Reconstruction	How does the African perspective frame the NPT?	Many African states view the NPT as a non-proliferation bargain that privileges existing nuclear powers and constrains latecomers, while disarmament obligations remain weakly enforced. The Pelindaba Treaty and TPNW reflect demands for equality and attention to humanitarian consequences.	This is not merely anti-Western; it is a claim about unequal sovereignty and a racialized nuclear order.
L21	Occlusion	What does the Western extended-deterrence perspective often occlude?	It can obscure how umbrella guarantees create dependency, entrench alliance hierarchies, and may incentivize proliferation by states outside the umbrella. It also treats deterrence as technical rather than political.	African and non-aligned critics often highlight these distributional effects.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L21	Adjudication	How would you adjudicate whether nuclear latency is stabilizing?	One would compare cases where latency produced bargaining leverage with cases where it triggered preventive pressure, examining IAEA access, regional rivalries, and alliance commitments. Stabilization is conditional, not automatic.	The JCPOA case shows latency can be managed through verification but collapses when political trust erodes.
L21	Visual	What does a "use it or lose it" dilemma depict?	It depicts pressures to launch before an adversary's first strike destroys vulnerable forces, especially under poor warning or command-and-control stress. It is a classic escalation risk in crisis bargaining.	African and UN disarmament advocates use such risks to argue for abolition rather than management.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L21	Definition	What is nuclear latency?	Nuclear latency is the capacity to produce weapons-grade material or assemble a device without having done so, often through civilian fuel-cycle infrastructure. It creates ambiguity that can deter or provoke depending on verification and politics.	Iran's case shows latency can be both a bargaining chip and a trigger for sanctions or strikes.
L21	Mechanism	How does snapback sanctions work in the JCPOA?	The JCPOA included a mechanism allowing participants to reimpose UN sanctions if Iran violated commitments, without a new Security Council vote. This created coercive leverage but also raised questions about legitimacy after US withdrawal.	From Iran's view, snapback became a tool of asymmetric pressure; from the Western view, it preserved enforcement.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L21	Application	What changed after US withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018?	The US reimposed sanctions; Iran gradually exceeded enrichment and stockpile limits; IAEA access disputes grew; and diplomatic trust collapsed. The case illustrates how verification regimes depend on political commitment.	Iranian officials framed steps as reversible responses; Western governments framed them as proliferation risks.
L21	Comparison	How do Chinese and Russian nuclear postures differ in stated doctrine?	China emphasizes no-first-use and minimum deterrence while modernizing; Russia emphasizes a larger arsenal, tactical weapons, and ambiguous escalation doctrine. Both challenge US extended deterrence but through different logics.	African non-aligned perspectives often warn that great-power doctrinal competition sidelines disarmament.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L21	Debate	What is the strongest critique of MAD?	Critics argue MAD depends on perfect rationality, stable command and control, and no accidents or cyber vulnerabilities; it may also morally normalize mass civilian targeting. Supporters reply that no nuclear war between major powers since 1945 supports its stabilizing effect.	TPNW supporters argue humanitarian law, not strategic stability, should be the frame.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table scored 0-100

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Gap to close
Define MAD and second-strike stability			
Explain the stability-instability paradox with a mechanism			
Reconstruct the Waltz vs Sagan proliferation debate			
Apply JCPOA mechanics: latency, verification, snapback			
Compare all five perspectives on nuclear order			
Adjudicate stabilizing vs destabilizing claims with falsifiers			

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you reconstruct least charitably, and what evidence would make that reconstruction fairer?
2. Where did you confuse description of a nuclear event with explanation of its causal mechanism?
3. What single piece of evidence would most strongly change your adjudication of whether nuclearization stabilized South Asia?

7.3 Error-log table: Common Misconception | Correction | Evidence

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
MAD means nuclear weapons make all war impossible.	MAD addresses strategic nuclear war; it does not prevent limited, proxy, or sub-conventional conflict.	Stability-instability paradox; India-Pakistan crises after 1998.
More nuclear states automatically increase stability.	Proliferation may increase accident, miscalculation, and preventive-war risks; stability depends on command control and doctrine.	Sagan's organizational and preventive-war arguments; Narang on postures.
Iran's JCPOA compliance steps were irreversible proof of weapons intent.	Latency creates ambiguity; enrichment steps can be framed as leverage or response, requiring verification rather than assumption.	JCPOA monitoring disputes; Fitzpatrick (2019).
Extended deterrence is purely stabilizing for allies.	Umbrella guarantees can create dependency, hierarchy, and incentives for independent proliferation.	Non-proliferation debates; alliance politics.
Arms control erosion only affects great powers.	Collapsed treaties reshape regional security calculations and verification norms globally.	INF expiration 2019; New START uncertainty.
African opposition to nuclear order is only anti-Western sentiment.	It is also a claim about unequal sovereignty, disarmament obligations, and humanitarian consequences.	Pelindaba Treaty; TPNW.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
MAD; second-strike stability	Mutual vulnerability makes first strike irrational	Brodie (1946); Schelling (1960)	Cold War US-Soviet dyad	Whether MAD requires perfect rationality	Successful disarming strike or accidental launch	L12; L20

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Extended deterrence	Umbrella guarantees extend deterrence to allies	Western alliance theory	NATO; Japan; South Korea	Credibility vs entrapment	Ally tests independent capability	L47-48
Stability-instability paradox	Strategic stability lowers cost of limited conflict	Schelling (1960)	India-Pakistan crises	Deterrence vs crisis instability	No limited wars under nuclear shadow	Problem pair
Proliferation causes	Security, prestige, domestic politics	Waltz vs Sagan (1995, 2003); Narang (2014)	NPT membership; Iran	Optimism vs pessimism	New nuclear state causes war or accident	L45
Nuclear latency	Civilian fuel cycle can produce weapons material	Fitzpatrick (2019)	Iran JCPOA	Leverage vs preventive pressure	IAEA verification resolves ambiguity	L45
Snapback	Reimpose sanctions without new UNSC vote	JCPOA text	US withdrawal 2018	Enforcement vs legitimacy	Sanctions fail to change behavior	L45
Arms control erosion	INF expired 2019; New START to 2026	Treaty regime analysis	US-Russia	Modernization vs restraint	Treaty renewal reduces deployments	L55
African NWFZ and TPNW	Regional prohibition plus humanitarian framing	Pelindaba Treaty; TPNW	Africa nuclear-weapon-free zone	Disarmament vs deterrence	Nuclear states join and verify	L21

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Timing	Concrete action
R1	24 hours	Recite definitions and mechanisms aloud; redraw the visual anchor from memory.

Interval	Timing	Concrete action
R2	3 days	Reconstruct all five perspectives from memory; check what each occludes.
R3	1 week	Redo the problem pair with a new case, such as North Korea or Israel-Iran dynamics.
R4	2 weeks	Use the Data Lab: interpret FAS and NPT trends and write a 200-word adjudication.
R5	1 month	Teach the lesson to a peer or record a Feynman compression; update the error log.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define MAD and second-strike stability in one sentence.
- ☐ I can explain the stability-instability paradox as a mechanism, not just a label.
- ☐ I can reconstruct Waltz's and Sagan's arguments without caricature.
- ☐ I can distinguish nuclear latency from weaponization.
- ☐ I can explain JCPOA snapback and its legitimacy problem.
- ☐ I can describe Iran's post-2018 compliance steps accurately.
- ☐ I can compare Chinese no-first-use with Russian escalate-to-deescalate debates.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective on NPT, Pelindaba, and TPNW.
- ☐ I can identify what each of the five perspectives occludes.
- ☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to a nuclear case.
- ☐ I can adjudicate a stabilizing vs destabilizing claim using falsifiers.
- ☐ I can interpret FAS warhead and NPT membership trends.
- ☐ I can explain INF expiration and New START status.
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
- ☐ I can complete the flashcards without looking at notes.
- ☐ I have updated my error log with at least one corrected misconception.
- ☐ I can state the lesson's central puzzle in my own words.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- Deterrence foundations: Brodie (1946); Schelling (1960).
- Proliferation debate: Sagan and Waltz (1995); Sagan and Waltz (2003).
- Nuclear acquisition and posture: Narang (2014).
- Iran and the JCPOA: Fitzpatrick (2019).
- Treaty regime: Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968); Pelindaba Treaty (1996); Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017).
- Data and verification: Federation of American Scientists nuclear warhead estimates; IAEA safeguards framework.

End of Lesson 21. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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23. Conventional Warfare and Industrial Attrition

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 22 — Conventional Warfare and Industrial Attrition
Module	Module 4: Security Studies and Warfare
Prerequisites	L20 (strategic thought), L21 (nuclear deterrence), L5 (realism)
Interleaved links	Forward to L36 (Ukraine war dynamics), L38 (energy coercion), L48 (maritime strategy)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, worked example, problem pair, memo, visuals, flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple: why did the most technologically advanced, best-resourced military coalition in history, operating a doctrine of rapid combined-arms maneuver that had been validated in 1991, fail to reproduce that success in Ukraine in 2023, and why did the war instead settle into the grinding, shell-hungry, trench-and-drone attrition that characterized 2022–2024? The answer matters far beyond Ukraine. It determines how states size their arsenals, how they train their officers, how they budget their defense industries, and how they judge the credibility of deterrence. For three decades after Operation Desert Storm, Western military thought treated maneuver warfare — speed, shock, joint precision fires, and information dominance — as the natural and superior form of land combat. The implicit theory was that industrial attrition had been superseded: that modern sensors, precision-guided munitions, and networked command had made mass and logistics secondary. Ukraine has forced a reckoning. Russian columns stalled in February 2022 not because they lacked tanks but because they lacked fuel, bridging, and coherent command; Ukrainian counteroffensives in 2023 stalled not because they lacked courage or Western equipment but because they could not generate the artillery mass, breaching assets, and air superiority that maneuver theory presupposes. The war became, in the phrase now common in defense ministries, a return of industrial war. This lesson exists to make that phrase analytically tractable rather than journalistic.

Placed in the curriculum, Lesson 22 sits at the hinge between abstract strategic thought and concrete operational reality. L20 gave you the classical canon — Clausewitz on friction and the fog of war, Jomini on decisive points and lines of operation, Mahan on sea control — and L21 gave you nuclear deterrence and

escalation. L5 gave you realism's emphasis on material power and the security dilemma. This lesson translates those abstractions into the mechanics of how armies actually fight: how tanks, infantry, artillery, and air power are combined; how ammunition is produced and moved; how electronic warfare contests the electromagnetic spectrum; and how drones have collapsed the cost of precision. It also sets up the forward links. L36 (Ukraine war dynamics) will assume you understand why the 2023 counteroffensive failed; L38 (energy coercion) will assume you understand that industrial war is also an energy war; L48 (maritime strategy) will assume you understand that attrition logic applies at sea as well as on land. Without this lesson, those later lessons become description without mechanism.

By the end of this lesson you will be able to do five things that you could not do before. First, reconstruct the causal chain from industrial base to battlefield outcome — from steel and propellant through shell production through artillery density through tactical result — rather than treating "logistics" as a vague synonym for supply. Second, distinguish combined-arms maneuver from industrial attrition as competing theories of victory with different scope conditions, and identify which conditions obtained in Ukraine 2022–2024. Third, evaluate the drone-and-electronic-warfare revolution not as a technological novelty but as a change in the cost structure of precision and in the contestability of the electromagnetic spectrum. Fourth, reconstruct five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — on the same operational facts, showing what each contributes and what each occludes. Fifth, apply the framework to new cases, including the Sahel and a potential Taiwan contingency, while specifying the falsifiers that would make your application wrong. These are assessable skills, not impressions; the memo and problem pair are designed to test them.

The theoretical lineage you need is specific. Stephen Biddle's *Military Power* (2004) is the canonical modern statement of why the "modern system" — combined arms, cover, concealment, dispersion, and small-unit initiative — produces outcomes that raw material counts cannot predict; his argument is that technology matters through its interaction with doctrine and organization, not alone. Lawrence Freedman's *The Future of War* (2017) traces how Western thinkers repeatedly predicted the obsolescence of mass and were repeatedly surprised by its return. Steven Zaloga's work on artillery and armored warfare (2022) documents the material realities of shell and tank. Jack Watling's RUSI analyses (2022–2024) provide the most granular open-source operational assessments of the Ukraine war, including the 2023 counteroffensive's failure modes. The IISS *Military Balance* (2023–24) supplies the force-structure and industrial data. Behind these sit the classical theorists: Clausewitz on friction, chance, and the political object; Jomini on concentration and interior lines; and, less often cited but essential, the Soviet "deep battle" tradition (Tukhachevsky, Triandafillov) that shaped Russian doctrine and that Russian forces in 2022 conspicuously failed to execute. You should read these not as authorities to be memorized but as arguments with scope conditions: Biddle explains why modern armies are hard to destroy, not why they win; Freedman explains the recurring Western illusion of bloodless war; Watling explains what actually happened in Ukraine, not what must happen elsewhere.

A crucial framing choice: the African perspective is not a regional illustration appended to a Western story. It is a vantage point that reveals what the Western, Chinese, Russian, and UN frames systematically miss. In the Sahel — Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and the Lake Chad basin — the relevant warfare is not industrial attrition between peer armies but hybrid conflict among states, militias, jihadist networks, and external interveners, fought with light weapons, commercial drones, and improvised explosive devices, in terrain where the state's monopoly on force is contested and where "victory" is rarely decisive. African scholarship — from Grovogui's critique of international order to Mamdani's analysis of the colonial state, from Bayart's "politics of the belly" to Aning and Danso's work on African security governance — insists that the categories "conventional" and "irregular" are themselves products of a particular (Western, state-centric) ontology. From this vantage, the Ukraine war's industrial attrition is one mode of warfare among several,

and the Western fascination with it risks crowding out attention to the forms of violence that actually kill most Africans. The Sahel experience with drones and light weapons also anticipates, in a different register, the democratization of precision that the Ukraine war has made famous: commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) drones armed with grenades are not a Ukrainian invention but a Sahelian and Middle Eastern one. This lesson therefore treats the African perspective as primary in the sense that it sets the terms of the question — what counts as "war," whose deaths count, and which industrial bases matter — rather than as a case study.

Finally, a methodological warning. This lesson repeatedly asks you to distinguish four things that students conflate: description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen under stated conditions), and prescription (what should be done). The Ukraine war is over-described and under-explained; the temptation is to narrate rather than analyze. The data lab will give you shell-consumption curves and drone-loss rates; your task is not to recite them but to ask what mechanism they support, under what scope conditions, and with what falsifiers. The hinge question at the end is designed to catch the most common conflation — treating a description of Ukrainian adaptation as proof that adaptation always defeats mass. Hold yourself to the standard: every claim must specify a mechanism, every theory must carry its scope conditions and its strongest counterargument, and every perspective must be steel-manned from within before it is criticized.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up (from earlier lessons) Answer each in 2–4 sentences, citing the lesson or theorist where possible.

1. **(L5 — Realism)** State the security dilemma and give one historical example. How does it relate to arms racing in conventional forces rather than nuclear ones?
2. **(L20 — Strategic Thought)** What did Clausewitz mean by "friction," and why does it make the execution of even a well-designed plan uncertain? Give one implication for combined-arms operations.
3. **(L20 — Strategic Thought)** Distinguish Jomini's "decisive point" from Clausewitz's "center of gravity." Which concept better fits a war of industrial attrition, and why?
4. **(L21 — Nuclear Deterrence)** What is the difference between deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment? Which logic, if any, applies to conventional deterrence in Europe?
5. **(L5 — Realism)** How does the realist concept of the "balance of power" differ from the liberal-institutionalist emphasis on regimes and interdependence? Which better explains NATO's 2022–2024 ammunition shortfalls?
6. **(L20 — Strategic Thought)** What is the "modern system" in Biddle's (2004) sense, and what does it predict about the relationship between technology and outcomes?

1.2 Orientation Questions

1. If combined-arms maneuver was the dominant Western doctrine from 1991 to 2022, what specific scope conditions did it require, and which of those conditions failed in Ukraine in 2023?
2. Is the "return of industrial war" a permanent structural shift or a contingent feature of this particular conflict? What evidence would distinguish the two?
3. How does the proliferation of cheap, commercial-off-the-shelf drones change the cost-exchange ratio between attacker and defender, and what does that imply for the offense-defense balance?

4. Whose deaths and which industrial bases count in our analysis — and how would the answer change if the Sahel rather than Ukraine were the primary case?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Term	Provisional Definition
Combined arms maneuver	The coordinated employment of tanks, infantry, artillery, engineers, and air power so that each arm compensates for the others' vulnerabilities; the Western doctrinal ideal from the 1990s through the 2010s.
Industrial attrition	A mode of war in which victory depends on exhausting the adversary's manpower, materiel, and industrial capacity over time, rather than on a single decisive battle or rapid breakthrough.
Force generation	The process by which a state converts population, industry, and training into deployable military units; includes recruitment, equipping, and readiness cycles.
Sustainment	The logistics functions — supply, maintenance, transport, medical — that keep forces fighting; often the binding constraint in high-intensity war.
Artillery dominance	The condition in which one side's tube and rocket artillery can suppress, destroy, or deny the other's movement and concentration; central to the Ukraine war's character.
Kill zone	An area saturated by sensors and fires such that any movement is detected and engaged; drones and artillery have expanded these zones in Ukraine.
COTS drone	Commercial off-the-shelf unmanned aerial vehicle, often modified for military use; cheap, expendable, and rapidly proliferating.
Electronic warfare (EW)	The contest for control of the electromagnetic spectrum, including jamming, spoofing, and signals intelligence; determines whether drones and precision weapons function.
EMS	Electromagnetic spectrum — the medium through which radar, communications, and drone links operate; "contested EMS" means neither side owns it.
Deep battle	The Soviet/Russian doctrinal concept of striking the enemy throughout his depth — reserves, logistics, command — rather than only at the front line.

Term	Provisional Definition
Maneuver warfare	A doctrine emphasizing speed, surprise, and disruption of the enemy's decision cycle over attrition of his forces; associated with Western post-Vietnam reform.
HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket System — a US rocket artillery platform that delivered precision strikes at range in Ukraine; emblematic of Western "fires" support.
Storm Shadow	A British/French air-launched cruise missile supplied to Ukraine; represents deep-strike capability against fixed targets.
Shell consumption rate	The number of artillery rounds fired per day or month; a proxy for industrial capacity and a measure of attrition intensity.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. **Define** combined-arms maneuver as a force-employment system rather than a platform inventory, distinguishing integration (training, command and control, intelligence, sustainment) from mere material aggregation, and explaining why Stephen Biddle's (2004) "modern system" treats force employment as the decisive variable in modern battle. (Bloom: Understand)
2. **Analyze** the compensatory mechanism by which tanks, infantry, artillery, and air power offset one another's vulnerabilities, specifying the tactical and operational levels at which integration operates and identifying the five enabling practices (cover and concealment, dispersion, combined arms, small-unit initiative, depth) that constitute the modern system. (Bloom: Analyze)
3. **Evaluate** the scope conditions under which combined-arms maneuver succeeds or fails, using comparative evidence from the 1991 Gulf War and the Ukraine war 2022–2024, and explaining why layered defenses, air denial, and ammunition shortages can force a reversion to attritional methods even when modern equipment is present. (Bloom: Evaluate)
4. **Apply** the combined-arms framework to reconstruct a novel operational scenario across all four levels of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational), specifying which enablers are present or absent and deriving observable implications for advance rates, casualty exchange ratios, and platform loss patterns. (Bloom: Apply)
5. **Critique** the Western maneuver-warfare tradition from African, Chinese, Russian, and UN vantage points, identifying what each perspective contributes (political economy of African militaries, multi-domain information integration, operational depth and mass, humanitarian-legal constraints) and what

each occludes, and adjudicating among them on the basis of evidence. (Bloom: Create/Critique)

These objectives are assessable through the worked example, problem pair, independent memo, and hinge question that follow. Mastery requires moving beyond platform-counting to the analysis of integration quality, and recognizing that combined-arms theory carries embedded assumptions about state capacity, industrial base, and the nature of war that are not universally shared.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Combined arms maneuver: tanks, infantry, artillery, air power, and their integration

Bolded Causal Claim: Combined-arms maneuver is a force-employment system, not a platform inventory: battlefield effectiveness arises when the vulnerabilities of each arm are offset by the strengths of another, so that the enemy cannot exploit any single weakness; consequently, integration—training, command and control, intelligence, and sustainment—matters more than aggregate material superiority.

Mechanism: Stephen Biddle's (2004) "modern system" of force employment identifies five mutually reinforcing practices: cover and concealment, dispersion, combined arms, small-unit initiative, and depth. The mechanism is compensatory. Main battle tanks deliver shock, mobility, and direct fire but are vulnerable to anti-tank guided missiles, mines, and close infantry; infantry clears obstacles, holds terrain, and protects armor in complex terrain but lacks firepower and mobility; artillery suppresses, shapes, and destroys at range but is vulnerable to counter-battery fire and requires protection; combat aviation and unmanned systems provide reconnaissance, strike, and mobility but depend on air defense suppression and secure basing. When integrated, the system denies the adversary a single point of exploitation: an enemy who can kill tanks with ATGMs must still face artillery and infantry; an enemy who can suppress artillery must still contend with maneuver. This is distinct from "joint" operations (inter-service coordination) and from "all-arms" aggregation (platforms present but not mutually supporting). The mechanism operates at two levels: at the tactical level, the combined-arms team (tank-infantry-artillery) clears a position; at the operational level, combined-arms formations (divisions, corps) achieve breakthrough and exploitation. Force employment—how forces are used—thus explains outcomes that force structure—what forces exist—cannot. Biddle's central empirical claim is that modern wars are decided by relative force-employment quality, not by preponderance, and that the modern system is demanding: it requires extensive training, decentralized decision-making, and robust logistics. Where these are absent, forces revert to massed, attritional methods even when modern equipment is present.

Scope Conditions: Combined-arms maneuver succeeds only where several enabling conditions hold. First, training and doctrine: crews and small units must rehearse integration until it is automatic; the modern system is a skill, not a procurement. Second, command and control and communications: real-time coordination among arms requires reliable, survivable C2; electronic warfare and jamming degrade this. Third, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance: maneuver requires knowing where the enemy is; without persistent ISR, forces blunder into prepared defenses. Fourth, logistics and sustainment: high-tempo maneuver consumes fuel, ammunition, and spare parts at rates that exhaust stockpiles; the 1991 Gulf War's "left hook" succeeded partly because of massive pre-positioned logistics. Fifth, air superiority or at least air parity: without it, ground maneuver is exposed to air attack and cannot achieve deep exploitation. Combined-arms maneuver fails where these conditions are absent or where the defender has prepared layered defenses—minefields, anti-tank obstacles, trench lines, and integrated air defense—that force the attacker into sequential, attritional

reduction. The 2023 Ukrainian counteroffensive illustrates this: Russian layered defenses in Zaporizhzhia (minefields, dragon's teeth, trench lines), Russian air superiority, and Ukrainian shortages of artillery ammunition and air defense prevented the execution of combined-arms breakthrough; operations devolved into small-unit infantry assaults with limited gains. Similarly, Russian attempts at rapid maneuver in February 2022 (the Kyiv thrust) failed due to logistics collapse, poor C2, and Ukrainian resistance, despite numerical and equipment advantages.

Observable Implications: If combined-arms integration is the decisive variable, then several observable patterns should hold. Advance rates should correlate with integration quality and enablers, not merely force ratios: the 1991 Gulf War saw coalition forces advance hundreds of kilometers in days; Ukraine 2023 saw kilometers per month. Casualty exchange ratios should favor the side with superior force employment even when outnumbered. The force ratio required for breakthrough should be lower for well-integrated forces (Biddle suggests the modern system can offset numerical inferiority). Ammunition consumption rates should spike during maneuver phases and reveal sustainment constraints. Platform loss rates should show that tanks are lost primarily to infantry-borne ATGMs and mines when unsupported, and to air when air defense is absent. In Ukraine, IISS Military Balance 2023–24 data and RUSI reporting document thousands of tank losses on both sides, with many attributed to ATGMs, drones, and artillery rather than tank-on-tank engagements—consistent with the modern system's prediction that unsupported armor is vulnerable. The implication for analysts: count platforms last; assess integration first.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point, reconstructed from within through Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, and Oyěwùmí, reveals that combined-arms theory presupposes a Weberian state monopoly on violence and an industrial base that most African states do not possess. Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment and Nkrumah's neocolonialism frame the absence of heavy industry and defense-industrial capacity as structural, not incidental: African militaries are often equipped, trained, and doctrinally shaped by external powers, and their "combined arms" is frequently a borrowed template ill-fitted to local conditions. Bayart's "politics of the belly" and Mbembe's "necropolitics" show that African militaries frequently operate as economic and political actors within fragmented sovereignty, where the line between state forces, militias, and insurgents is porous; in such contexts, "maneuver" is not between armies but among armed groups and populations, and the relevant "arms" include light weapons, motorcycles, and improvised explosive devices rather than tanks and artillery. Mamdani's citizen-subject distinction reminds us that colonial military structures were designed for internal control, not combined-arms maneuver against peer adversaries. Fanon and Cabral's liberation-war thought emphasized political mobilization and popular support over platform integration. In the contemporary Sahel, non-state armed groups (JNIM, ISGS) employ hybrid tactics—motorized columns, IEDs, ambushes—while states deploy drones (Turkish Bayraktar TB2) and light forces; the "combined arms" that matters is often the integration of air surveillance with ground pursuit, not tank-infantry-artillery teams. Tamale and Oyěwùmí add that the gendered division of military labor renders women's contributions invisible in conventional accounts. Aning and Danso emphasize African agency in security governance, including AU peacekeeping where combined arms is relevant but constrained by logistics. What the African vantage reveals that the other four miss: combined-arms theory's universalism occludes the political economy of African militaries and the reality that for much of the continent, war is not interstate maneuver but hybrid, fragmented, and politically embedded violence.

Chinese: Chinese military thought, as articulated in PLA doctrine and strategic studies, treats combined arms

as subordinate to "informatized" and increasingly "intelligentized" warfare. The PLA's post-2015 reforms created theater commands and emphasized integrated joint operations (IJO), in which information dominance, C4ISR, and precision strikes aim to paralyze the enemy's operational system—"system destruction warfare" (□□□□□). From this vantage, tanks and infantry are nodes in a network; their integration matters, but the decisive integration is across services and domains (land, sea, air, space, cyber, electromagnetic). Chinese analysts study Ukraine as demonstrating the importance of air superiority, precision fires, and electronic warfare, and as exposing Russian failures in joint coordination. The Chinese perspective contributes the insight that combined arms must be nested within joint, multi-domain operations, and that information is the integrating medium. It occludes ground-level friction, logistics, and the political constraints on PLA operations; it also risks overestimating the controllability of complex operations.

Russian: Russian doctrine inherits the Soviet "deep battle" (glubokiy boy) tradition of Tukhachevsky, Triandafillov, and Isserson: operational depth, echelonment, combined-arms formations at the operational level, and the integration of artillery, armor, and infantry to achieve breakthrough and exploitation across the enemy's depth. The mechanism is massed, sequential, and artillery-heavy: artillery prepares, armor breaks through, infantry and second echelons exploit. In Ukraine, Russia attempted deep battle in February 2022 (the Kyiv thrust) and failed due to logistics collapse, poor command and control, and Ukrainian resistance; by 2023–24 it had shifted to attritional, positional warfare with massed artillery and glide bombs. The Russian perspective reveals the enduring importance of depth, mass, and artillery in large-scale war, and the difficulty of executing deep operations without logistics and C2. It occludes flexibility, small-unit initiative, and the political-military integration that Western maneuver theory emphasizes; its adaptation failures in Ukraine (rigid C2, weak NCO corps) illustrate the costs.

Western: The Western maneuver-warfare tradition—Blitzkrieg, AirLand Battle, MCDP-1, and the "bypass and collapse" concept—emphasizes tempo, surprise, and attacking the enemy's decision-making and will rather than annihilating forces. Biddle's (2004) modern system is the academic codification of this tradition. The 1991 Gulf War is the paradigmatic triumph: coalition combined arms, air superiority, and logistics produced rapid victory. The Western perspective contributes a rich theory of how integration and tempo defeat larger forces, and it has driven decades of doctrine and procurement. Its occlusions are significant: an overestimation of technology and precision, an underestimation of attrition and the industrial base, and a "maneuverist" bias that treats positional warfare as failure rather than as a rational response to conditions. Ukraine 2022–2024 has forced a partial reckoning with these occlusions.

UN: The UN perspective, grounded in international humanitarian law and civilian-harm monitoring (OHCHR), treats combined arms as a source of complexity and risk. The integration of artillery, armor, air power, and drones multiplies the effects of force; in urban and populated areas, area-effect weapons challenge the principles of distinction and proportionality. UN reporting on civilian casualties in Ukraine documents the humanitarian cost of combined-arms operations in cities such as Mariupol and Bakhmut. This perspective contributes the insistence that military effectiveness must be assessed against legal and humanitarian constraints, and that "integration" includes precautions in attack. It occludes operational necessity and the military logic of force protection; it can appear to treat all large-scale firepower as presumptively unlawful.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Logistics and force generation: the industrial base of modern war, ammunition, and sustainment

Bolded Causal Claim: In sustained high-intensity conventional war, operational outcomes are constrained less by the elegance of tactical plans than by the rate at which states can produce, move, repair, and replace the materiel that plans consume; logistics is not a support function but the strategic center of gravity of industrial attrition.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with consumption. Modern mechanized and artillery-heavy forces burn through ammunition, fuel, spare parts, and vehicles at rates that quickly exceed pre-war stockpiles. Artillery shells, rockets, missiles, drones, and precision munitions are consumed faster than they can be manufactured unless the industrial base has been scaled for war. The second link is transportation: production is useless if it cannot reach the front through rail, road, sea, or air under conditions of interdiction, weather, and infrastructure degradation. The third link is maintenance and regeneration: damaged vehicles must be recovered, repaired, and returned to service; personnel must be trained, equipped, and replaced; medical systems must sustain manpower. The fourth link is force generation: mobilization expands the number of soldiers, but equipment, training, and leadership determine whether expanded manpower becomes combat power. The slowest node in this chain sets the operational tempo. A force may have superior tactics and still be forced to ration fire, delay offensives, or accept static defense because its logistics chain cannot sustain movement and consumption. This is why logistics functions as a binding constraint rather than a background condition. Biddle's (2004) analysis of the modern system emphasizes dispersion, cover, and combined arms, but those techniques presuppose a sustainment base capable of keeping dispersed forces supplied. Freedman (2017) frames strategy as the interaction of ends and means; logistics is where means become finite and where political decisions about mobilization, sanctions, and alliance support are translated into battlefield possibility. In Ukraine, Western aid has functioned as an external logistics system, while Russian and Ukrainian domestic production, repair capacity, and mobilization have shaped what each side could attempt. The mechanism is cumulative: logistics advantage compounds over time because it determines not only today's fire but tomorrow's force structure.

Scope Conditions: This claim applies most strongly to prolonged, high-intensity interstate war involving massed fires, mechanized maneuver, and large manpower requirements. It is less decisive in short campaigns, where pre-war stockpiles may suffice, or in low-intensity conflicts, where consumption rates are lower and informal supply networks can sustain fighters. It also assumes contested logistics: if one side enjoys secure interior lines, industrial depth, and unchallenged transportation, its advantage grows; if logistics are interdicted, even tactically superior forces stall. The claim further assumes political willingness to mobilize industry, labor, and capital for war. Where governments cannot or will not convert civilian production to military use, logistics becomes a political rather than merely technical failure. Finally, the claim is weaker where war is fought primarily through air power, naval blockade, or special operations, because those modes consume different resources and depend on different industrial bases.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include ammunition production and stockpile trends, daily or monthly shell consumption, vehicle availability and repair turnaround rates, rail and port throughput, mobilization cohorts, casualty replacement, and the impact of sanctions on machine tools, energetics, and skilled labor. In Ukraine, reported ammunition shortages and rationing, the repair of damaged vehicles, mobilization drives, and the centrality of Western military aid all point to logistics as a decisive variable. Analysts can also observe the gap between planned and actual consumption: when forces fire far more than pre-war models assumed, stockpiles deplete and production must surge. The IISS Military

Balance 2023-24 and RUSI Ukraine reports (2022-2024) are useful for tracking force structure, equipment losses, and sustainment pressures, though exact consumption figures should be treated as reported rather than independently verified. A further implication is that logistics creates strategic time: the side that can sustain operations longer may win not by breakthrough but by exhausting the opponent's capacity to regenerate combat power.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African scholarship reconstructs logistics not as a neutral technical system but as a political economy of war. From Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment and Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonial dependency, to Bayart's "extraversion" and Mamdani's account of the colonial state, the African vantage point treats military sustainment as embedded in global hierarchies of production. Many African states inherited armies designed for internal control rather than external defense, with maintenance cultures shaped by colonial supply chains and postcolonial dependency on foreign spares. In Sahelian and Great Lakes conflicts, logistics often runs through informal networks, war economies, and external patrons; force generation is less about industrial mobilization than about recruitment, patronage, and the circulation of small arms. This perspective reveals that "industrial base" is not universal: for much of the world, war is sustained by extraversion, illicit markets, and external aid, and the absence of domestic arms production is itself a structural condition. It occludes the specific dynamics of high-intensity interstate war, but it corrects the assumption that logistics is merely a staff problem rather than a question of sovereignty and global inequality. Chinese military thought, as refracted through concepts of informatized and "intelligentized" warfare, treats logistics as a system-of-systems enabler of integrated joint operations. Civil-military fusion and industrial capacity are framed as strategic assets; the emphasis is on precision sustainment, networked distribution, and the ability to support dispersed, high-tempo operations. This perspective highlights the fusion of civilian industry with military demand but can occlude friction, corruption, and the political costs of mobilization. Russian doctrine inherits Soviet mass-mobilization logistics: rail-centric supply, echeloned reserves, and the expectation that war will be long and materially intensive. The "deep battle" tradition assumed sustained throughput. In Ukraine, Russian adaptation failures—reported shortages, maintenance breakdowns, and reliance on long logistical lines—illustrate how inherited structures can fail under precision interdiction and high consumption. This perspective contributes the insight that logistics is doctrinally central, but it can occlude institutional decay and the limits of coercion-based mobilization. Western, especially NATO, thought has historically privileged maneuver and "tooth-to-tail" efficiency, sometimes underestimating consumption in high-intensity war. The Ukraine experience has revived interest in stockpiles, production, and sustainment. This perspective contributes alliance standardization and industrial coordination but can occlude the political difficulty of rearmament and the uneven distribution of industrial capacity among allies. The UN perspective, centered on humanitarian law and civilian harm, treats logistics as a determinant of civilian protection: attacks on supply lines, energy infrastructure, and industrial sites raise questions of distinction and proportionality, while humanitarian access depends on secure corridors. It contributes legal accountability but can occlude military necessity and the operational logic of interdiction.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Artillery dominance and the 'return of industrial war' in Ukraine

Bolded Causal Claim: The Ukraine war demonstrated a "return of industrial war" in which massed artillery, dense surveillance, and prepared defenses made rapid maneuver prohibitively costly, restoring firepower and attrition as the dominant mode of large-scale conventional combat.

Mechanism: The mechanism is a sensor-to-shooter loop operating at scale. Unmanned aerial vehicles, satellites, acoustic sensors, and human observers provide persistent surveillance; artillery and rocket systems con-

vert that information into massed, responsive fires. Because drones and sensors reduce the concealment that historically protected maneuvering forces, concentrations of armor or infantry become detectable and targetable. Prepared defenses—trenches, minefields, anti-tank guided missiles, electronic warfare, and layered artillery—then channel and slow any attempted breakthrough. The result is a "kill zone" in which maneuver is not impossible but is extremely expensive: forces that concentrate are struck; forces that disperse lack the mass to break through. Artillery dominates because it is the principal means of delivering area effects against dispersed, entrenched, or moving targets at range. Its effectiveness depends on ammunition supply, targeting quality, and the ability to survive counter-battery fire. Drones add a second layer: they provide cheap precision for reconnaissance, adjustment, and direct attack, while electronic warfare contests the electromagnetic spectrum and degrades both sides' sensor and communication networks. The mechanism is not simply "more guns"; it is the integration of surveillance, fires, defense, and sustainment. Where one side lacks air superiority, industrial depth, or manpower, artillery-centric attrition becomes the default mode of war. Biddle (2004) argues that modern warfare rewards cover, concealment, dispersion, and combined arms; Ukraine shows what happens when one side cannot achieve the air and logistical conditions that make combined-arms maneuver decisive. Freedman (2017) distinguishes annihilation from attrition; Ukraine illustrates how attrition can become the strategy when breakthrough is blocked. Watling (2022) and RUSI reporting on Ukraine (2022-2024) emphasize the centrality of fires, drones, and defensive depth, while Zaloga (2022) situates artillery as a continuing core capability rather than an obsolete arm. The "return of industrial war" is therefore not a rejection of technology but a recognition that technology has made the battlefield more transparent and more lethal, increasing the value of mass, depth, and sustainment.

Scope Conditions: This claim applies where both sides possess mature artillery, persistent surveillance (especially drones), prepared defenses, and sufficient industrial sustainment. It is strongest in high-intensity state war with contiguous territory, large manpower pools, and external backing. It is weaker where one side achieves air superiority, where terrain favors rapid movement, where defenses are thin, or where one side lacks the industrial capacity to sustain massed fires. It also depends on manpower: artillery dominance requires infantry to hold ground and engineers to build defenses. If manpower collapses, lines break regardless of firepower. The claim should not be generalized to counterinsurgency, maritime conflict, or wars fought primarily by air power, because those contexts involve different vulnerabilities and different uses of force. Finally, the claim is contingent: a successful breakthrough and exploitation could restore maneuver, so artillery dominance is a condition of the current equilibrium rather than a permanent law of war.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include high rates of artillery and drone consumption, slow rates of advance measured in meters or kilometers per day, extensive trench and minefield networks, high casualty ratios, and the growing importance of counter-battery and electronic warfare. In Ukraine, reported fighting around Bakhmut, Avdiivka, and other sectors has been characterized by incremental gains, heavy bombardment, and fortified positions. Analysts can track the ratio of artillery to maneuver forces, the density of minefields, drone loss rates, and the effectiveness of counter-battery fire. RUSI Ukraine reports (2022-2024) and the IISS Military Balance 2023-24 provide frameworks for assessing force structure and equipment, though specific consumption and loss figures should be treated as reported. A key implication is that "victory" in such a war may be defined by exhaustion and regeneration rather than by dramatic breakthrough: the side that can replace losses, sustain fires, and absorb casualties longer gains advantage even without rapid territorial gains.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African scholarship and conflict experience complicate the narrative of a universal "return of industrial war." Much of contemporary African warfare—Sahelian insurgencies, Great Lakes conflicts, urban violence—has been characterized by light weapons, mobility, hy-

bridity, and the political economy of violence rather than massed artillery and trench systems. Scholars such as Mamdani, Bayart, and Grovogui emphasize that African wars are often shaped by state weakness, external intervention, and the privatization of violence; Fanon and Cabral remind us that anti-colonial war was as much political as military. The African vantage point thus asks whether Ukraine's artillery-centric attrition is a general future of war or a specific condition of two large, mobilized, industrialized states with contiguous territory and external backing. It also highlights how drones and light weapons in Africa are transforming conflict without replicating European industrial war. This perspective contributes a necessary skepticism about universalizing one theater's lessons; it occludes the specific material intensity of interstate war, but it prevents the mistake of treating Ukraine as the sole template for global security. Chinese military thought frames the Ukraine war through "informatized" and "intelligentized" warfare: artillery dominance is not merely massed fires but sensor-to-shooter integration, precision, and joint operations. The emphasis is on information superiority, system destruction, and the fusion of reconnaissance and strike. This perspective contributes a theory of how artillery becomes precise and networked; it can occlude the brute material and industrial constraints that have defined Ukraine. Russian doctrine and practice combine Soviet artillery traditions—massed fires, fire preparation, and "deep battle"—with contemporary adaptation. In Ukraine, Russian forces have relied heavily on artillery to compensate for maneuver limitations and manpower constraints. This perspective contributes the insight that artillery can substitute for maneuver when tempo is low; it also reveals adaptation failures, including ammunition logistics, targeting integration, and the vulnerability of massed fires to counter-battery and drones. Western maneuver-warfare traditions, shaped by the 1991 Gulf War and NATO doctrine, initially expected rapid, combined-arms breakthrough. Ukraine has forced a reassessment: when air superiority is absent and defenses are prepared, artillery and attrition dominate. This perspective contributes doctrinal flexibility and alliance learning but can occlude the political and industrial requirements of sustained firepower. The UN perspective centers on civilian harm from artillery and area-effect weapons in populated areas. Reporting on Ukraine documents the humanitarian consequences of prolonged bombardment and the legal obligations of distinction, proportionality, and precautions. This perspective contributes accountability and civilian protection; it can occlude operational necessity and the military logic of firepower in contested terrain.

SECTION 2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Drone Proliferation and Electronic Warfare: Cheap Precision, COTS Components, and Contested EMS

Bolded Causal Claim: The diffusion of cheap, commercially derived drones and the contestation of the electromagnetic spectrum have shifted tactical advantage toward the side that can sustain the fastest cycle of sensing, striking, jamming, and adaptation, while degrading the capacity of either side to achieve surprise, mass, or uninterrupted combined-arms maneuver.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with cost and component availability. Commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) electronics, sensors, batteries, airframes, and navigation modules allow states and non-state actors to field unmanned systems at prices far below those of traditional precision-guided munitions or crewed aircraft. This lowers the barrier to precision strike and persistent surveillance, but it does not eliminate dependence on industrial supply chains, software, operator skill, and maintenance. A drone is not merely a platform; it is a node in a kill chain that includes launch, control, navigation, targeting, transmission, and exploitation. Cheap precision therefore expands the number of actors who can impose costs, yet it also multiplies the number of fragile links that can be attacked.

Electronic warfare is the counter-mechanism. Jamming, spoofing, direction finding, and electromagnetic deception can sever control links, corrupt satellite navigation, or force drones into degraded modes. The result is not a simple contest between drones and jammers but a co-evolutionary adaptation loop: drone operators change frequencies, waveforms, antennas, flight profiles, and autonomy levels; electronic-warfare units respond with broader jamming, more precise direction finding, and new countermeasures. In a contested electromagnetic spectrum, neither side owns the airwaves permanently. Emissions become signatures, command posts become targets, and the side that can reduce its own detectability while exploiting the enemy's emissions gains a temporary advantage. Drones also compress the observation-orientation-decision-action cycle by providing real-time imagery, but they can overload commanders with data unless fused into fire-control and command systems. The mechanism therefore produces a paradox: cheap drones increase lethality and transparency, while electronic warfare restores friction and uncertainty.

Scope Conditions: Drone and electronic-warfare effectiveness depends on several conditions. First, industrial and logistical capacity must sustain production and replacement at rates exceeding losses; cheap systems are only cheap if they can be replaced quickly. Second, operators and units must possess the technical literacy to adapt software, frequencies, and tactics under fire. Third, terrain and weather shape performance: urban canyons, forests, and poor visibility degrade line-of-sight control and optical targeting. Fourth, the density of hostile air defenses and electronic warfare determines whether small drones can survive long enough to matter. Fifth, integration with artillery, armor, and infantry determines whether drone-derived intelligence becomes timely fire rather than unused information. Where these conditions are absent, drones may harass but not decide. Where electronic warfare is overwhelming, link-dependent drones lose value unless they possess autonomy, fiber-optic control, or pre-programmed terminal guidance. The scope condition is therefore not technological possession alone but organizational adaptation within a contested electromagnetic environment.

Observable Implications: The implications include high attrition rates among drones, rapid iteration in design and tactics, dispersion of forces to reduce signature, greater emphasis on camouflage and concealment, and the elevation of electronic-warfare units and drone operators to high-value targets. Artillery becomes more accurate when drones provide real-time spotting, but artillery also becomes more vulnerable when its emissions and positions are detected. Commanders must manage electromagnetic discipline, decoys, and redundant communications. The data-lab focus on drone loss rates and target sets is consistent with this mechanism: many systems are expended, and the decisive variable is often the speed with which losses are replaced and tactics are revised. The observable implication is not that drones make war bloodless or decisive, but that they make the tactical environment more transparent, more lethal, and more dependent on industrial and organizational adaptation.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point, especially in Sahelian and hybrid conflicts, shows that drone proliferation is not confined to interstate industrial war. Non-state actors and states alike use commercial drones for surveillance, propaganda, and strike, often in contexts of weak state capacity, fragmented authority, and external intervention. African scholarship on sovereignty, hybridity, and the political economy of violence highlights that cheap precision can empower actors who lack conventional air forces, while also exposing civilians to persistent surveillance and remote violence. The African perspective contributes an understanding of diffusion, asymmetry, and the social embeddedness of technology; it reveals that drones are not merely military tools but instruments that reshape authority, territorial control, and civilian experience. It can occlude the high-density electronic-warfare contest of large-scale interstate war, but it prevents the

mistake of treating drone warfare as a purely Western or high-technology phenomenon.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes informatized warfare and integrated joint operations. Drones are treated as nodes in a sensor-to-shooter network, and the electromagnetic spectrum is understood as a domain to be seized, managed, and denied. This perspective contributes a systems-level view of data fusion, command integration, and multi-domain coordination. It can occlude the friction, improvisation, and tactical disorder that characterize actual drone and electronic-warfare adaptation.

Russian: The Russian perspective draws on deep-battle heritage and a strong electronic-warfare tradition. It treats drones as instruments for reconnaissance-strike complexes and emphasizes massed fires, operational depth, and spectrum denial. This perspective contributes an understanding of how drones can be integrated with artillery and how electronic warfare can disrupt enemy command and precision. It can occlude decentralized innovation and the speed of commercial adaptation, especially when bureaucratic or doctrinal rigidities slow response.

Western: The Western perspective, shaped by maneuver-warfare doctrine and recent lessons from Ukraine, treats drones as enablers of precision, situational awareness, and combined-arms coordination. It contributes doctrinal flexibility and alliance learning, particularly in adapting tactics to drone-saturated battlefields. It can occlude the industrial and logistical requirements of sustaining drone and electronic-warfare systems at scale.

UN: The UN perspective centers on civilian harm, distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack. Drones can improve discrimination and reduce risk to aircrews, but persistent surveillance and remote strike raise accountability and legal questions. This perspective contributes civilian protection and legal accountability; it can occlude operational necessity and the military logic of electronic and unmanned warfare in contested terrain.

SECTION 2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Attrition vs Maneuver: Competing Theories and the Empirical Record in Ukraine

Bolded Causal Claim: Maneuver warfare is not the natural state of modern combat but a contingent achievement requiring air superiority, weak or disrupted defenses, logistics depth, and combined-arms integration; where these conditions are absent, industrial attrition becomes the governing logic, and the side with greater sustainment, replacement, and adaptation prevails.

Mechanism: Maneuver theory, associated with thinkers such as Liddell Hart and later operationalized in doctrines such as AirLand Battle, seeks to disrupt enemy cohesion through speed, surprise, combined arms, and action against operational depth. Its promise is decision at lower cost: by paralyzing the enemy's command and logistics, one avoids the grinding expenditure of resources characteristic of attrition. Attrition theory, by contrast, treats war as a contest of resources, casualties, ammunition, and industrial capacity; it accepts that enemy cohesion may be broken only after sustained exhaustion. The mechanism of attrition is cumulative: artillery, drones, mines, and infantry defense impose losses faster than the attacker can replace them, while the defender's own losses are offset by prepared positions, shorter supply lines, and mobilized industry.

In Ukraine, the mechanism of maneuver was blocked by prepared defenses, dense minefields, layered artillery, air defense, and drone surveillance. Without air superiority, attacking forces could not suppress defenders or protect their own logistics; without sufficient breaching capacity and reserves, tactical gains could not be exploited into operational breakthrough. The result was not the absence of maneuver but its

compression: maneuver occurred at small scale and short duration, while the strategic rhythm became attritional. The empirical record from 2022 through 2024 shows initial Russian maneuver failing under logistics strain and Ukrainian resistance, followed by Ukrainian counteroffensive gains constrained by defenses and firepower, and then a prolonged phase in which artillery consumption, casualty replacement, and industrial output became central variables. Biddle's analysis of the modern system helps explain why: dispersion, cover, combined arms, and prepared defense reduce the lethality of any single arm and make breakthrough dependent on integrated, well-supported operations rather than speed alone.

Scope Conditions: Maneuver is feasible under identifiable conditions: air superiority or at least air parity, weak or disrupted defenses, sufficient logistics depth, surprise, and combined-arms integration at tactical and operational levels. Attrition dominates when defenses are prepared, airpower is contested or absent, forces are large and mobilized, and industrial bases are engaged. The two are not mutually exclusive; maneuver attempts can occur within an attritional context, and attrition can create conditions for later maneuver by exhausting reserves. Political objectives also matter: a state may accept attritional costs if it believes time and resources favor it, while another may seek rapid decision to avoid domestic or alliance strain. The scope condition is therefore not a binary choice between doctrines but an assessment of whether the material and operational prerequisites for maneuver exist.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include the rate of territorial gain relative to casualties and ammunition expended, the depth of penetration achieved by attacking forces, the consumption rates of artillery shells and precision munitions, equipment losses by type, and the ability to generate and replace forces. Where maneuver is working, one expects rapid exploitation, disrupted enemy rear areas, and declining enemy cohesion. Where attrition dominates, one expects stable or slowly shifting front lines, high consumption, and competition over industrial output and manpower. The data-lab focus on artillery shell consumption, tank losses, and target sets reflects this: the empirical record in Ukraine points to a war in which firepower, replacement, and adaptation have been more decisive than operational shock. The observable implication is that doctrine must be tested against material conditions; a maneuver template that succeeded in one theater may fail in another if air superiority, defense density, or logistics differ.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point, informed by experiences of protracted and hybrid conflict, emphasizes that attrition is often political, social, and economic as well as military. In Sahelian and other African conflicts, light weapons, non-state actors, external intervention, and weak state capacity can produce prolonged violence in which maneuver is rare and legitimacy is contested. African scholarship on underdevelopment, sovereignty, and hybridity highlights that war outcomes depend on social cohesion, resource extraction, and international support, not only on force ratios. This perspective contributes an understanding of protracted conflict and the limits of conventional maneuver templates; it reveals that attrition can be a condition of political order rather than merely a military method. It can occlude the high-intensity industrial and interstate dimensions of the Ukraine war, but it prevents the assumption that maneuver failure is simply a tactical problem.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes informatized warfare and integrated joint operations. Maneuver is conceived as system destruction: disrupting the enemy's information, command, and logistics networks rather than only seizing territory. Attrition is understood as firepower and resource competition within a broader systems contest. This perspective contributes a network-centric view of operational paralysis. It can occlude the physical friction, terrain, and human costs that constrain maneuver in actual war.

Russian: The Russian perspective draws on deep-battle heritage, which historically emphasized operational maneuver, echeloned forces, and penetration to operational depth. In Ukraine, adaptation failures and logistics strain have exposed the gap between doctrine and execution. This perspective contributes an understanding of mass, depth, and firepower integration. It can occlude the need for decentralized adaptation and the decisive role of industrial sustainment and air defense in denying maneuver.

Western: The Western perspective, especially the maneuver-warfare tradition associated with AirLand Battle and post-Cold War doctrine, initially expected rapid combined-arms breakthrough. Ukraine has forced reassessment: when air superiority is absent and defenses are prepared, artillery and attrition dominate. This perspective contributes doctrinal flexibility and alliance learning but can occlude the political and industrial requirements of sustained firepower.

UN: The UN perspective centers on civilian harm from artillery and area-effect weapons in populated areas. Reporting on Ukraine documents the humanitarian consequences of prolonged bombardment and the legal obligations of distinction, proportionality, and precautions. This perspective contributes accountability and civilian protection; it can occlude operational necessity and the military logic of firepower in contested terrain.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on conventional warfare and industrial attrition begins from a theoretical premise that the other four perspectives tend to bracket: that the distinction between "conventional" and "irregular" warfare is itself a product of a particular, Eurocentric state form, and that in much of Africa the state has never monopolized violence in the Weberian sense. From this premise, the African perspective does not simply add cases; it reframes the analytical categories. Where Western doctrine treats combined arms maneuver as the integration of tanks, infantry, artillery, and air power within a unified command structure, African scholarship asks whose command structure, over what territory, and for whose accumulation. The question of industrial attrition becomes not merely how many shells a factory can produce but how the political economy of violence is organized—who profits, who is conscripted, and whose bodies are expended.

The theoretical lineage is deep. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) established that colonial violence was not an aberration but the foundational logic of the colonial state; decolonization therefore required a counter-violence that was simultaneously military and political. Cabral's *Return to the Source* (1973) insisted that liberation warfare must be rooted in the people's culture and material conditions, not in imported doctrine. Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism* (1965) argued that formal independence masked continued economic and military dependence, a condition that shapes African security to this day. Nyerere's ujamaa and self-reliance doctrine framed military capacity as inseparable from economic sovereignty. Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) provided the structural account: African underdevelopment was not a starting condition but a product of the international division of labor, which means that African states enter any conventional conflict with an industrial base already shaped by external extraction. These thinkers do not merely describe African wars; they theorize the relationship between violence, sovereignty, and global capitalism.

Post-independence scholarship extended this. Bayart's *The State in Africa* (1993) theorized the "politics of the belly"—the fusion of state and private accumulation through violence—and the "extraversion" of African states, their dependence on external resources. Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001) and later *Necropolitics* (2019) analyzed how sovereignty in Africa operates through the power to dictate who may live and who must

die, a framework that illuminates how attrition warfare is experienced by populations rather than merely measured in shell counts. Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) and *Define and Rule* (2012) traced how colonial indirect rule produced bifurcated states—citizens in urban areas, subjects in rural ones—creating the institutional architecture within which post-colonial violence unfolds. Grovogui's *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) challenged the Westphalian monopoly on sovereignty, arguing that African polities have always operated with plural, overlapping sovereignties. Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) and subsequent work on gender and social organization remind us that the "man" of maneuver warfare is a gendered construct, and that African social ontologies offer different starting points for understanding who fights and how.

Applied to conventional warfare and industrial attrition, this lineage yields several distinctive claims. First, the African experience suggests that the "return of industrial war" in Ukraine is not a return to a universal past but a specific configuration of state capacity, industrial depth, and territorial defense that most African states do not possess. The Sahel conflicts—Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad—illustrate a different modality: hybrid warfare in which non-state armed groups employ light weapons, IEDs, motorcycles, and increasingly drones, against state forces that are themselves fragmented, externally supported, and often predatory. The drones in the Sahel are not the massed FPV swarms of Ukraine but commercial off-the-shelf platforms used for reconnaissance and, increasingly, for improvised explosive delivery. This is not a lesser form of warfare; it is a different political economy of violence, one in which the "industrial base" is not a national factory system but a global market in small arms, commercial drones, and mercenary services.

Second, the African perspective foregrounds external dependency. The French Operation Barkhane (2014-2022), the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and the subsequent Russian Wagner/Africa Corps presence demonstrate that African conventional military capacity is frequently outsourced. When France withdrew from Mali and Burkina Faso, the resulting vacuum was filled not by indigenous industrial capacity but by Russian private military contractors. This is the African analogue of "force generation" problems: not a shortage of shells but a shortage of sovereign command over the means of violence. Work on African security governance emphasizes that security sector reform has often prioritized external donor preferences over local institutional development, producing armies that are equipped but not sustained.

Third, the African perspective contributes a critique of the "new wars" thesis. The argument that post-Cold War conflicts are characterized by identity politics, predation, and the erosion of the distinction between combatant and civilian has been influential but also contested. African scholars have pointed out that this framing can obscure continuities with colonial violence and the role of global economic structures. The wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo (1998-2003), involving multiple African states and numerous armed groups, were in some respects highly conventional—state armies, heavy weapons, territorial control—while also being deeply entangled with resource extraction. The African vantage point thus resists the binary of "old" conventional war versus "new" irregular war, insisting instead on hybridity and political economy.

Fourth, the African perspective on drones and electronic warfare is distinctive. While Ukraine has seen mass proliferation of FPV drones and contestation of the electromagnetic spectrum, African states and non-state actors have adopted drones more selectively, often for surveillance and targeted strikes. Ethiopia's use of drones in the Tigray war (2020-2022), reportedly including Turkish Bayraktar TB2s and Iranian Mohajer-6s, demonstrated that drone warfare in Africa is already a reality, but one shaped by external supply chains and great-power competition. The African perspective asks: who controls the data links, the maintenance, and the targeting intelligence? The answer usually points to external suppliers, reinforcing dependency.

What does the African perspective occlude? It can understate the specificity of high-intensity state-on-

state warfare. The industrial attrition of Ukraine—millions of artillery shells, thousands of tanks, sustained mobilization—does not map neatly onto African conflicts, which are typically lower in intensity but longer in duration. The African perspective may also romanticize "people's war" or overemphasize external causation at the expense of local agency. And it can struggle to account for cases where African states have successfully waged conventional war: Ethiopia-Eritrea (1998-2000), which involved trench warfare and mass mobilization, or the DRC's conventional campaigns. These cases suggest that industrial attrition is not foreign to Africa but is conditioned by different state capacities.

The strongest counterargument to the African perspective is that it risks overgeneralizing from post-colonial fragility. Not all African states are weak; some have built substantial conventional forces (Egypt, Algeria, South Africa, Nigeria). The African perspective's emphasis on dependency and hybridity may obscure the agency of African states in conventional military affairs. Moreover, the Sahel experience, while important, is not representative of the continent's full range of security challenges.

Nevertheless, the African vantage point contributes something the other four cannot: a sustained critique of the state-centric, industrial-base assumptions that underpin Western, Chinese, and Russian doctrines. It reveals that "conventional warfare" is not a natural category but a historically specific form of violence tied to a particular state form, and that when that state form is absent or externally dependent, the warfare that results is not a deviation but a different logic. It also insists that the human cost of attrition—bodies, displacement, ecological destruction—be centered, not abstracted into shell consumption rates. In this sense, the African perspective is not merely an alternative case study but a methodological challenge to the field.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on conventional warfare and industrial attrition is shaped by the PLA's doctrinal evolution from "people's war" to "informatized warfare" (□□□□□) and, more recently, to "intelligentized warfare" (□□□□□). This evolution reflects a strategic judgment that future conflict will be decided not by mass alone but by the integration of information, precision, and joint operations across domains. The Chinese perspective thus approaches the Ukraine war as a laboratory for observing how a major power fights when air superiority is contested, electronic warfare is pervasive, and industrial sustainment becomes the binding constraint.

The theoretical lineage draws on Chinese strategic thought—Sun Tzu's emphasis on shi (strategic advantage) and deception, Mao's people's war, and Deng Xiaoping's military modernization—but has been substantially reshaped by PLA reform since 2015. The 2015 Defense White Paper and subsequent reforms established "integrated joint operations" (□□□□□□□) as the core concept, emphasizing "system of systems" (□□□□) confrontation: the ability to disrupt the enemy's operational system while protecting one's own. Scholars such as M. Taylor Fravel have documented how the PLA has moved from a ground-force-centric, attrition-based model to one emphasizing information dominance, precision strike, and jointness. Joel Wuthnow and Phillip Saunders have analyzed the institutional challenges of this transition, noting that the PLA's command structure and training still lag behind its doctrinal ambitions.

Applied to the five key ideas, the Chinese perspective yields specific insights. On combined arms maneuver, the PLA has studied the Ukraine war's failure of Russian combined-arms integration and concluded that maneuver without information dominance and air superiority is suicidal. Chinese analysts have reportedly noted that Russian forces failed to achieve the "three-dimensional" (land, air, space, cyber) integration that PLA doctrine prescribes. On logistics and force generation, China's defense industrial base—centered on state-owned enterprises such as NORINCO and AVIC—is viewed as a strategic asset, and the Ukraine war's

ammunition shortages have reinforced the Chinese emphasis on "war reserves" and industrial mobilization. On artillery, China has long maintained large artillery forces and has observed Ukraine's artillery-centric warfare with interest, noting both the effectiveness of massed fires and the vulnerability of artillery to counter-battery and drones. On drones and EW, the Chinese perspective is perhaps most developed: the PLA has invested heavily in drone swarms, electronic warfare, and "intelligent" (AI-enabled) systems, viewing the electromagnetic spectrum as a primary battlespace. The Ukraine war's drone proliferation is read as confirmation that "low-cost, high-smart" systems can offset conventional mass. On attrition versus maneuver, Chinese doctrine tends to favor "active defense" and "asymmetric" approaches that avoid direct attrition, but acknowledges that prolonged conflict may require industrial depth.

What does the Chinese perspective contribute? It offers a systemic, "system of systems" lens that integrates information, firepower, and logistics into a single analytical frame. It highlights the role of the electromagnetic spectrum and cyber as co-equal with physical domains. And it brings a long-term industrial planning perspective, treating defense production as a strategic capability rather than a wartime improvisation.

What does it occlude? It can overstate the PLA's actual jointness and information integration, which remain works in progress. It may understate the political and institutional friction that hampers Chinese military effectiveness—corruption, lack of combat experience, and the tension between party control and operational autonomy. And it tends to treat technology as a substitute for the messy human and political dimensions of war that the African perspective foregrounds. The Chinese perspective also has limited direct experience with high-intensity conventional war since 1979 (the Sino-Vietnamese War), which constrains its empirical base.

The strongest counterargument is that Chinese "informatized warfare" doctrine may be aspirational rather than operational, and that the PLA's lack of combat experience means its lessons from Ukraine are second-hand and potentially misread. Moreover, the Chinese emphasis on "intelligentized" warfare may underestimate the continued importance of industrial mass and human endurance, as demonstrated in Ukraine.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on conventional warfare and industrial attrition is rooted in the Soviet "deep battle" (глубокий бой) tradition and its post-Soviet evolution. Deep battle, developed by Tukhachevsky and Svechin in the 1920s-30s, emphasized simultaneous strikes across the depth of the enemy's defense, combining maneuver, firepower, and aviation to achieve breakthrough and exploitation. This heritage shaped Russian military thought through the Cold War and into the post-Soviet era, informing concepts such as "non-contact warfare" and, more recently, "active defense."

The Russian perspective on Ukraine is thus not simply one of failure but of a doctrinal tradition confronting operational reality. Russian forces entered Ukraine in 2022 expecting a rapid, combined-arms advance on Kyiv, drawing on the deep-battle template of breakthrough and exploitation. When this failed—due to logistics breakdowns, Ukrainian resistance, and the absence of air superiority—Russia adapted toward attrition: massed artillery, incremental advances, and the "meat grinder" tactics seen at Bakhmut and Avdiivka. This adaptation reflects a Russian strategic culture that has historically accepted high casualties and prioritized mass over precision.

On the five key ideas: Russian combined arms has been criticized for poor integration—tanks advancing without infantry support, artillery and aviation poorly coordinated. Logistics and force generation have been a persistent weakness, with the 2022 Kyiv offensive stalling due to fuel and ammunition shortages,

though Russia has since mobilized its defense industrial base (Uralvagonzavod, Kalashnikov Concern) and expanded shell production. Artillery dominance is where the Russian perspective is strongest: Russia entered the war with a large artillery advantage and has used it extensively, though Ukrainian counter-battery and HIMARS strikes degraded this. Drones and EW: Russia has adapted significantly, deploying Lancet loitering munitions, Shahed (Geran-2) drones, and extensive EW systems, though initially lagging behind Ukraine in FPV drone innovation. Attrition versus maneuver: Russia has effectively chosen attrition, accepting high casualties and slow advances, reflecting a strategic calculus that time and mass favor Moscow.

What does the Russian perspective contribute? It demonstrates the continued relevance of artillery mass and industrial depth in high-intensity war. It shows that a state willing to absorb casualties and mobilize its economy can sustain prolonged attrition. And it offers a counterpoint to Western maneuver doctrine: when maneuver fails, firepower and mass can still achieve incremental gains.

What does it occlude? It underestimates the costs of attrition—casualties, economic strain, and political sustainability. It can rationalize operational failures as strategic patience. And it struggles to account for the role of precision, intelligence, and alliance support in enabling Ukrainian resistance. The Russian perspective also tends to obscure the corruption and institutional dysfunction that hampered its initial campaign, attributing setbacks to external factors rather than internal failures.

The strongest counterargument is that Russian "adaptation" in Ukraine has been reactive and costly, and that the deep-battle tradition, while theoretically sophisticated, has not translated into effective combined-arms operations in practice. Moreover, Russia's reliance on attrition may be strategically self-defeating if it exhausts the very industrial and demographic base it depends on.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on conventional warfare and industrial attrition is shaped by the maneuver-warfare tradition—AirLand Battle, NATO doctrine, and the post-Cold War emphasis on precision, speed, and information dominance. This tradition, crystallized in the 1991 Gulf War and refined through the 1990s and 2000s, held that technological superiority and operational agility could defeat larger, slower opponents. The Ukraine war has forced a significant reassessment: when air superiority is absent and defenses are prepared, artillery and attrition dominate, and the Western template does not transfer cleanly.

The theoretical lineage includes Liddell Hart's indirect approach, the German Blitzkrieg (studied and adapted by NATO), and the U.S. Army's AirLand Battle doctrine of the 1980s. Biddle's *Military Power* (2004) provided the most rigorous modern account of the "modern system"—the integration of cover, concealment, dispersion, and small-unit initiative that makes modern defense so formidable and that makes combined-arms offense necessary but difficult. Freedman's *The Future of War* (2017) traced how Western strategic thought has oscillated between expectations of short, decisive wars and the reality of prolonged conflict. The Western perspective also draws on the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) literature of the 1990s, which anticipated that information technology would transform warfare into a "system of systems" contest.

Applied to Ukraine: Western analysts initially expected Russian combined-arms breakthrough; when this failed, they expected Ukrainian counteroffensives to succeed with Western equipment and training. The 2023 Ukrainian counteroffensive's limited gains prompted further reassessment. Western observers have noted the dominance of artillery, the proliferation of drones, and the importance of EW, while also highlighting industrial bottlenecks—shell production, air defense interceptors, and the difficulty of scaling precision munitions. The Western perspective emphasizes alliance learning: NATO has drawn lessons on logistics, air

defense, and industrial mobilization, and has begun to rebuild stockpiles and production capacity.

What does the Western perspective contribute? Doctrinal flexibility and a willingness to update beliefs based on evidence. A strong emphasis on precision and minimizing civilian harm. And an alliance framework that pools resources and shares intelligence. The Western perspective also brings rigorous operational analysis—RUSI reports, IISS Military Balance, and academic work by Watling and others—that has documented the mechanics of the Ukraine war in detail.

What does it occlude? It can overestimate the transferability of Western doctrine to non-Western contexts. It may underestimate the political and industrial requirements of sustained firepower, treating logistics as a technical rather than political problem. And it can be slow to abandon the maneuver-warfare paradigm even when evidence favors attrition. The Western perspective also tends to frame the war in terms of "lessons learned" for NATO, potentially instrumentalizing Ukrainian suffering for alliance planning.

The strongest counterargument is that Western maneuver doctrine is not wrong but conditional: it works when air superiority and industrial depth are present, and fails when they are not. The lesson of Ukraine is not that maneuver is dead but that it requires conditions that cannot be assumed. Moreover, the Western emphasis on precision and technology may obscure the continued importance of mass and endurance, which the Russian perspective highlights and which the African perspective contextualizes within political economy.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on conventional warfare and industrial attrition centers on civilian harm, international humanitarian law (IHL), and the protection of non-combatants. This perspective does not primarily ask how wars are won but how they are fought—whether the means and methods of warfare comply with the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack. In the Ukraine context, the UN has documented extensive civilian casualties from artillery, missile strikes, and area-effect weapons, particularly in populated areas.

The theoretical lineage includes the Geneva Conventions (1949) and their Additional Protocols (1977), the customary IHL framework codified by the ICRC, and the UN's own human rights and humanitarian architecture. The UN perspective also draws on the "protection of civilians" (PoC) agenda developed in the 1990s and 2000s, particularly in the context of peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. The UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, established by the Human Rights Council in 2022, and the reports of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provide the empirical basis. The UN perspective is also informed by the broader debate on "explosive weapons in populated areas" (EWIPA), which has gained traction in recent years and led to the 2022 Dublin Declaration.

Applied to the five key ideas: On combined arms maneuver, the UN perspective is less concerned with tactical integration than with the effects of combined-arms operations on civilians—particularly the use of artillery and air power in populated areas. On logistics and force generation, the UN perspective notes that sustained industrial war produces sustained civilian harm, and that the "war economy" can divert resources from civilian needs. On artillery dominance, the UN has documented that artillery and multiple-launch rocket systems (MLRS) have been the leading cause of civilian casualties in Ukraine, particularly in the early phases of the war. On drones and EW, the UN perspective raises concerns about the use of drones for targeted strikes in populated areas and the potential for autonomous systems to complicate accountability. On attrition versus maneuver, the UN perspective suggests that prolonged attrition warfare multiplies civilian harm over time, as front lines stabilize and populated areas become contested.

What does the UN perspective contribute? It provides an independent, evidence-based account of civilian harm that is not filtered through military or political interests. It establishes legal standards that constrain state behavior and provide a basis for accountability. And it centers the human cost of industrial attrition, which military analyses can abstract into statistics. The UN perspective also contributes a framework for "humanitarian access" and the protection of critical infrastructure, which is essential for civilian survival in prolonged war.

What does it occlude? It can struggle to account for operational necessity—the military logic that drives the use of artillery and area weapons in contested terrain. It may treat all civilian harm as potentially unlawful, without adequately distinguishing between lawful and unlawful attacks. And it can be slow to adapt to new technologies (drones, EW) whose legal status is unsettled. The UN perspective also depends on state cooperation for access and data, which can limit its reach in contested or denied areas.

The strongest counterargument is that IHL was designed for a different era of warfare and may not adequately address the realities of industrial attrition, drone swarms, and electronic warfare. Moreover, the UN perspective's emphasis on civilian protection can be co-opted by states to justify inaction or to delegitimize adversary operations while excusing their own. The UN perspective also risks treating "civilian harm" as a static category, without accounting for how prolonged war transforms civilian-military relationships and the meaning of "civilian" itself.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reframes the war as a hybrid political economy of state capacity, external patronage, mercenary networks, and civilian harm; highlights rapid diffusion of cheap precision and drones	May underweight conventional industrial mass, formal force generation, and the decisive role of state capacity	Sovereignty, human security, anti-imperial critique, and protection of civilian space	Sahelian hybrid conflicts, mercenary networks, and drone/light-weapon diffusion	Western: conventional state capacity and alliance logistics still determine strategic endurance

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Identifies information dominance, joint integration, sensor-to-shooter links, and electronic-warfare contestation as binding constraints on combined arms	Risks technological determinism; may understate political will, social resilience, and Ukrainian agency	State security, strategic stability, and system-of-systems military effectiveness	PLA informatization reforms and observed Russian integration failures	Russian: massed artillery, operational depth, and industrial endurance remain central
Russian	Preserves deep-battle logic of operational depth, artillery mass, echelons, and adaptation to positional war	Tends to externalize failure onto logistics alone and understate Ukrainian agency and Western support	Great-power security, sphere of influence, and military endurance	Soviet deep-battle heritage and 2022–2024 adaptation to attritional fighting	Western: initial failures show rigidity in command and combined-arms integration
Western	Explains the enabling role of precision, NATO support, training, and combined-arms doctrine; revises maneuver assumptions in light of attrition	Tends to overstate technology and alliance support while underestimating Russian industrial adaptation	Liberal order, deterrence, and alliance-based security	1991 Gulf War maneuver template and NATO ammunition transfers to Ukraine	African: civilian harm, hybridity, and external patronage are missed by state-centric doctrine

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Supplies civilian-harm data, infrastructure-damage accounting, and IHL frameworks for distinction, proportionality, and accountability	Underweights military necessity, operational adaptation, and the political economy of sustainment	Humanitarian protection, civilian immunity, and legal accountability	UN human-rights monitoring, ICC investigations, and civilian-casualty reporting	Russian/Western: legal categories may lag behind industrial attrition, drones, and electronic warfare

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the war turns on commanders' tactical adaptation, drone operators' skill, artillery crews' endurance, and soldiers' morale under prolonged bombardment; variation in decentralized initiative and command friction shaped local outcomes even when aggregate force ratios were stable. At the state level, Ukraine and Russia differ in mobilization capacity, industrial depth, procurement, and command structure, with Russia's ability to sustain high-volume fires contrasting with Ukraine's dependence on Western ammunition and precision systems. At the systemic level, NATO and EU support, sanctions, global supply chains, and great-power competition conditioned what each state could generate and sustain. At the transnational level, foreign fighters, private military formations, diaspora fundraising, humanitarian networks, global component supply chains, and international legal institutions linked the battlefield to wider political and economic circuits.

Mechanism. The central mechanism is the interaction between failed rapid maneuver and the subsequent shift to industrial attrition. Russia's 2022 attempt at large-scale maneuver collapsed under logistics strain, command rigidity, and Ukrainian resistance, after which the war became a contest of fires, fortification, and sustainment. Artillery consumption, drone loss rates, and the contest over the electromagnetic spectrum turned tactical transparency into a binding constraint: dispersed formations, electronic warfare, and cheap precision compressed kill chains and made classical combined-arms breakthroughs costly. Western systems such as HIMARS and Storm Shadow altered target sets by striking logistics nodes, command posts, and infrastructure, but they did not by themselves restore maneuver because Russian adaptation, fortification, and industrial depth absorbed shocks. Ukraine's 2023 counteroffensive struggled where minefields, drone surveillance, and artillery density denied the concentration and tempo required for breakthrough. Thus the outcome is best understood not as a simple failure of doctrine but as a mechanism in which industrial capacity, alliance support, information contestation, and adaptation jointly determined the feasible tempo of operations.

Perspective reconstruction. African (primary): From an African vantage informed by Grovogui's critique of sovereignty, Mbembe's analysis of violence, and Bayart's attention to the political economy of extraver-

sion, the Ukraine war appears less as a self-contained interstate clash than as a hybrid conflict in which state capacity, external patronage, and civilian harm are inseparable. The African experience of Sahelian conflicts suggests that cheap precision, drones, and light weapons diffuse quickly across porous borders and empower non-state actors, mercenaries, and informal networks, so the Ukrainian battlefield cannot be understood only through formal force structures. It also highlights that external support—whether NATO arms or Russian private military formations—reconfigures local authority and can prolong war by substituting for indigenous sustainment. Civilian harm and displacement are not side effects but constitutive of how such wars are fought and legitimized, echoing concerns in African scholarship about the blurring of combatant and civilian spaces. Finally, the African perspective cautions against treating any single Western maneuver template as universal, because Sahelian experience shows that technology and mass interact with fragile institutions in ways that formal doctrine often misses. Chinese: The Chinese perspective reads Ukraine through informatized warfare and integrated joint operations: the war demonstrates that information dominance, sensor-to-shooter links, and electronic-warfare contestation shape whether combined arms can function at all. It emphasizes that precision fires and drones are valuable only when embedded in a resilient command-and-control and logistics system, and that Russia's difficulties reveal the costs of weak joint integration. At the same time, it treats industrial depth and ammunition sustainment as strategic variables, not mere background conditions. Its limitation is a tendency to overstate technological determinism and to understate the political and social sources of Ukrainian resistance and Western cohesion. Russian: The Russian perspective interprets the war through the heritage of deep battle and operational art: massed artillery, operational depth, and echeloned forces remain central, while the initial 2022 failures are attributed to poor integration, logistics, and command rather than to the obsolescence of maneuver itself. It sees the subsequent positional phase as a necessary adaptation to Ukrainian defenses and Western precision support, with drones and electronic warfare layered onto traditional fires. The perspective also stresses force generation and the industrial base as determinants of endurance. Its weakness is a tendency to understate Ukrainian agency, to externalize failure onto logistics alone, and to overstate the coherence of adaptation. Western: The Western perspective initially approached Ukraine through the maneuver-warfare and modern-systems tradition associated with Biddle: combined arms, precision, and information should enable rapid, decisive operations. The 2022–2024 record forced a revision toward industrial attrition, emphasizing NATO ammunition transfers, training, and precision munitions as enabling Ukrainian defense. It highlights Russian command failures and the value of Western C4ISR and long-range fires. Its occlusion is a tendency to overstate technology and alliance support while underestimating Russian industrial adaptation and the political durability of attritional war. UN: The UN perspective centers civilian harm, infrastructure destruction, and IHL compliance, treating the war as a test of distinction, proportionality, and accountability. It documents patterns of civilian casualties and damage to energy and transport infrastructure, framing military operations within legal categories that constrain and legitimate force. This perspective is essential for understanding the human costs and the legitimacy of operations, but it can underweight military necessity and the operational adaptation that shapes targeting. It also depends on access and state cooperation, which limits its reach in contested or denied areas.

Explicit adjudication. Adjudicating among these perspectives, the case is best explained by a state-and-systemic synthesis: Ukraine's survival and Russia's inability to achieve rapid victory reflect force generation, industrial sustainment, and alliance support more than any single doctrinal template. The Western perspective captures the enabling role of precision and NATO support, while the Russian perspective captures the enduring importance of artillery mass and operational depth; neither alone explains why maneuver failed to produce decision. The Chinese perspective correctly identifies information and electronic-warfare contestation as a binding constraint on combined arms, but it risks reducing politics to technology. The African

perspective adds the crucial insight that the war is also a hybrid political economy of external patronage, mercenary networks, and civilian harm, which state-centric military analysis often misses. The UN perspective supplies the normative and evidentiary floor for civilian protection, though it cannot by itself explain operational outcomes. Thus the most robust explanation is layered: industrial attrition and alliance support explain endurance; information and fires explain tactical friction; hybridity and civilian harm explain legitimacy and long-term consequences.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. Reconstruct the 1991 Gulf War template as a sequence of operational conditions rather than as a slogan: air campaign, degradation of command and logistics, maneuver envelopment, defender collapse, and limited political objective.

2. List the scope conditions that made that template work in 1991: air superiority, defender vulnerability, permissive logistics, strategic surprise or at least operational initiative, and a political end state achievable by paralysis.

3. Identify which of those conditions were present, absent, or reversed in Ukraine's 2023 counteroffensive, paying particular attention to air defense, minefields, fortifications, electronic warfare, drone reconnaissance, and ammunition sustainment.

4. Apply the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to explain why the template did or did not transfer.

5. Reconstruct at least two perspectives on the same evidence: a Western maneuver tradition and a Russian deep-battle/defense perspective, with optional African, Chinese, or UN overlays.

6. State falsifiers: what evidence would weaken your explanation, and what evidence would strengthen the claim that maneuver remains viable under different conditions?

MODEL ANSWER

The 1991 Gulf War is often remembered as proof that superior technology, air power, and maneuver can produce rapid victory at low cost. The coalition campaign did combine an extended air campaign against Iraqi command, control, logistics, and fielded forces with a ground maneuver that enveloped Kuwaiti defenses; Iraqi forces were degraded, disoriented, and in many cases surrendered or fled. Yet treating this as a transferable template requires specifying its scope conditions rather than extracting a slogan. The template assumed air superiority, a vulnerable and overextended opponent, a permissive logistics environment, and a political objective limited enough to be achieved by operational paralysis. It also assumed that the defender's command system could be disrupted faster than it could adapt.

In Ukraine in 2023, several of those conditions were absent or reversed. Ukraine did not possess air superiority; Russian aviation, air defense, and electronic warfare contested the airspace and complicated close air support, reconnaissance, and drone operations. Russian forces had spent months constructing defense in

depth: minefields, dragon's teeth, trench networks, pre-registered artillery, and reserve echelons. The front was not a thin screen that could be bypassed; it was a fortified zone designed to absorb and channel attack. Consequently, the problem was not simply moving fast but generating enough combat power at the point of breach, sustaining it through successive belts, and preventing Russian counterattacks from restoring the defense.

The failure of the template is best explained as a mismatch between operational concept and strategic-technical environment, not as proof that maneuver is obsolete. At the tactical level, breaching operations required specialized equipment, engineer support, and time under observation; drones and artillery punished concentration. At the operational level, combined-arms synchronization—infantry, armor, artillery, engineers, air defense, and electronic warfare—proved difficult with heterogeneous equipment, varying training backgrounds, and command systems adapted under wartime pressure. At the strategic level, ammunition consumption, maintenance, and replacement rates mattered as much as battlefield skill; industrial attrition shaped what was possible. At the transnational level, aid flows enabled Ukraine's defense but did not create the air superiority or mass that the Gulf template presupposed. RUSI reporting on Ukraine emphasizes that sustainment and force generation, not only tactical proficiency, conditioned operational outcomes.

Perspective reconstruction clarifies the disagreement. A Western maneuver tradition tends to emphasize tempo, initiative, and combined-arms integration; from this vantage, the 2023 offensive's difficulties can be read as execution problems—insufficient mass, incomplete synchronization, and delayed commitment. A Russian perspective rooted in deep battle and defensive operations emphasizes depth, reserves, and the attrition of the attacker; from this vantage, the defense succeeded because it forced Ukraine to spend scarce resources against prepared positions. An African perspective on hybrid and resource-constrained warfare would add that templates imported from high-technology, expeditionary contexts often underestimate sustainment, local adaptation, and the political economy of force generation; the Sahel experience with drones, light weapons, and fragmented authority suggests that technological asymmetry can be offset by dispersion, endurance, and social embeddedness. A Chinese perspective on informatized and integrated joint operations would stress that without information dominance and joint command and control, maneuver cannot be synchronized; a UN perspective would foreground civilian harm, proportionality, and the legal constraints that shape target selection and tempo.

Adjudication should be conditional. The evidence supports the claim that the Gulf template failed in Ukraine 2023 because its scope conditions—air superiority, defender vulnerability, permissive logistics, and operational surprise—were not met. It does not support the stronger claim that maneuver warfare has been superseded by attrition or drones. Falsifiers include a future combined-arms offensive that achieves breakthrough under conditions of local air superiority and adequate sustainment; conversely, repeated failures of mechanized assault against prepared defenses despite air support would strengthen the attrition thesis. The lesson is that operational templates are hypotheses about a specific strategic environment, not universal laws.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description

Case: In 2020, Azerbaijan conducted an offensive to regain territory in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. The campaign combined unmanned aerial systems for reconnaissance and strike, long-range artillery and rocket fire, electronic warfare, and ground maneuver by mechanized and special forces. Armenian defenses, though fortified in places, faced pressure on multiple axes and suffered from disrupted command and logistics. The war was short, produced decisive territorial change, and was widely interpreted as a demonstration

of drone-enabled precision and rapid maneuver. Yet the case also raises questions about transferability: Azerbaijan benefited from a favorable balance of forces, external support, and an opponent with limited strategic depth and air defense coverage. The conflict was not a peer industrial war; ammunition expenditure, force generation, and sustainment demands were modest compared with Ukraine. Analyze whether the 2020 campaign validates a maneuver template, a drone-centric revolution, or a context-specific victory whose lessons are easily overgeneralized.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts

Mechanism: Identify the causal chain linking drones, artillery, electronic warfare, and ground maneuver to the operational outcome, specifying necessary versus sufficient conditions.
Perspective reconstruction: Reconstruct how at least three of the five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—would explain the same campaign, including what each perspective reveals and what it occludes.
Historical analogue: Compare the 2020 campaign with one earlier case, such as the 1991 Gulf War or the 2022-2024 Ukraine war, and specify which scope conditions transfer and which do not.
Falsifiers: State evidence that would weaken your preferred explanation and evidence that would support an alternative interpretation.

(c) Self-check line

Self-check: Did you distinguish description of what happened, explanation of why it happened, prediction of what would happen under changed conditions, and prescription of what should be done?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Hinge Question: Which of the following best explains why the 1991 Gulf War operational template failed in Ukraine's 2023 counteroffensive?

A. Tanks have become obsolete in all forms of modern warfare.
B. Ukraine lacked air superiority and faced a prepared defense in depth, so the template's scope conditions were not met.
C. Artillery dominance alone is sufficient to guarantee operational success.
D. Western training and doctrine automatically produce breakthrough against fortified positions.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses

- **A is wrong** because it overgeneralizes from drone and anti-tank anecdotes. Tanks remain useful when integrated with infantry, artillery, engineers, air defense, and electronic warfare; the problem in Ukraine was not the tank as a platform but the absence of the supporting conditions that make armored maneuver viable.

- **C is wrong** because it mistakes a necessary condition for a sufficient one. Artillery can suppress, attrit, and shape the battlefield, but without breach, exploitation, sustainment, and protection against counterattack, artillery dominance can produce stalemate rather than breakthrough.

- **D is wrong** because it confuses doctrine with strategic and material conditions. Training improves synchronization and tempo, but it cannot substitute for air superiority, adequate ammunition, force

generation, maintenance capacity, or an opponent whose defenses are unprepared.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

The data below are open-source estimates, not classified actuals. Oryx-verified losses are visual confirmations and therefore lower bounds; real losses are higher. Rates vary sharply by phase and are reported differently by Russian, Ukrainian, and Western sources. Treat every figure as an order-of-magnitude indicator, not a precise measurement.

Table 1 — Artillery shell consumption in Ukraine by phase (approximate daily rates)

Phase (approx. dates)	Russian daily rate	Ukrainian daily rate	Dominant driver
Feb–Jun 2022 (initial offensive)	20,000–40,000	5,000–7,000	Soviet stockpiles; massed fires; fire superiority
Sep–Nov 2022 (Kharkiv/Kherson counteroffensives)	10,000–20,000	4,000–6,000	Maneuver exploitation; logistics interdiction
Dec 2022–May 2023 (Bakhmut/Avdiivka)	10,000–20,000	2,000–4,000	Attritional grinding; defensive depth
Jun–Sep 2023 (counteroffensive)	10,000+	2,000–3,000	Ukrainian shell hunger; Russian mines and EW
2024	10,000+	2,000–3,000	NATO ramp-up; Russian production surge

Sources: RUSI Ukraine reports (2022–2024); Watling (2022); IISS Military Balance 2023–24. NATO's collective production target rose toward roughly 1.2 million 155 mm shells per year by 2025, up from a pre-war baseline near 300,000, while Russian output expanded through mobilized industry and North Korean supply.

Table 2 — Drone loss rates by category (approximate)

Category	Examples	Per-sortie loss (approx.)	Monthly scale (approx.)	Notes
FPV quadcopters	Commercial drones fitted with warheads	30–70%, EW-dependent	Tens of thousands	COTS components; short range; RUSI
Reconnaissance UAVs	Orlan-10, Mavic, Bayraktar TB2	Moderate–high	Thousands	TB2 losses heavy early; later suppressed by air defense

Category	Examples	Per-sortie loss (approx.)	Monthly scale (approx.)	Notes
Loitering munitions	Lancet, Switchblade	Moderate	Hundreds–thousands	Lancet effective against armor and air defense
Strategic ISR	(limited platforms)	Lower per sortie	Dozens	High value, scarce, heavily defended

Sources: RUSI Ukraine reports (2022–2024); Watling (2022). FPV loss rates are the most uncertain figure because many sorties are unrecorded and "loss" includes drones that fail to find a target.

Table 3 — Precision fires and armored losses (approximate)

HIMARS/Storm Shadow target sets (cumulative, approximate)

System	Primary target sets	Operational effect
HIMARS (GMLRS)	Ammunition depots, bridges, command posts, rail nodes	Logistics disruption; enabled Kherson and Donbas pressure
Storm Shadow/SCALP	Bridges, headquarters, airfields, shipyards	Deep strike; Crimea and Black Sea Fleet degradation

Tank losses by type (Oryx-verified, approximate cumulative to 2024)

Type	Russian losses (approx.)	Ukrainian losses (approx.)
T-72 variants	1,200+	300+
T-80 variants	600+	100+
T-90 variants	150+	10+
Western (Leopard, Challenger, Abrams)	n/a	50+ combined
Total verified	2,000+	800+

Sources: Oryx (visually confirmed losses); IISS Military Balance 2023–24; RUSI. Verified totals exclude unconfirmed losses and repaired/returned vehicles.

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Artillery consumption fell on the Ukrainian side from roughly 5,000–7,000 shells per day in early 2022 to roughly 2,000–3,000 by 2023–2024, while Russian rates stayed above 10,000. What does this asymmetry imply about the relationship between industrial capacity and battlefield initiative, and why did the gap not close even after NATO's production ramp began?
2. **Level of analysis.** Is Ukrainian shell hunger best explained at the state level (Ukrainian industrial destruction and pre-war stockpile depletion), the systemic level (NATO's collective production base and political willingness to fund it), or the transnational level (global supply chains for propellant, explosives, and machine tools)? Which level carries the most explanatory weight for the 2023 counteroffensive's artillery shortfall, and what evidence would distinguish them?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Read the drone-loss data through each lens: (a) African — how does the Sahel experience of commercial drones and light weapons reframe "cheap precision" as a democratization of lethality rather than a Western technological edge? (b) Chinese — how does the PLA's informatized-warfare doctrine interpret mass FPV attrition as evidence that information dominance, not platform count, decides outcomes? (c) Russian — how does the deep-battle heritage explain both the Lancet's effectiveness and the failure to scale it? (d) Western — how does the maneuver-warfare tradition read high drone losses as proof that massed armor without air superiority is obsolete? (e) UN — what do drone-strike civilian-harm patterns imply for IHL proportionality and distinction when operators are kilometers away and targets are identified by video feed?

4. **Interpretation.** Do FPV drone loss rates of 30–70% per sortie imply that drones are replacing artillery, or that they are a complementary, high-attrition layer that consumes industrial capacity differently (batteries, motors, chips, operators) rather than replacing shell production? What would falsify each reading?

5. **Limitation.** Oryx-verified tank losses show Russia losing roughly 2,000+ tanks against Ukraine's 800+. What do these figures not capture — unverified losses, repaired and returned vehicles, tanks abandoned for lack of fuel or crews, and the difference between a destroyed tank and a mission-killed one — and how would each omission bias conclusions about which side is "winning" the attrition contest?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — Combined Arms Integration Wheel (hand-drawn, A4 landscape)

- **What to draw:** A central circle labeled "Maneuver force / combined-arms team." Draw six spokes radiating outward to smaller circles: (1) Tanks/armor, (2) Infantry, (3) Artillery (tube + rocket), (4) Air power (CAS, SEAD), (5) ISR/EW, (6) Logistics/sustainment. Around the outer ring, draw a dashed "friction band" with labels: comms latency, weather, terrain, EW jamming, ammunition resupply, maintenance. Draw arrows between spokes showing dependencies: artillery → infantry (suppression), air → armor (SEAD), EW → all (EMS contest), logistics → all (sustainment).
- **Labels to place:** "Suppression," "SEAD," "EMS contest," "Sustainment," "Friction," "Tempo."
- **Perspective overlay:** Annotate in the margin: Russian (deep battle: echeloned, massed, sequential); Western (maneuver warfare: tempo, shock, dislocation); Chinese (informatized: sensor-to-shooter, joint); African (Sahel: light, mobile, hybrid, drone-enabled); UN (civilian harm at each node).

Visual 2 — Industrial Attrition Curve (hand-drawn, A4 landscape)

- **What to draw:** X-axis: time from Feb 2022 to Dec 2024 (monthly ticks). Y-axis: daily artillery shell consumption (0 to 50,000). Plot two lines: Russia (upper, fluctuating 10,000–40,000) and Ukraine (lower, declining from ~6,000 to ~2,500). Shade the gap between lines. Add a second, smaller y-axis or inset: NATO 155 mm production ramp (300,000 → 1.2M/year) and Russian surge. Mark vertical lines for key events: Kharkiv counteroffensive (Sep 2022), Bakhmut (Dec 2022–May 2023), 2023 counteroffensive (Jun 2023), North Korean supply (2024).
- **Labels to place:** "Shell hunger," "Fire superiority," "Production gap," "Stockpile depletion."
- **Perspective overlay:** Annotate: Western (industrial base as strategic asset); Russian (mobilized war

economy); Chinese (mass production vs precision); African (resource extraction and external supply dependence); UN (civilian harm from sustained bombardment).

Visual 3 — Drone–EW Contest Spectrum (hand-drawn, A4 portrait)

- **What to draw:** A 2×2 grid. X-axis: cost per unit (cheap COTS → exquisite). Y-axis: survivability under electronic warfare (low → high). Plot points: FPV quadcopter (cheap, low survivability), Lancet (mid cost, mid survivability), Bayraktar TB2 (mid-high cost, low survivability in contested EMS), Storm Shadow (exquisite, high survivability), Orlan-10 (mid, moderate). Draw a diagonal "contested EMS frontier" line separating survivable from non-survivable systems. Add a shaded "Sahel overlay" region: non-state actors, commercial drones, light weapons, no air defense.
- **Labels to place:** "COTS," "Contested EMS," "Exquisite," "Sahel overlay," "Attrition."
- **Perspective overlay:** Annotate: African (democratization of lethality; state weakness); Chinese (informationized warfare; sensor-to-shooter); Russian (deep battle + Lancet adaptation); Western (maneuver tradition challenged); UN (IHL proportionality at distance).

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
Define combined arms maneuver	Integration of tanks, infantry, artillery, air power, ISR/EW, and logistics into a mutually supporting team; Biddle (2004) emphasizes skill, coordination, and cover/concealment; Freedman (2017) on strategy and war. Source log: Biddle 2004; Freedman 2017.
Mechanism of artillery dominance	Massed fires suppress, fix, and destroy; create conditions for maneuver; in Ukraine, fire superiority substituted for maneuver when fronts stabilized. Source log: Watling 2022; RUSI 2022–24.
Why did shell hunger emerge?	Pre-war stockpiles depleted; NATO production base atrophied; propellant/explosives bottlenecks; political funding lag; Russian surge via mobilized industry and external supply. Source log: IISS Military Balance 2023–24; RUSI.
What do drone loss rates imply?	FPV attrition 30–70% per sortie; drones complement rather than replace artillery; consume different industrial inputs (chips, motors, batteries, operators). Source log: RUSI; Watling 2022.
HIMARS target sets logic	Deep precision fires against logistics nodes, bridges, command posts; disrupts tempo rather than front-line mass; Storm Shadow extends to strategic targets. Source log: Zaloga 2022; RUSI.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
Tank losses: what do they measure?	Oryx-verified lower bounds; exclude unverified, repaired, abandoned; mission-kill vs destroyed distinction; crew quality and maintenance matter. Source log: Oryx; IISS.
Attrition vs maneuver theories	Attrition: destroy enemy capacity; maneuver: dislocate decision-making; Ukraine shows both, with attrition dominant in stabilized fronts. Source log: Biddle 2004; Freedman 2017.
African perspective (Sahel)	Hybrid conflict; commercial drones and light weapons; non-state actors; state fragility; external supply dependence; democratization of lethality. Source log: Aning; Danso (general arguments).
Chinese perspective	Informatized warfare; integrated joint operations; sensor-to-shooter; mass production; information dominance over platform count. Source log: PLA doctrine (general).
Russian perspective	Deep battle heritage; echeloned, massed fires; adaptation failures in 2022; Lancet effectiveness; mobilized industry. Source log: Zaloga 2022; RUSI.
Western perspective	Maneuver-warfare tradition; lessons of Ukraine; industrial base as strategic asset; combined-arms adaptation. Source log: Biddle 2004; Watling 2022.
UN perspective	Civilian harm data; IHL proportionality and distinction; accountability for strikes; protection of civilians. Source log: UN OCHA/OHCHR (general).

Summary (3–5 sentences): Conventional warfare in Ukraine demonstrates that industrial attrition, not maneuver alone, determines outcomes when fronts stabilize: artillery consumption, drone loss rates, and tank losses all point to a contest of production and sustainment. Combined arms remains necessary but is constrained by electronic warfare, mines, and logistics. Each perspective—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN—reads the same data through different premises about technology, industry, and legitimacy. The data are approximate and Oryx-verified losses are lower bounds, so conclusions about "winning" the attrition contest remain provisional. Mastering this lesson means distinguishing description, explanation, prediction, and prescription across all five lenses.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. In plain terms: modern war between large armies is still about who can make and move more stuff—shells, drones, tanks, fuel—faster than the other side can destroy it. When both sides dig in, the side that fires more and loses less wins slowly. Drones are cheap but break easily; artillery

is expensive but decisive; tanks need everything else to work. Factories and supply lines matter as much as generals.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. I am fuzzy on: (a) the exact share of Ukrainian shell consumption met by domestic vs. foreign production; (b) whether FPV loss rates are measured per sortie or per drone; (c) how many Russian tanks were repaired and returned versus permanently lost; (d) the precise causal weight of EW versus mines in stalling the 2023 counteroffensive; (e) how Sahel non-state drone use compares quantitatively to state use in Ukraine.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Rechecking against RUSI reports and Watling (2022): artillery rates are estimates, not official figures; Oryx counts are lower bounds; drone loss rates are the least reliable data point. The claim that NATO production rose toward ~1.2M shells/year by 2025 is consistent with IISS Military Balance 2023–24. The claim that Russian rates stayed above 10,000/day is an approximation from multiple sources, not a single verified series. No invented quotations were used; all attributions are to general arguments or report families.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. Analogy: industrial attrition is like two factories competing while also bombing each other's factories—the winner is whoever keeps producing after the other's line stops. Limits: (a) factories are not people; morale, leadership, and alliance politics also decide outcomes; (b) the analogy ignores information warfare and electronic contest; (c) it overstates symmetry—Russia and Ukraine had different pre-war industrial bases and external suppliers; (d) it cannot capture civilian harm, which is central to the UN perspective.

Step 5 — Rewrite. Conventional warfare and industrial attrition in Ukraine show that when maneuver stalls, outcomes are decided by production, sustainment, and adaptation across five domains—armor, infantry, artillery, air, and the electromagnetic spectrum. Combined arms remains the necessary framework, but its effectiveness depends on logistics and industrial depth that NATO had allowed to atrophy. Drones add a cheap, high-attrition layer that complements rather than replaces artillery. Reading this case requires all five perspectives: African (democratization of lethality and state fragility), Chinese (informationized joint operations), Russian (deep battle and mobilized industry), Western (maneuver tradition and industrial rearmament), and UN (civilian harm and IHL). The data are approximate and contested, so every conclusion about who is "winning" the attrition contest should be held as provisional and tested against falsifiers.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L22	Definition	What is combined arms maneuver?	It is the coordinated employment of tanks, infantry, artillery, air power, engineers, and logistics so that each arm compensates for the others' vulnerabilities. The mechanism is not mere simultaneity but mutual support under a unified command and control system.	Western doctrine often treats it as the culminating form of maneuver warfare; Russian deep-battle theory treats it as operational-level breakthrough.
L22	Mechanism	How does artillery dominance convert firepower into territorial control?	Artillery shapes the battlespace by suppressing, degrading, and fixing enemy forces before infantry or armor closes; in Ukraine, massed fires and counter-battery competition made movement costly. The mechanism is cumulative attrition of combat power and freedom of maneuver.	The UN perspective emphasizes that the same fires create civilian-harm and IHL compliance problems.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L22	Application	Why did the 2023 Ukrainian counteroffensive struggle to achieve rapid breakthrough?	It faced layered defenses, minefields, drone reconnaissance, and artillery fires that turned maneuver into sequential breaching under observation. The lesson is that maneuver requires not just platforms but tempo, surprise, and sustainment.	Western assessments stress planning and training gaps; Russian accounts stress defensive depth and fires.
L22	Comparison	What distinguishes attrition from maneuver as theories of victory?	Attrition seeks to exhaust the enemy's manpower, materiel, and will through cumulative loss; maneuver seeks to dislocate the enemy's decision-making and collapse cohesion faster than losses accumulate. The empirical question is which mechanism dominates under given technological and industrial conditions.	African hybrid-conflict experience often shows attrition-like exhaustion without decisive maneuver.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L22	Source	What is Biddle's (2004) central claim about military power?	Biddle argues that military effectiveness depends on the interaction of technology, doctrine, and organizational skill, especially combined arms integration, rather than on technology alone. The mechanism is skillful employment of complex systems under uncertainty.	This challenges both technocentric and platform-centric explanations of battlefield outcomes.
L22	Debate	What is the "return of industrial war" thesis?	It holds that high-intensity conventional war has re-exposed the importance of ammunition production, repair capacity, manpower replacement, and logistics endurance. The mechanism is that consumption outpaces exquisite stockpiles.	It reframes Ukraine not as an anomaly but as a reminder of industrial constraints.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L22	Reconstruction	How does Russian deep-battle heritage inform its warfighting?	Deep battle emphasizes operational breakthrough, echeloned forces, fires, and exploitation across depth. In Ukraine, adaptation failures included coordination problems, logistics strain, and underestimation of Ukrainian resistance.	The Russian perspective treats heritage as a resource; critics treat it as a source of rigidity.
L22	Occlusion	What does the Western maneuver-warfare tradition tend to occlude?	It can understate the industrial, logistical, and political foundations of sustained combat, especially when facing a peer with depth and fires. The occlusion is a bias toward tempo and decision over consumption and endurance.	This is why Western lessons from Ukraine emphasize adaptation rather than template transfer.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L22	Adjudication	Why did the 1991 Gulf War template fail in Ukraine 2023?	The Gulf War featured air supremacy, open terrain, a degraded opponent, and short logistics lines; Ukraine featured contested airspace, dense defenses, drones, mines, and an adaptive peer. The mechanism of victory was context-dependent, not portable.	Adjudication requires comparing scope conditions, not just outcomes.
L22	Visual	What does the drone and electronic-warfare spectrum represent?	It represents a contested electromagnetic environment in which cheap sensors, loitering munitions, and jamming compress the kill chain and make movement visible. The mechanism is persistent observation plus rapid precision strike at low cost.	Chinese informatized-warfare thinking treats this spectrum as central to joint operations.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L22	Definition	What is force generation in modern war?	Force generation is the process of recruiting, training, equipping, sustaining, and replacing military units over time. The mechanism links industrial capacity, personnel systems, and command structures to battlefield mass.	It is often invisible in platform-focused analysis but decisive in attrition.
L22	Mechanism	Why do logistics and ammunition dominate industrial attrition?	Because high-intensity war consumes shells, missiles, vehicles, and trained personnel faster than peacetime stockpiles and production lines can replace them. The mechanism is a mismatch between consumption rates and regeneration rates.	RUSI and IISS data are used to track this mismatch, though estimates vary.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L22	Application	What do HIMARS and Storm Shadow target sets illustrate?	They illustrate precision strike against logistics nodes, command posts, ammunition depots, and infrastructure, aiming to disrupt sustainment rather than only destroy frontline units. The mechanism is operational paralysis through deep targeting.	Their effectiveness depends on intelligence, air defense, and target adaptation.
L22	Comparison	How do COTS drones change the cost-exchange ratio?	Commercial off-the-shelf drones and components lower the cost of reconnaissance and strike, allowing weaker actors to impose costs on expensive platforms. The mechanism is asymmetric cost imposition and rapid iteration.	Sahel hybrid conflicts show similar low-cost adaptation by non-state actors.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table

Competency	Self-assessed confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery to check
Combined arms integration		Can explain mutual support, not just list platforms.
Logistics and force generation		Can connect ammunition consumption to industrial capacity.
Artillery dominance in Ukraine		Can distinguish fires, suppression, and attrition.

Competency	Self-assessed confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery to check
Drone proliferation and EW		Can explain contested EMS and cost-exchange ratios.
Attrition vs maneuver		Can state scope conditions for each theory.
Five-perspective reconstruction		Can steel-man each perspective without caricature.
Data lab interpretation		Can identify trend, level of analysis, and limitation.
Adjudication of Gulf War vs Ukraine		Can specify why a template failed.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which key idea most changed your prior assumption about modern conventional war, and what evidence would make you revise it again?
2. Where did your answer confuse description of events with explanation of mechanisms?
3. Which of the five perspectives did you underweight, and what did that omission hide?

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
More advanced weapons automatically produce maneuver victory.	Weapons matter through doctrine, training, logistics, and integration; technology alone is insufficient.	Biddle (2004) on military power and combined arms.
Ukraine proves maneuver warfare is obsolete.	Ukraine shows maneuver is harder under drones, mines, and fires, not that it is impossible.	2023 counteroffensive adaptation and defensive depth.
Artillery dominance means only shell counts matter.	Fires require targeting, logistics, survivability, and command coordination.	RUSI Ukraine reports on artillery and sustainment.
Cheap drones make expensive platforms irrelevant.	Drones raise costs and risks but do not eliminate the need for armor, air defense, and logistics.	Tank losses by type and drone loss rates in data lab.
The Gulf War template can be exported to any peer war.	Templates fail when scope conditions such as air supremacy and opponent weakness do not hold.	Comparison of 1991 Gulf War and Ukraine 2022-2024.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Combined arms maneuver; logistics; force generation; artillery dominance; drone/EW; attrition vs maneuver	Mutual support; consumption vs regeneration; fires and suppression; contested EMS; cost-exchange ratio; dislocation vs exhaustion	Biddle (2004) on military power; Freedman (2017) on strategy; deep-battle heritage; maneuver-warfare tradition	Ukraine 2022-2024; 1991 Gulf War; Sahel hybrid conflicts; IISS Military Balance 2023-24; RUSI reports	Maneuver vs attrition; technology vs skill; industrial war vs precision war	A maneuver breakthrough despite dense drones and mines; no ammunition shortage despite high consumption; drones failing to affect movement	L20 strategic thought; L21 nuclear; L5 realism; L36 Ukraine dynamics; L38 energy coercion; L48 maritime strategy

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 — Immediate (same day):** Re-read the five key ideas and recite the bolded causal claims from memory; check any card you missed.
- **R2 — 24 hours:** Redraw the drone/EW and logistics visuals from Section 3 without notes; compare with the lesson.
- **R3 — 72 hours:** Write a 200-word adjudication of the Gulf War template in Ukraine using all five perspectives.
- **R4 — 1 week:** Re-run the Data Lab questions and explain one trend at each level of analysis.
- **R5 — 2 weeks:** Teach the attrition-vs-maneuver debate aloud in five minutes, then identify your weakest evidence and reread the relevant source.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define combined arms maneuver as mutual support, not platform listing.
☐ I can explain the logistics and ammunition mechanism in industrial attrition.
☐ I can distinguish artillery suppression, degradation, and attrition.
☐ I can explain how drones and EW create a contested electromagnetic environment.
☐ I can compare attrition and maneuver as theories of victory with scope conditions.
☐ I can reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
☐ I can identify what each perspective contributes and occludes.
☐ I can explain why the 1991 Gulf War template failed in Ukraine 2023.
☐ I can use Biddle (2004) and Freedman (2017) accurately.
☐ I can interpret artillery shell consumption and drone loss-rate data.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I can state falsifiers for at least three key claims.
☐ I can link this lesson to L20, L21, L5, L36, L38, and L48.

☐ I can complete the independent memo headings without a sample.
☐ I can answer the hinge question and diagnose each distractor.
☐ I have logged at least one misconception in the error log.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- **Combined arms and military power:** Biddle, S. (2004), *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*.
- **Strategy and war:** Freedman, L. (2017), *The Future of War: A History*.
- **Armor and mechanized warfare:** Zaloga, S. (2022), *Armored Champion: The Top Tanks of World War II* is not the Ukraine source; use Zaloga's relevant armored-warfare analyses where available.
- **Land warfare and artillery:** Watling, J. (2022), RUSI land-warfare and artillery analyses.
- **Ukraine war reporting and lessons:** RUSI Ukraine reports (2022).
- **Ukraine war reporting and lessons:** RUSI Ukraine reports (2023).
- **Ukraine war reporting and lessons:** RUSI Ukraine reports (2024).
- **Force structure and inventories:** IISS, *The Military Balance 2023*.
- **Force structure and inventories:** IISS, *The Military Balance 2024*.

End of Lesson 22. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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24. Asymmetric and Irregular Warfare

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 23 — Asymmetric and Irregular Warfare
Module	Module 4: Security Studies and Warfare
Prerequisites	L12 (Cold War, proxy wars); L20 (coercion); L8 (post-colonialism)
Interleaved links	Forward to L30 (Sahel); L34 (Sahel synthesis); L43 (Axis of Resistance); L50 (non-state actors)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, visuals, flashcards, worked example
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple and stubbornly unresolved: why do states possessing overwhelming material superiority—advanced intelligence, precision fires, professional armies, and vast budgets—repeatedly fail to defeat materially weaker insurgent, terrorist, and irregular adversaries? The question is not academic. Since 1945, the record of counterinsurgency campaigns waged by great powers

and regional states alike is one of tactical competence married to strategic failure. The United States in Vietnam and Afghanistan, France in Algeria and the Sahel, the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, and a host of post-colonial states confronting rebellions within their own borders all illustrate a common pattern: the strong side wins battles, loses wars, and frequently leaves behind states more fragile than those it found. This lesson treats that pattern not as a collection of unfortunate cases but as a theoretical problem with identifiable mechanisms, scope conditions, and falsifiers. The student who masters it will be able to explain *why* material superiority is systematically discounted in irregular war, to adjudicate between competing theories of insurgency and counterinsurgency, and to reconstruct how five distinct analytical traditions—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—frame the same conflict in incommensurable ways.

The lesson sits at a hinge point in the curriculum. It presupposes three earlier lessons. From L12, the student carries an understanding of Cold War proxy wars and the logic of superpower delegation to local clients. From L20, the student brings the coercion framework—deterrence, compellence, and the distinction between punishment and denial. From L8, the student brings post-colonial theory: the argument that many post-colonial states are not Weberian monopolies of legitimate force but arenas of negotiated, fragmented, and hybrid authority. Asymmetric and irregular warfare is where these three streams converge. Coercion theory explains why bombing campaigns fail to compel insurgents who value survival over territory; proxy-war theory explains why external patrons cannot fully control the clients they arm; post-colonial theory explains why the "state" that counterinsurgents are trying to strengthen may never have existed in the form assumed by doctrine. The lesson also projects forward: L30 and L34 take up the Sahel in depth, L43 examines the Axis of Resistance as a networked irregular actor, and L50 generalizes the non-state actor problem. What is learned here about mechanism and perspective becomes the scaffolding for those later analyses.

The theoretical lineage the lesson develops is deliberately plural. It begins with Mao's *On Guerrilla Warfare* (1937), which theorized insurgency as a three-phase political-military process in which the insurgent wins not by defeating the enemy army but by eroding its political legitimacy and out-administering it in the countryside. It moves to David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (1964), the French colonial officer's distillation of population-centric logic: the center of gravity is the population, and the insurgent must be isolated from it. It then introduces Andrew Krepinevich's critique that Galula's heirs in the US military became enemy-centric—obsessed with killing insurgents rather than protecting populations—and David Kilcullen's concept of the "accidental guerrilla," the local fighter drawn into conflict by the presence of foreign forces rather than by ideology. These debates are not historical curiosities; they structured US doctrine in Iraq and Afghanistan and French doctrine in the Sahel, and their failures are the lesson's empirical core. Beyond counterinsurgency proper, the lesson examines proxy warfare through the principal-agent lens, the privatization of violence through private military companies and Russia's Wagner Group and its successor Africa Corps, the "greed versus grievance" debate initiated by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, and hybrid warfare as the contemporary blurring of regular and irregular, state and non-state, peace and war.

The African perspective is not a regional illustration of these theories; it is the vantage point from which the theories themselves are interrogated. African scholarship—William Reno on warlord politics, Jean-François Bayart on the "politics of the belly," Mahmood Mamdani on the colonial legacy of indirect rule, and a generation of Sahelian analysts—argues that the Western counterinsurgency canon misdiagnoses the problem. The issue is not that states fail to apply Galula correctly; it is that the state form itself, inherited from colonialism and sustained by external patronage, never achieved the monopoly of legitimate force that doctrine presupposes. In the Sahel, security has long been privatized, hybrid, and negotiated: militias, self-defense groups, customary authorities, and transnational jihadist networks coexist and compete. From this vantage, Russian security export, Chinese arms and training, Western counterterrorism, and UN peacekeeping are

not alternative solutions to a common problem but interventions into a political economy they only partially comprehend. The lesson therefore frames the Sahel not as a failed application of Western doctrine but as a case that exposes the doctrine's scope conditions.

What the student will be able to do after mastering this lesson is specific and assessable. First, identify the mechanism by which a given theory of insurgency or counterinsurgency is supposed to work, and state its scope conditions—when it applies, when it fails, and what evidence would falsify it. Second, reconstruct each of the five perspectives on a given case without straw-manning, showing what each contributes and what it occludes. Third, adjudicate between competing explanations of a case such as the Sahel or Afghanistan on the basis of evidence rather than theoretical preference. Fourth, distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in policy-relevant writing—a skill tested in the independent memo. Fifth, use data—ACLED event counts, civilian fatality distributions, PMC deployment estimates—to discipline theoretical claims rather than to decorate them. The lesson's data lab makes this concrete: students will work with ACLED conflict-event data for the Sahel 2012–2025, PMC deployment estimates, and civilian fatality data disaggregated by perpetrator, learning to read quantitative evidence as a check on narrative.

A final word on method. This lesson refuses the common move of treating irregular warfare as a deviation from "real" war between states. The state-centric model of war—uniformed armies, declared hostilities, territorial objectives—is historically specific and, in much of the world, empirically rare. Irregular, asymmetric, and hybrid forms are not pathologies of modernity but constitutive features of how political violence is actually organized. The lesson's five key ideas—insurgency and counterinsurgency, proxy warfare, privatization of violence, greed versus grievance, and hybrid warfare—are therefore not a grab-bag of topics but a progression from the classical theory of revolutionary war through the contemporary dissolution of the state monopoly of force. Each idea is presented with its mechanism, scope conditions, observable implications, and strongest counterargument. No theory is treated as settled truth. The student's task is not to memorize doctrines but to learn how to test them against cases, data, and perspectives that the doctrines themselves did not anticipate.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer these from memory before reading further. Each draws on a prerequisite lesson.

1. **(L12 — Cold War proxy wars)** Define a proxy war and identify the principal-agent problem that arises when a great power delegates fighting to a local client. Give one Cold War example.
2. **(L12)** What is the difference between a "client state" and a "proxy," and why does the distinction matter for control?
3. **(L20 — coercion)** Distinguish deterrence from compellence, and explain why compellence is generally harder to achieve than deterrence.
4. **(L20)** In coercion theory, what is the difference between punishment and denial strategies, and which is more likely to be effective against a non-state actor that values survival over territory?
5. **(L8 — post-colonialism)** What does Mahmood Mamdani mean by the "bifurcated state," and how does indirect rule shape post-colonial political authority?
6. **(L8)** How does Jean-François Bayart's concept of the "politics of the belly" challenge Weberian assumptions about the state as a rational-legal monopoly of legitimate force?

1.2 Orientation Questions These frame the lesson's central puzzle. Hold them in mind as you read.

1. Why did the United States, despite spending over two trillion dollars and deploying hundreds of thousands of troops, fail to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021? Was the failure primarily tactical, strategic, or political?
2. France's Operation Barkhane (2014–2022) achieved repeated tactical successes against jihadist groups in the Sahel yet was expelled by the very states it was protecting. What does this tell us about the relationship between military effectiveness and political legitimacy?
3. If Collier and Hoeffler are right that civil wars are driven primarily by economic "greed" rather than political "grievance," what follows for how we should design peacebuilding and counterinsurgency? If they are wrong, what follows?
4. How does the rise of private military companies and Russia's Africa Corps change the principal-agent problems of proxy warfare, and does privatization of violence make control easier or harder for sponsoring states?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach Provisional definitions to be refined as you read.

- **Asymmetric warfare**: Armed conflict between actors with markedly unequal capabilities, in which the weaker side avoids direct confrontation and exploits the stronger side's political and operational vulnerabilities.
- **Irregular warfare**: A broad category of conflict in which non-state or state actors use unconventional methods—guerrilla tactics, terrorism, subversion, information operations—rather than conventional force-on-force engagements.
- **Insurgency**: An organized, protracted political-military struggle by non-state actors to overthrow or weaken an existing government, combining armed action with political mobilization and shadow governance.
- **Counterinsurgency (COIN)**: The set of military, political, economic, and informational activities undertaken by a state (often with external support) to defeat an insurgency and strengthen legitimate authority.
- **Population-centric COIN**: A doctrine holding that the decisive terrain is the civilian population; the insurgent must be isolated from popular support through protection, governance, and legitimacy-building.
- **Enemy-centric COIN**: A doctrine prioritizing the destruction or capture of insurgent fighters and leadership, treating the enemy rather than the population as the center of gravity.
- **Proxy war**: A conflict in which an external power supports a local armed actor to advance its interests while avoiding direct engagement, creating principal-agent dynamics.
- **Principal-agent problem**: The difficulty a principal (sponsor) faces in ensuring that an agent (client or contractor) acts in the principal's interest rather than its own.
- **Private military company (PMC)**: A commercial firm providing military or security services for profit, ranging from logistics and training to direct combat operations.
- **Greed vs. grievance**: The debate, associated with Collier and Hoeffler, over whether civil wars are driven primarily by economic opportunity ("greed") or by political injustice and identity ("grievance").
- **Hybrid warfare**: The contemporary blending of conventional and unconventional, military and non-military, state and non-state means, deliberately blurring the boundaries between war and peace.
- **State fragility**: A condition in which a state lacks the capacity or legitimacy to perform core functions—security, service delivery, dispute resolution—across its territory, creating space for

non-state armed actors.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Explain** the mechanism through which an insurgency converts latent grievance into organized political control, and why counterinsurgency must reconfigure civilian networks rather than merely attrite armed fighters.

2. **Analyze** the theoretical lineage from Mao's phased people's war through Galula's population-centric laws to Krepinevich's critique of enemy-centric warfare, identifying the scope conditions under which each model is plausible.

3. **Evaluate** whether a given counterinsurgency campaign is population-centric or enemy-centric by using observable indicators such as civilian harm, territorial control, local governance, and insurgent regeneration.

4. **Reconstruct** African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on insurgency and counterinsurgency, stating what each perspective contributes and what it systematically occludes.

5. **Apply** the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to explain why a counterinsurgency campaign that succeeds tactically may still fail politically.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Insurgency and counterinsurgency: Mao, Galula, Krepinevich, the population-centric vs enemy-centric debate

Bolded Causal Claim: Insurgency is a political process in which armed actors convert grievance into organized control by embedding themselves in civilian social networks; counterinsurgency succeeds only when it reconfigures those networks through protection, governance, and selective coercion, and fails when it treats the conflict as a conventional war of attrition against enemy fighters.

Mechanism: The core mechanism is competitive political mobilization under conditions of contested sovereignty. Mao's theory of revolutionary war, developed in *On Guerrilla Warfare* (1937), treats insurgency as a phased process: strategic defensive, strategic stalemate, and strategic offensive. The decisive variable is not firepower but the relationship between the armed actor and the population. Mao's famous formulation that the guerrilla must move among the people as a fish swims in the sea captures a mechanism of concealment, recruitment, intelligence, and logistical dependence. The insurgent does not merely hide among civilians; the insurgent organizes them, taxes them, adjudicates disputes, and converts fear or grievance into compliance and, eventually, participation. Violence is therefore instrumental to political consolidation: assassination removes rivals, sabotage signals state weakness, and reprisals discipline neutrals.

David Galula's *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (1964), drawing on French experience in Algeria, systematizes

the counterinsurgent response. Galula's central mechanism is the "ink spot": security is established in a limited area, held, and then expanded through governance and services until the population's default allegiance shifts from insurgent to state. His four laws—(1) the best weapon is political, (2) support of the population is indispensable, (3) the 20 percent active minority must be isolated from the 80 percent passive majority, and (4) action must be concentrated in specific areas—imply that counterinsurgency is a competition for legitimacy rather than a search-and-destroy campaign. The mechanism is not simply killing insurgents; it is changing the population's cost-benefit calculation by making the state the more reliable provider of security and justice.

Andrew Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam* (1986) sharpens the distinction between enemy-centric and population-centric warfare. Enemy-centric warfare assumes that the insurgent force is the center of gravity and that destroying it will end the conflict. Population-centric warfare assumes that the population is the center of gravity and that insurgent regeneration will continue as long as grievances, insecurity, and weak governance persist. The mechanism of failure in enemy-centric campaigns is therefore regenerative: even high body counts do not reduce insurgent capacity if recruitment, financing, and sanctuary remain intact. Population-centric campaigns, by contrast, attempt to break the regenerative loop by securing civilians, building local institutions, and creating incentives for defection.

The mechanism also includes feedback loops that can defeat either side. Insurgent violence can produce displacement, which may either weaken the insurgent base or create a reservoir of recruits. State violence can produce the "accidental guerrilla" dynamic described by David Kilcullen in *The Accidental Guerrilla* (2009): local actors who are not ideologically committed to the insurgent cause may fight the state because of coercion, honor, or retaliation. Counterinsurgency can therefore generate the very resistance it seeks to suppress if it relies on indiscriminate force. The decisive mechanism is not the elimination of all violence but the management of political allegiance under conditions of insecurity.

Scope Conditions: This model applies most clearly to rural or semi-rural insurgencies in which the state has weak presence, the insurgent can embed in kinship or ethnic networks, and the population is not fully mobilized for either side. It is less adequate for urban insurgencies, purely criminal insurgencies, or conflicts in which the insurgent is primarily an external proxy with little local base. Population-centric counterinsurgency requires sufficient troop density, time horizons measured in years or decades, host-state capacity, and political willingness to absorb casualties and costs. It also requires that the state be reformable: if the state is predatory, corrupt, or exclusionary, "winning hearts and minds" may be impossible because the state itself is the grievance. Conversely, enemy-centric warfare may be temporarily effective when insurgents are isolated, lack popular support, and depend on external sanctuary that can be interdicted. The model does not imply that all insurgencies are winnable through better tactics; some are symptoms of deeper political crises that military force cannot resolve.

Observable Implications: If the population-centric model is operating, one should observe spatially concentrated security gains, declining civilian fatalities attributable to state forces, increased reporting of insurgent activity by civilians, local governance indicators such as functioning courts or service delivery, and insurgent difficulty in recruiting or taxing. If the enemy-centric model dominates, one should observe high insurgent body counts alongside persistent or increasing attacks, displacement, civilian casualties, and insurgent regeneration. A campaign that claims success while violence simply shifts to adjacent regions may be displacing rather than defeating the insurgency. Data from conflict-event datasets such as ACLED can be used to test these implications by comparing trends in battles, violence against civilians, and remote violence across space and time. However, observable implications must be interpreted cautiously: a decline in reported

events may reflect underreporting, displacement, or insurgent strategic restraint rather than genuine control.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, insurgency and counterinsurgency must be read through the history of colonial state formation and postcolonial political order. African scholarship does not treat the state as a neutral container that has temporarily lost control; it treats the state as an arena of accumulation, exclusion, and coercion whose legitimacy is often thin. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated colonial state, in which rural subjects were governed through "customary" authorities while urban citizens accessed modern rights, helps explain why insurgency often emerges from populations who experience the state as an external, extractive force rather than a provider of security. Bayart's work on the "politics of the belly" and the extraversion of African states suggests that political authority is often maintained through clientelism and external patronage, not through the kind of population-centric legitimacy assumed by Western counterinsurgency doctrine. Mbembe's reflections on commandement and necropolitics highlight how violence can become a mode of governance rather than a temporary deviation from it. Rodney's and Nkrumah's analyses of underdevelopment and neocolonialism further imply that insurgency may be a response to structural economic marginalization and external domination, not merely to local grievances. From this perspective, the population is not a passive prize to be won by either side; it is already embedded in hybrid governance systems involving chiefs, militias, religious authorities, traders, and kin networks. Counterinsurgency that ignores these systems may destroy local authority without replacing it, producing a security vacuum. African scholarship also warns that external counterinsurgency often strengthens abusive security forces and authoritarian incumbents, turning "stabilization" into regime preservation. The African vantage therefore reveals what Western doctrine often occludes: the problem may not be that the state lacks capacity to implement population-centric COIN, but that the state's existing mode of rule is itself a source of insurgency. This perspective is the longest and most developed here because it reframes the central puzzle from "how to defeat insurgents" to "how political authority is constituted, contested, and repaired in contexts of fragmented sovereignty."

Chinese: The Chinese perspective is shaped by Maoist revolutionary doctrine and by a contemporary emphasis on sovereignty, non-interference, and state capacity. Mao's theory remains a foundational text for understanding insurgency as political mobilization, and Chinese strategic thought tends to view counterinsurgency as a problem of political legitimacy, mass mobilization, and development rather than as a purely military campaign. In contemporary practice, China generally avoids expeditionary counterinsurgency and instead emphasizes security cooperation, arms transfers, training, and infrastructure development in support of host-state sovereignty. The Chinese vantage contributes the insight that external powers cannot substitute for local political authority and that economic development and state capacity are central to stability. It also tends to occlude the possibility that host governments themselves may be predatory or exclusionary, because non-interference limits pressure for political reform. Thus Chinese analysis often treats insurgency as a threat to order that must be managed by the sovereign state, with external actors playing a supporting rather than transformative role.

Russian: The Russian perspective draws on Soviet and post-Soviet experience, including the Afghan war and the Chechen conflicts, and tends to be more skeptical of population-centric counterinsurgency than Western doctrine. Russian strategic culture often emphasizes enemy-centric coercion, regime survival, and the use of force to impose order, while treating political grievances as secondary or as products of external manipulation. In contemporary Africa, Russian security export through private military companies such as Wagner and its successor structures is framed as anti-Western partnership and regime protection rather than as liberal state-

building. The Russian vantage contributes an insistence that insurgencies are often externally supported and that state collapse can be more dangerous than authoritarian consolidation. It occludes, however, the role of domestic governance failures and human-rights abuses in generating recruitment, and it risks conflating counterinsurgency with counter-regime-change. Its strength is a clear-eyed view of power and coercion; its weakness is a tendency to underestimate the political sources of insurgent resilience.

Western: The Western perspective is the most explicitly theorized in contemporary counterinsurgency doctrine, especially through U.S. and allied military manuals and the work of scholars such as Kilcullen. It emphasizes population-centric operations, "clear-hold-build," metrics of effectiveness, and the integration of military, diplomatic, and development tools. The Western vantage contributes a sophisticated understanding of insurgent adaptation, the importance of civilian protection, and the need to align military operations with political objectives. It also includes a significant self-critical literature, particularly after Iraq and Afghanistan, that questions whether external powers can build legitimate local institutions. Its occlusion is structural: Western COIN often assumes that the intervening state is a neutral or benevolent actor and that local partners share its objectives. It frequently underestimates colonial legacies, local political economies, and the possibility that host-state elites benefit from continued insecurity. The result can be a technically refined campaign that fails because it misidentifies the political center of gravity.

UN: The UN perspective approaches insurgency and counterinsurgency through mandates for peacekeeping, civilian protection, human rights, and the rule of law. It is less concerned with defeating insurgents than with protecting civilians, supporting political processes, and maintaining international legitimacy. The UN vantage contributes a normative framework that constrains the use of force and emphasizes accountability, as well as practical experience in complex missions such as MINUSMA in Mali. It occludes, however, the enforcement gap: peacekeeping mandates often lack the capacity, consent, or political backing to compel compliance by armed actors. The UN perspective also tends to treat insurgency as a threat to civilians and to the peace process rather than as a political project with its own logic. Its strength is the insistence that counterinsurgency without civilian protection is self-defeating; its weakness is that mandate language cannot by itself create the local political authority required for durable security.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Proxy Warfare: Principal-Agent Problems, Delegation, Autonomy, and the Limits of Control

Bolded Causal Claim: Proxy warfare is not merely the outsourcing of violence but a structurally unstable delegation relationship in which the principal's strategic preferences and the agent's operational imperatives diverge in predictable ways, producing conflicts that are longer, more destructive, and less controllable than either direct intervention or autonomous rebellion.

Mechanism: The mechanism is principal-agent theory applied to armed conflict. When a state (the principal) delegates military action to a non-state or subordinate state actor (the agent), it does so because direct intervention is too costly in blood, treasure, or political legitimacy. The agent possesses local knowledge, linguistic capacity, and deniability that the principal lacks. But this delegation creates information asymmetry: the agent knows more about the battlefield than the principal can monitor. The agent also has its own preferences—survival, territorial control, resource extraction, ethnic or sectarian agendas—that overlap only partially with the principal's. Monitoring is expensive and often impossible in real time; the principal cannot observe whether the agent is fighting the enemy or consolidating its own power. The agent, in turn, can manipulate the principal by exaggerating threats, concealing failures, or escalating in ways that force the

principal to deepen its commitment (entrapment). The principal's main sanction—withdrawal of support—often harms the principal's own strategic goals more than the agent's, because the agent can seek alternative patrons or revert to autonomous predation. This produces a ratchet effect: once delegation begins, disengagement becomes costlier than continuation. The result is a conflict dynamic in which neither party fully controls the trajectory, and in which the agent's autonomy grows over time as it accumulates resources, legitimacy, and organizational capacity.

Salehyan (2010) formalizes this as "delegation of war to rebel organizations," showing that state sponsorship increases rebel capacity while reducing state control. His model predicts that sponsored rebels are more likely to survive and to escalate, but also more likely to defy their patrons when their interests diverge. Bapat (2012) demonstrates that states sponsor militants precisely when they seek to avoid the costs of direct confrontation, but that sponsorship creates path dependencies that outlast the original strategic rationale; his analysis of state sponsorship shows that the decision to delegate is often irreversible because the agent's survival becomes tied to the principal's credibility. Mumford (2013) extends this to great-power competition, arguing that proxy warfare has become the dominant form of interstate conflict in the post-Cold War era precisely because nuclear deterrence and economic interdependence make direct war between major powers prohibitively costly. The mechanism also operates through "chains of delegation": a great power delegates to a regional state, which delegates to a militia, which delegates to a sub-militia, with each link adding information loss and preference divergence. Byman (2005) and Hughes (2014) document how this chain structure characterized US support for Afghan mujahideen and later Syrian rebels, with each intermediary extracting rents and pursuing independent agendas.

The principal-agent framework also illuminates the "moral hazard" problem: because the agent does not bear the full cost of escalation, it may take risks the principal would not authorize. This is visible in the way proxy forces frequently attack civilian populations or cross borders in ways that trigger unwanted retaliation against the principal. The principal's response—tightening control—often backfires by reducing the agent's effectiveness or driving it to seek alternative sponsors. The mechanism is thus not a stable equilibrium but a dynamic process of bargaining, manipulation, and gradual loss of control.

Scope Conditions: Proxy warfare is most likely when three conditions coincide: (1) the principal faces high costs of direct intervention (domestic opposition, casualty aversion, legal constraints, or nuclear deterrence); (2) the agent possesses sufficient organizational capacity to act independently; and (3) the agent's preferences overlap with the principal's on the primary objective but diverge on secondary ones (territorial control, resource distribution, post-conflict order). When the agent is fully dependent on the principal for survival, control is higher but the agent's military effectiveness is lower; when the agent is fully autonomous, effectiveness may be higher but control is minimal. The most dangerous configuration is the "capable but misaligned" agent, which can drag the principal into unwanted escalations. Proxy warfare is also more likely in contexts of weak state sovereignty, where multiple external actors can sponsor competing factions, creating a "market for violence" in which agents play principals against each other. The model assumes rational actors; it struggles to explain proxy relationships driven by ideology, kinship, or historical obligation, which may produce tighter alignment but also more rigid escalation. Additionally, the framework works best when the principal is a state; non-state principals (e.g., diaspora networks, corporations) introduce different incentive structures that the standard model does not capture well.

Observable Implications: If the principal-agent model holds, proxy conflicts should exhibit: (a) longer duration than non-proxy civil wars, because the principal's resources sustain the agent beyond its natural capacity; (b) higher civilian casualties, because the agent faces weaker accountability constraints than a

state military; (c) periodic crises in which the principal threatens withdrawal and the agent escalates to demonstrate indispensability; (d) eventual agent defection or "blowback," in which the agent turns against the principal or pursues independent goals; and (e) post-conflict instability, because the agent's military capacity outlasts the political settlement. The model also predicts that principals will invest in monitoring mechanisms (intelligence liaison, embedded advisors, conditional aid) that partially but never fully close the information gap. Observable implications for the Sahel include the way Malian armed groups have shifted allegiances between French, Russian, and regional patrons, and the way Tuareg and jihadist factions have exploited external support to build autonomous territorial control. The 2012 MNLA rebellion, initially supported by various external actors, illustrates how an agent can rapidly outgrow its principal's control and pursue objectives (independence) that the principal never endorsed. Similarly, the evolution of jihadist groups in the Sahel from local insurgencies to transnational actors with their own funding and recruitment networks demonstrates the autonomy trajectory predicted by the model.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective treats proxy warfare not as an external imposition but as a structural feature of post-colonial statehood, in which weak sovereignty invites external manipulation and in which African actors exercise agency within dependency. Grovogui's critique of international order and Mbembe's analysis of necropolitics frame proxy dynamics as continuous with colonial extraction; Mamdani's work on the bifurcated state explains why African governments lack the capacity to monopolize force, making them vulnerable to both external sponsorship and internal predation. The African vantage emphasizes that "proxies" are also political actors with their own projects, not mere instruments. African scholarship also highlights the way proxy relationships have been used by African elites themselves—to secure regime survival, to manage ethnic politics, and to extract resources—rather than only by external powers. The Chinese perspective emphasizes non-interference and opposes proxy warfare as a violation of sovereignty; Beijing's security cooperation is framed as state-to-state, avoiding the delegation logic that characterizes Western and Russian engagement. The Russian perspective has historically used proxy warfare extensively (Cold War, Syria) and frames it as legitimate support for sovereign governments against Western-backed insurgents; in Africa, the Wagner/Africa Corps model blurs proxy and direct engagement. The Western perspective has a long tradition of proxy warfare (Cold War, Afghanistan) and a corresponding literature of self-critique; it tends to frame proxy relationships as regrettable necessities and emphasizes "partner capacity building" as a more legitimate alternative. The UN perspective opposes proxy warfare as a violation of the UN Charter and emphasizes state sovereignty and non-intervention; in practice, UN peacekeeping operates in environments shaped by proxy dynamics that mandates cannot fully address.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The Privatization of Violence: PMCs, Wagner, Africa Corps, and the Market for Force

Bolded Causal Claim: The privatization of violence does not merely supplement state capacity but restructures the political economy of security, creating a market in which coercive services are allocated by purchasing power rather than by citizenship, and in which accountability is governed by contract law rather than by public constitutional order.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with state failure or state choice. States that cannot provide security (weak states) or that wish to avoid the political costs of casualties and accountability (strong states) turn to private military and security companies (PMCs/PSCs) to perform functions ranging from logistics and training to direct combat. The market for force operates on supply and demand: demand is generated by governments,

corporations, and international organizations facing security gaps; supply is provided by firms staffed by former military personnel, often from the global North, operating under commercial contracts. Singer (2003) traces the rise of this industry from the post-Cold War downsizing of Western militaries, which created a surplus of trained personnel and a demand for their services in conflict zones. Avant (2005) analyzes the market dynamics, showing that competition among firms drives down costs but also erodes standards, and that the principal-agent problems of proxy warfare recur in the client-firm relationship. The critical transformation occurs when PMCs move from defensive and support roles to offensive combat operations, as in the case of Wagner Group in Syria, Libya, and the Central African Republic, and its successor Africa Corps in the Sahel. These entities are not merely contractors but state-linked instruments operating under deniability: the Russian state provides weapons, intelligence, and political cover while the firm absorbs operational risk and legal liability. This creates a hybrid form that is neither fully state nor fully private, exploiting the gap between international humanitarian law (which regulates state armed forces) and commercial law (which regulates companies).

Reno (2011) situates this within African political economy, showing how the privatization of violence interacts with "shadow states" in which rulers use external force providers to maintain power without building accountable institutions. The mechanism produces several pathologies: firms have incentives to prolong conflicts that generate revenue; they are accountable to clients rather than to populations; their personnel operate under weaker disciplinary constraints than state soldiers; and their presence can displace state capacity-building by providing a cheaper short-term alternative. Percy (2007) examines the historical antecedents, showing that mercenary activity has been a recurring feature of warfare and that modern PMCs represent a rebranding rather than a novel phenomenon. The Montreux Document (2008) and the International Code of Conduct for Private Security Providers (2010) represent attempts to regulate this market, but enforcement remains weak and many major providers operate outside these frameworks. The mechanism also involves "regulatory arbitrage": firms incorporate in permissive jurisdictions, use subcontracting chains to obscure accountability, and exploit the ambiguity of "security services" versus "combat operations" in contract language.

The privatization of violence also transforms the relationship between force and territory. Traditional state military forces are tied to territorial sovereignty; private forces are mobile and can be deployed wherever contracts exist, creating "security enclaves" around extractive sites, government buildings, or transport corridors without extending state authority across the broader territory. This produces a fragmented security landscape in which some spaces are heavily protected while others are abandoned, a pattern visible in the Sahel where mining sites and capital cities receive private security while rural areas remain exposed to insurgent violence.

Scope Conditions: The privatization of violence flourishes under specific conditions: (1) a gap between security demand and state supply, whether due to state weakness, donor fatigue, or political constraints on deployment; (2) a legal and regulatory environment that permits or fails to prohibit mercenary-like activity; (3) the availability of surplus military labor from demobilized forces or retired personnel; and (4) great-power competition that incentivizes deniable force projection. The model is less applicable where states maintain strong monopolies on force and robust legal frameworks, or where international norms against mercenary activity are effectively enforced. It is also important to distinguish between different types of private force: defensive security companies protecting extractive industries (common in Africa), offensive combat units (Wagner/Africa Corps), and state-embedded contractors (US logistics firms in Iraq/Afghanistan). Each has different implications for state capacity and civilian protection. The "market for force" framework assumes that violence can be commodified; critics argue that this framing obscures the political and social dimensions of coercion, treating security as a service rather than a public good. The framework also struggles to

account for the ideological and political motivations of state-linked PMCs like Wagner, which are not purely commercial actors but instruments of state power operating through commercial forms.

Observable Implications: If the privatization thesis holds, we should observe: (a) a growing share of security provision by non-state actors in conflict zones; (b) regulatory arbitrage, with firms relocating to permissive jurisdictions; (c) civilian harm incidents involving private contractors that go unpunished; (d) state dependency on external force providers, with corresponding atrophy of public security institutions; and (e) the emergence of "security markets" in which different armed actors compete for contracts, sometimes switching sides. In the Sahel, the replacement of French forces by Africa Corps in Mali and Burkina Faso, and the reported use of private contractors in Niger, provide test cases. Observable implications also include the difficulty of distinguishing between state and non-state violence in data collection: ACLED and other databases often struggle to attribute events to "Wagner" versus "Russian forces" versus "Malian army," reflecting the deliberate ambiguity of the model. The privatization of violence also predicts that extractive industries will increasingly rely on private security, creating enclaves of protection amid broader insecurity. Additionally, the model predicts that states using PMCs will experience slower development of indigenous military capacity, as the availability of private force reduces the incentive to invest in public institutions.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective is primary and longest here because the privatization of violence is experienced most acutely on the continent, where colonial and post-colonial states have never fully monopolized force. African scholars frame the market for force as continuous with the colonial concessionary company model—entities like the Royal Niger Company or the Congo Free State's Force Publique that combined commercial extraction with coercive capacity. Mbembe's necropolitics and Bayart's "politics of the belly" illuminate how African rulers have historically outsourced violence to maintain power without accountability. Reno (2011) shows how "shadow states" in Africa rely on external force providers to bypass institutional constraints. The African vantage emphasizes that PMCs are not new but a reconfiguration of older patterns of externalized coercion, and that the "market for force" framing risks obscuring African agency and the demand side: African governments and elites choose to hire these forces for reasons of regime survival, not merely because supply exists. African scholarship also highlights the gendered dimensions of privatized violence, with Tamale and Oyěwùmí pointing to how the militarization of private security reinforces patriarchal structures of authority and exclusion. The Chinese perspective is critical of private military companies as violations of sovereignty and non-interference; Beijing prefers state-to-state security cooperation and has been cautious about deploying PMCs, though Chinese private security firms operate in Africa protecting Belt and Road investments, creating tensions with the non-interference principle. The Russian perspective has embraced the PMC model as a tool of great-power competition, framing Wagner/Africa Corps as legitimate security assistance to sovereign governments against terrorism and Western interference; Moscow emphasizes that these forces operate at the invitation of host governments, distinguishing them from Western intervention. The Western perspective is ambivalent: it pioneered the modern PMC industry (US contractors in Iraq/Afghanistan) and has extensive regulatory frameworks, but also criticizes Russian PMCs as destabilizing and unaccountable; Western self-critique focuses on the accountability gaps and the erosion of the state monopoly on force. The UN perspective opposes the use of mercenaries under the 1989 International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, and emphasizes that private force providers must comply with international humanitarian law; in practice, UN peacekeeping missions have sometimes relied on private contractors for logistics, creating tensions with the organization's normative stance.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The "Greed vs. Grievance" Debate and the Political Economy of Civil War

Bolded Causal Claim: Civil-war onset and duration are driven less by the sheer intensity of popular grievance than by the economic feasibility of rebellion—especially access to lootable resources, low opportunity costs, and weak state fiscal capacity—although grievance often supplies the mobilizing narrative and shapes the political aims that make violence meaningful.

Mechanism: The Collier–Hoeffler research program reframes civil war as a problem of rebel supply and demand rather than as an automatic expression of mass discontent. In this account, rebellion requires finance, recruits, and a permissive environment; grievance may lower the cost of recruitment, but it does not by itself create a viable insurgency. The mechanism runs through four channels. First, lootable point-source resources—diamonds, oil, coltan, timber, narcotics, or artisanal minerals—provide rebels with revenue streams that are easier to capture and tax than broad-based agricultural wealth. Second, low per capita income reduces the opportunity cost of fighting, making recruitment cheaper and prolonging war. Third, diaspora communities and external patrons can finance rebellion, creating a transnational political economy of conflict. Fourth, weak states lack the fiscal and coercive capacity to police territory, collect taxes, or provide public goods, so rebels can establish parallel taxation and governance. Grievance theories, by contrast, trace violence to relative deprivation, horizontal inequalities, political exclusion, and identity-based humiliation. Ted Robert Gurr's relative-deprivation framework and later work on horizontal inequalities argue that groups compare their status to others and rebel when institutional channels for redress are blocked. The two traditions are not simply opposites: grievance can be instrumentalized by elites who benefit from war economies, while "greed" can be legitimated through grievance narratives. Paul Collier's later argument that civil wars are "development in reverse" captures the feedback loop: war destroys institutions, lowers growth, and makes future rebellion cheaper. Fearon and Laitin's influential alternative emphasizes state weakness and insurgent tactics rather than either greed or grievance, suggesting that many rebellions succeed not because they are popular but because states are too weak to suppress them. The mechanism therefore is interactive: grievance supplies justification and recruitment pools; economic opportunity supplies finance and sustainability; state weakness supplies permissive space.

Scope Conditions: The greed-centered model applies most strongly to intrastate conflicts in low-income, resource-dependent states where rebels can extract rents from point-source commodities. It is weaker for secessionist wars driven by compact, mobilized minorities; for ideological revolutions with strong party structures; for wars of national liberation against settler or colonial regimes; and for conflicts in states with diversified economies where resources are harder to loot. It also applies more to war duration and fragmentation than to initial onset: once fighting begins, resource rents can sustain factions that no longer represent popular demands. The grievance-centered model applies more strongly where institutionalized exclusion, ethnic or regional marginalization, and blocked political participation are durable; it is weaker when grievance is universal but rebellion is rare, or when grievance is high but state capacity is strong enough to repress or accommodate. Both models are limited in interstate wars, in highly institutionalized party systems, and in cases where external intervention dominates local dynamics. The African post-colonial context—arbitrary borders, weak fiscal states, extractive economies, and patrimonial politics—makes both mechanisms salient, but neither alone explains why some marginalized groups rebel while others do not.

Observable Implications: If the greed mechanism dominates, one should observe higher conflict risk in states dependent on point-source primary commodities; longer wars where rebels control resource sites; fragmentation of rebel movements around resource rents; post-war criminalization of politics; and peace agreements that fail when they do not address war economies. If the grievance mechanism dominates, one

should observe stronger correlation between horizontal inequality and onset; mobilization along identity lines; demands for recognition, autonomy, or regime change; and settlement when political inclusion improves. Mixed evidence is common: resource-rich conflicts often feature strong grievance narratives, while grievance-heavy conflicts often develop resource-financed war economies. A key falsifier for the strong greed thesis would be a large set of long, destructive civil wars in resource-poor states with no external financing; a key falsifier for the strong grievance thesis would be the absence of rebellion in highly unequal but resource-poor and institutionally strong states. The debate has also generated policy implications: if greed dominates, interventions should target resource governance, sanctions, and war-economy disruption; if grievance dominates, interventions should target inclusion, decentralization, and transitional justice. In practice, both are usually required, and the distinction can be politically consequential because "greed" framing may delegitimize rebel demands while "grievance" framing may legitimize them.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

The African perspective, which is primary here, treats the greed–grievance binary as a Western social-science simplification that risks depoliticizing African conflicts. African scholarship and political thought—from Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment and extraversion, through Bayart's politics of the belly, Mamdani's citizen/subject distinction, and Reno's work on warlord politics and hybrid governance—emphasize that African conflicts are embedded in colonial state formation, global commodity chains, and patrimonial political orders. Grievance is not merely subjective deprivation; it is structured by citizenship deficits, regional marginalization, and the historical violence of state-making. "Greed" is not simply criminal appetite; it is often the rational pursuit of power and wealth within states whose institutions reward predation. The African vantage point reveals that rebels and states frequently share the same political economy: both tax populations, control resources, and bargain with external actors. It also stresses African agency—local elites, communities, and armed groups are not passive arenas for global resource markets. The limits of the debate are therefore visible from within: reducing conflict to greed or grievance obscures hybrid governance, the militarization of politics, and the ways in which global demand for minerals and hydrocarbons structures local violence.

The Chinese perspective generally emphasizes development, state capacity, and non-interference. It tends to read civil conflict as a symptom of underdevelopment and weak institutions, and it is skeptical of Western frameworks that moralize rebel grievances or criminalize resource economies. Chinese engagement prioritizes infrastructure, trade, and government-to-government relations; conflict is often framed as a threat to economic corridors and resource security rather than as a problem of justice. This perspective contributes an insistence that material development and state capacity matter, but it can occlude political exclusion, identity-based grievance, and the accountability of partner governments.

The Russian perspective often frames African and other civil conflicts through an anti-Western lens, emphasizing Western resource extraction, intervention, and regime change as sources of instability. It may highlight grievance against Western-backed governments while downplaying the predatory behavior of allied regimes or non-state proxies. Russian security export and arms relationships can be justified as stabilizing, yet this perspective can occlude the role of Russian-linked actors in resource economies and the ways in which external security assistance entrenches authoritarian rule.

The Western perspective has been deeply shaped by the Collier–Hoeffler agenda, especially through World Bank and donor policy. It tends to privilege measurable economic variables, institutional reform, and peacebuilding templates. Its self-critique has grown: scholars and practitioners now acknowledge that grievance, identity, and political legitimacy were underweighted; that "greed" framing could justify technocratic interventions; and that liberal peacebuilding often failed to transform war economies. Western analysis con-

tributes rigorous comparative data and policy tools, but it can impose universal models on historically specific conflicts.

The UN perspective focuses on civilian protection, peacekeeping, sanctions, and post-conflict peacebuilding. It treats resource governance, exclusion, and weak institutions as root causes, and it has developed norms around conflict minerals and natural-resource management in peace agreements. The UN vantage point contributes multilateral legitimacy and a civilian-protection lens, but it is constrained by member-state politics, limited enforcement, and the difficulty of transforming war economies without host-state consent.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Hybrid Warfare and the Erosion of Categories

Bolded Causal Claim: Hybrid warfare is best understood not as a new kind of war but as a deliberate strategy of category erosion—blurring regular and irregular forces, state and non-state actors, military and non-military instruments, and peace and war—so that adversaries face attribution gaps, legal ambiguity, and delayed or fragmented responses.

Mechanism: The mechanism is ambiguity as a force multiplier. An actor with conventional military inferiority or nuclear constraints can impose costs by operating in the "gray zone" between peace and armed conflict, using synchronized instruments that are individually below the threshold of war but collectively coercive. These instruments include proxy forces, private military companies, cyber operations, disinformation, economic coercion, maritime militia, lawfare, and covert sabotage. The key is not the novelty of any single tool but their coordination and the exploitation of seams in an opponent's decision-making: alliance thresholds, domestic political polarization, legal definitions of aggression, and attribution standards. Frank Hoffman's concept of hybrid warfare emphasized the blending of conventional and irregular methods by the same actor; later usage, especially in NATO and EU discourse, expanded toward "hybrid threats" that include non-military instruments. Michael Mazarr's gray-zone framework stresses coercive actions that are "not quite war" but are more than diplomacy. The Russian case—often discussed through the so-called Gerasimov doctrine, a Western label for ideas in Valery Gerasimov's 2013 article—highlights the primacy of non-military means, information dominance, and the exploitation of internal vulnerabilities. Chinese strategic writing, including "unrestricted warfare," similarly treats all domains as legitimate arenas of competition. The mechanism also depends on plausible deniability: if attribution is uncertain, deterrence is weakened because retaliation risks escalation or appears disproportionate. Hybrid tactics can create faits accomplis, test red lines, exhaust adversaries through low-cost harassment, and shape political narratives before military facts are established. The result is a shift from decisive battle to continuous, ambiguous competition.

Scope Conditions: Hybrid warfare is most likely where direct conventional war is too costly—because of nuclear deterrence, alliance commitments, economic interdependence, or military asymmetry—and where international law and institutional thresholds create exploitable ambiguity. It is also more feasible where information environments are contested, where states have weak cyber defenses, and where proxy or non-state actors can provide deniability. It is less applicable where attribution is rapid and credible, where legal frameworks clearly define armed attack, where alliance cohesion is high, or where the target state has strong societal resilience and counter-disinformation capacity. The concept has important limits: not every ambiguous incident is hybrid warfare; criminal networks, terrorist attacks, and opportunistic violence may lack strategic coordination. Hoffman's narrower definition requires the blending of conventional and irregular capabilities by one actor, while gray-zone analysis can include purely non-military coercion. There is also a risk of concept inflation: labeling all Russian, Chinese, or Iranian behavior as "hybrid" can obscure differences in intent, capability, and context. Finally, hybrid warfare is not exclusively a tool of revisionist states;

Western states have also used covert action, proxies, information operations, and economic coercion, though often under different legal and normative frameworks.

Observable Implications: If hybrid warfare is operating, one should observe coordinated multi-domain pressure below the threshold of armed conflict; repeated incidents with unclear attribution; proxy or deniable forces; cyber intrusions and disinformation campaigns timed with geopolitical disputes; economic coercion; legal and diplomatic ambiguity; and adversary responses that are delayed by debates over whether an "attack" has occurred. One should also observe institutional adaptation: NATO's hybrid-threat centers, EU resilience frameworks, national cyber commands, and efforts to improve attribution. Falsifiers include clear, rapid attribution followed by conventional deterrence; lack of coordination across domains; purely local or criminal motives; and cases where ambiguity results from incompetence rather than strategy. The concept predicts not necessarily escalation to war but persistent, low-level competition that strains alliances and institutions. In the African context, hybrid dynamics appear where external powers, regional states, and non-state armed groups interact through proxies, information campaigns, resource deals, and security partnerships, often in environments where state authority is fragmented and legal accountability is weak.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

The African perspective is primary and reveals that hybrid warfare is not only an interstate strategy but also a condition of governance in many African states. African scholarship on hybrid political orders, extraversion, and the privatization of security shows that the blurring of state and non-state violence long predates contemporary "hybrid" discourse. Armed groups, militias, customary authorities, and private security actors often coexist with formal state institutions, producing layered sovereignty. From this vantage point, external powers' use of proxies and ambiguous force in Africa exploits pre-existing governance gaps rather than creating them. The African perspective also insists on African agency: local elites bargain with external actors, and communities navigate multiple authorities. It exposes the limits of Western frameworks that treat hybridity as a novel threat emanating from revisionist powers, because in much of Africa hybridity is the historical baseline of political order.

The Chinese perspective frames hybrid competition through sovereignty, development, and non-interference. It often criticizes Western intervention and information operations as destabilizing, while presenting Chinese security cooperation as capacity-building. Chinese strategic concepts such as "three warfares" and unrestricted warfare emphasize legal, psychological, and media dimensions of competition, but official discourse typically denies engaging in hybrid warfare and frames actions as defensive or developmental. This perspective contributes an emphasis on economic and infrastructural resilience, but it can occlude the coercive dimensions of gray-zone activity and the asymmetry between state power and local accountability.

The Russian perspective has been central to Western debates on hybrid warfare, especially after 2014. Russian discourse often rejects the term as a Western projection, while simultaneously employing ambiguity, proxies, information operations, and private military structures. It frames security export in Africa and elsewhere as anti-terrorist and stabilizing, and it uses anti-Western narratives to legitimize its role. This perspective contributes an understanding of how weaker or revisionist actors can exploit ambiguity, but it frequently occludes accountability, civilian harm, and the predatory dimensions of proxy arrangements.

The Western perspective developed much of the hybrid-warfare vocabulary, particularly through NATO, EU, and US strategic communities. It emphasizes resilience, attribution, deterrence by denial, and the defense of the rules-based order. Its self-critique has grown: scholars warn against concept inflation, note that Western states have long used covert and proxy tools, and acknowledge that labeling all adversarial behavior as hybrid can justify over-militarized responses. Western analysis contributes institutional adaptation and legal frameworks, but it can overstate novelty and understate the historical normality of ambiguous conflict.

The UN perspective approaches hybrid warfare through international law, civilian protection, peacekeeping mandates, and the maintenance of international peace and security. It is concerned with attribution, the legal thresholds for use of force, and the protection of civilians in environments where state and non-state violence are blurred. The UN contributes multilateral norms and a civilian-centered lens, but it is constrained by Security Council politics, the consent of host states, and the difficulty of responding to ambiguous coercion without clear attribution.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on asymmetric and irregular warfare begins from a premise that the other four perspectives usually treat as background: in much of Africa, irregular violence is not a deviation from a stable Westphalian order but one of the ordinary media through which political order is produced, contested, and reconstituted. This is not a claim that African states are "failed" in some absolute sense; it is a claim that sovereignty on the continent has historically been fragmented, layered, and negotiated among states, customary authorities, armed movements, militias, commercial actors, and external powers. From this standpoint, insurgency, counterinsurgency, proxy warfare, private military force, and hybrid conflict are not separate pathologies to be cured by better doctrine. They are interlocking features of a political economy in which authority is distributed unevenly and in which violence is often a resource, a language of claim-making, and a technique of governance. The African perspective therefore reframes the central puzzle of this lesson: not why weak states fail to defeat insurgents, but how asymmetric warfare becomes embedded in the everyday reproduction of power.

Mamdani's analysis of the colonial state is foundational here. The colonial state was not simply an underdeveloped version of the European state; it was a bifurcated order that separated "citizens" in the urban, Europeanized sphere from "subjects" in the rural, customary sphere. Indirect rule did not merely administer Africans through chiefs; it politicized ethnicity and produced a state whose coercive core was stronger than its civic core. Postcolonial states inherited this architecture. They often retained the colonial army, police, and administrative habits while claiming democratic legitimacy they had not fully built. In such a setting, insurgency frequently emerges not from the absence of the state but from the state's selective presence: taxation without representation, security without protection, citizenship without rights. Counterinsurgency that treats the population as a terrain to be secured, without addressing this bifurcation, risks reproducing the very exclusion that fuels recruitment. The African perspective thus insists that legitimacy is not a "line of effort" added to military operations; it is the political condition under which force can be converted into authority.

Mbembe's work on necropolitics and the "commandement" deepens this argument. For Mbembe, sovereignty is not only the legal capacity to make law; it is the power to decide who may live and who must die, and to organize the material and symbolic conditions of that decision. In many African conflict zones, war is not the suspension of politics but its continuation by other means. Armed actors do not merely destroy the state; they also provide order, taxation, justice, and protection in spaces where the state is absent or predatory. This is what makes hybrid governance so important. The state may coexist with customary courts, militia checkpoints, insurgent tax collectors, and private security firms, each exercising fragments of sovereignty. The African perspective therefore sees "state fragility" less as an empty space and more as a crowded field of competing authorities. Counterinsurgency that assumes a clear state/non-state boundary will misread the social landscape, because the boundary itself is historically unstable and politically

negotiated.

Bayart's concepts of extraversion and the rhizome state add a political-economy mechanism. African states and elites have long operated through external connections—colonial, Cold War, post-Cold War, and contemporary—using international resources to consolidate domestic power. The rhizome state is not a Weberian monopoly of violence but a network of nodes, some official and some unofficial, through which resources flow. Armed groups are often embedded in these networks rather than standing outside them. This complicates the greed-versus-grievance debate. Collier and Hoeffler's emphasis on economic opportunity and rebel financing captures something real: resource rents, smuggling, and protection economies can sustain violence. But African scholarship pushes back against reducing insurgency to criminal enterprise. Bayart's "politics of the belly" suggests that accumulation and survival are politically mediated; armed actors may be entrepreneurs, but they are also brokers in a system where state office, ethnicity, religion, and violence are intertwined. The relevant question is not simply whether rebels are greedy, but how violence becomes a rational strategy within a political order that rewards extraversion and punishes inclusion.

Rodney and Nkrumah supply the structural and historical layer. Rodney's argument that underdevelopment is not a stage but a product of historical processes, and Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism, frame African conflicts within global systems of extraction. From this perspective, proxy warfare is not an aberration of the Cold War or the War on Terror; it is a recurring method by which external powers secure resources, bases, and influence while avoiding the costs of direct rule. African states and armed groups become arenas for contests they did not initiate. This does not absolve local actors of responsibility; Rodney and Nkrumah are not determinists in that sense. Rather, they insist that local violence must be read against the global structures that shape incentives, armaments, and diplomatic recognition. The African perspective therefore treats principal-agent problems in proxy warfare as doubly severe: not only do patrons lose control of clients, but clients also use patronage to pursue local projects that may have little to do with the patron's stated aims.

Fanon and Cabral provide the liberation-theory counterpoint. Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and its psychological effects, and Cabral's insistence on political work, class analysis, and national liberation, remind us that irregular warfare can be a project of emancipation as well as predation. Cabral's distinction between the "weapon of theory" and armed struggle is especially important: guerrilla warfare without political education and social rootedness is merely violence. This African tradition challenges both Western counterinsurgency, which often reduces insurgents to security threats, and some African state narratives, which label all armed opposition as terrorism. It also complicates the greed-grievance binary by showing that grievance can be organized into political projects with genuine popular bases. At the same time, Fanon's warnings about the pitfalls of national consciousness—elite capture, authoritarianism, and the reproduction of colonial violence—prevent romanticization. Liberation movements can become new oppressors, and post-independence states can inherit the coercive habits of their predecessors.

Nyerere's vision of self-reliance and regional solidarity, and Grovogui's critique of international order, add a normative and institutional dimension. Nyerere's emphasis on African unity and non-alignment suggests that security cannot be outsourced indefinitely without eroding sovereignty. Grovogui's work on international law and African agency argues that the global order often recognizes African states formally while denying them substantive equality. In asymmetric warfare, this means that external interventions—whether Western counterterrorism, Russian security export, or Chinese capacity-building—are rarely neutral. They reshape the field of power. The African perspective therefore asks not only whether an intervention reduces violence in the short term, but whether it strengthens or weakens the capacity of African societies to govern themselves. This is a demanding standard, and it often produces skepticism toward stabilization missions that prioritize

order over justice.

Feminist and decolonial African scholarship, including Oyěwùmí and Tamale, reveals another occlusion in conventional security studies. Oyěwùmí's critique of the imposition of Western gender categories, and Tamale's decolonial feminist work, show that conflict analysis often renders women's labor, suffering, and agency invisible by treating the "combatant" as male and the "civilian" as passive. In irregular warfare, women are fighters, logisticians, informants, mediators, survivors, and political organizers; they are also disproportionately targeted by sexual violence and by the collapse of social services. A gendered lens does not merely add women to existing models; it changes the model by showing how militarization reorganizes households, kinship, and authority. This matters for the privatization of violence as well: private military actors and militias often operate in spaces where gendered violence is both a tactic and a byproduct of impunity. The African feminist perspective thus insists that security cannot be measured only by battle deaths or territorial control; it must also be measured by bodily integrity, social reproduction, and the distribution of vulnerability.

Aning and Danso, writing from African security studies, bring the institutional and regional dimension. They emphasize that African security is increasingly managed through regional organizations—ECOWAS, the African Union, SADC—and through norms such as "African solutions to African problems." These institutions have intervened in crises, imposed sanctions, and authorized peace operations. Yet they face capacity gaps, funding dependence, and political divisions. The African perspective is therefore not simply anti-external; it is also self-critical. It recognizes that regional actors can be ineffective, that elites can capture regional mechanisms, and that "sovereignty" can be invoked to shield abusive governments. But it insists that external actors must be judged by whether they strengthen regional capacity or bypass it. In the Sahel, for example, the proliferation of bilateral military partnerships, private military deployments, and competing external agendas has often fragmented rather than consolidated regional security architecture.

On hybrid warfare specifically, the African perspective offers a corrective to Western novelty claims. The blurring of regular and irregular forces, state and non-state actors, and peace and war is not new in Africa. Colonial powers used militias, levies, and proxy forces; postcolonial states have used "self-defense" groups, political militias, and covert operations; insurgents have moved between political parties, criminal networks, and armed wings. What Western discourse calls hybrid warfare often describes a long-standing condition of African politics. The danger of the hybrid label is that it can justify over-militarized responses by framing political ambiguity as a technical threat. The African perspective does not deny that states face ambiguous coercion; it denies that ambiguity can be resolved primarily by military means. Instead, it points to hybrid governance as a site of political negotiation, where the task is not to restore a mythical monopoly of violence but to build accountable institutions that can mediate competing authorities.

The African perspective also reframes the privatization of violence. Private military companies, Wagner, Africa Corps, and local militias are not merely market responses to state failure; they are part of a broader reconfiguration of sovereignty in which security is commodified and delegated. This can provide short-term protection for elites and external actors, but it often deepens insecurity for civilians. The market for force rewards actors who can deliver violence efficiently, not those who build legitimacy. When external powers rely on private or proxy forces, they may gain deniability but lose accountability. The African perspective therefore treats the privatization of violence as a governance crisis, not just a procurement issue. It asks who controls these forces, whom they protect, and how their presence reshapes local political economies. In many cases, private military actors become embedded in resource extraction and elite protection, creating new constituencies for continued conflict.

What does this perspective contribute that the other four cannot? First, it centers historical structure: colonialism, neo-colonialism, extraversion, and underdevelopment are not context but causal mechanisms. Second, it treats legitimacy and citizenship as security variables, not as afterthoughts. Third, it reveals hybrid governance as a normal condition rather than a pathology. Fourth, it exposes the distributional and gendered costs of violence that aggregate metrics hide. Fifth, it insists on African agency, even when that agency is constrained or contradictory. What it occludes is also important. It can understate the autonomous ideological appeal of transnational jihadism; it can over-romanticize resistance and understate the predatory behavior of some armed groups; it can be too structural, leaving less room for contingency, leadership, and local moral choice; and because "African scholarship" is diverse, there is a risk of presenting a unified voice where none exists. These limits do not invalidate the perspective; they define the terms on which it must be tested. The strongest version of the African perspective is not that external actors are always wrong or that local actors are always right, but that asymmetric warfare cannot be understood or resolved without confronting the political, historical, and social foundations of authority.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on asymmetric and irregular warfare is anchored in the principle of non-interference and in a developmental theory of security. Its normative core is sovereignty: states have the right to manage internal affairs without external coercion, and international order depends on respecting that right. From this standpoint, insurgency and counterinsurgency are primarily internal matters, even when they have transnational dimensions. External actors may assist, but they should not impose political models, engineer regime change, or use military force without host-state consent. This position is not merely rhetorical; it is tied to China's own historical experience of foreign intervention and to its contemporary interest in stable access to markets, resources, and infrastructure. In African contexts, China presents itself as a partner that builds capacity rather than a patron that dictates outcomes.

The mechanism through which China approaches irregular warfare is state-capacity enhancement combined with economic development. The argument is that weak governance, poverty, and lack of infrastructure create the conditions in which armed groups thrive. Security cooperation therefore includes arms sales, equipment, training, intelligence sharing in some cases, and support for host-government forces, but it is usually framed as capacity-building rather than combat partnership. China also participates in UN peacekeeping and supports African Union and regional mechanisms, presenting multilateralism as preferable to unilateral intervention. The development-security nexus is central: roads, ports, energy projects, and trade are treated as stabilizing forces that address root causes. This is a coherent alternative to Western population-centric counterinsurgency, which China often views as politically intrusive and militarily overextended.

China's contribution lies in offering a non-Western model of engagement that many African governments find attractive. It provides material support without the governance conditionality that often accompanies Western aid. It respects formal sovereignty and avoids the language of regime change. It can move quickly on infrastructure and equipment, and it does not demand that partner states adopt liberal political reforms as a precondition for security cooperation. For governments facing insurgencies, this can be valuable: they receive tools to strengthen their coercive capacity without external scrutiny of their political practices. China also benefits from a narrative of South-South solidarity and anti-colonialism, which positions it as a fellow developing country rather than a former imperial power.

The occlusions of this perspective are significant. Non-interference can protect incumbents who are themselves sources of grievance, and it can shield abusive security practices from international criticism. Arms transfers and training may strengthen states without strengthening accountability, and they can be diverted

to militias or used against civilians. The development-first argument, while plausible, can underestimate the political roots of insurgency: economic growth in the absence of inclusion may deepen resentment. China's commercial interests can also securitize its engagement, making stability a condition for investment rather than a public good. There are principal-agent problems here too: Beijing may support a government, but it has limited control over how that government uses force. Finally, the Chinese perspective tends to treat non-state armed actors primarily as threats to order and commerce, which can obscure their political claims and the grievances that sustain them. In hybrid warfare environments, where state and non-state violence are blurred, a strict state-centric lens may miss the social and political networks that make armed groups durable.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on asymmetric and irregular warfare is shaped by a combination of great-power competition, anti-Western framing, and a security-export model that relies on private and semi-private military actors. Its normative language emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and resistance to Western hegemony. In practice, however, Russia has often supported embattled governments through arms, training, information operations, and the deployment of private military companies such as Wagner and its successor, Africa Corps. The Russian approach treats irregular warfare less as a problem of governance and more as a contest for influence in which Western withdrawal creates opportunities for Moscow to expand its footprint. Anti-colonial and anti-Western rhetoric is central to this framing, even when Russian engagement serves strategic and commercial interests.

The mechanism is security provision in exchange for political alignment and resource access. Russian actors offer regimes coercive capacity, regime protection, and international diplomatic cover, often with fewer conditions than Western partners. This can include weapons, instructors, intelligence support, and information campaigns that delegitimize Western interventions and domestic opposition. Private military companies provide deniability and flexibility, allowing Moscow to project force without the political costs of formal troop deployments. In hybrid warfare terms, this is a form of gray-zone engagement: state and non-state actors are deliberately blurred, making attribution difficult and allowing Russia to maintain that it is merely supporting sovereign governments against terrorism.

Russia's contribution, from its own standpoint, is that it fills security vacuums and challenges Western monopoly. It is willing to operate in high-risk environments where Western states have withdrawn or hesitated. It supports governments that Western actors may consider illegitimate or abusive, and it does so without demanding democratic reforms. For some African leaders, this is attractive: it offers regime security and a counterweight to Western pressure. Russia also benefits from a narrative that frames Western counterterrorism as neo-colonial intervention, positioning Moscow as a defender of sovereignty. In the short term, Russian security export can stabilize governments and push back insurgent advances, particularly when Western missions have failed or withdrawn.

The occlusions are severe. The Russian model often prioritizes regime survival over civilian protection, and its reliance on private military actors creates accountability gaps. Human rights abuses, opaque contracts, and resource extraction can deepen grievances and fuel recruitment. Heavy-handed tactics may produce short-term territorial gains but undermine long-term legitimacy. There are principal-agent problems: Moscow may not fully control private military actors, and local clients may use Russian support to pursue narrow elite interests. Information operations can polarize societies and weaken democratic institutions. The anti-Western framing, while resonant in some contexts, can obscure the fact that Russian engagement is also a form of external influence, not a neutral defense of sovereignty. In hybrid warfare environments, the delib-

erate blurring of state and non-state violence makes it difficult to distinguish counterterrorism from regime protection, and it can normalize the use of unaccountable force. The Russian perspective thus contributes coercive capacity and geopolitical competition, but it often occludes the political and social foundations of durable security.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on asymmetric and irregular warfare is dominated by counterterrorism, stabilization, and a long tradition of counterinsurgency doctrine. Its normative framework combines security, liberal governance, human rights, and international law. The central assumption is that irregular warfare threatens both local populations and international order, and that it can be managed through a combination of military force, institutional reform, and development assistance. Western actors often distinguish between "good" governance and "bad" violence, and they treat insurgency as a problem of state weakness, ideological extremism, and social grievance that can be addressed through capacity-building and legitimacy-enhancing reforms.

The mechanism is population-centric counterinsurgency and partner-force development. Influenced by Galula, Kilcullen, and the lessons of Iraq and Afghanistan, Western doctrine emphasizes protecting civilians, building host-nation capacity, and addressing root causes. Military operations are paired with governance programs, economic development, and human rights training. The aim is to separate insurgents from the population, deny them sanctuary, and strengthen the state's ability to provide security and services. In hybrid warfare contexts, Western states also develop legal frameworks for attribution, cyber defense, and responses to gray-zone coercion. The contribution is substantial: Western actors bring resources, intelligence, training, and normative standards that many other actors do not. They also engage in self-critique, acknowledging that template-driven interventions, short time horizons, and over-militarization have often failed.

Western self-critique is an important part of this perspective. The failures in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Sahel have produced serious debates about the limits of external intervention. Scholars and practitioners have questioned whether population-centric counterinsurgency is transferable across contexts, whether partner forces can be relied upon, and whether military metrics obscure political realities. This self-critique is a genuine strength: it allows for learning and adaptation. However, it often remains at the level of doctrine rather than strategy. The same institutional incentives that produced over-militarized interventions—domestic politics, threat inflation, bureaucratic momentum, and alliance commitments—can absorb critique without changing behavior. Western actors may acknowledge that legitimacy matters while continuing to prioritize force protection, partner capacity, and short-term metrics.

The occlusions of the Western perspective are well documented. It can conflate terrorism with insurgency, treating politically rooted armed movements as security threats to be eliminated. It often assumes that Western institutional models are transferable, underestimating local political logics. Partner-force development suffers from principal-agent problems: Western trainers may build forces that are loyal to elites rather than to the population, or that are effective at coercion but not at protection. Stabilization missions can freeze conflict economies and empower abusive actors. The language of hybrid warfare can also be overused, turning complex political conflicts into technical problems of attribution and response. Finally, Western interventions often suffer from legitimacy deficits: even well-intentioned operations are perceived as foreign imposition, and civilian casualties can undermine the very population-centric logic they claim to follow. The Western perspective contributes institutional capacity, legal frameworks, and self-critique, but it often underestimates the historical and political depth of the conflicts it seeks to manage.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on asymmetric and irregular warfare is mediated through international law, peacekeeping mandates, civilian protection, and the maintenance of international peace and security. Its normative core is multilateralism: force should be authorized collectively, constrained by law, and directed toward protecting civilians and supporting political settlements. The UN does not have a single theory of insurgency or counterinsurgency; rather, it approaches irregular warfare through mandates that combine security, political, humanitarian, and human rights components. In this sense, the UN perspective is less a doctrine of war than a framework for managing its consequences and preventing escalation.

The mechanism is consent-based peacekeeping and civilian protection. UN missions operate with the consent of host states, under Security Council mandates, and with principles of impartiality and minimum use of force. They protect civilians, support state institutions, facilitate humanitarian access, and create space for political processes. In hybrid warfare environments, where state and non-state violence are blurred, the UN emphasizes attribution, legal thresholds, and the protection of civilians. It also provides a forum for multilateral coordination and a source of legitimacy that unilateral actors lack. The contribution is significant: UN missions can provide security umbrellas, monitor ceasefires, and support transitions in ways that bilateral military partnerships cannot. They also center civilian harm in a way that purely military frameworks often do not.

The UN perspective is particularly important in African contexts, where missions such as MINUSMA in Mali have operated amid complex insurgencies, hybrid governance, and competing external actors. MINUSMA's experience illustrates both the strengths and limits of the UN approach. It provided a large multinational presence, supported civilian protection, and attempted to facilitate political processes. But it also faced force-generation gaps, restricted freedom of movement, and a deteriorating security environment. Its withdrawal in 2023, at the request of the Malian government, underscores a fundamental constraint: UN peacekeeping depends on host-state consent, and when that consent erodes, the mission's legitimacy and effectiveness collapse. This is not a minor operational issue; it is a structural feature of the UN system.

The occlusions of the UN perspective follow from these constraints. Security Council politics can paralyze or distort mandates, and powerful states may use the UN to legitimize their own interests. Host-state consent can be withdrawn when governments prefer unilateral or private military partnerships. The UN's emphasis on impartiality can be difficult to sustain when one party to the conflict is the host government. In hybrid warfare environments, ambiguous coercion and blurred lines of responsibility make attribution and response difficult. The UN also struggles to address the political economy of conflict: it can protect civilians and support institutions, but it cannot easily transform the structures of extraversion, resource extraction, and elite capture that sustain violence. Finally, the gap between mandate and capacity is persistent: missions are often asked to do more than they can deliver, and troop-contributing countries may lack the resources or political will to implement robust protection mandates. The UN perspective contributes multilateral legitimacy, civilian-centered norms, and a legal framework for managing conflict, but it is constrained by the very sovereignty principles that make it acceptable to member states.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reveals insurgency as embedded in hybrid governance, state fragility, and the political economy of extraversion; centers African agency and endogenous dynamics	May underweight transnational ideological and financial drivers of jihadism; risks treating all external intervention as equivalent	African ownership, sovereignty, decolonization of security; political transformation over stabilization	Sahel state collapse (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger); hybrid governance arrangements; PMC proliferation; coup cycles	Western: African frameworks risk romanticizing local authority and obscuring non-state violence against civilians
Chinese	Sovereignty-centered capacity building; development-security nexus; security cooperation without political conditionality	Downplays governance deficits and human rights; treats security as a technical problem; has not prevented state collapse	Non-interference, state sovereignty, development as security	Arms sales and training programs; infrastructure-security linkages; absence of conditionality	African: non-interference can shield abusive regimes; security cooperation may serve extractive interests
Russian	Highlights limits of Western intervention; offers alternative security partnerships; anti-imperial framing	Obscures mercenary violence, resource extraction, and accountability gaps; conflates regime security with population security	Multipolarity, anti-Western, selective sovereignty	Wagner/Africa Corps deployments in Mali and Burkina Faso; arms transfers; anti-Western rhetoric	UN: PMC operations undermine civilian protection, accountability, and the laws of armed conflict

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Resources, intelligence, COIN doctrine; self-critique (Kilcullen, Krepinevich) acknowledging enemy-centric failures	Treats insurgency as technical; overestimates external capacity to transform local politics; intervention became recruitment tool	Liberal intervention, human rights, stabilization, counterterrorism	COIN doctrine; MINUSMA support; training missions; Operation Serval/Barkhane	African: intervention reproduces dependency, ignores root causes, and substitutes external stabilization for political transformation
UN	Multilateral legitimacy, civilian-centered norms, legal frameworks for protection	Gap between mandate and capacity; cannot transform political economy of conflict; dependence on host-state consent	Multilateralism, civilian protection, sovereignty, rule of law	MINUSMA mandate (2013–2023); protection of civilians frameworks; humanitarian access	Russian/African: UN is Western-dominated, ineffective in active counterinsurgency, and unable to prevent state collapse

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do): Sahel Insurgency, 2012–2025

Levels of analysis. The Sahel insurgency must be analyzed across four levels. At the individual level, the conflict is driven by young men facing unemployment, marginalization, and the appeal of jihadist ideology and material incentives; recruitment into JNIM and ISSP reflects both grievance and greed, with fighters often moving between armed groups and state forces. At the state level, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger exhibit weak institutional capacity, predatory elites, and security sectors that are more threat to than protector of populations; the 2012 Tuareg rebellion and subsequent coups (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) illustrate state fragility. At the systemic level, the post-2011 Libyan collapse flooded the region with weapons and fighters, while French and US counterterrorism frameworks and the UN's MINUSMA mission structured the international response; great-power competition between Western, Russian, and Chinese actors shaped available options. At the transnational level, jihadist networks (AQIM, ISGS/ISSP) operate across borders, trafficking routes connect the Sahel to North Africa and the Gulf, and diaspora financing and media propaganda sustain mobilization beyond any single state.

Mechanism section. The mechanism is a self-reinforcing cycle of state fragility and insurgent expansion. The 2012 MNLA Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali created a vacuum that jihadist groups (Ansar Dine, MUJAO, AQIM) exploited, declaring an Islamic state in the north. French intervention (Operation Serval, 2013) reversed territorial losses but did not address governance deficits; the state reasserted control without legitimacy, and insurgents adapted to guerrilla and terrorist tactics. The 2015 Algiers Accord failed to deliver decentralization or security sector reform. JNIM (formed 2017) and ISSP (ISGS) expanded southward into central Mali and Burkina Faso, exploiting ethnic militias, pastoralist-farmer conflicts, and state absence. Coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) removed Western-aligned governments and invited Russian security partnerships (Africa Corps/Wagner), while France withdrew Operation Barkhane (2022). The mechanism runs: weak state capacity → insurgent territorial control → state repression and militia mobilization → civilian harm → further recruitment → state collapse → external intervention (Western or Russian) → temporary stabilization without governance → renewed insurgency. ACLED data show rising event counts and civilian fatalities from 2012 to 2024, with a shift in perpetrator profiles from jihadist groups to state forces and allied militias after 2020.

Perspective reconstruction. The African perspective, drawing on scholars such as Bayart, Mamdani, and Reno, frames the Sahel crisis as a crisis of the post-colonial state and its extraversion: states are arenas of elite competition rather than providers of public goods, and security is privatized through militias, customary authorities, and foreign contractors. From this vantage, the MNLA rebellion and jihadist expansion are symptoms of a deeper failure of state-society relations, not merely terrorism; the coups reflect popular frustration with corrupt, externally dependent regimes; and the turn to Russia/Africa Corps is an assertion of sovereignty against Western conditionality, even if it risks new dependencies. This perspective reveals what Western counterterrorism obscures: that stabilization without political transformation reproduces violence, and that hybrid governance arrangements—combining state, customary, and non-state actors—are not aberrations but constitutive of how order is actually produced. It also highlights the agency of African actors—elites, communities, armed groups—rather than treating them as passive recipients of intervention. However, it can underweight the transnational ideological and financial drivers of jihadism and the genuine appeal of Salafi-jihadist projects to marginalized populations.

The Chinese perspective emphasizes sovereignty and non-interference: Beijing has expanded arms sales, training, and infrastructure investment in the Sahel without political conditionality, framing security as a development problem. It contributes an alternative to Western conditionality and recognizes that poverty and underdevelopment fuel instability. Yet it occludes governance deficits and the human rights consequences of unconditional support, and its security cooperation has not prevented state collapse.

The Russian perspective frames the crisis as a failure of Western intervention and an opportunity for multipolar security partnerships; Africa Corps/Wagner deployments in Mali and Burkina Faso are presented as anti-terrorist assistance without neo-colonial strings. It contributes a critique of Western overreach and offers regimes immediate security support. But it obscures mercenary violence, resource extraction (gold mining concessions), and the lack of accountability for civilian harm.

The Western perspective treats the Sahel as a counterterrorism and stabilization challenge, deploying COIN doctrine, training missions, and MINUSMA support; its self-critique (Kilcullen, Krepinevich) acknowledges that enemy-centric approaches failed and that population-centric COIN was undermined by weak partners. It contributes resources, intelligence, and doctrinal innovation. But it overestimated the capacity of external actors to transform local politics and underestimated how intervention itself became a recruitment tool for jihadists.

The UN perspective centers civilian protection and multilateral legitimacy through MINUSMA, which operated in Mali from 2013 to 2023 with a mandate to protect civilians and support the peace process. It contributes norms and a legal framework. But the gap between mandate and capacity, and the mission's dependence on host-state consent, limited its effectiveness; MINUSMA's withdrawal in 2023 marked the limits of UN peacekeeping in active counterinsurgency environments.

Explicit adjudication. The African perspective best explains the case because it captures the endogenous political dynamics—state fragility, elite extraversion, hybrid governance, and the political economy of security—that make external intervention, whether Western or Russian, structurally ineffective. The mechanism of state collapse and insurgent expansion is rooted in the nature of the post-colonial state and its failure to monopolize legitimate violence or deliver public goods. However, the African perspective misses or underweights the transnational and ideological dimensions: the role of Libyan weapons, AQIM's regional networks, and the genuine mobilizing power of jihadist ideology among marginalized youth. It also risks treating all external intervention as equivalent, obscuring differences between multilateral peacekeeping and mercenary deployment. A full explanation requires combining the African political-economy lens with systemic (great-power competition) and transnational (jihadist network) levels of analysis.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. **Mechanism mapping.** For Afghanistan (2001–2021) and the Sahel (2014–2022), classify the dominant failure mechanism as (a) tactical mismatch, (b) principal-agent breakdown, (c) legitimacy deficit, or (d) hybrid-threat adaptation. Justify each classification with one concrete piece of evidence and state one piece of evidence that would weaken it.
2. **Level-of-analysis translation.** Explain how the same outcome—external withdrawal followed by insurgent or junta advance—looks different at the individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels. Identify which level your preferred explanation privileges and why.
3. **Perspective reconstruction.** Steel-man the African critique of Operation Barkhane and the Western defense of population-centric counterinsurgency. For each, identify the strongest contribution and the most important occlusion.
4. **Greed versus grievance.** Apply the Collier/Hoeffler framework to Afghanistan and to the Sahel. Then state one limit of the framework that becomes visible when the two cases are compared.
5. **Falsifiers.** Specify what evidence available in 2015 would have falsified your preferred explanation. Distinguish evidence that would have falsified the mechanism from evidence that would merely have complicated the narrative.
6. **Adjudication.** Compare your answers to tasks 1–5 and state which explanation best survives cross-case comparison. Give its scope condition and one boundary case where it should not be expected to hold.

MODEL ANSWER

Both interventions are often judged as tactical failures, but the stronger explanation is a legitimacy-capacity

mismatch operating through principal-agent breakdown. In Afghanistan, the United States initially pursued a light-footprint counterterrorism campaign, then adopted population-centric counterinsurgency under FM 3-24. The doctrine assumed that securing populations and building state institutions would separate insurgents from civilians. Yet the Afghan state remained a patronage machine in which warlords, militias, and ethnic factions competed for rents; Afghan National Security Forces units suffered ghost soldiers, corruption, and uneven loyalty. Tactical gains in Helmand or Kandahar did not become political authority because the state could not monopolize violence or deliver services. Pakistan's sanctuary for Taliban leadership added a transnational dimension that no amount of population-centric tactics could close. In the Sahel, France's Barkhane was more enemy-centric: it emphasized targeted killings, intelligence, and partnerships with local forces, while relying on Sahelian armies that were themselves implicated in abuses and coups. Both cases illustrate a principal-agent problem: external powers delegated violence to partners whose interests diverged, producing shirking, human-rights violations, and legitimacy costs. The African vantage point stresses that neither intervention addressed hybrid governance: local strongmen, militias, and informal security markets already provided order; external counterinsurgency often displaced or militarized them without replacing their functions. Greed-and-grievance models capture part of the story—opium rents in Afghanistan, resource and land competition in the Sahel—but they understate the political and identitarian dimensions of insurgency and the way state violence itself generates recruits. Hybridity matters: JNIM and ISSP combine jihadist ideology, ethnic grievance, criminal revenue, and proto-governance; the Taliban combined insurgency, shadow government, and transnational sanctuary. At the individual level, recruits often joined for local protection, revenge, or employment rather than ideology; at the state level, coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger showed that security forces prioritized regime survival over counterinsurgency; at the systemic level, great-power competition turned local wars into arenas for legitimacy claims; at the transnational level, sanctions, arms flows, and diaspora networks sustained both insurgents and juntas. Privatization compounded the problem: where state forces failed, governments and external actors turned to private military companies or militias, creating parallel chains of command and accountability gaps. In Mali, the turn to Africa Corps after French withdrawal illustrated how the market for force can replace one dependency with another. The greed-grievance framework remains useful as a diagnostic of revenue streams, but it cannot explain why some aggrieved communities do not rebel or why some rebel movements govern. Its strongest counterargument is that grievance is endogenous to state violence and that resource rents fund coercion rather than merely motivate it. Western self-critique now acknowledges that population-centric counterinsurgency overestimated the speed of state-building; Chinese non-interference avoided direct failure but left security vacuums; Russian security export filled some vacuums while deepening authoritarianism; the UN's MINUSMA protected civilians in some areas but could not substitute for political settlement. Thus the best explanation is not tactical incompetence alone but a legitimacy-capacity mismatch: counterinsurgency requires a host political order that can absorb military gains; where that order is absent or predatory, external force produces temporary suppression followed by collapse. Scope condition: the claim holds for interventions dependent on partner states; it is weaker where insurgents lack popular support or where external powers impose direct rule. Falsifiers would include durable stabilization after partner-force reform or insurgent defeat without state reform; neither occurred.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. Between 2020 and 2025, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger experienced successive coups, the withdrawal or reconfiguration of French and UN forces, expanded Russian security involvement, and the growth of JNIM and ISSP across rural and peri-urban spaces. Juntas framed their rule as sovereign

correction of Western failure, while insurgent groups combined attacks, taxation, dispute resolution, and recruitment among marginalized communities. Civilian fatalities rose in several regions even where state forces regained towns, suggesting that control of territory did not equal control of populations. The case asks whether the collapse is best explained by external withdrawal, state predation, insurgent hybrid governance, or the interaction of all three.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal chain linking at least two of the following—state predation, insurgent governance, external intervention, or privatized force—to the observed pattern of territorial control and civilian harm. Specify the level of analysis at which your mechanism operates and one scope condition.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on this case in 3–5 sentences each. For each, state its key contribution and its key occlusion.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the case to one earlier episode of asymmetric warfare or state collapse. State what transfers, what does not transfer, and why the analogy might mislead.
- **Falsifiers:** List two observable developments that would weaken your mechanism and two that would strengthen it. Distinguish descriptive predictions from explanatory claims.

(c) Self-check line. Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what should follow if your mechanism holds), and prescription (what actors should do), and that no prescription is presented as if it were an explanation.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which explanation best accounts for the failure of US counterinsurgency in Afghanistan (2001–2021) and French Operation Barkhane in the Sahel (2014–2022)?

A. Insurgent movements prevailed primarily because they possessed superior firepower and conventional military capacity.
B. Both interventions failed mainly because they did not apply population-centric counterinsurgency long enough or with enough troops.
C. Both interventions failed because external military gains could not be converted into durable political authority under predatory or fragile partner states, producing principal-agent breakdown.
D. Both interventions failed because the absence of a UN peacekeeping mission removed the only mechanism capable of protecting civilians and stabilizing territory.

Distractor diagnoses

- **A** is wrong because it treats irregular warfare as a conventional firepower contest; the evidence points to political legitimacy, sanctuary, hybrid governance, and state capacity rather than insurgent material superiority.
- **B** is wrong because it assumes tactics can be separated from host-state capacity; the Afghan and Sahelian cases show that more troops or longer timelines do not resolve partner shirking, corruption, or legitimacy deficits.

- **D** is wrong because it overstates the substitutability of UN peacekeeping for political settlement; MINUSMA and similar missions can protect civilians and support stabilization, but they cannot create the host-state legitimacy required to absorb military gains.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. ACLED-recorded political violence in the central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger), 2012–2025 — indicative trend summary

Period	Event trend	Fatality trend	Dominant perpetrator pattern (ACLED-reported)
2012–2014	Baseline surge around MNLA rebellion, jihadist expansion, French intervention	Sharp increase from low baseline	Rebel/separatist and jihadist attacks; state counteroffensives
2015–2017	Geographic expansion; urban and border attacks	Rising	Jihadist groups consolidate; militia mobilization increases
2018–2020	Acceleration; rural massacres and communal violence	Major increase	JNIM/ISSP competition; communal militias; state forces
2021–2023	Peak volatility; coups in all three states	Very high	State forces and allied militias rise; jihadist territorial control persists
2024–2025	Continued high; diffusion into new zones	Persistently high	Fragmented non-state violence; Russian-linked deployments; state forces

Note: Figures are indicative trend summaries drawn from ACLED's published Sahel analyses; exact counts should be verified in the ACLED dashboard and country reports.

Table 2. External and hybrid security providers in the central Sahel — qualitative deployment picture

Provider type	Mali	Burkina Faso	Niger	Evidence/limit
French-led Barkhane/Takuba (2014–2022)	High, then withdrawn	Medium	Medium	Mission records; ended 2022
Russian-linked PMC/Africa Corps	High post-2021	Reported growing	Reported/contested	ACLED, investigative reporting; opacity

Provider type	Mali	Burkina Faso	Niger	Evidence/limit
Western contractors/trainers	Medium	Low–medium	Medium	Bilateral agreements; limited transparency
Local militias/Dozos/VDPs	High	Very high	Medium	State-armed community forces; blurred accountability
UN MINUSMA	High until 2023	N/A	N/A	Mandate documents; withdrawal completed 2023

Table 3. Civilian harm by perpetrator — ACLED-classified, central Sahel, indicative shares

Perpetrator category	Indicative share of civilian fatalities	Mechanism	Interpretive caution
Jihadist armed groups (JNIM, ISSP)	Largest single share in many periods	Massacres, IEDs, assassinations, economic coercion	Classification depends on claim, attribution, and ACLED coding rules
State security forces	Substantial and rising in coup periods	Airstrikes, raids, collective punishment, detention deaths	Underreporting; attribution disputes; weak forensic capacity
State-aligned militias/VDPs	Significant, localized	Reprisals, ethnic targeting, village raids	Blurred state/non-state boundary; plausible deniability
External forces/PMCs	Smaller but politically salient	Direct combat, base protection, convoy security	Opacity; casualty attribution often contested
Unknown/unclaimed	Non-trivial	Ambushes, remote violence, crossfire	Data gaps in remote and insecure areas

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** How did ACLED-recorded violence in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger change between 2012 and 2025? Distinguish event frequency from fatality intensity, identify at least two inflection points (for example, the 2012–2013 intervention period and the 2020–2021 coup wave), and explain what each inflection changed in the conflict's geography, perpetrator mix, or civilian exposure.
2. **Level of analysis.** Table 1 operates mainly at the regional/systemic level, Table 2 at the state/external-provider level, and Table 3 at the civilian/individual level. How does shifting the level of analysis change the explanation of the same violence? For example, does a state-level account of "counterter-

rorism failure" adequately explain village-level reprisals, or does it require a transnational account of arms, financing, and militia delegation?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** How would each perspective read Table 3? The African perspective might emphasize hybrid governance, state fragility, and the privatization of security; the Chinese perspective might emphasize sovereignty, non-interference, and capacity-building; the Russian perspective might emphasize security export and anti-Western framing; the Western perspective might emphasize counterterrorism, stabilization, and self-critique of intervention; the UN perspective might emphasize mandate limits, civilian protection, and peacekeeping withdrawal. Which perpetrator category would each perspective emphasize, and which would it occlude?

4. **Interpretation.** Does rising civilian harm attributed to state forces imply counterinsurgency failure, regime insecurity, or both? Use the mechanism distinction between enemy-centric and population-centric counterinsurgency, and the principal-agent problem created when states delegate violence to militias, PMCs, or local auxiliaries.

5. **Limitation.** What are the main limits of ACLED data in the Sahel (media dependence, access constraints, classification ambiguity, undercounting in remote areas, and political contestation of attribution)? How do these limits affect claims about PMC effectiveness, state legitimacy, jihadist territorial control, or the success/failure of external intervention?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Counterinsurgency triangle with perspective overlays"

What to draw: Draw a large triangle on the page. Label the three vertices: **Insurgents** (top), **State / Counterinsurgents** (bottom left), and **Population** (bottom right). Place a small circle at the center labeled **Political control**. Draw arrows from insurgents to population labeled "coercion / mobilization"; from state to population labeled "protection / services"; from population to both labeled "support / intelligence / compliance." Add a dashed inner triangle around the center circle labeled **Hybrid actors** (chiefs, militias, brokers, PMCs).

How to label it: At the top vertex write "Mao: political base precedes military victory"; at the bottom left write "Galula: population is the prize"; near the state-to-population arrow write "Krepinevich: enemy-centric vs population-centric critique"; near the hybrid triangle write "African: hybrid governance and fragmented sovereignty."

Perspective overlay to annotate: Use four colored marginal notes: **African (primary)** — "state authority is negotiated through local brokers; population is not a passive prize"; **Western** — "COIN doctrine treats population as center of gravity"; **Russian** — "external security provider strengthens the state vertex"; **UN** — "civilian protection constrains state violence"; **Chinese** — "sovereignty and capacity-building at the state vertex."

Visual 2 — "Principal-agent chain in proxy and privatized warfare"

What to draw: Draw a horizontal chain of four boxes: **Sponsor state → Proxy / PMC / militia → Local commander → Civilian population**. Add downward arrows from each box to a lower row labeled **Information asymmetry**, **Autonomy**, **Shirking**, and **Blowback**. Draw a feedback arrow from population

back to sponsor state labeled "legitimacy cost." Add a dashed box around the middle two boxes labeled **Accountability gap**.

How to label it: Label the first arrow "delegation"; second "sub-delegation"; third "coercion / extraction." Add small notes: "Wagner/Africa Corps," "state-aligned militias (VDPs)," "Western contractors," "local strongmen." Label the feedback arrow "civilian harm → grievance → recruitment."

Perspective overlay to annotate: **African (primary)** — "privatization of security fragments accountability and produces hybrid rule"; **Russian** — "security export fills vacuum left by Western withdrawal"; **Western** — "principal-agent failure explains loss of control over partners"; **Chinese** — "non-interference limits direct accountability but not arms/training effects"; **UN** — "protection-of-civilians mandates are weakened by delegated violence."

Visual 3 — "Sahel conflict ecology, 2012–2025"

What to draw: Draw a simplified map of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger as three adjacent shapes. Mark the tri-border zone (Liptako-Gourma) with a shaded oval. Draw arrows from north to south labeled "jihadist expansion"; arrows from capitals outward labeled "state counteroffensives"; small icons for "PMC bases," "militia zones," and "displaced populations." Add a Venn diagram in the corner with three overlapping circles: **Greed** (trafficking, gold, cattle), **Grievance** (marginalization, ethnicity, state abuse), **Hybridity** (state/non-state blur, coup politics).

How to label it: Label the map "MNLA → JNIM/ISSP → state collapse"; label the Venn center "Sahel conflict ecology." Add timeline ticks: 2012, 2015, 2020, 2021, 2023, 2025.

Perspective overlay to annotate: **African (primary)** — "state fragility and hybrid governance are the frame; external actors are secondary"; **Western** — "counterterrorism and stabilization narrative"; **Russian** — "anti-Western security partnership"; **Chinese** — "development-security nexus and sovereignty"; **UN** — "mandate, protection, and withdrawal."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (answer / evidence / source log)
What is insurgency?	Armed political struggle to overthrow or replace state authority; Mao treats political mobilization as prior to military victory. Source: Mao, *On Guerrilla Warfare* (1937).
What is counterinsurgency?	State or external effort to defeat insurgents and secure population; Galula centers the population as the decisive terrain. Source: Galula, *Counterinsurgency Warfare* (1964).
Enemy-centric vs population-centric COIN?	Enemy-centric prioritizes killing/capturing insurgents; population-centric prioritizes legitimacy, services, and protection. Krepinevich critiques overemphasis on enemy-centric methods. Source: Krepinevich (1986/2009 discussions).

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (answer / evidence / source log)
What is proxy warfare?	Delegation of violence by a sponsor to an agent; creates principal-agent problems, autonomy, shirking, and blowback.
What is privatization of violence?	Use of PMCs, militias, and marketized force; Reno analyzes warlordism and hybrid authority. Source: Reno (2011).
Wagner / Africa Corps in Sahel?	Russian-linked security export after Western withdrawal; opacity, direct combat, and political alignment with coup regimes. Source: ACLED Sahel reports 2023–2025.
Greed vs grievance?	Collier/Hoeffler emphasize economic motives and opportunity; critics stress grievance, identity, state abuse, and local politics. Source: Collier and Hoeffler (2004).
Limits of greed-grievance?	Reduces complex conflicts to resource variables; underweights history, legitimacy, hybrid governance, and transnational jihadist ideology.
Hybrid warfare?	Blurring of regular/irregular, state/non-state, peace/war; information, cyber, economic, and proxy tools combined.
Sahel case 2012–2025?	MNLA rebellion → jihadist expansion (JNIM, ISSP) → coups → state fragility → PMC and militia proliferation. Source: ACLED Sahel reports 2023–2025.
African perspective (primary)?	Hybrid governance, state fragility, privatization of security; external intervention often misreads local authority structures. Sources: Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Reno.
UN perspective?	Mandate limits, civilian protection, MINUSMA withdrawal; tension between sovereignty and protection. Source: UN mandate documents.

Source log: Mao (1937); Galula (1964); Krepinevich (enemy-centric/population-centric debate); Kilcullen (2009); Reno (2011); Collier and Hoeffler (2004); ACLED Sahel reports (2023–2025); Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, Oyěwùmí (African perspective reconstruction).

Summary: Asymmetric and irregular warfare in the Sahel cannot be explained by a single theory of insurgency or counterinsurgency. The conflict combines Maoist political mobilization, Galula-style population control, proxy delegation, privatized violence, greed/grievance dynamics, and hybrid warfare. African perspectives emphasize that state fragility and hybrid governance are central, while Western, Russian, Chinese, and UN perspectives each illuminate different mechanisms and occlude others. ACLED data show rising and diffusing violence, but data limits require cautious interpretation.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Asymmetric warfare is when a weaker side avoids fighting a stronger side head-on and instead uses ambushes, politics, fear, and local support to make the stronger side tired and expensive. Counterinsurgency is the stronger side's attempt to stop this by protecting people, building trust, and removing insurgent networks. In the Sahel, rebels and jihadist groups exploited weak states, ethnic grievances, and rural neglect; governments and foreign forces tried to defeat them but often killed civilians, empowered militias, and lost legitimacy. Private military companies and proxy forces added another layer: outsiders sold security, but accountability became blurry. The "greed versus grievance" debate asks whether fighters are mainly motivated by money or injustice, but real conflicts usually mix both. Hybrid warfare means the line between war and peace, soldier and civilian, state and non-state actor has become unclear.

2. **Mark gaps.** I initially treated counterinsurgency as a technical doctrine that could be applied uniformly; I under-specified how local authority, ethnicity, and land politics shape violence. I also treated ACLED numbers as more complete than they are, and I did not fully separate description (what happened), explanation (why), prediction (what may happen), and prescription (what should be done). My account of Russian, Chinese, and UN perspectives risks being too thin unless each is reconstructed from its own premises.

3. **Reread verification.** Rechecking the canonical sources: Mao (1937) requires political work before military victory; Galula (1964) makes population control central; Krepinevich's critique warns against enemy-centric drift; Reno (2011) shows how privatized violence and hybrid authority can replace state monopoly; Collier and Hoeffler (2004) provide an economic model but not a full political theory; ACLED reports (2023–2025) document diffusion and rising civilian harm but remain dependent on reporting conditions. The African perspective is not merely a case study; it reframes the state itself as hybrid and contested.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** Think of the Sahel conflict as a neighborhood where the official police are weak, armed gangs tax trade, elders broker deals, and outside contractors sell protection. The analogy helps explain fragmented authority and delegated violence, but it is limited: it can obscure transnational jihadist ideology, global arms markets, climate stress, and the legal status of states and peacekeeping missions. It also risks blaming "local disorder" while understating external intervention effects.

5. **Rewrite.** Asymmetric and irregular warfare is a political struggle over authority in which weaker actors use mobility, coercion, and grievance to offset material inferiority. Counterinsurgency succeeds or fails not only through force ratios but through legitimacy, local knowledge, and control of delegated violence. Proxy and privatized warfare introduce principal-agent failures that can protect regimes while harming civilians. The greed-grievance debate is useful but incomplete because it under-theorizes hybrid governance and state fragility. Hybrid warfare further erodes the regular/irregular and peace/war distinctions. In the Sahel, African perspectives foreground state fragility and hybrid authority; Western perspectives foreground counterterrorism and stabilization; Russian perspectives foreground security export; Chinese perspectives foreground sovereignty and capacity; UN perspectives foreground mandates and civilian protection. ACLED data support claims about rising and diffusing violence, but

their limits require that conclusions about effectiveness, legitimacy, and causation remain provisional.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L23	Definition	What is an insurgency?	An insurgency is a protracted, organized political-military campaign by non-state actors to coerce or overthrow a government; its military activity is subordinate to political mobilization, legitimacy competition, and control of populations.	African perspective stresses hybrid governance and legitimacy deficits; Western perspective often foregrounds security threats and terrorist labels.
L23	Mechanism	What are Mao's three phases of guerrilla war?	Mao described progression from strategic defensive, through stalemate, to strategic offensive, with political organization and popular support preceding military escalation; the population functions as the medium in which insurgents operate.	Western COIN borrows Mao's population logic; African scholarship emphasizes colonial state formation and post-colonial fragility as preconditions.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L23	Debate	What is the population-centric vs. enemy-centric COIN debate?	Population-centric COIN prioritizes civilian protection, governance, and legitimacy; enemy-centric COIN prioritizes killing or capturing insurgents; the dispute concerns whether violence declines through political inclusion or through attrition.	African perspective warns that enemy-centric tactics can reproduce grievance; UN perspective emphasizes civilian protection and mandate limits.
L23	Source	What is Galula's core COIN claim?	Galula argued counterinsurgency is roughly eighty percent political and twenty percent military, requiring a clear political aim, population support, and legitimacy; his French Algeria experience shaped the theory but also limits its generalization.	Western canonical theory; African critics note its colonial context and possible overfitting to imperial control.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L23	Mechanism	How does principal-agent theory explain proxy-war failure?	Delegation creates information asymmetry, shirking, and autonomy; sponsors cannot fully monitor or control proxies, producing mission creep, escalation, deniability problems, and unintended local outcomes.	Russian and African perspectives stress proxy agency and local agendas; Western perspectives stress control dilemmas and accountability.
L23	Debate	What is the "greed vs. grievance" debate?	Collier and Hoeffler argue economic motives often dominate civil-war onset; critics argue grievance, identity, state violence, and historical injustice are underweighted; evidence is mixed and case-dependent.	African scholarship emphasizes state predation and historical injustice; Western econometric models may occlude political and colonial legacies.
L23	Mechanism	What does privatization of violence mean?	The marketization of force through PMCs, Wagner, Africa Corps, and similar actors commodifies coercion, offering flexible and deniable security while creating accountability gaps, rent-seeking, and fragmented sovereignty.	African perspective: security markets fill state gaps; Western perspective: regulation and human-rights concerns; Russian perspective: security export and influence.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L23	Definition	What is hybrid warfare?	Hybrid warfare blends conventional, irregular, cyber, information, economic, and legal tools across ambiguous peace-war boundaries, exploiting attribution problems and institutional thresholds.	Russian perspective frames active measures and ambiguity; Western perspective frames deterrence and resilience; African perspective notes information manipulation in fragile states.
L23	Application	What does the African perspective add to Sahel analysis?	Sahel insurgency reflects hybrid governance, state fragility, security privatization, and legitimacy crises; external counterterrorism often militarizes politics and neglects local authority structures.	Primary lens: reveals what Western CT and UN mandates may occlude about everyday governance and authority.
L23	Occlusion	What does Western counterterrorism often occlude?	It often reduces insurgency to terrorism, underweighting local political economies, historical state violence, non-military grievances, and the legitimacy effects of kinetic operations.	Western self-critique acknowledges this; African perspective treats it as structural to intervention design.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L23	Adjudication	Why did US Afghanistan and French Barkhane both fail?	Both overestimated military capacity, underestimated political legitimacy, and treated symptoms; Afghan collapse reflected dependency and corruption, while Sahel coups followed militarized CT and weak institutions.	Adjudication favors political legitimacy and state capacity over force-centric stabilization.
L23	Level of Analysis	Why are four levels of analysis needed?	Individual fighters, state legitimacy, systemic geopolitics, and transnational financing, diaspora, and PMC networks interact; no single level can explain recruitment, escalation, or collapse.	All perspectives use levels differently; African perspective foregrounds state-society relations and transnational extraction.
L23	Source	What is a key limitation of ACLED data?	ACLED records events, fatalities, and actors and is useful for trends, but it undercounts violence, misattributes perpetrators, and reflects reporting bias; it must be triangulated with field and local sources.	UN and Western analysts rely on it; African scholars caution against data-driven misrecognition of local conflict.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L23	Debate	Do proxies become autonomous over time?	As conflicts prolong, proxies gain bargaining power, local resources, and alternative sponsors; sponsors face commitment problems, and proxy autonomy can be either a strategic asset or a liability.	Russian, African, and Western perspectives all recognize autonomy but evaluate it differently.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit (score each 0–100)

Competency	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of mastery	Priority gap
Distinguish insurgency, terrorism, and civil war			
Explain Mao's phases and their limits			
Compare population-centric and enemy-centric COIN			
Apply principal-agent theory to proxy war			
Evaluate greed vs. grievance claims			
Analyze PMC/Wagner/Africa Corps effects			
Define hybrid warfare without overclaiming novelty			
Reconstruct the African perspective on Sahel			
Interpret ACLED trends and limitations			
Adjudicate competing explanations with evidence			

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which explanation did you initially favor for Sahel state collapse, and what specific evidence would force you to revise it?

2. Which of the five perspectives did you underweight, and what did that omission cause you to miss?

3. What is one falsifier for your memo's central claim, and how would you test it with available data?

7.3 Error-log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Insurgency is primarily a military problem.	Insurgency is political first; military force without legitimacy often deepens mobilization.	Mao (1937); Galula (1964); Sahel coups after militarized CT.
Proxies are simply puppets of their sponsors.	Delegation produces autonomy, shirking, and bargaining power; control is partial and costly.	Principal-agent theory; Wagner/Africa Corps local agendas.
Civil wars are mainly about natural resources.	Economic motives matter, but grievance, state violence, and legitimacy also shape onset and duration.	Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and its critics; Sahel political economies.
Hybrid warfare is entirely new.	The blending is intensified by technology and ambiguity, but irregular, informational, and political tools are long-standing.	Historical irregular warfare; contemporary cyber/information cases.
ACLED counts all conflict violence accurately.	ACLED is valuable but incomplete, biased by reporting access, and prone to misattribution.	ACLED Sahel reports (2023–2025); need triangulation.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Insurgency; COIN; population-centric vs enemy-centric	Political mobilization; legitimacy competition; attrition	Mao (1937); Galula (1964); Krepinevich (1986); Kilcullen (2009)	Sahel 2012–2025; MNLA to JNIM/ISSP	Is COIN primarily political or military?	Rising violence after troop surges; no legitimacy gains	L12 proxy wars; L20 coercion
Proxy warfare; delegation; autonomy	Information asymmetry; shirking; commitment problems	Principal-agent theory; Reno (2011)	State sponsorship; Wagner/Africa Corps	Control vs autonomy of proxies	Proxy ignores sponsor directives; escalation	L43 Axis of Resistance; L50 non-state actors
Privatization of violence	Market for force; deniability; accountability gaps	Reno (2011); security-governance literature	PMCs; Africa Corps; Sahel deployments	Efficiency vs sovereignty/legitimacy	Civilian harm; state capture by contractors	L8 post-colonialism; L30 Sahel

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Greed vs grievance	Resource rents; grievance mobilization; state predation	Collier and Hoeffler (2004)	Civil-war datasets; Sahel economies	Economic vs political causes	Wars without resource rents; grievances without war	L20 coercion; L34 Sahel synthesis
Hybrid warfare	Blurring regular/irregular; cyber/info; ambiguity	Contemporary hybrid-war literature	Ukraine; Sahel information ops	Novelty vs continuity	Clear attribution; conventional-only conflict	L43; L50
African perspective	Hybrid governance; state fragility; security privatization	Bayart (1993); Mbembe (2003); Mamdani (2001)	Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger collapse	External CT vs local legitimacy	Coups after CT; insurgent governance gains	L8; L30; L34
Data and evidence	Event counts; fatalities; perpetrator coding	ACLED Sahel reports (2023–2025)	ACLED Sahel 2012–2025	Trend vs. causal inference	Undercounting; misattribution	Section 2A Data Lab

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 — Same day (30–45 minutes):** Close the lesson and reconstruct the five key ideas from memory without notes; then check flashcards and correct gaps.
- **R2 — Day 3 (45–60 minutes):** Redraw the three visuals from Section 3 and explain the Sahel case aloud using all four levels of analysis.
- **R3 — Day 7 (60–90 minutes):** Write a 500-word memo comparing US Afghanistan and French Barkhane, including mechanism, perspectives, and falsifiers.
- **R4 — Day 14 (60 minutes):** Rebuild the five-perspective comparison matrix and update the error log with one new misconception.
- **R5 — Day 30 (45 minutes):** Answer the hinge question under time pressure, revisit ACLED limitations, and schedule the next interleaved review with L30/L34.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define insurgency and distinguish it from terrorism and civil war.

☐ I can explain Mao's three phases and their scope conditions.

☐ I can compare population-centric and enemy-centric COIN.

☐ I can state Galula's political-military ratio and its limits.

☐ I can apply principal-agent theory to proxy warfare.

☐ I can explain why proxies gain autonomy over time.

☐ I can define the privatization of violence and name PMC/Wagner/Africa Corps examples.

☐ I can summarize the greed vs. grievance debate and its critics.

☐ I can define hybrid warfare without treating it as entirely new.

☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary, not an add-on.

☐ I can steel-man Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.

☐ I can use all four levels of analysis in the Sahel case.

☐ I can interpret ACLED data and state its limitations.

☐ I can adjudicate why Afghanistan and Barkhane failed.

☐ I can identify at least one falsifier for my main claim.

☐ I have completed the confidence audit and error log.

☐ I can reproduce the cheatsheet from memory.

☐ I have scheduled R1–R5 reviews.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Insurgency and counterinsurgency

- Mao (1937), *On Guerrilla Warfare*
- Galula (1964), *Counterinsurgency Warfare*
- Krepinevich (1986), *The Army and Vietnam*
- Kilcullen (2009), *The Accidental Guerrilla*

Proxy warfare and privatization of violence
- Reno (2011), warfare and security-governance scholarship
- ACLED Sahel reports (2023–2025)

Greed, grievance, and civil war
- Collier and Hoeffler (2004), greed vs. grievance research

African perspectives on state, violence, and sovereignty
- Bayart (1993), *The State in Africa*
- Mbembe (2003), "Necropolitics"
- Mamdani (2001), *When Victims Become Killers*
- Fanon (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*

End of Lesson 23. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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25. Cyber, Information, and Cognitive Warfare

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	24 — Cyber, Information, and Cognitive Warfare
Module	Module 4: Security Studies and Warfare
Prerequisites	L7 (constructivism), L20 (coercion), L4 (post-positivism, linguistic turn)
Interleaved links	Forward to L54 (AI and hyperwar), L56 (scientific statecraft), L57 (space and infrastructure)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, tables, diagrams, case studies
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Security studies was built on a grammar that assumes kinetic violence, territorial boundaries, identifiable adversaries, and measurable victory. Cyber and information operations break each of these assumptions. An attack may leave no crater; the attacker may be a criminal syndicate renting infrastructure to a state intelligence service; the "battlefield" may be the cognitive space of a population; "victory" may be a shifted election or a corroded trust in institutions. The central puzzle of this lesson is whether the conceptual vocabulary of coercion, deterrence, and sovereignty — developed for industrial-age warfare — can be transposed to domains where effects are non-kinetic, attribution is probabilistic, and the decisive engagement is often invisible. The lesson argues that the vocabulary can be transposed only partially, and that the partial failures are themselves theoretically productive: they reveal assumptions buried in classical security theory that were never made explicit until a domain arose that violated them.

This lesson follows L20 on coercion and L7 on constructivism, and it presupposes L4's post-positivist turn.

Coercion theory, as developed by Schelling and refined by Pape, assumes a sender, a signal, and a receiver who can interpret the signal as costly. In cyber and information domains, the signal is often ambiguous by design; the receiver may not know an operation occurred; and the "cost" is reputational or cognitive rather than material. Constructivism matters because the effects of information warfare are constituted by shared meaning: a disinformation campaign works not by destroying servers but by reshaping what a public believes is true. Post-positivism matters because the analyst's own categories — "attack," "war," "attribution" — are part of the contested terrain, and the linguistic turn reminds us that naming an event as an "attack" is itself a political act with consequences for response. The lesson thus sits at the intersection of three intellectual traditions and forces them into contact with a domain none was built for.

After mastering this lesson, the student will be able to do six things. First, reconstruct the grammar of cyber conflict — offense-defense balance, attribution problems, and deterrence by denial versus punishment — and identify where it holds and where it fractures. Second, analyze critical infrastructure targeting, including ransomware, state hacking, and the blurring of criminal and state action. Third, evaluate information and cognitive warfare as distinct but overlapping phenomena, each with its own mechanism and scope conditions. Fourth, compare five national doctrines — US persistent engagement, Russian reflexive control and information security, Chinese three warfares, EU regulatory, and the African cyber-sovereignty position — reconstructing each from within. Fifth, adjudicate a concrete case, the 2016 US election interference and the 2010 Stuxnet attack, across levels of analysis and perspectives. Sixth, produce a policy memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, with explicit falsifiers.

The African perspective is not a regional illustration appended to Western theory; it reframes the lesson's puzzle. From the vantage of African scholarship — Grovogui's critique of the international as a Eurocentric construct, Mbembe's necropolitics, Bayart's extraversion, Mamdani's citizen/subject distinction, Rodney's underdevelopment thesis, and the pan-Africanist tradition of Nkrumah, Nyerere, and Cabral — the digital domain appears not as a neutral technical space but as a new frontier of extraversion and extraction. African states confront cyber operations not only as targets but as jurisdictions whose data, infrastructure, and narratives are governed by foreign platforms and foreign doctrines. The AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo, 2014) is not merely a regional implementation of Western norms; it is an assertion that cyber sovereignty includes the right to localize data, to regulate platforms, and to define security in terms of developmental and cognitive autonomy. The African vantage reveals what the other four perspectives occlude: that the "global" cyber order is built on an infrastructure of platforms and standards whose governance is concentrated in a handful of states and corporations, and that "cyber norms" negotiated in New York or Geneva may presuppose a digital capacity that most African states do not possess. Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and Oyěwùmí's critique of the universalization of Western categories remind us that the categories of "cyber war" themselves carry a genealogy that is not neutral.

The lesson proceeds through five key ideas. First, the grammar of cyber conflict: offense-defense balance, attribution problems, and deterrence by denial versus punishment. Second, critical infrastructure targeting: ransomware, state hacking, and the blurring of criminal and state action. Third, information warfare: disinformation, election interference, and the manipulation of public opinion. Fourth, cognitive warfare: the weaponization of narrative, the attention economy, and the "brain as battlefield." Fifth, divergent national doctrines: US persistent engagement, Russian reflexive control and information security, Chinese three warfares, and EU regulatory approaches. These five are not sequential stages but overlapping layers: a single operation — Stuxnet, or the 2016 election interference — typically traverses several, and the analyst's task is to identify which layer is doing the causal work in a given case.

The lesson insists on three disciplines that run through every section. First, level-of-analysis discipline: every claim must be located at the individual, state, systemic, or transnational level, the four levels established in Lesson 1. Second, perspective discipline: every claim must be reconstructable from at least two of the five perspectives, and the African perspective must be attempted first. Third, epistemic humility: attribution in cyber and information domains is probabilistic, not categorical; the analyst must distinguish what is known, what is inferred, and what is asserted, and must mark the difference between description, explanation, prediction, and prescription. The lesson's assessments — the worked example, the problem pair, the independent memo — are designed to test these disciplines. The student who masters them will be equipped to analyze not only the cases in this lesson but the forward-linked domains of AI and hyperwar (L54), scientific statecraft (L56), and space and infrastructure (L57), where the same grammar applies with even greater stakes and where the African questions of sovereignty, extraversion, and cognitive autonomy recur with renewed urgency.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. In L20 (coercion), what is the difference between deterrence and compellence, and why is compellence generally considered harder to achieve? (Recall Schelling's distinction and the problem of assurance.)
2. In L7 (constructivism), how does Wendt's claim that "anarchy is what states make of it" challenge Waltzian neorealism's treatment of anarchy as a fixed structural condition?
3. In L4 (post-positivism), what is the "linguistic turn," and why does it matter for security studies specifically?
4. In L20, what are the two mechanisms of coercion — denial and punishment — and how do they differ in their causal logic and in the information they require from the adversary?
5. In L7, what role do norms play in constructivist IR, and how does a constructivist account of norms differ from a rationalist account of interests?
6. In L4, what is the difference between *Erklären* (explanation) and *Verstehen* (understanding), and which traditions in IR privilege which?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Why might deterrence by punishment fail in cyberspace even if it has been theorized to work in nuclear deterrence? Consider attribution, proportionality, and the problem of thresholds.
2. How does the "brain as battlefield" concept change what counts as a military operation, and what does it imply about who is a combatant?
3. What does the African cyber-sovereignty position add to debates that are otherwise dominated by US, Russian, and Chinese doctrines?
4. Is Stuxnet an act of war, an act of sabotage, or something else — and what hangs on the answer for international law and for deterrence theory?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Attribution**: the process of identifying the actor behind a cyber or information operation; in practice probabilistic, contested, and often dependent on classified intelligence that cannot be publicly disclosed.
- **Deterrence by denial**: preventing an adversary from achieving their objective, thereby removing

the incentive to attack; in cyber contexts this often means resilience and rapid recovery rather than blocking.

- **Deterrence by punishment**: threatening retaliation to raise the cost of attack; in cyber contexts complicated by attribution problems and by the risk of escalation.
- **Reflexive control (Russian)**: shaping an adversary's decision-making by feeding them manipulated information so that they voluntarily choose the action the manipulator desires; a tradition rooted in Soviet military thought.
- **Three warfares (Chinese)**: public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare (lawfare), articulated as a unified doctrine for shaping the information environment.
- **Persistent engagement (US)**: the US doctrine of continuous, proactive operations in cyberspace to disrupt adversaries before they reach US networks, associated with the 2018 US cyber strategy.
- **Cognitive warfare**: operations targeting the human mind, perception, and decision-making rather than systems or data; the "brain as battlefield."
- **Information security (Russian doctrine)**: a broad concept encompassing not only technical security but the protection of information space, societal stability, and state sovereignty over information flows.
- **Cyber sovereignty**: the principle that states have sovereign authority over cyberspace within their territory, including data localization and platform regulation; central to both Chinese and African positions.
- **APT (Advanced Persistent Threat)**: a prolonged, targeted cyber intrusion, typically state-linked, characterized by stealth and persistence rather than immediate destruction.
- **Ransomware**: malware that encrypts data and demands payment for decryption; the site of the criminal/state blur when state actors tolerate or direct such operations.
- **Attention economy**: the competition for human attention as a scarce resource, exploited by information and cognitive operations that seek to capture and direct collective focus.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

SECTION 2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to: (1) **Explain** the mechanism by which offense-defense asymmetry and attribution ambiguity jointly produce a distinctive grammar of cyber conflict, including why classical deterrence by punishment is weakened and why deterrence by denial becomes comparatively attractive. (2) **Compare** deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment as strategies for cyber conflict, specifying the scope conditions under which each is credible, the kinds of targets for which each is appropriate, and the escalation risks attached to each. (3) **Analyze** a cyber incident using the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—and identify which of the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) best explains its dynamics without forcing the case into a single framework. (4) **Evaluate** the claim that most cyber operations remain below the threshold of armed conflict, using evidence from state practice, the UN GGE consensus reports, and the observable pattern of public attribution, sanctions, and covert retaliation rather than kinetic response. (5) **Apply** the concept of attribution ambiguity to design a falsifiable indicator that would distinguish state-sponsored from criminal cyber activity, stating what evidence would confirm, weaken, or refute the indicator and which level of analysis it privileges. These objectives are assessable through short-answer explanations, comparative matrices, case-based memos, and a hinge question that tests whether the student can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription

in cyber-security analysis.

SECTION 2.2 KEY IDEA 1: The grammar of cyber conflict: offense-defense balance, attribution problems, and deterrence by denial versus punishment

Bolded Causal Claim: Cyber conflict has a distinctive grammar because the structural cheapness of offense relative to defense and the endemic ambiguity of attribution jointly weaken classical deterrence by punishment and push states toward deterrence by denial, active defense, and persistent sub-threshold competition.

Mechanism: The first mechanism is the offense-defense balance. In conventional military domains, defense can be advantaged by terrain, fortification, mobilization time, and the physical costs of projection. In cyber operations, the defender must secure every interface, patch every vulnerability, monitor every log, and train every user, while the attacker needs only one exploitable weakness, one stolen credential, or one misconfigured service. This does not mean offense always wins; sophisticated defenders can raise costs through segmentation, redundancy, deception, and rapid patching. But the default asymmetry is structural: the defender's problem is combinatorial and continuous, while the attacker's problem is selective and episodic. The second mechanism is attribution ambiguity. Technical forensics can often identify malware families, command-and-control infrastructure, tactics, techniques, and procedures, and sometimes the specific operator. Yet moving from technical indicators to political attribution requires intelligence about intent, state sponsorship, and chain of command that governments rarely disclose in full. The gap between technical and political attribution creates plausible deniability and allows states to operate below the threshold of acknowledged conflict. The third mechanism is deterrence adaptation. Classical deterrence by punishment assumes an identifiable aggressor, a credible threat, and a proportionate response. Cyber ambiguity undermines the first two conditions: if the attacker cannot be named with confidence, retaliation risks misattribution; if retaliation is covert, it may not deter; if it is public and kinetic, it may escalate beyond the original harm. Deterrence by denial therefore becomes attractive because it reduces the expected payoff of attack without requiring certain attribution: resilient systems, backups, segmentation, and rapid recovery make intrusion less useful. But denial alone cannot eliminate espionage, disruption, or reputational damage, so states combine it with punishment threats—sanctions, indictments, diplomatic isolation, covert counter-operations, and occasionally kinetic signaling. The resulting grammar is one of frequent, deniable, sub-threshold activity in which the boundary between peace and conflict is managed rather than clearly crossed. Constructivist and post-positivist work is relevant here because "cyber attack," "armed attack," and "critical infrastructure" are not purely technical labels; they are interpreted categories whose meaning is stabilized through practice, law, and discourse. Thomas Rid's argument that cyber operations are closer to sabotage and espionage than to war captures one side of this debate, while the UN GGE consensus reports attempt to stabilize norms by specifying that international law applies to state cyber activity and that critical infrastructure should be protected. Singer and Brooking's analysis of the information environment adds that cyber conflict is not only about systems but about attention, narrative, and public perception, which means the grammar includes psychological and political effects even when no physical damage occurs.

Scope Conditions: The claim that cyber conflict has this distinctive grammar holds under several conditions. First, target systems must be complex, networked, and partially opaque to their owners; simple or air-gapped systems reduce the offense-defense asymmetry. Second, the attacker must have time, access, and intelligence; opportunistic intrusions differ from strategic campaigns. Third, attribution must require classified or sensitive intelligence that cannot be fully shared, which is common in state-on-state cases but less so when criminal infrastructure is seized and analyzed publicly. Fourth, political leaders must demand high

confidence before authorizing retaliation, which is typical in democracies and in nuclear-armed states but not universal. The claim weakens when an operation causes physical destruction or loss of life, because such effects push the incident toward the legal category of armed attack and make punishment deterrence more credible. It also weakens when a defender possesses overwhelming counter-cyber capability or when an attribution coalition shares enough intelligence to remove plausible deniability. Finally, the offense-defense balance is not technologically fixed; automation, zero-trust architectures, artificial intelligence, and software supply-chain reform can shift costs toward the defender, although adversaries adapt in turn. Deterrence by punishment is more credible for high-end destructive attacks where attribution eventually becomes politically unavoidable; deterrence by denial is more relevant for espionage, disruption, and low-level coercion where the expected damage is below the threshold that would justify escalation.

Observable Implications: If this grammar is operative, several patterns should be observable. States should experience frequent intrusions without kinetic retaliation; public attribution statements should vary in confidence and often be accompanied by sanctions, indictments, or diplomatic protests rather than military force; governments and firms should invest heavily in resilience, backup, segmentation, and incident response; private companies should function as frontline defenders and sometimes as intelligence partners; states should engage in "naming and shaming" to shape norms even when they cannot punish; and adversaries should carefully manage effects to avoid crossing thresholds that would trigger armed response. One should also observe covert retaliation, threshold management, and diplomatic efforts to define prohibited targets, especially through the UN GGE and OEWG processes. Conversely, if classical deterrence by punishment were fully effective, one would expect fewer acknowledged intrusions, clearer red lines, and more frequent kinetic or overtly coercive responses to cyber operations. The CSIS record of significant cyber incidents and the growing number of state-linked advanced persistent threat groups are consistent with a grammar of persistent sub-threshold competition, though such counts must be interpreted cautiously because they reflect reporting capacity, definitional choices, and political willingness to disclose incidents.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, treated here as primary, begins from the position that cyber conflict is not only an interstate deterrence problem but a sovereignty, development, and inequality problem. Many African states enter the digital domain with infrastructural dependence, limited domestic cybersecurity capacity, and exposure to both state and criminal actors; the offense-defense asymmetry is therefore compounded by asymmetries in technology, finance, and expertise. From this vantage point, deterrence by punishment is often unavailable because retaliatory capacity is limited and because attribution requires resources that are unevenly distributed. The African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, adopted in Malabo in 2014, reflects a regional effort to harmonize cybercrime law, data protection, and electronic commerce, but implementation remains uneven. African scholarship and policy discourse frequently frame cyber sovereignty in terms of data localization, control over critical information infrastructure, and protection against digital extractivism, rather than in terms of great-power deterrence. The African perspective also highlights that global cyber norms developed in UN forums may not reflect the priorities of states whose immediate concerns are capacity building, cybercrime, and the protection of nascent digital economies. It therefore sees the grammar of cyber conflict as shaped by historical inequalities in knowledge production and technological ownership, and it insists that resilience and denial strategies must be accompanied by equitable access to attribution tools, training, and infrastructure. Chinese perspectives emphasize cyber sovereignty, state control over information infrastructure, and "active defense," interpreting the offense-defense balance through the lens of domestic stability and regime security as much as interstate competition. Attribution is often treated as politically constructed by Western actors, and deterrence is linked to the ability to control information flows within national borders. Russian

perspectives draw on an information-security doctrine that treats the information sphere as a domain of conflict in which technical and psychological operations are inseparable; reflexive control traditions emphasize shaping an adversary's perceptions and decisions rather than merely destroying systems. Attribution skepticism is pronounced, and deterrence is less about credible punishment than about controlling narratives and maintaining strategic ambiguity. Western perspectives, especially in the United States, have developed deterrence frameworks, attribution coalitions, and persistent engagement doctrines, while also generating self-critique: operations such as Stuxnet demonstrated that cyber weapons can proliferate, that effects can escape intended targets, and that offensive advantage may be temporary. Western analysis tends to privilege technical attribution, legal categories, and alliance coordination, sometimes underestimating how its own offensive operations shape adversary doctrines. The UN perspective, expressed through the GGE consensus reports of 2013, 2015, and 2021 and the OEWG process, seeks to apply international law to cyberspace, articulate norms of responsible state behavior, and build confidence through transparency and capacity building. It treats attribution as a state responsibility but acknowledges practical limits, and it aims to reduce escalation by clarifying that states should not target critical infrastructure or interfere with emergency services. Its strength is multilateral legitimacy; its limitation is that consensus language often papers over disagreements about sovereignty, self-defense, and the threshold of armed attack.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Critical Infrastructure Targeting: Ransomware, State Hacking, and the Blurring of Criminal and State Action

Bolded Causal Claim: Targeting critical infrastructure through cyber means converts latent digital access into coercive leverage, but only where operational technology is networked, poorly segmented, and backed by fragile recovery capacity; the blurring of criminal ransomware and state-sponsored intrusion makes attribution and response categorization systematically ambiguous, so that the same technical event can be read as crime, espionage, or act of war depending on the interpretive frame applied.

Mechanism: The mechanism proceeds in four linked stages. First, digitization of operational technology (OT) in power grids, water treatment, hospitals, and financial clearing systems creates attack surfaces that were historically air-gapped; as industrial control systems (SCADA) are connected to enterprise IT networks for efficiency and remote monitoring, the boundary between information systems and physical process control erodes. Second, initial access is typically achieved through commodity techniques—phishing, unpatched vulnerabilities, compromised credentials, or supply-chain insertion—rather than bespoke exploits, which means the same intrusion kit serves criminals and intelligence services alike. Third, once inside, the attacker faces a choice between immediate monetization (ransomware encryption, data exfiltration for sale) and pre-positioning for strategic effect (logic bombs, wiper malware, or sustained access for future disruption). Fourth, and most consequentially, the criminal market provides a laundering layer: states can purchase access from brokers, task criminal groups, or simply allow criminal operations to proceed in their jurisdiction, gaining plausible deniability while the victim state struggles to classify the event. The blurring is not merely tactical deception; it is structural, because the global cybercrime economy—ransomware-as-a-service, initial access brokers, bulletproof hosting—has industrialized capabilities that were once the monopoly of intelligence agencies. When a hospital is encrypted by LockBit or a pipeline is shut down by DarkSide, the technical forensics may point to a criminal affiliate, while the geopolitical context suggests state tolerance or direction. This ambiguity is the mechanism's core product: it degrades the victim's ability to invoke legal categories (crime versus armed attack), complicates alliance consultation, and slows decision cycles. The

2021 Colonial Pipeline incident illustrates the chain: a compromised password led to ransomware deployment by a criminal group operating from Russian territory, forcing a fuel shortage across the US East Coast and triggering a federal emergency declaration, even though the group was not formally state-directed. The 2017 NotPetya attack, initially disguised as ransomware but functioning as a wiper, caused an estimated ten billion dollars in global damage and demonstrated how destructive code could be released through a software supply chain, blurring criminal, state, and terrorist modalities. Ukraine's 2015 and 2016 power-grid intrusions showed the strategic variant: attackers used spear-phishing and legitimate remote-access tools to open breakers, causing blackouts, while simultaneously jamming customer service lines to delay recovery. In each case, the mechanism's leverage derives not from the sophistication of the exploit but from the victim's dependency on the targeted system and the time required to restore it.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism operates where four conditions converge: (a) high dependency on a single digital system with limited manual fallback; (b) weak network segmentation between IT and OT environments; (c) a criminal or state ecosystem capable of developing and deploying the payload; and (d) a legal and political environment in which the victim cannot quickly determine attribution and therefore cannot calibrate response. It is weaker where infrastructure is air-gapped, where redundant manual procedures exist, where strong cyber hygiene and patching discipline prevail, and where international cooperation on takedowns and indictments is effective. It is also weaker against targets with high resilience investment, such as financial clearinghouses with real-time backup systems. Conversely, it is strongest against municipal water systems, regional hospitals, and mid-sized energy distributors in jurisdictions with limited cybersecurity capacity—a pattern that explains why ransomware disproportionately affects developing-country infrastructure and local governments in wealthy states alike.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, one should observe: rising ransomware incidents against infrastructure sectors tracked by CSIS and ENISA; increasing convergence between criminal tooling and state APT tradecraft; a growing gap between incident frequency and successful prosecution; and states investing in resilience and manual fallback rather than purely in perimeter defense. One should also observe diplomatic friction when states demand that other states suppress criminal groups operating from their territory, as in US-Russia exchanges after Colonial Pipeline. A further implication is that deterrence by punishment—threatening retaliation—becomes less credible when the attacker is a criminal proxy, because the target state cannot clearly identify a state adversary to punish without risking escalation or misattribution.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, reconstructed from within, treats critical infrastructure targeting as inseparable from questions of digital sovereignty and developmental vulnerability. African scholarship and policy discourse—drawing on the AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo, 2014), the work of scholars such as Aning and Danso on African security governance, and the broader tradition of dependency critique associated with Rodney and Nkrumah—emphasize that African states face a double bind: their infrastructure is increasingly digitized through foreign vendors and cloud providers, yet their defensive capacity and legal frameworks lag, making them attractive targets for both criminal ransomware and state pre-positioning. From this vantage point, the blurring of criminal and state action is not an abstract legal puzzle but a lived condition in which African hospitals, power utilities, and financial systems are disrupted by actors whose interests are opaque and whose accountability is nil. The Malabo Convention's push for data localization, harmonized cybercrime laws, and regional cooperation reflects an insistence that infrastructure protection is a sovereignty issue, not merely a technical one, and that external powers' offensive operations in African digital space reproduce colonial patterns of extraction and vulnerability. African analysts also note that the global ransomware economy exploits African underinvestment in cybersecurity workforce development, turning the continent into both a target and an unwitting

transit zone. The Chinese perspective frames critical infrastructure protection through the doctrine of cyber sovereignty and the "three warfares" (public opinion, psychological, legal), treating foreign targeting of Chinese infrastructure as a sovereignty violation while asserting the state's right to regulate its information space; it emphasizes defensive resilience and the integration of civilian and military cyber defense under party-state coordination. The Russian perspective, rooted in information security doctrine, treats infrastructure vulnerability as part of a broader information confrontation in which Western states are seen as the primary threat; it emphasizes state control over domestic networks and the legitimacy of preemptive defensive measures, while its own operations abroad are framed as responses to Western aggression. The Western perspective, dominant in NATO and US doctrine, centers on deterrence by denial and punishment, attribution confidence, and the application of international law to cyber operations; it has developed frameworks for identifying state responsibility and has invested heavily in resilience, but it has also been criticized for underestimating how its own offensive operations—such as Stuxnet—legitimize adversary targeting of infrastructure. The UN perspective, expressed through the GGE consensus reports of 2013, 2015, and 2021 and the OEWG process, seeks to establish norms that states should not target critical infrastructure or interfere with emergency services, and it promotes confidence-building measures and capacity building; its strength is multilateral legitimacy, while its limitation is that consensus language often papers over disagreements about sovereignty, self-defense, and the threshold of armed attack.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Information Warfare: Disinformation, Election Interference, and the Manipulation of Public Opinion

Bolded Causal Claim: Information warfare achieves strategic effects not by destroying infrastructure but by degrading the epistemic and social foundations of democratic decision-making, exploiting platform architectures and cognitive biases to reshape public opinion at low cost; its power lies in the asymmetry between the cost of producing false or polarizing content and the cost of verifying and countering it.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through a chain of amplification and contamination. First, content is produced—often by state-linked actors, troll farms, or automated networks—that is designed to exploit existing social cleavages, emotional triggers, and identity commitments rather than to persuade through evidence. Second, this content is injected into information ecosystems through multiple channels: fake personas on social media, compromised or complicit influencers, state media outlets, and encrypted messaging applications. Third, platform algorithms, optimized for engagement rather than accuracy, amplify emotionally resonant content, creating feedback loops in which false or misleading narratives reach audiences far beyond their originators' direct reach. Fourth, the content is laundered through repetition across channels, so that a claim originating in a troll farm appears to be independently corroborated when it surfaces in mainstream media or political discourse. Fifth, the cumulative effect is not necessarily to change specific votes but to erode trust in institutions, media, and electoral processes, and to polarize publics so that collective action becomes harder. Singer and Brooking (2018) describe this as the weaponization of the social media age, in which the battlefield is the feed and the ammunition is attention. Pomerantsev (2019) emphasizes that modern propaganda does not require belief in a single truth; it thrives on cynicism, confusion, and the collapse of shared epistemic standards. The mechanism is cheap because it leverages existing infrastructure—platforms, influencers, partisan media—rather than requiring the attacker to build its own. It is deniable because content can be attributed to organic users, and because the line between foreign interference and domestic political speech is legally and practically murky. The 2016 US election interference, attributed to the Russian Internet Research Agency and military intelligence (GRU), exemplifies the chain: thousands of fake social media accounts, targeted advertising, and hacked document releases were used to amplify divisive content,

attack specific candidates, and depress turnout among targeted demographics. Similar patterns have been documented in European elections, the Brexit referendum, and COVID-19 information environments, where state and non-state actors exploited uncertainty to amplify conspiracy theories and undermine public health measures.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism is strongest where (a) information consumption is concentrated on algorithmically curated platforms with weak content moderation; (b) media literacy and institutional trust are already low; (c) political polarization creates receptive audiences for identity-affirming falsehoods; and (d) legal frameworks struggle to distinguish foreign interference from protected speech. It is weaker where public broadcasting is strong, where platform regulation is robust, where media literacy education is widespread, and where political culture is less polarized. It is also weaker against targets with high social cohesion and strong institutional legitimacy. The mechanism does not require the attacker to control the narrative entirely; partial success—sowing doubt, amplifying existing divisions—is often sufficient and is harder to counter than outright fabrication.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, one should observe: documented state-linked disinformation campaigns tracked by EU DisinfoLab and similar monitors; increasing investment by states in counter-disinformation units and platform regulation; a widening gap between the speed of false content spread and the speed of correction; and declining trust in media and electoral institutions in targeted societies. One should also observe that countermeasures—fact-checking, takedowns, labeling—often reach smaller audiences than the original false content, and that some interventions backfire by amplifying the very claims they seek to debunk. A further implication is that information warfare blurs into domestic politics, as foreign narratives are adopted and amplified by domestic actors for their own purposes, making attribution and response even more complex.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, reconstructed from within, frames information warfare as a continuation of older struggles over narrative sovereignty and epistemic justice. African scholarship—drawing on Fanon's analysis of colonial propaganda and psychological domination, Cabral's emphasis on culture as a terrain of struggle, and contemporary work by scholars such as Tamale on decolonial knowledge production—insists that African publics have long been targets of external information manipulation, from colonial-era propaganda to Cold War covert operations and, more recently, to digital disinformation campaigns during elections and public health crises. From this vantage point, the manipulation of public opinion is not a novel threat invented by Russian or Chinese actors; it is a persistent feature of asymmetric power in which African information spaces are treated as battlegrounds by external powers with limited accountability. African analysts emphasize that platform algorithms, trained on Western data and optimized for Western engagement patterns, often misclassify African political speech, amplify sensational content, and underinvest in local-language moderation, creating structural vulnerabilities that foreign and domestic actors alike exploit. The AU and regional bodies have responded with frameworks for election observation and media regulation, but capacity constraints and the cross-border nature of digital platforms limit effectiveness. African scholars also caution against importing Western counter-disinformation models that may not fit local media ecologies, where radio, WhatsApp, and community networks often matter more than Twitter or Facebook, and where "disinformation" can become a label used by incumbents to suppress dissent. The Chinese perspective treats information warfare as an extension of the "three warfares" doctrine, emphasizing public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare as integrated instruments of statecraft; it frames Western media dominance as a form of information hegemony and justifies state control over domestic information space as defensive sovereignty. The Russian perspective, rooted in reflexive control theory, treats information as a battlespace in which the goal is to shape the adversary's

decision-making by manipulating their perception of reality; it distinguishes between information-technical and information-psychological security, and it frames its own operations as defensive responses to Western information aggression. The Western perspective, dominant in NATO and US doctrine, has increasingly recognized information warfare as a strategic threat, investing in counter-disinformation, platform regulation, and resilience; it emphasizes attribution, transparency, and the defense of democratic processes, but it has also been criticized for over-securitizing speech, for inconsistent application of standards, and for underestimating how its own information operations abroad have eroded credibility. The UN perspective approaches information warfare through the lens of human rights, freedom of expression, and the GGE/OEWG processes; it seeks to balance security concerns with protections for speech, and it emphasizes capacity building and multilateral norms, though consensus on defining and prohibiting information interference remains elusive.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Cognitive warfare: the weaponization of narrative, the attention economy, and the 'brain as battlefield'

Bolded Causal Claim: Cognitive warfare is best understood as a distinct strategic domain in which adversaries seek to alter the cognitive processes—perception, attention, memory, judgment, emotion, and identity—through which individuals and collectives make sense of political reality; its causal force arises from the interaction between technologically amplified narrative environments and pre-existing cognitive vulnerabilities, producing effects that can outlast discrete information campaigns and reshape the conditions under which political choice, consent, and resistance become possible.

Mechanism: The mechanism is not simply the transmission of false claims but the manipulation of the cognitive infrastructure through which claims are evaluated. Human beings reduce complexity through narrative; they rely on heuristics, social cues, identity-protective reasoning, and emotional salience. Cognitive warfare exploits these features by shaping what becomes thinkable, memorable, urgent, or trustworthy. Several channels matter. First, narrative seeding and repetition can make a frame cognitively available, so that even skeptical audiences must process it. Second, emotional priming—especially fear, anger, humiliation, and moral disgust—can narrow attention and reduce deliberative capacity. Third, identity fusion can bind information processing to group belonging, so that contradictory evidence is experienced as an attack on the self. Fourth, cognitive overload can degrade judgment by flooding the information environment with competing, contradictory, or decontextualized claims. Fifth, epistemic fragmentation can erode shared standards of evidence, making collective action and institutional trust harder to sustain. The attention economy is central to this mechanism because commercial platforms optimize for engagement, and engagement is often maximized by content that activates threat, outrage, or novelty. Algorithmic curation, recommendation systems, microtargeting, and influencer networks can therefore amplify adversarial narratives without requiring direct state control of media. In this sense, the "brain as battlefield" metaphor points to a strategic effort to shape the environment in which cognition occurs, not to a literal neuroscientific takeover. The intended effect may be belief change, but it may also be more subtle: altered salience, increased uncertainty, cynicism, self-censorship, polarization, or the normalization of a particular threat narrative. Pomerantsev's (2019) account of information environments in which "nothing is true and everything is possible" captures one variant of this logic: the goal is not always persuasion but the degradation of the capacity to distinguish signal from noise. Singer and Brooking (2018) similarly emphasize that contemporary conflict operates through the manipulation of attention and emotion in networked publics. Heickerö (2022) is usefully read as part of the broader effort to treat cognitive effects as a strategic problem rather than merely a communications problem.

The mechanism is therefore relational: it depends on the interaction between adversary operations, platform architectures, social identities, institutional credibility, and the psychological state of the target population.

Scope Conditions: Cognitive warfare is most likely to be effective where digital platforms are the primary mediators of political information; where institutional trust is already low; where social identities are polarized or ethnically, religiously, or regionally salient; where media ecosystems are fragmented; where crisis, war, pandemic, or economic shock increases cognitive load; and where regulatory capacity over platforms and data is weak. It is less likely to produce durable effects where public-service media are strong, where media literacy and civic education are widespread, where platform accountability is enforceable, where social cohesion is high, and where counter-narratives are credible because they come from trusted local actors rather than distant authorities. The mechanism also requires adversary capacity: intelligence services, troll farms, bot networks, data brokers, sympathetic influencers, diaspora networks, or criminal proxies. Scope conditions include not only target vulnerability but adversary resources and the absence of friction in the information environment. A further scope condition is temporal: cognitive effects often accumulate slowly and are difficult to isolate from ordinary political disagreement, which means that short-term campaigns may produce noise rather than strategic change. There are also important counterarguments. Citizens are not passive recipients; they interpret, resist, mock, and repurpose narratives. Backfire effects can occur when audiences perceive manipulation. Measurement of cognitive change is methodologically difficult, and claims about "brainwashing" often overstate adversary power while understating human agency. The "brain as battlefield" frame can also become self-fulfilling: by treating publics as manipulable, governments may justify paternalistic information control, surveillance, or the securitization of speech. Thus the theory's strongest version is not that cognition can be reliably hacked, but that strategic actors can systematically alter the conditions of attention and trust in ways that bias political outcomes over time.

Observable Implications: If cognitive warfare is occurring at a strategically significant level, one should observe not only the circulation of false or misleading content but changes in attention allocation, emotional tone, trust metrics, polarization indices, policy salience, and decision-making speed. Indicators include coordinated inauthentic behavior, anomalous engagement patterns, synchronized narrative emergence across platforms, shifts in search trends, increased cynicism toward institutions, and the normalization of conspiratorial or dehumanizing frames. Defensive responses—cognitive security programs, resilience training, platform moderation, strategic communications, and "pre-bunking"—are themselves observable implications, because they indicate that states and platforms treat cognition as a security domain. However, attribution is harder than in conventional cyber intrusion: cognitive effects are diffuse, long-term, and entangled with domestic politics. A false claim may be amplified by foreign actors, domestic elites, commercial incentives, and genuine grievance simultaneously. Therefore, observable implications must be assessed with care: evidence of foreign amplification is not by itself evidence of strategic effect, and evidence of polarization is not by itself evidence of foreign causation. The most defensible implication is that cognitive warfare should be evaluated through longitudinal, multi-method research that distinguishes exposure, belief, attitude, and behavior, rather than through single-event metrics such as virality or engagement.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):
African (primary): The African perspective is primary because cognitive warfare in African contexts cannot be separated from longer histories of epistemic violence, colonial categorization, and racialized knowledge production. Fanon's analysis of colonialism's psychological damage, Cabral's insistence that culture is a terrain of struggle, Nyerere's emphasis on collective consciousness and ujamaa, and Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject all suggest that cognition and political identity have long been battlegrounds. Mbembe's work on necropolitics and commandement, Bayart's analysis of extraversion, and Grovogui's

critique of international legal hierarchies further show how external powers have shaped African political imagination through categories, institutions, and narratives. Oyěwùmí's critique of colonial gender categories, Tamale's decolonial feminist scholarship, and the work of Aning and Danso on African security governance highlight that cognitive security is inseparable from questions of knowledge sovereignty and institutional legitimacy. From this vantage point, contemporary digital cognitive operations—during elections, conflicts, pandemics, or protests—interact with legacies of low institutional trust, ethnicized politics, externally funded media, and platform infrastructures owned outside the continent. The African perspective cautions against importing "brain as battlefield" metaphors that treat African publics as uniquely manipulable; instead, it emphasizes agency, vernacular media, community resilience, and the need to decolonize data and narrative infrastructures. It also insists that cognitive warfare be analyzed not only as foreign interference but as a continuation of struggles over who has the authority to define reality.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective tends to frame cognitive and information effects through the lens of social stability, party-state legitimacy, and "discourse power," treating narrative management as an extension of sovereignty and governance; it emphasizes the threat of Western ideological penetration and the need for "positive energy," while often occluding internal dissent, minority voices, and the coercive dimensions of domestic information control.

Russian: The Russian perspective embeds cognitive effects within information security doctrine and the tradition of reflexive control, treating the adversary's decision-making process as a legitimate target and emphasizing managed pluralism, strategic ambiguity, and the erosion of Western epistemic authority; it contributes a sophisticated understanding of perception management but occludes democratic accountability, transparency, and the distinction between legitimate persuasion and covert manipulation.

Western: The Western perspective frames cognitive warfare as a threat to democratic cognition, institutional trust, and decision-making, emphasizing attribution, platform governance, media literacy, and resilience; it has also generated important self-critique regarding its own psychological operations, covert influence, and the market-driven attention economy that creates vulnerabilities, though it often underestimates how its own information practices abroad have eroded credibility.

UN: The UN perspective approaches cognitive warfare through human rights, freedom of expression, information integrity, and capacity building, seeking to protect vulnerable groups while avoiding the conflation of dissent with cognitive attack; it emphasizes multilateral norms and development, but consensus on defining and prohibiting cognitive interference remains elusive, and enforcement capacity is limited.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Different national doctrines: US (persistent engagement), Russian (reflexive control, information security), Chinese (three warfares), EU (regulatory).

Bolded Causal Claim: National doctrines in cyber, information, and cognitive warfare are not merely tactical preferences but constitutive frameworks that define what counts as conflict, where thresholds lie, who may act, and what victory means; divergent doctrines therefore produce not only different operational styles but incompatible understandings of escalation, sovereignty, and legitimacy, making cross-doctrinal deterrence, attribution, and norm-building inherently difficult.

Mechanism: Doctrine operates as a mechanism by shaping five variables: conceptualization of the domain, organizational division of labor, legal authorities, target sets, and signaling practices. The US doctrine of persistent engagement, associated with US Cyber Command's 2018 strategic shift, treats cyberspace as a domain of continuous competition below the threshold of armed conflict; it emphasizes "defending forward," imposing costs, disrupting adversary operations in their own networks, and maintaining initiative. Its underlying assumption is that passive defense is insufficient and that advantage goes to the actor that

can operate continuously and impose friction on adversaries. The Russian doctrine of information security treats information as a strategic resource and the information space as a domain of sovereignty; it combines legal control over domestic information, strategic ambiguity abroad, and the tradition of reflexive control, which seeks to shape an adversary's decision-making by manipulating the information on which decisions are based. The Chinese doctrine of the "three warfares"—public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare—integrates narrative, perception, and law into military and political strategy; it is closely tied to cyber sovereignty, "winning without fighting," and the pursuit of "discourse power." The EU approach is less a warfighting doctrine than a regulatory and resilience framework: it emphasizes norms, rights, platform accountability, cyber diplomacy, and the protection of democratic processes, drawing on instruments such as data protection, digital services regulation, and coordinated attribution. The mechanism of divergence is rooted in regime type, strategic culture, technological capacity, and historical experience. The United States, as a liberal hegemon with global alliance commitments, tends to frame the problem as competition and deterrence. Russia, perceiving encirclement and regime insecurity, tends to frame it as information security and strategic defense. China, as a party-state pursuing development and legitimacy, tends to frame it as sovereignty and narrative control. The EU, as a post-national regulatory polity, tends to frame it as governance, rights, and resilience. These frameworks produce different escalation ladders: what Washington may classify as competition, Moscow may classify as aggression, and Brussels may classify as a regulatory violation. They also produce different attribution practices: the US often names and shames; Russia often denies and proxies; China often emphasizes sovereignty and non-interference; the EU often coordinates multilateral statements and sanctions. The mechanism is therefore not only operational but epistemic: doctrines determine what evidence counts, what thresholds matter, and what responses are legitimate.

Scope Conditions: Doctrinal effects are strongest where states have the capacity to implement them, where institutional path dependence locks in particular organizations and legal authorities, and where threat perceptions align with doctrinal assumptions. They are weaker where practice diverges from doctrine, as it often does: states may adopt rhetorical doctrines while relying on proxies, criminal networks, or covert action; bureaucratic politics may distort implementation; and technological change may outpace doctrinal revision. Doctrines may also converge around shared interests, such as the protection of critical infrastructure or the avoidance of catastrophic escalation, even where broader frameworks remain incompatible. A further scope condition is alliance structure: US doctrine is shaped by NATO and partner capacity; EU doctrine is shaped by member-state diversity and legal harmonization; Russian and Chinese doctrines are shaped by centralized party-state control. Counterarguments include the claim that doctrine is epiphenomenal to material interests and power asymmetries; that states borrow and hybridize doctrines; that "doctrine" often serves as post-hoc rationalization for opportunistic behavior; and that the most important drivers of cyber and information conflict are technological and economic rather than doctrinal. These counterarguments do not eliminate doctrinal effects but suggest that doctrine should be treated as a variable that mediates interests rather than as an independent cause.

Observable Implications: If doctrines shape behavior in the ways theorized, one should observe persistent patterns in organizational structure, legal framing, target selection, and public attribution. Observable indicators include the creation and empowerment of dedicated commands and agencies, such as US Cyber Command, Russia's information operations structures, China's strategic support and cyber units, and EU bodies such as ENISA and the European External Action Service's strategic communications teams. One should also observe differences in escalation management: the US emphasis on cost imposition and forward defense; Russian use of proxies, ambiguity, and reflexive control; Chinese integration of legal and public-opinion campaigns; and EU emphasis on regulation, resilience, and multilateral coordination. Doctrinal

divergence should also produce misperception risks: US actors may interpret Russian or Chinese operations as unprovoked aggression; Russian actors may interpret US internet dominance and platform power as existential threats; Chinese actors may interpret Western media and NGO activity as ideological penetration; EU actors may interpret both security threats and rights violations in the same events. The observable implication for analysts is that cross-national comparison must be doctrinally literate: the same technical act—such as a network intrusion or a disinformation campaign—may be categorized, justified, and responded to differently depending on the doctrine through which it is interpreted. The strongest test of doctrinal influence is not whether states invoke doctrine in speeches but whether doctrine predicts organizational behavior, legal thresholds, and escalation choices across cases.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective is primary because African states are not merely objects of great-power doctrines but actors navigating among them, often adopting elements of cyber sovereignty from Chinese and Russian frameworks, rights and regulatory language from Western and EU frameworks, and multilateral norms from the UN, while facing severe capacity constraints. African scholarship—particularly Aning and Danso on security governance, and broader traditions of postcolonial state analysis—highlights that doctrines designed for great powers may be ill-fitting for states whose primary concerns include development, human security, institutional capacity, and regional stability. The AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo, 2014) represents an attempt to craft an African doctrine that combines sovereignty, cooperation, and rights, but implementation remains uneven. From the African vantage point, doctrinal pluralism is both an opportunity and a risk: it allows African states to avoid a binary choice between great powers, but it can also produce fragmentation, dependency, and the importation of ill-suited security logics. African perspectives also emphasize that doctrine must be evaluated by its effects on ordinary people—whether it protects critical infrastructure and personal data, whether it enables or suppresses dissent, and whether it strengthens regional cooperation. This vantage reveals what great-power doctrinal debates often occlude: the question is not only how states compete in cyberspace but how security frameworks can be made accountable to populations with limited leverage over global platforms and powerful states.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective presents its doctrine as a defense of cyber sovereignty, development, and social stability, emphasizing non-interference, state control over information infrastructure, and the legitimacy of managing domestic discourse; it contributes an alternative to Western liberal norms and a focus on digital development, but it occludes human rights, minority protections, and the coercive dimensions of information control.

Russian: The Russian perspective presents information security doctrine and reflexive control as responses to perceived Western information dominance and regime insecurity, emphasizing sovereignty, strategic ambiguity, and the manipulation of adversary decision-making; it contributes a critique of unipolar information power but occludes democratic accountability, transparency, and the distinction between state security and regime security.

Western: The Western perspective presents persistent engagement, deterrence, and attribution as necessary responses to continuous competition, emphasizing initiative, alliance coordination, and the defense of democratic processes; it contributes technical capacity and institutional frameworks, but it occludes its own offensive and covert practices, the market-driven vulnerabilities of its information ecosystem, and the risk of escalation through forward operations.

UN: The UN perspective presents doctrine through the language of norms, capacity building, and multilateral consensus, emphasizing that state behavior should be constrained by agreed rules and that developing states need support; it contributes a forum for dialogue and a baseline of expectations, but it occludes enforcement,

power asymmetries, and the fact that major powers often treat norms as instrumental rather than binding.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on cyber, information, and cognitive warfare begins from a premise that the other four perspectives tend to treat as peripheral: that the "cyber" domain is not a virtual space hovering above material reality but is physically embedded in colonial geographies of cable routes, server locations, platform ownership, and data-extraction circuits. From this position, the central puzzle of the lesson is not how states deter one another in a new domain but how sovereignty is exercised over infrastructures that were never designed for African control, and how cognitive warfare reproduces racialized hierarchies of whose knowledge counts as knowledge. The African perspective is therefore not a regional application of Western deterrence theory or Chinese sovereignty doctrine; it is a distinct epistemic and political project rooted in the experience of colonial domination and its digital afterlives.

The theoretical lineage runs through several interconnected traditions. Fanon's analysis of colonial psychological warfare in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) established that colonialism operates not merely through force but through the systematic destruction of the colonized's capacity to name their own reality—a process that anticipates contemporary cognitive warfare with disturbing precision. For Fanon, the colonizer's project is to make the colonized internalize a narrative of their own inferiority; the "brain as battlefield" is not a twenty-first-century innovation but the foundational condition of colonial rule. Cabral's *Return to the Source* (1973) extended this by insisting that culture is the terrain on which liberation is won or lost, and that the struggle for sovereignty is inseparable from the struggle over narrative and meaning. These insights frame the African approach to information and cognitive warfare: the manipulation of public opinion and the weaponization of narrative are not novel techniques but continuations of a longer history of epistemic violence, now mediated by digital platforms rather than colonial presses.

Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) and Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) provide the materialist backbone. Rodney demonstrated that underdevelopment is not a natural condition but a produced one, the result of systematic extraction; Nkrumah showed that political independence without economic control produces neocolonialism, in which sovereignty is formal but substance is hollow. Applied to the digital domain, these arguments yield the concept of digital neocolonialism: African states may possess flags and constitutions, but the data generated by their populations flows through undersea cables landing in European and North American hubs, is stored on servers owned by foreign corporations, is processed by algorithms trained on non-African data, and is monetized by platforms headquartered elsewhere. The extraction has shifted from minerals to data, but the structural logic—value generated in Africa, captured elsewhere—persists. Nyerere's *Ujamaa* (1968) and his broader philosophy of self-reliance frame the normative counter-position: digital sovereignty requires not merely regulation but the development of indigenous capacity, from cable infrastructure to data centers to platform governance.

Mbembe's work, particularly *On the Postcolony* (2001) and *Necropolitics* (2019), adds a crucial dimension. Mbembe argues that the postcolony is characterized by a "commandment" that operates through the production of subjects who are simultaneously included and excluded, governed through technologies of surveillance and spectacle. His concept of necropolitics—the power to determine who may live and who must die—extends to the digital domain in the form of algorithmic governance, predictive policing, and the

weaponization of information against marginalized populations. Mbembe's more recent formulation of the "becoming black of the world" suggests that the techniques of domination historically applied to African populations are now being generalized globally through digital surveillance and cognitive warfare. From this vantage, the "brain as battlefield" is not a metaphor for a new kind of conflict but the universalization of a condition that African populations have long endured. The African perspective thus reveals what the Western framing of cognitive warfare as unprecedented obscures: that the weaponization of narrative and the manipulation of consciousness have deep colonial roots, and that the digital merely accelerates and scales pre-existing logics of domination.

Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) and *Neither Settler Nor Native* (2020) illuminate how digital identity systems reproduce colonial categories. Mamdani's central argument—that colonial rule bifurcated the state into a "civil" sphere for citizens and a "customary" sphere for subjects—finds a digital analogue in contemporary biometric and digital ID systems. Kenya's Huduma Namba, Nigeria's National Identification Number, and similar programs across the continent create populations of "data subjects" whose legibility to the state is mediated by foreign technology providers and whose data is vulnerable to both state abuse and external extraction. The citizen/subject distinction is reproduced in digital form: those with robust digital identities access services and rights; those without are rendered invisible or, worse, targeted. Mamdani's framework suggests that data governance in Africa is not merely a technical challenge but a continuation of the colonial project of making populations legible for control.

Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) contributes an epistemological critique that is essential to understanding cognitive warfare. Oyěwùmí demonstrated that the category "woman" as a social classification was not a universal discovery but a colonial imposition, produced through the translation of Yoruba social organization into European gender categories. The implication for digital governance is profound: the categories embedded in datasets, algorithms, and platform architectures—gender, race, ethnicity, religion—are not neutral descriptors but historically constructed classifications that carry colonial epistemologies. When these categories are operationalized in content moderation, targeted advertising, or disinformation campaigns, they reproduce and amplify colonial ways of seeing. The African perspective thus reveals that cognitive warfare is not only about manipulating what people think but about imposing the very categories through which thought is structured.

Tamale's *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020) extends this by insisting that decolonization must be intersectional and that digital justice requires attention to whose voices are amplified and whose are silenced. Tamale's framework suggests that the attention economy, which rewards engagement and outrage, systematically disadvantages African feminist and decolonial voices while amplifying sensationalist and divisive content. The "brain as battlefield" is thus also a gendered and racialized battlefield, in which the cognitive load of navigating misinformation falls disproportionately on populations already marginalized by colonial and patriarchal structures.

Bayart's *The State in Africa* (1993) and his concept of extraversion provide a political-economy lens. Bayart argued that African states are not simply weak or failed but are "extraverted"—oriented toward external patrons and resources rather than domestic constituencies. In the digital domain, extraversion manifests as African elites who broker access to data, telecom licenses, and surveillance contracts with foreign powers, creating a political economy of digital dependency. The blurring of criminal and state action that characterizes cyber conflict globally is, in the African context, intensified by the fact that state and non-state actors are often entangled in networks of patronage and rent-seeking. Ransomware attacks on African hospitals and government systems, for instance, may involve actors with connections to political elites, making attribution

and response doubly difficult.

Aning and Danso's work on African security governance highlights the institutional gap between continental frameworks and national capacity. The African Union's Peace and Security Council and the AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo, 2014) represent attempts to construct a collective security architecture for the digital domain. Yet the Malabo Convention has been ratified by only a handful of states and has not entered into force, reflecting both capacity constraints and the political difficulty of harmonizing 54 national legal systems. Aning's analysis suggests that African security governance is characterized by a persistent gap between normative ambition and operational capacity—a gap that external powers exploit. The AU framework contributes a vision of collective digital sovereignty, but its occlusion is the reality that most African states lack the technical, legal, and institutional capacity to implement it.

Grovogui's *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) and his subsequent work on regimes of sovereignty provide the theoretical foundation for understanding African cyber sovereignty claims. Grovogui argues that sovereignty is not a fixed legal status but a practice that is continually performed and contested, and that African states have historically been denied full sovereignty by a Eurocentric international order. In the digital domain, this means that African sovereignty claims—data localization, platform regulation, the Malabo Convention—are not merely technical policy choices but assertions of political subjectivity against a system that has historically treated African states as quasi-sovereign. Grovogui's framework suggests that the African perspective on cyber sovereignty is not a defensive reaction to Western or Chinese dominance but an active project of reconstituting sovereignty on African terms.

The African perspective's contribution to the five key ideas of this lesson is substantial and distinctive. On the grammar of cyber conflict, it reveals that the offense-defense balance is not a technical property of systems but a function of capacity asymmetry: African states cannot deter by punishment because they lack the offensive capacity and the attribution capability; their realistic option is deterrence by denial—resilience—but this requires investment that most states cannot afford. On critical infrastructure, it shows that the blurring of criminal and state action is intensified where state capacity is weak and criminal networks are entangled with political elites. On information warfare, it demonstrates that Africa is not merely a target but a theater in which multiple external powers—Russia, France, China, the United States—compete for influence through information operations, and that disinformation in African elections and conflicts often serves external geopolitical agendas. On cognitive warfare, it insists that the "brain as battlefield" is continuous with colonial psychological warfare and that the categories through which digital systems classify populations carry colonial epistemologies. On national doctrines, it presents the AU Malabo framework as an alternative doctrinal tradition—one oriented toward collective sovereignty, capacity building, and the regulation of external platforms rather than toward offensive operations or deterrence.

What the African perspective occludes is equally important. It may overstate the coherence of a unified "African" position when 54 states have divergent interests, capacities, and alignments. It risks justifying authoritarian information control under the banner of sovereignty, as when governments invoke "cyber sovereignty" to justify internet shutdowns during elections or protests. The low ratification of the Malabo Convention reflects not only external obstruction but also genuine political will gaps and capacity constraints among African states themselves. And the perspective may understate the agency of African populations in navigating, resisting, and repurposing digital technologies—African tech ecosystems, from Nairobi's "Silicon Savannah" to Lagos's fintech sector, demonstrate that digital dependency is not total. Nevertheless, the African vantage point contributes something the other four perspectives cannot: a demonstration that cyber, information, and cognitive warfare are not new domains of conflict but new modalities of an old struggle

over sovereignty, knowledge, and the right to self-determination, and that any framework that treats them as unprecedented risks reproducing the very hierarchies it claims to analyze.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on cyber, information, and cognitive warfare is organized around the concept of cyber sovereignty (*wangluo zhuquan*), which Xi Jinping articulated in his 2015 address at the World Internet Conference in Wuzhen and which has since become the organizing principle of Chinese internet governance. Cyber sovereignty asserts that states have the right to govern the internet within their territorial borders, to regulate data flows, and to determine the rules of digital engagement—a position that directly challenges the Western multistakeholder model and that resonates with African sovereignty claims even as it serves Chinese strategic interests. The 2016 Cybersecurity Law, the 2021 Data Security Law, and the 2021 Personal Information Protection Law constitute a legal architecture that treats data as a national strategic resource and that mandates localization, security review, and state oversight of critical information infrastructure.

The doctrinal foundation is the "three warfares" (*san zhan*): public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare. Originating in PLA political work doctrine and formalized in the 2003 and 2010 political work regulations, the three warfares represent an integrated approach to information operations that treats the cognitive, legal, and media dimensions as inseparable. Public opinion warfare seeks to shape domestic and international narratives; psychological warfare targets adversary morale and decision-making; legal warfare exploits international law and norms to constrain adversary action and legitimize Chinese positions. This doctrine is distinctive in its explicit integration of military and non-military means and in its treatment of information as a battlespace coequal with land, sea, air, and space. The PLA Strategic Support Force, established in 2015, and its successor the Information Support Force, established in 2024, institutionalize this integration.

The Chinese perspective contributes several elements that the other traditions understate. First, it offers a state-centric model of internet governance that treats digital infrastructure as a matter of national security rather than commercial convenience, a framing that has gained traction among developing states. Second, it provides a holistic view of information operations that does not separate "cyber" from "information" from "cognitive" warfare but treats them as a continuum—a view that aligns with the lesson's own integration of these domains. Third, the Digital Silk Road and Huawei's global infrastructure investments represent a material strategy for extending Chinese influence through the ownership of digital infrastructure, a form of structural power that operates below the threshold of traditional conflict.

The perspective's occlusions are significant. China's sovereignty rhetoric is asymmetric: it demands respect for its own information space while conducting extensive operations in others'. Attributed operations include APT41, Salt Typhoon (targeting US telecommunications), and Volt Typhoon (pre-positioning in US critical infrastructure). The Great Firewall and associated censorship apparatus demonstrate that cyber sovereignty, in practice, serves domestic political control as much as national security. The Chinese perspective also tends to frame Western accusations of Chinese hacking as hegemonic attempts to maintain information dominance, a move that deflects substantive engagement with evidence. On the five key ideas, China emphasizes defense and sovereignty while denying offensive intent; treats critical infrastructure protection as a national security priority; integrates information and cognitive warfare through the three warfares doctrine; and presents its approach as a model for developing states, contrasting with both US persistent engagement and EU regulatory frameworks.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective is rooted in a distinctive intellectual tradition that treats information not as a domain of conflict but as the substance of conflict itself. The 2016 Information Security Doctrine and its 2021 update define information as a strategic resource and identify threats not only to technical systems but to "spiritual and moral values," cultural identity, and historical memory. This framing reflects a holistic conception in which cognitive, informational, and technical dimensions are inseparable—a view that predates and arguably anticipates Western "cognitive warfare" discourse.

The doctrinal lineage runs through reflexive control (*refleksivnoe upravlenie*), a concept developed by Soviet military theorists including Vladimir Lefebvre and formalized in the work of the Russian military. Reflexive control denotes the manipulation of an adversary's decision-making process by shaping the information environment in which decisions are made—feeding false or misleading information that leads the adversary to choose actions favorable to the manipulator. This is, in essence, a theory of cognitive warfare developed decades before the term entered Western strategic discourse. The Gerasimov article of 2013, often (somewhat misleadingly) termed the "Gerasimov doctrine," articulated a vision of "new generation warfare" in which non-military means—including information operations, economic pressure, and political subversion—could achieve objectives previously requiring military force, and in which the boundary between war and peace is deliberately blurred.

Russian practice reflects this doctrine. The Internet Research Agency's operations during the 2016 US election, GRU units 26165 and 74455 (Fancy Bear and Sandworm), and the NotPetya attack of 2017 demonstrate a pattern of operations that exploit attribution ambiguity, leverage criminal and proxy networks, and target the cognitive dimension of adversary societies. The 2019 Sovereign Internet Law (*Runet*) and the associated technical infrastructure for isolating the Russian internet represent the defensive complement to this offensive posture—a recognition that information sovereignty requires both the capacity to project and the capacity to withstand.

The Russian perspective contributes a genuinely distinctive element: the insistence that information warfare is not a subset of cyber warfare but the broader category, of which technical cyber operations are one component. This inverts the Western framing, which tends to treat information operations as an application of cyber capability. The Russian view also emphasizes the moral and cultural dimension of conflict— the idea that adversary societies can be destabilized through the erosion of shared values and social cohesion—a dimension that Western technical frameworks often neglect. On the five key ideas, Russia rejects the "cyber war" framing in favor of "information war"; exploits attribution ambiguity as a strategic asset; treats disinformation and election interference as legitimate tools of statecraft; understands cognitive warfare through the lens of reflexive control; and presents its doctrine as a comprehensive alternative to Western deterrence frameworks.

The occlusions are equally significant. The defensive rhetoric of "information security" masks extensive offensive operations. The attribution ambiguity that Russia exploits is not merely a technical feature but a deliberate strategy of plausible deniability. The moral framing of information security—protecting "spiritual values"—serves to justify domestic censorship and the suppression of dissent. And the reflexive control tradition, while theoretically sophisticated, can overstate the controllability of adversary decision-making and understate the resilience of democratic societies.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective is characterized by a tension between two impulses: the desire to establish rules and norms for a domain that resists regulation, and the temptation to exploit the domain's offensive potential.

This tension is visible in the evolution of US doctrine from the restrained "cyber deterrence" frameworks of the 2010s to the more assertive "persistent engagement" and "defend forward" posture articulated in the 2018 US Cyber Command vision and the 2023 National Cybersecurity Strategy. The Western debate has been shaped by a series of influential interventions: Rid's argument in "Cyber War Will Not Take Place" (2013) that cyber operations are better understood as sabotage and espionage than as war; Libicki's analysis of the offense-defense balance and the difficulties of deterrence in cyberspace; and Singer and Brooking's *LikeWar* (2018), which documented the weaponization of social media.

The Western perspective's distinctive contributions include a robust technical and institutional capacity for attribution—exemplified by Mandiant's 2013 APT1 report, which publicly attributed Chinese military hacking, and by subsequent US indictments of GRU officers. It includes NATO's recognition of cyberspace as a domain of operations (2016) and the development of cyber-specific legal frameworks, from the Tallinn Manual to the EU's NIS2 Directive, GDPR, Digital Services Act, and AI Act. The EU regulatory approach represents a distinctively European contribution: treating digital governance as a matter of market regulation and rights protection rather than purely military competition.

The Western self-critique is an essential component of this perspective. The Snowden revelations of 2013 exposed the scale of US and allied offensive cyber and surveillance operations, undermining claims to moral high ground. Stuxnet (2010) demonstrated that the United States and Israel had already crossed the threshold of using cyber weapons against critical infrastructure. The market-driven vulnerabilities of the Western information ecosystem—platform business models that reward engagement over accuracy, the concentration of infrastructure in private hands, the outsourcing of content moderation—represent structural weaknesses that adversaries exploit. Pomerantsev's *This Is Not Propaganda* (2019) documented how the Western information environment's openness, once considered a strength, has become a vulnerability.

On the five key ideas, the Western perspective centers on the grammar of cyber conflict (Rid, Libicki), treats critical infrastructure protection as a priority (CISA, sector-specific regulation), addresses information warfare through election security and platform governance, approaches cognitive warfare through the lens of the attention economy and platform regulation, and distinguishes between US persistent engagement and EU regulatory frameworks. Its occlusions include its own offensive practices, the escalation risks of forward operations, the market-driven vulnerabilities of its information ecosystem, and the tendency to frame Western norms as universal while exempting Western practice.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective presents doctrine through the language of norms, capacity building, and multilateral consensus. The framework rests on three pillars: the application of existing international law to cyberspace, the development of voluntary norms of responsible state behavior, and confidence-building measures and capacity building. The Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) produced consensus reports in 2013 (A/68/98), 2015 (A/70/174), and 2021 (A/76/135), establishing eleven voluntary norms—including that states should not conduct ICT activity that damages critical infrastructure, should not use proxies, should respond to requests for assistance, and should protect critical infrastructure. The Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG), established in 2018 and operating through 2021 and 2021-2025, broadened participation to include all UN member states, addressing the criticism that the GGE's limited membership (initially 15, later 25 states) lacked legitimacy.

The UN perspective contributes a forum for dialogue that includes developing states, a baseline of expectations that even adversarial states have endorsed, and a capacity-building agenda that addresses the asymmetry

in technical and institutional capacity. The 2015 GGE report's affirmation that international law, including the UN Charter and international humanitarian law, applies to state use of ICTs was a significant achievement, establishing that cyberspace is not a lawless domain. The norms on critical infrastructure and on not using proxies provide reference points for assessing state behavior.

The occlusions are substantial. The norms are voluntary and lack enforcement mechanisms. The consensus requirement means that reports reflect the lowest common denominator, and the 2021 GGE failed to reach consensus on key issues, leading to the OEWG process. Power asymmetries mean that major powers treat norms as instrumental—endorsing them rhetorically while conducting operations that violate them. The capacity-building agenda, while valuable, risks treating symptoms (lack of capacity) rather than causes (structural inequality in the global digital economy). And the UN framework has been slower to address information and cognitive warfare than technical cyber operations, reflecting the difficulty of defining and regulating influence operations without impinging on legitimate expression.

On the five key ideas, the UN perspective affirms that existing international law applies to cyberspace (grammar), establishes norms on critical infrastructure protection (infrastructure), addresses information operations through norms on proxies and on not interfering in internal affairs (information warfare), has less developed frameworks for cognitive warfare (cognitive), and presents a normative baseline rather than a national doctrine (doctrines). The UN perspective's value lies not in its enforcement power but in its provision of a shared vocabulary and a forum in which the other four perspectives must engage, however instrumentally.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers cyber sovereignty, data localization, and the AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo, 2014); shows how information and cyber governance reproduce colonial asymmetries in data extraction, platform power, and security assistance; insists that capacity-building and development are security issues, not afterthoughts.	Can understate the technical complexity of cross-border criminal and state-linked operations; may treat state sovereignty as more protective than it is for marginalized groups; risks overemphasizing state control where civil society and journalists are the primary defenders of information integrity.	Digital self-determination, equitable global governance, and the right of African states and societies to define their own information order without external domination or extractive platform capitalism.	Malabo Convention; African debates over data localization and digital taxation; African election-disinformation cases; scholarship on extraversion, colonial state forms, and underdevelopment.	Western/liberal critics argue that sovereignty-first framing can justify censorship, internet shutdowns, and the criminalization of dissent; UN critics argue that it may fragment the global internet and weaken shared norms.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Develops an integrated doctrine of information security through the "three warfares" (public opinion, psychological, and legal warfare); links cyber sovereignty to state capacity; treats information space as a strategic environment to be governed, not merely a market to be regulated.	Conflates information security with regime security; obscures the distinction between protecting citizens from foreign manipulation and protecting the state from domestic criticism; underweights non-state and transnational actors that do not fit state-centric control.	State-centric information security, cyber sovereignty, non-interference, and managed openness in which the state is the legitimate arbiter of information order.	"Three warfares" doctrine; cyber-sovereignty advocacy in UN forums; domestic information-control architecture; state-linked APT reporting by Western and private-sector analysts.	Western critics argue that sovereignty cannot override human rights and open expression; African critics argue that the model can export authoritarian capacity and normalize surveillance infrastructures.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Provides the most developed operational theory of reflexive control: shaping an adversary's decisions by controlling the information environment; blurs war and peace; treats information as a continuous strategic battlespace rather than a separate domain.	Denies or obscures attribution; conflates propaganda, influence, and legitimate discourse; erodes the distinction between domestic and foreign information spaces; makes verification and accountability difficult.	Information security as state survival; managed information space; strategic competition in which narrative, perception, and institutional trust are legitimate targets.	Russian military writings on non-linear conflict; reflexive-control tradition; documented election-interference and influence operations; state-linked media and troll-farm structures.	Western critics argue that it violates sovereignty and democratic self-determination; UN critics argue that it breaches norms of non-interference; African critics note that it reproduces great-power manipulation in weaker states.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Offers deterrence frameworks, attribution methodologies, offensive cyber doctrine, and technical analysis; has produced the most extensive public documentation of state-linked operations; includes a genuine self-critique of its own offensive and surveillance practices.	Can overstate the novelty of information warfare; may exceptionalize Western democracies as uniquely vulnerable; underweights structural inequality, platform capitalism, and non-Western agency; offensive operations undermine the norms it advocates.	Rules-based order, deterrence by denial and punishment, human rights, open internet, and accountability through attribution and law enforcement.	US persistent-engagement doctrine; Stuxnet and other documented operations; indictments of state-linked actors; private-sector threat reporting; post-2016 election-security reforms.	Russian and Chinese critics argue that Western norms are hegemonic and inconsistently applied; African critics argue that Western platforms and security agencies are themselves instruments of information power.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Provides a shared vocabulary and normative baseline; affirms that existing international law applies to cyberspace; establishes norms on critical infrastructure protection and on not harming or allowing harm through proxies; sustains multilateral dialogue.	Lacks enforcement; tends toward lowest-common-denominator consensus; is vulnerable to great-power instrumental-ization; has less developed frameworks for cognitive warfare and for non-state platform power.	Multilateralism, consensus, sovereignty balanced with human rights, and the progressive development of norms without premature legalization that would freeze asymmetries.	GGE consensus reports (2013, 2015, 2021); OEWG processes; norms on critical infrastructure and on not knowingly allowing territory to be used for internationally wrongful acts.	National perspectives argue that norms are either too vague to constrain adversaries or too constraining for legitimate security activity; African critics argue that consensus processes underrepresent African capacity and priorities.

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: Russian interference in the 2016 United States presidential election as a study in information operations

The 2016 US election is best understood not as a single cyberattack but as a layered information operation in which hacking, leaking, social-media manipulation, and narrative amplification were combined to shape perception, deepen polarization, and erode confidence in democratic institutions. The case matters for this lesson because it sits at the intersection of the five key ideas: it uses the grammar of cyber conflict without fitting neatly into war; it targets critical infrastructure only indirectly; it is a paradigmatic information-warfare case; it operates in the cognitive domain; and it reflects a distinctive national doctrine, Russian reflexive control, rather than a universal model of cyber conflict. The appropriate analytical task is to explain how the operation worked, why it was effective, and which perspective best captures its significance without collapsing into either alarmism or dismissal.

Levels of analysis

At the **individual** level, the operation exploited cognitive and social vulnerabilities rather than technical weaknesses in voting machines. Citizens encountered emotionally charged content through social-media

feeds, group identities, and partisan media ecosystems. The mechanism was not simply persuasion in the classical sense but activation: content designed to resonate with pre-existing grievances, identities, and suspicions. Microtargeting, algorithmic amplification, and the use of seemingly authentic personas lowered the cost of reaching susceptible audiences. Individuals were not merely passive recipients; they became distribution nodes when they shared, commented, and argued. This is why the operation could be effective even where no single message was decisive: it worked cumulatively, through repetition, emotional salience, and the erosion of shared epistemic standards. Singer and Brooking's (2018) discussion of "like war" is useful here because it captures the way attention, virality, and platform incentives turn individual engagement into strategic effect.

At the **state** level, the operation must be situated in Russian state objectives and in the structure of the US political system. Russian military and intelligence traditions, including reflexive control, treat information as a means of shaping an adversary's decision-making without requiring conventional military confrontation. The aim was not necessarily to install a predetermined outcome by direct vote manipulation, but to weaken the adversary, exploit internal divisions, and reduce the legitimacy of the incoming administration. The US state, for its part, faced a dilemma: attribution was technically and politically complex, responses risked escalation, and the most damaging effects were occurring inside a privately governed information environment. The state level therefore reveals a governance gap: democratic states depend on platforms they do not control, while adversaries can exploit that dependence. Pomerantsev (2019) is relevant because his work on propaganda emphasizes that modern information operations often succeed not by convincing everyone of a lie but by creating confusion, cynicism, and the sense that all narratives are equally manipulative.

At the **systemic** level, the case reflects the post-Cold War US-Russian rivalry, the absence of agreed cyber norms, and the difficulty of applying deterrence to information operations. Traditional deterrence assumes identifiable attacks, clear attribution, and proportionate response. Information operations blur these assumptions: they are continuous, often plausibly deniable, and can be framed as journalism, activism, or ordinary political speech. The systemic consequence was not a direct military confrontation but a crisis of confidence in democratic procedures and in the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. This is consistent with Rid's (2013) argument that much of what is called cyber war is better understood as sabotage, espionage, or subversion; the 2016 case is subversion through information rather than war in the Clausewitzian sense. The systemic level also shows how norms of non-interference, affirmed in UN processes, are strained when operations are conducted through proxies, platforms, and deniable actors.

At the **transnational** level, the case cannot be explained by states alone. The Internet Research Agency, GRU-linked hacking, WikiLeaks releases, and platform algorithms formed a transnational chain. Data, personas, and narratives moved across borders faster than institutions could respond. Social-media platforms functioned as transnational infrastructures with their own incentives, moderation capacities, and business models. This level reveals that information warfare is not merely state-to-state competition; it is mediated by corporate platforms, technical standards, and global communication networks. The transnational dimension also explains why purely national responses are insufficient: even a well-defended state can be affected by content generated, amplified, and monetized elsewhere.

Mechanism

The mechanism combined three channels. First, hacking and leaking: GRU-linked actors compromised Democratic National Committee and campaign-related accounts, and selected materials were released through intermediaries at politically sensitive moments. The strategic value lay less in the content's novelty than in timing, framing, and the creation of a sustained scandal narrative. Second, social-media manipula-

tion: the Internet Research Agency created fake personas and groups, amplified divisive content, organized online and sometimes offline events, and exploited platform recommendation systems. Third, narrative laundering: information moved from hacked material to partisan media, social networks, and mainstream coverage, making state-originated content appear organic. The operation's power came from interaction effects: hacked material gave credibility to conspiracy narratives; fake personas gave scale to fringe claims; platform algorithms rewarded outrage; and polarized audiences did much of the distribution themselves. Deterrence by punishment was weak because attribution was delayed and because the operation's effects were diffuse. Deterrence by denial was also weak because the target was not a network to be hardened but a public sphere to be influenced. This is a key reason the case challenges the standard grammar of cyber conflict: the decisive effects were cognitive and political, not technical.

Perspective reconstruction

The **African perspective**, reconstructed on its own terms, begins from the observation that information warfare is not a novelty invented in the North Atlantic but a long-standing feature of imperial and post-colonial politics. African scholarship on sovereignty, extraversion, and the colonial state—associated with Grovogui, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, and others—suggests that control over information has always been central to domination, from colonial propaganda and radio to Cold War coups and contemporary digital extraction. From this vantage, the 2016 US election is not an unprecedented rupture but a visible instance of techniques that have long been tested in weaker states: the manipulation of perception, the exploitation of institutional fragility, and the use of external actors to shape domestic outcomes. The African perspective also highlights asymmetry: African states and societies are often treated as objects of information operations, data extraction, and platform experimentation, while great powers discover vulnerability only when operations reach their own capitals. It further insists that African agency matters: journalists, civil society, and regional institutions have developed practices of verification and resistance that are not captured by Northern security frameworks. The Malabo Convention and debates over data localization express an attempt to reclaim digital sovereignty, but they also reveal a tension between state control and citizen protection. What the African perspective contributes is a longue durée and a decolonial critique: it shows that the "crisis" of 2016 is partly a crisis of Northern exceptionalism, in which techniques long normalized in the global South are suddenly recognized as threats when they affect great powers. What it can miss, if taken alone, is the specific tradecraft of the Russian operation and the particular vulnerabilities of the US electoral and media system.

The **Chinese perspective** interprets the case through information security and cyber sovereignty. It tends to see the US as simultaneously the architect and victim of an open information order: American platforms dominate global communication, while American political institutions proved vulnerable to manipulation. From this view, 2016 demonstrates the dangers of unmanaged information flows and justifies state-led governance of the information space. The Chinese perspective contributes an awareness of platform power as geopolitical power, but it occludes the difference between protecting citizens and protecting the state, and it can treat all foreign information influence as equivalent to subversion.

The **Russian perspective** treats the case as an example of reflexive control and strategic competition in the information domain. It would emphasize that information has always been contested, that Western states conduct their own influence operations, and that the US response reflects an inability to accept vulnerability. This perspective contributes a theory of how perception can be shaped without direct coercion, but it occludes accountability, denies or minimizes state responsibility, and normalizes the erosion of democratic trust as an acceptable instrument of policy.

The **Western perspective** frames the case as an attack on democratic self-determination and as evidence that

deterrence frameworks are inadequate for information operations. It contributes attribution, legal accountability, and institutional reform, including election-security measures and platform scrutiny. Its self-critique is important: Western states have conducted information operations, surveillance, and covert action, and platform business models amplified the harm. What it can miss is its own tendency to treat 2016 as exceptional rather than as part of a broader pattern of global information manipulation, and to underweight the role of domestic inequality and polarization in making the operation effective.

The **UN perspective** frames the case as a violation of sovereignty and non-interference, even where operations are conducted through proxies and digital means. It contributes a normative baseline and a forum for dialogue, including GGE and OEWG processes that affirm existing international law applies to cyberspace. Its limitation is enforcement: norms without verification and consequence may be acknowledged rhetorically while being ignored operationally. The UN perspective also struggles to define where legitimate international persuasion ends and prohibited interference begins, especially in an era of global media and diaspora politics.

Explicit adjudication

No single perspective fully explains the 2016 case. The Russian perspective best explains the operational logic: reflexive control, deniability, and the strategic use of information to shape adversary decision-making. The Western perspective best explains the harm: the damage to democratic legitimacy, the need for attribution, and the inadequacy of deterrence. The transnational analysis best explains the mechanism: the operation succeeded because state tradecraft was amplified by platform architecture and by domestic polarization. The African perspective best explains the global significance: it situates the case within a longer history of information domination and reveals the double standard by which great powers recognize as crisis what weaker states have long endured. The Chinese perspective best explains the structural power of platforms but overreaches when it equates openness with vulnerability and state control with security. The UN perspective provides the necessary normative vocabulary but lacks the capacity to adjudicate competing claims.

On balance, the strongest explanation is a layered one: Russian doctrine supplied intent and method; transnational platforms supplied reach and amplification; US domestic polarization supplied susceptibility; and weak norms supplied impunity. The Russian perspective is therefore the best single account of why the operation took the form it did, but it is the least adequate account of its legitimacy and consequences. The African perspective is the best corrective to Northern exceptionalism, yet it is less precise about the specific tradecraft. The Western perspective is indispensable for accountability but risks overstating novelty and understating complicity. The most defensible conclusion is that 2016 was not an anomaly in cyber conflict but an illustration of how information operations exploit the gap between technical security, cognitive vulnerability, platform governance, and international law.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Case: The 2010 Stuxnet attack on Iran's Natanz facility — how does it fit or break the grammar of cyber warfare?

Tasks

1. **Level of analysis.** Identify the level or levels at which Stuxnet operates using the Lesson 1 framework (individual, state, systemic, transnational). Explain why a malware operation that crosses all four levels strains that framework, and specify which level you think is analytically decisive for explaining

the operation's success.

2. **Offense-defense balance.** Reconstruct the argument about whether Stuxnet demonstrates offense dominance in cyber conflict or the opposite. Draw on Rid (2013) and the grammar of cyber conflict (attribution problems, deterrence by denial versus punishment). Specify the scope conditions under which your conclusion holds.

3. **Attribution and deterrence.** How was Stuxnet attributed to US and Israeli actors, what evidentiary basis supported that attribution, and what does the case imply for deterrence by punishment? Distinguish between technical attribution, political attribution, and legal attribution.

4. **Theory fit.** Evaluate whether Stuxnet is better understood as cyber warfare, sabotage, or coercion (L20). For each candidate theory, state which scope conditions Stuxnet satisfies and which it violates. Adjudicate on the basis of evidence.

5. **Five-perspective reconstruction.** In 3–5 sentences each, reconstruct how the African (Malabo Convention sovereignty concerns), Chinese (cyber sovereignty, three warfares), Russian (information security doctrine, reflexive control), Western (persistent engagement, self-critique), and UN (GGE norms) perspectives would each interpret Stuxnet.

6. **Falsification.** State what evidence would have to emerge to overturn the consensus that Stuxnet was a state operation, and explain what such evidence would imply for the "blurring of criminal and state action" thesis and for the state-centric grammar of cyber conflict.

Model Answer

The Stuxnet operation against Iran's Natanz enrichment facility in 2010 is the canonical case that both confirms and complicates the grammar of cyber conflict. At the level of analysis, Stuxnet is irreducibly transnational: the malware was designed in one jurisdiction, propagated through global supply chains and removable media, executed against Iranian industrial control systems, and attributed—through forensic analysis and investigative reporting—to a US-Israeli joint program. This transnationality strains the Lesson 1 framework because the operation's causal chain cannot be localized to a single state actor; the "state" that acted was a coalition operating through intelligence agencies, private contractors, and commercial software vendors. The individual level matters too: the operation required engineers who understood Siemens Step 7 and centrifuge physics, meaning that human capital, not just code, was the scarce resource. The analytically decisive level is transnational, because the operation's feasibility depended on globalized supply chains and cross-border technical expertise that no single state could monopolize.

On the offense-defense balance, Stuxnet cuts both ways. Rid (2013) argues that cyber operations are closer to sabotage than to war, and Stuxnet's extended development cycle, its need for zero-day exploits, and its dependence on physical access via infected removable media all suggest that offense is expensive and contingent rather than dominant. Yet the operation succeeded in destroying roughly one-fifth of Iran's centrifuges while remaining covert for over a year, which suggests that a well-resourced attacker can achieve strategic effects with plausible deniability. The scope condition for offense dominance appears to be resource asymmetry: states with advanced signals intelligence and industrial-control-system expertise can penetrate air-gapped networks, but this is not a generalizable capability. Deterrence by denial—hardening Natanz's network segmentation—was partially effective in that Iran eventually detected the intrusion, but only after significant damage. Deterrence by punishment was unavailable to Iran in 2010 because attribution was uncertain and retaliation options were limited; Iran's later cyber operations against Saudi Aramco and US fi-

nancial institutions can be read as delayed, imprecise punishment, illustrating the temporal lag that weakens cyber deterrence.

Attribution of Stuxnet rested on code similarities to other operations, the use of stolen digital certificates, and investigative journalism rather than on any state admission. This matters for deterrence theory: punishment requires that the target know who attacked it, and Stuxnet's attribution was probabilistic and contested for years. The operation thus supports the claim that attribution problems are structural in cyber conflict, not merely technical gaps awaiting better forensics.

Whether Stuxnet is cyber warfare, sabotage, or coercion depends on definitional scope. As warfare, it lacks the violence that Clausewitzian frameworks require; Rid (2013) would classify it as sabotage. As coercion, it fits the logic developed in L20: it was designed to degrade Iran's bargaining position in nuclear negotiations by raising the cost of enrichment, and it was accompanied by diplomatic pressure. The strongest fit is with sabotage-plus-coercion: a covert operation intended to alter an adversary's cost-benefit calculus without triggering armed conflict. It breaks the "war" framing because no state acknowledged it and no kinetic response followed.

The five perspectives diverge sharply. The African vantage, informed by the AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo, 2014), would read Stuxnet as a precedent for violating sovereignty through code: if a state can destroy another's infrastructure remotely, then data localization and sovereign control over critical information infrastructure become security imperatives rather than merely economic preferences. The Chinese perspective, articulated through the "three warfares" doctrine and cyber sovereignty, would emphasize that Stuxnet demonstrates the need for national control over information infrastructure and would likely support Iran's position that the operation violated sovereignty. The Russian perspective, grounded in information security doctrine, would treat Stuxnet as evidence that Western states weaponize information technology while framing their own operations as defensive; reflexive control would suggest that the operation aimed to shape Iranian decision-making about the nuclear program. The Western perspective, particularly the US doctrine of persistent engagement, would read Stuxnet as a successful application of "defend forward" logic—disrupting threats before they materialize—while its self-critical strand would note that the operation's eventual discovery and the proliferation of its techniques into later malware illustrate the blowback risks of offensive cyber operations. The UN perspective, reflected in the GGE consensus reports (2013, 2015, 2021), would stress that Stuxnet occurred in a normative vacuum: the GGE's later affirmation that international law applies to cyberspace was partly a response to operations like Stuxnet, and the 2021 report's emphasis on critical infrastructure protection reflects the lesson that covert sabotage of nuclear facilities threatens international stability.

Falsification of the state-operation consensus would require evidence that a non-state actor—criminal, terrorist, or corporate—developed and deployed Stuxnet independently. Such evidence would not merely revise attribution; it would undermine the "blurring of criminal and state action" thesis by showing that the operation was criminal rather than state-sponsored, and it would force a re-evaluation of whether the grammar of cyber conflict is state-centric at all. Absent such evidence, Stuxnet remains the boundary case that defines the field: an operation that was strategic in effect, covert in execution, and ambiguous in legal status.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In December 2020, a supply-chain compromise of the SolarWinds Orion network management platform was disclosed, affecting an estimated 18,000 organizations including multiple US government agencies and Fortune 500 companies. The intrusion, attributed by US intelligence to Russia's

Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR), had persisted undetected for approximately nine months, during which attackers accessed email systems and, in some cases, moved laterally into classified networks. The operation involved no destructive payload; instead, it was a sustained espionage campaign conducted through a trusted software update channel. The case raises questions about whether supply-chain compromise constitutes warfare, espionage, or something in between, and about the adequacy of existing deterrence frameworks when the attacker's objective is intelligence collection rather than disruption. It also tests the limits of attribution: the US government formally attributed the operation to Russia, but attribution rested on intelligence community assessment rather than on publicly verifiable forensic evidence, and no state has been held legally accountable.

(b) Required memo headings (use as prompts):

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking the SolarWinds compromise to its strategic effects. Specify the level of analysis at which the mechanism operates, the scope conditions under which it functions, and what would have to be true for the mechanism to fail.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) would interpret the SolarWinds case. For each, state what it contributes and what it occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one historical case (pre-2010 or non-cyber) that shares the mechanism you identified, and specify the respects in which the analogy holds and breaks down.
- **Falsifiers:** State at least two pieces of evidence that, if they emerged, would overturn your central claim about the case. Explain what each would imply for your mechanism and for the broader theory.

(c) Self-check: Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen next), and prescription (what should be done) as four separate operations, and that no section conflates them.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which of the following best captures the central theoretical lesson of the Stuxnet case for the grammar of cyber conflict?

A. Stuxnet proves that cyber offense is always dominant because malware can destroy physical infrastructure.

B. Stuxnet demonstrates that attribution is impossible in cyberspace, making deterrence by punishment permanently unworkable.

C. Stuxnet shows that cyber operations can achieve strategic effects only under narrow scope conditions—high resource asymmetry, physical access, and extended preparation—while remaining legally and politically ambiguous.

D. Stuxnet confirms that cyber warfare is simply a new domain of conventional war governed by existing jus in bello rules.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **A** is wrong because it overstates offense dominance. Stuxnet required an eighteen-month development cycle, zero-day exploits, stolen digital certificates, and physical access via removable media. Offense

was expensive and contingent, not automatic; the case supports Rid (2013) in showing that cyber operations are closer to sabotage than to war, and that offense dominance holds only under conditions of extreme resource asymmetry.

- **B** is wrong because it conflates difficulty with impossibility. Attribution of Stuxnet was probabilistic and contested for years, but it was eventually achieved through forensic analysis and investigative reporting. The case supports the claim that attribution problems are structural, not that they are insurmountable; deterrence by punishment is weakened and delayed, not permanently unworkable.
- **C** is correct. Stuxnet achieved strategic effects (destruction of roughly one-fifth of Iran's centrifuges) only under narrow scope conditions: advanced signals intelligence, industrial-control-system expertise, physical access, and an extended preparation period. It remained legally and politically ambiguous because no state acknowledged it and no kinetic response followed, illustrating the gap between strategic effect and legal status that defines the grammar of cyber conflict.
- **D** is wrong because it ignores the central debate. Rid (2013) argues that cyber war will not take place, and the UN GGE process (2013, 2015, 2021) has struggled to establish that existing international law fully governs cyber operations. Stuxnet's covert, unacknowledged character and the absence of a kinetic response demonstrate that cyber operations do not map neatly onto conventional war's legal and political categories.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Significant cyber incidents by target category and suspected actor type (CSIS chronology, 2005–2024; indicative patterns, not exhaustive counts)

Target category	State-linked (suspected)	Criminal / ransomware	Unknown or unattributed	Illustrative pattern
Critical infrastructure (energy, water, transport, health)	High and rising	High and rising	Moderate	Shift from espionage toward operational disruption and extortion
Government / defense / diplomatic systems	High	Low to moderate	Moderate	Persistent access, credential theft, and strategic intelligence collection
Financial sector	Moderate	High	Moderate	Fraud, extortion, and payment-system disruption

Target category	State-linked (suspected)	Criminal / ransomware	Unknown or unattributed	Illustrative pattern
Health sector	Moderate	High	Moderate	Ransomware against hospitals; high societal cost and low tolerance for downtime
Media, elections, and public institutions	High	Low	Moderate to high	Narrative manipulation, leaks, and trust erosion
Private technology and supply-chain firms	High	Moderate	Moderate	Compromise of trusted vendors and software-update channels

Data note: CSIS-style chronologies are event-driven and Western-reporting heavy; absence of an incident is not evidence of absence, and attribution labels often reflect intelligence assessments rather than adjudicated findings.

Table 2 — Disinformation campaign estimates and themes (EU DisinfoLab and adjacent platform/government reporting; indicative ranges)

Campaign theme	Geographic focus	Estimated reach (indicative)	Core technique	Source family
Election interference and democratic trust	US, EU, selected Global South states	Large-scale (platform takedowns and reach estimates)	Fake personas, leaked documents, narrative amplification	EU DisinfoLab, platform transparency reports, government assessments
Public-health narratives	Global	Very large during 2020–2022	Misleading medical claims, impersonation of experts	WHO, platform reports, EU DisinfoLab
War and conflict narratives	Ukraine, Middle East, Africa	Large and sustained	State media, proxy outlets, synthetic media	EU DisinfoLab, OSINT groups, platform reports

Campaign theme	Geographic focus	Estimated reach (indicative)	Core technique	Source family
Migration and border politics	EU, US, border regions	Moderate to large	Emotional imagery, false statistics, dehumanizing frames	EU DisinfoLab, fact-checking consortia
Climate and energy narratives	Global, EU, US	Moderate	Delay, doubt, and polarization campaigns	Academic and NGO monitoring

Data note: Reach estimates are not comparable across platforms; "impressions" are not beliefs, and take-down counts measure enforcement capacity as much as campaign scale.

Table 3 — State-linked and state-adjacent APT ecosystem (MITRE ATT&CK groups, vendor reporting, and public indictments; qualitative mapping)

Actor cluster	Suspected sponsor	Primary objective	Typical target set	Doctrinal frame
Russia-linked clusters	Russian military/intelligence services	Espionage, disruption, political influence	Government, energy, media, elections	Information security, reflexive control, active measures
China-linked clusters	PLA- and MSS-linked entities	Long-term access, IP theft, strategic positioning	Technology, defense, telecom, critical infrastructure	Three warfares, cyber sovereignty, asymmetric competition
Iran-linked clusters	Iranian state and proxy networks	Retaliation, regional coercion, espionage	Regional rivals, US/Israeli targets, diaspora	Deterrence by punishment, proxy competition
DPRK-linked clusters	North Korean state	Revenue generation, espionage, disruption	Finance, crypto, defense, media	Sanctions evasion, regime survival
Western state-linked operations	US, Israel, and allies (publicly attributed in select cases)	Counter-proliferation, disruption, intelligence	Adversary nuclear/missile programs, terrorist networks	Persistent engagement, defend forward, covert action
Criminal ransomware groups	Non-state, sometimes state-tolerated	Extortion and profit	Hospitals, municipalities, SMEs, supply chains	Market logic with occasional political utility

Data note: APT labels are vendor conventions; clusters merge, split, and rebrand. Public attribution is politically consequential and should be treated as evidence, not as a neutral fact.

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** How has the distribution of significant cyber incidents shifted between 2005 and 2024—from espionage and data theft toward disruption, extortion, and influence operations—and what mixture of technological change, criminal business models, and geopolitical rivalry best explains that shift?

2. **Level of analysis.** Using the four levels (individual, state, systemic, transnational), which level best explains the 2010 Stuxnet attack on Natanz, and which level is most often underweighted in popular accounts of cyber warfare?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct one incident—such as a ransomware attack on a hospital or an election-interference operation—from the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN vantage points: what does each perspective render visible, and what does it occlude?

4. **Interpretation.** Does the blurring of criminal ransomware and state-linked hacking strengthen deterrence by punishment, weaken it, or transform it into a problem of attribution and jurisdiction?

5. **Limitation.** What are the three most serious validity threats in CSIS incident chronologies, EU DisinfoLab campaign estimates, and APT taxonomies, and how would you triangulate across them without overstating certainty?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The grammar of cyber conflict" (hand-drawn on A4 or whiteboard)

- **Shapes to draw:** Draw a large rectangle as the "conflict space." Inside it, draw a horizontal axis labeled "Attribution confidence" (low on the left, high on the right) and a vertical axis labeled "Escalation risk" (low at the bottom, high at the top). Draw a diagonal dashed line from lower-left to upper-right labeled "Attribution gap."

- **Zones:** In the lower-left, draw a shaded oval labeled "Deterrence by denial (resilience, patching, redundancy)." In the upper-right, draw a shaded oval labeled "Deterrence by punishment (retaliation, sanctions, counter-operations)." In the middle, draw a hatched band labeled "Ambiguity zone: plausible deniability."

- **Labels to place:** "Stuxnet (high capability, contested attribution)," "Hospital ransomware (criminal/state blur)," "Election interference (narrative, not kinetic)," "Attribution threshold," "Escalation ladder."

- **Perspective overlay:** Annotate the left side with "African: sovereignty and capacity gaps"; the top with "Russian: information security and reflexive control"; the right with "Western: deterrence and attribution"; the bottom with "Chinese: cyber sovereignty and three warfares"; and the center with "UN: GGE norms and OEWG process."

Visual 2 — "Blurring of criminal and state action" (hand-drawn Venn diagram)

- **Shapes to draw:** Draw three overlapping circles. Label the left circle "State intelligence / military cyber units," the right circle "Criminal ransomware and fraud networks," and the bottom circle "Proxy, patriotic, or tolerated hackers."

- **Overlap labels:** Label the center intersection "Plausible deniability / shared tooling / shared infrastructure." Label the state-criminal overlap "State tolerance or direction." Label the state-proxy overlap "Patriotic mobilization." Label the criminal-proxy overlap "Access-as-a-service / initial access brokers."

- **Arrows and notes:** Draw arrows from the center to four boxes labeled "Attribution problem," "Jurisdiction problem," "Escalation control," and "Victim harm." Add a small box labeled "Ransomware-as-a-service (RaaS)" pointing into the criminal circle.

- **Perspective overlay:** Annotate the state circle with "Russian/Chinese: information security and sovereignty"; the criminal circle with "Western: law enforcement and sanctions"; the proxy circle with "African: capacity and legal harmonization gaps"; and the center with "UN: norms against harmful ICT activity."

Visual 3 — "Cognitive warfare funnel: the brain as battlefield" (hand-drawn funnel with feedback loops)

- **Shapes to draw:** Draw a wide funnel at the top narrowing to a point at the bottom. At the top, draw a cloud labeled "Attention economy (platforms, algorithms, outrage)." In the upper-middle, draw a box labeled "Narrative injection (disinformation, memes, leaks)." In the lower-middle, draw a box labeled "Emotional salience and identity threat." At the bottom, draw a circle labeled "Belief and behavior change."

- **Feedback loops:** Draw curved arrows from the bottom circle back to the top cloud labeled "Polarization increases engagement" and "Distrust increases susceptibility." Draw a side arrow from the narrative box to a small box labeled "Policy response / counter-narrative."

- **Labels to place:** "Reach ≠ persuasion," "Algorithmic amplification," "Micro-targeting," "Cognitive load," "Resilience and media literacy," "Democratic trust."

- **Perspective overlay:** Annotate the top with "Chinese: information dominance and three warfares"; the middle with "Russian: reflexive control and active measures"; the bottom with "Western: deterrence, resilience, and platform governance"; the side arrow with "UN: human rights and information integrity"; and the feedback loops with "African: digital sovereignty, data localization, and AU cyber norms."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the "grammar" of cyber conflict?	Cyber conflict is not simply war by other means; it has its own grammar: offense-defense balance, attribution problems, escalation ambiguity, and the difficulty of linking effects to political outcomes. Rid (2013) stresses that cyber war is often overstated; Singer and Brooking (2018) stress the normalization of digital conflict.
What is the offense-defense balance in cyberspace?	Offense often has structural advantages: vulnerabilities are hidden, patches lag, and attackers choose time and place. Defense requires continuous maintenance, visibility, and coordination. Scope condition: advantage varies by target maturity and attacker resources.
Why is attribution a core problem?	Technical traces can be spoofed, routed through third countries, or laundered through criminal infrastructure. Attribution is therefore probabilistic and political, not merely forensic. UN GGE reports (2013, 2015, 2021) treat attribution as a state responsibility but do not resolve its evidentiary limits.
Deterrence by denial vs. punishment?	Denial reduces vulnerability and raises attacker cost; punishment threatens retaliation. Punishment requires attribution and credibility; denial works even under uncertainty. Strongest counterargument: denial may be too slow or expensive for complex legacy systems.
What is critical infrastructure targeting?	Attacks on energy, water, health, transport, and finance convert technical access into societal harm. The mechanism is not just data loss but operational disruption and cascading failure.
How do criminal and state action blur?	Shared tools, infrastructure, and tolerance create ambiguity. Ransomware groups may act for profit while serving state interests indirectly. This complicates deterrence, law enforcement, and escalation control.
What is information warfare?	Information warfare targets perception, trust, and decision-making rather than physical systems. Mechanisms include disinformation, leaks, fake personas, and amplification. Pomerantsev (2019) emphasizes the industrialization of deception and the erosion of shared reality.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is cognitive warfare?	Cognitive warfare weaponizes attention, emotion, identity, and narrative. The "brain as battlefield" framing treats cognition as an operational domain. Mechanism: repeated, emotionally salient, identity-aligned messages exploit cognitive shortcuts and social trust.
What are the major national doctrines?	US: persistent engagement and defend forward; Russia: information security and reflexive control; China: three warfares and cyber sovereignty; EU: regulatory and rights-based governance. Heickerö (2022) is useful for comparing doctrinal vocabularies and their strategic assumptions.
What is the African perspective?	African scholarship and policy emphasize cyber sovereignty, data localization, capacity gaps, legal harmonization, and the AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo, 2014). The vantage point highlights dependency, uneven infrastructure, and the cost of imported security models.
What is the UN perspective?	The UN GGE and OEWG processes seek voluntary norms, confidence-building measures, and capacity building. They emphasize state responsibility, protection of critical infrastructure, and no-harm principles, while struggling with enforcement and geopolitical polarization.
How does the 2016 US election case fit?	It illustrates information operations more than classic cyber war: stolen data, narrative amplification, platform exploitation, and trust erosion. It is a case of cognitive and political effect rather than kinetic destruction.

Source log: Rid (2013); Singer and Brooking (2018); Pomerantsev (2019); Heickerö (2022); UN GGE consensus reports (2013, 2015, 2021); AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo, 2014); CSIS significant cyber incident chronology; EU DisinfoLab reports; MITRE ATT&CK group documentation.

Summary: Cyber, information, and cognitive warfare are best understood as overlapping domains with distinct mechanisms: technical exploitation, infrastructure disruption, narrative manipulation, and attention capture. Their effects depend on attribution uncertainty, doctrinal framing, and the social context of the target. African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives disagree not only about solutions but about what counts as the primary threat. The 2016 US election case shows that major strategic effects can occur without physical destruction, while Stuxnet shows that physical effects can occur without declared war.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Cyber warfare is when states or state-like actors use computers to spy, break things, steal money, or change what people believe. Information warfare is when they use stories, leaks, and fake accounts to shape public opinion. Cognitive warfare is when they target how people pay attention and what they trust. The hard part is knowing who did it, deciding how to respond, and avoiding escalation.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure where criminal ransomware ends and state warfare begins; I also tend to treat "disinformation" as persuasion even though reach does not prove belief change. I need to keep separate: access, effect, attribution, and political outcome.

3. **Reread verification.** Rechecking the sources confirms that Rid (2013) warns against inflating cyber war; Singer and Brooking (2018) emphasize normalization; Pomerantsev (2019) emphasizes industrialized deception; Heickerö (2022) helps compare doctrines; and the UN GGE reports (2013, 2015, 2021) frame norms rather than enforcement.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** Cyber conflict is like burglary in a neighborhood where the burglar can wear many disguises: better locks help (denial), but catching and punishing the burglar requires evidence (attribution). The analogy fails because digital tools can be copied instantly, effects can cascade across borders, and "locks" are often maintained by private companies rather than police.

5. **Rewrite.** Cyber, information, and cognitive warfare are distinct but interacting mechanisms—technical access, infrastructure disruption, narrative manipulation, and attention capture—whose strategic meaning depends on attribution, doctrine, and social context. Deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment are not interchangeable; the former works under uncertainty, while the latter requires credible attribution. National doctrines differ in what they treat as the battlefield: systems, information environments, or cognition itself. The African perspective adds that sovereignty, capacity, and data governance are not secondary issues but central to how cyber conflict is experienced and regulated.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L24	Definition	What is the offense-defense balance in cyber conflict?	It refers to whether attackers or defenders hold structural advantage in a given technological and institutional environment. In cyber, low attribution and cheap offense often favor attackers, but resilience, patching, and denial can shift advantage to defenders. Scope conditions include network architecture, legal thresholds, and intelligence capacity.	Western deterrence theory treats it as central; African and UN perspectives stress that imbalance also reflects unequal infrastructure and norm-setting power.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L24	Mechanism	Why does attribution remain the central mechanism problem in cyber conflict?	Attackers can route through proxies, compromised machines, and false flags, while defenders must meet evidentiary standards for retaliation or law enforcement. Attribution is therefore probabilistic and political, not merely technical. This shapes whether responses are denial, punishment, or legal process.	Russian and Chinese doctrines exploit ambiguity; Western frameworks demand higher evidentiary thresholds for public attribution.
L24	Application	Distinguish deterrence by denial from deterrence by punishment in cyber.	Denial seeks to make attacks fail or cost more than benefit through resilience, segmentation, and active defense. Punishment threatens retaliation, sanctions, or legal consequences after attribution. The former is more reliable under uncertainty; the latter depends on credible attribution and proportionality.	UN norms favor denial and restraint; US doctrine increasingly combines both.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L24	Comparison	How does information warfare differ from cyber warfare?	Cyber warfare targets systems, data integrity, and infrastructure through technical intrusion. Information warfare targets beliefs, narratives, and social cohesion through content, amplification, and platform manipulation. They overlap when hacked data is weaponized, but their mechanisms and defenses differ.	Russian doctrine treats information security as broader than network security; Western frameworks often separate them.
L24	Source	What is the core claim of Rid (2013)?	Rid argues that cyber operations are better understood as sabotage, espionage, and subversion than as war in the Clausewitzian sense. He stresses that effects are usually limited, reversible, and below the threshold of armed conflict. The claim is debated, not settled.	It challenges Western alarmism and supports UN emphasis on below-threshold norms.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L24	Debate	Is Stuxnet best classified as cyber war, sabotage, or coercion?	It can be read as sabotage because it physically damaged centrifuges; as coercion because it aimed to delay Iran's nuclear program; and as a precedent for cyber-physical attack. It does not fit a full-scale war model because it was covert, limited, and non-kinetic in human terms.	Western and Israeli strategic narratives emphasize capability; Iranian and UN perspectives emphasize sovereignty violation and escalation risk.
L24	Reconstruction	What is Russian reflexive control in information operations?	Reflexive control is the practice of shaping an adversary's decision-making by feeding it manipulated information so that it voluntarily chooses actions favorable to the initiator. It relies on cognitive and institutional biases rather than direct force. It is a doctrinal tradition, not merely a tactic.	Russian perspective treats it as legitimate strategic communication; Western perspective treats it as manipulation and interference.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L24	Occlusion	What do Western attribution frameworks often occlude?	They can understate the role of domestic polarization, platform business models, and prior foreign-policy grievances in making disinformation effective. They may also treat attribution as closure rather than as one step in a political contest. This risks overestimating technical fixes.	African and post-colonial perspectives highlight unequal voice and historical asymmetry in who gets to define "disinformation."
L24	Adjudication	How should one adjudicate between "cyber war" and "cyber competition" framings?	The cyber war framing fits cases of physical damage or clear armed-attack equivalence; the competition framing fits espionage, influence, and below-threshold disruption. Adjudication should use effects, intent, attribution confidence, and legal threshold rather than rhetoric. Neither framing is universally correct.	UN process favors competition and norms; some Western and Russian doctrines retain war framing for deterrence.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L24	Visual	How do the four levels of analysis apply to cyber conflict?	Individual level covers operators, hackers, and decision-makers; state level covers doctrine and retaliation; systemic level covers offense-defense balance and alliance structures; transnational level covers platforms, criminal markets, and diaspora networks. A complete explanation must specify which level drives the outcome.	African perspective adds transnational platform power and data-extraction asymmetries.
L24	Definition	What is cognitive warfare?	Cognitive warfare targets perception, attention, memory, and decision-making, treating human cognition as the battlespace. It uses narrative, emotion, repetition, and platform affordances to shape behavior without necessarily changing material conditions. It is broader than disinformation alone.	"Brain as battlefield" language is criticized by African and critical scholars for militarizing society and obscuring structural inequality.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L24	Mechanism	How does the attention economy enable information operations?	Platforms optimize for engagement, which rewards outrage, novelty, and identity threat; operators can exploit these incentives to amplify divisive content cheaply. The mechanism is socio-technical: algorithmic ranking plus human psychology plus network effects. Defense requires platform governance, not only fact-checking.	Western regulatory and EU approaches focus on platform accountability; Russian and Chinese approaches emphasize state control of information space.
L24	Comparison	Compare US persistent engagement with Chinese three warfares.	US persistent engagement emphasizes continuous cyber operations below armed-conflict thresholds to defend forward and impose costs. Chinese three warfares emphasizes public opinion, psychological, and legal warfare to shape perceptions and legitimacy. One is operational and network-centric; the other is political and legitimacy-centric.	African perspective warns both can erode sovereignty and local information ecosystems.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L24	Source	What do the UN GGE reports (2013, 2015, 2021) contribute?	They articulate voluntary norms for state behavior in cyberspace, including not attacking critical infrastructure and cooperating on incident response. They establish a common vocabulary but lack enforcement. Their value is normative scaffolding, not binding law.	UN perspective centers consensus; African states often seek capacity-building and development alongside norms.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100)

Concept	My score (0-100)	Calibration cue
Offense-defense balance in cyber		Can I name two scope conditions and one counterargument?
Attribution problem		Can I explain why attribution is political as well as technical?
Deterrence by denial vs punishment		Can I give one case where denial worked better than punishment?
Critical infrastructure targeting		Can I distinguish ransomware effects from state strategic intent?
Criminal/state blurring		Can I identify evidence that would separate tolerance from command?
Information warfare		Can I separate content manipulation from system intrusion?
Cognitive warfare		Can I explain why it is broader than disinformation?

Concept	My score (0-100)	Calibration cue
National doctrines		Can I compare two doctrines without caricature?
UN cyber norms		Can I state what GGE reports do and do not enforce?
African cyber sovereignty perspective		Can I explain Malabo 2014 in its own terms?

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which concept did I explain most confidently, and what evidence supports that confidence rather than familiarity?
2. Where did my explanation collapse into description of events rather than identification of mechanism?
3. Which perspective did I underweight, and what evidence or case would force me to revise my adjudication?

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Cyber war is imminent or inevitable.	Many cyber operations remain below the armed-conflict threshold; effects are often limited, reversible, or ambiguous.	Rid (2013); UN GGE consensus reports (2013, 2015, 2021).
Attribution is purely a technical problem.	Attribution requires intelligence fusion, legal standards, and political judgment; proxies and false flags make certainty rare.	Heickerö (2022); UN GGE process.
Disinformation succeeds mainly because individuals are irrational.	It exploits platform incentives, identity, network structure, and information asymmetry, not only individual gullibility.	Singer and Brooking (2018); Pomerantsev (2019).
Ransomware is only criminal activity.	State tolerance, safe havens, or strategic use can blur criminal and state action, especially when infrastructure is targeted.	CSIS Significant Cyber Incidents data; AU Convention on Cyber Security (Malabo 2014).
UN cyber norms are binding international law.	GGE reports are voluntary consensus norms and confidence-building measures, not treaties with enforcement.	UN GGE consensus reports (2013, 2015, 2021).

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Cognitive warfare is just propaganda renamed.	It includes attention capture, narrative engineering, and decision-shaping across platforms, not only message content.	Pomerantsev (2019); Singer and Brooking (2018).

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Offense-defense balance	Low attribution, cheap offense, resilience, patching	Rid (2013)	Stuxnet; CSIS incident data	Cyber war vs cyber competition	Sustained physical damage with clear state attribution	L20 coercion
Attribution problem	Proxies, false flags, intelligence fusion, legal thresholds	Heickerö (2022)	2016 US election; APT counts	Technical vs political attribution	Public, verifiable attribution meeting legal standards	L4 post-positivism
Deterrence by denial vs punishment	Resilience and cost-imposition vs retaliation and sanctions	US doctrine; UN norms	Ransomware campaigns	Reliability under uncertainty	Repeated successful denial without retaliation	L7 constructivism
Critical infrastructure targeting	Ransomware, state hacking, criminal/state blur	Singer and Brooking (2018)	CSIS Significant Cyber Incidents	Crime vs war	Clear evidence of state command and control	L57 space and infrastructure
Information warfare	Disinformation, election interference, platform amplification	Pomerantsev (2019)	2016 US election; EU DisinfoLab estimates	Manipulation vs legitimate speech	Independent platform data showing no measurable opinion shift	L7 constructivism

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Cognitive warfare	Narrative, attention economy, emotion, decision-shaping	Pomerantsev (2019); Singer and Brooking (2018)	Social media campaigns	Propaganda vs cognition	Evidence that narratives do not alter decisions	L54 AI and hyperwar
National doctrines	Persistent engagement; reflexive control; three warfares; EU regulation	US, Russian, Chinese, EU doctrines	Doctrine documents and official statements	Sovereignty vs intervention	Convergence of doctrines under shared norms	L56 scientific statecraft
UN cyber norms	Voluntary norms, confidence-building, capacity-building	UN GGE (2013, 2015, 2021)	Consensus reports	Law vs norms	Adoption of binding cyber treaty	L? (not specified)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 — Within 24 hours:** Reconstruct the five key ideas from memory without notes; then check against the lesson and correct gaps in the error log.
- **R2 — Within 72 hours:** Redraw the three visual anchors from memory and explain Stuxnet using the four levels of analysis.
- **R3 — Within 1 week:** Write a short memo on the 2016 US election case, including perspective reconstruction for all five traditions and an explicit adjudication.
- **R4 — Within 2 weeks:** Analyze the CSIS and EU DisinfoLab data, identifying one trend, one anomaly, and one limitation for each dataset.
- **R5 — Within 1 month:** Teach the distinction between cyber warfare and information warfare to a peer, then update the confidence audit and error log.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define offense-defense balance and name two scope conditions.
☐ I can explain why attribution is both technical and political.
☐ I can distinguish deterrence by denial from deterrence by punishment.
☐ I can explain how ransomware blurs criminal and state action.
☐ I can distinguish cyber warfare from information warfare.
☐ I can define cognitive warfare and explain the attention-economy mechanism.
☐ I can compare US persistent engagement and Chinese three warfares.

☐ I can explain Russian reflexive control as a doctrinal tradition.
☐ I can summarize the EU regulatory approach.
☐ I can state what the UN GGE reports do and do not enforce.
☐ I can explain the African perspective on cyber sovereignty and Malabo 2014.
☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to Stuxnet.
☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives on the 2016 US election case.
☐ I can identify at least one falsifier for a major claim in this lesson.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in my memo.
☐ I have updated my confidence audit and error log.
☐ I can explain one limitation of the CSIS or EU DisinfoLab data.
☐ I can state the core claim of Rid (2013) and one major critique of it.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- **Cyber war debate:** Rid (2013), *Cyber War Will Not Take Place*.
- **Information operations:** Singer and Brooking (2018), *LikeWar*.
- **Propaganda and cognition:** Pomerantsev (2019), *This Is Not Propaganda*.
- **Cyber operations and legal thresholds:** Heickerö (2022).
- **UN cyber norms:** UN GGE consensus reports (2013, 2015, 2021).
- **African cyber governance:** African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo, 2014).
- **Incident data:** CSIS Significant Cyber Incidents (2005-2024).
- **Disinformation estimates:** EU DisinfoLab campaign reports and datasets.
- **Doctrinal comparison:** US, Russian, Chinese, and EU cyber and information-security doctrine documents.
- **Critical infrastructure and ransomware:** Case studies of state-linked and criminal cyber operations against infrastructure.

End of Lesson 24. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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26. Maritime, Chokepoints, Space, and Gray-Zone Conflict

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 25: Maritime, Chokepoints, Space, and Gray-Zone Conflict
Module	Module 4: Security Studies and Warfare
Prerequisites	L20 (coercion), L22 (conventional), L24 (cyber)
Interleaved links	Forward to L44 (Hormuz/Bab el-Mandeb), L48 (Indo-Pacific sea denial), L57 (space)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, visuals, flashcards

Field	Value
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is how states and non-state actors contest control of the sea and of space without crossing the threshold into declared armed conflict, and why the geography of maritime chokepoints makes that contest both possible and dangerous. Maritime power has historically been the decisive instrument of global order: Alfred Thayer Mahan's 1890 argument that sea control determines national greatness remains the baseline against which contemporary strategies are measured, and Julian Corbett's 1911 refinement—that command of the sea is a means to an end rather than an end in itself—still structures naval doctrine. Yet the contemporary maritime environment is no longer one in which a single navy can guarantee command of the sea. It is characterized instead by layered denial: anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) systems that raise the cost of entry for superior fleets, gray-zone coercion that exploits legal and political ambiguity about what counts as an act of war, and the militarization of space-based infrastructure on which maritime operations increasingly depend. The student who masters this lesson will be able to explain why a superpower's carrier strike group can be held at risk by a weaker state's missile and mine arsenal, why a coast guard vessel can accomplish what a warship cannot, and why the destruction of a single satellite can disable a fleet's ability to find, fix, and target.

This lesson sits at the intersection of three preceding modules and synthesizes their logics in a domain where physical geography and legal ambiguity interact. Lesson 20 established the logic of coercion: how actors use threats to compel or deter without necessarily fighting, and how the credibility of threats depends on capability and resolve. Lesson 22 examined conventional warfare and the operational art of massed force, including the problem of escalation dominance. Lesson 24 extended the analysis to cyber, showing how attacks below the threshold of armed conflict can achieve strategic effects while exploiting attribution problems. Lesson 25 brings these threads together in the maritime and space domains, where narrow straits, shallow littorals, and orbital mechanics create a distinctive form of conflict in which the physical environment is itself a weapon. The forward links to Lessons 44, 48, and 57 indicate that the concepts introduced here will be applied in greater depth to the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb, to Indo-Pacific sea denial, and to space security. The student should therefore treat this lesson as a conceptual foundation that will be tested against specific cases later in the curriculum, not as a self-contained case study.

The African perspective is not an add-on to this analysis; it is the vantage point from which the lesson's central puzzle becomes most visible and most consequential. For African coastal states, maritime security is not primarily about great-power competition but about sovereignty over exclusive economic zones, the protection of fisheries from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, the suppression of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea, and the vulnerability of Red Sea shipping lanes to disruption. The 2023–2024 Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea demonstrated how a non-state actor operating from the African littoral could impose costs on global trade disproportionate to its military capacity, while African states bore the consequences in the form of disrupted port revenues, heightened insurance costs, and the militarization of their coastal waters by external powers. African scholarship—ranging from Grovogui's critique of international legal hierarchies and the racialized foundations of sovereignty, to Mbembe's analysis of necropolitics and the governance of death, to Bayart's work on the criminalization of the state and the extraversion of

African politics—suggests that maritime insecurity in Africa is inseparable from the political economy of coastal governance and the externalization of security by foreign powers. The African vantage reveals what the great-power frame occludes: that chokepoints are not merely strategic assets to be controlled but lived spaces whose populations experience the consequences of distant competition, and that the legal categories of the law of the sea often encode rather than resolve power asymmetries.

The lesson's five key ideas build a cumulative argument about how maritime and space domains are contested in the twenty-first century. First, the sea power traditions of Mahan and Corbett establish the theoretical baseline: command of the sea as a precondition for global power, and the distinction between command and control that shapes how navies are employed. Second, chokepoint geography—Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, Malacca, Suez, Panama—translates that theory into concrete leverage, showing how narrow passages convert maritime traffic into strategic vulnerability and how transit volumes create asymmetric dependence. Third, A2/AD strategies by China, Iran, and Russia demonstrate how weaker actors contest US maritime primacy not by matching American fleet size but by raising the cost of access through missiles, mines, submarines, and integrated air defense. Fourth, gray-zone coercion—coast guard vessels, maritime militia, cyber operations, economic pressure—shows how states achieve objectives below the threshold of armed conflict by exploiting ambiguity about attribution and about what counts as a use of force. Fifth, space as a military domain reveals the orbital infrastructure on which all maritime operations now depend—intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT), and communications—and the vulnerability of that infrastructure to anti-satellite weapons. Together, these ideas explain why maritime conflict today is less about fleet engagements than about denial, ambiguity, and infrastructure.

After mastering this lesson, the student will be able to reconstruct the Mahanian and Corbettian logics and identify their scope conditions; map the strategic significance of the five major chokepoints and explain how transit volumes create leverage; analyze A2/AD as a mechanism of cost-imposition rather than fleet parity; distinguish gray-zone coercion from armed conflict using legal and operational criteria; and evaluate the role of space-based ISR, PNT, and communications in maritime operations. The student will also be able to reconstruct five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on any maritime or space security issue, identifying what each contributes and what it occludes, and to adjudicate between competing explanations on the basis of evidence. The assessment tasks require the student to apply these skills to the Iranian asymmetric strategy in the Strait of Hormuz and to Chinese activity in the South China Sea, and to interpret data on oil transit volumes, satellite launches, and ASAT tests. The Bloom ceiling of evaluate and create means that the student is expected not merely to describe but to judge and to design analytical frameworks.

A methodological caution runs through the lesson and should frame the student's approach. Maritime and space security are domains in which classification, commercial sensitivity, and strategic ambiguity make evidence scarce and contested. Quantitative claims—transit volumes, satellite counts, incident tallies—should be treated as indicative rather than definitive, and the student should distinguish carefully between description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen), and prescription (what should be done). The strongest analyses in this field are those that specify mechanisms, state scope conditions, and acknowledge counterarguments rather than asserting conclusions. The lesson's structure—key ideas with causal claims, mechanisms, scope conditions, observable implications, and perspective notes—is designed to train that habit of mind, and the independent memo requires the student to demonstrate it explicitly.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. From Lesson 20: Define coercion and distinguish compellence from deterrence. What two conditions must hold for a coercive threat to be credible?
2. From Lesson 20: What is "gray-zone" conflict as introduced in the coercion module, and why does ambiguity about the threshold of armed conflict create strategic opportunity?
3. From Lesson 22: What is the "stability-instability paradox," and how does it shape the relationship between nuclear deterrence and conventional conflict?
4. From Lesson 22: Explain "escalation dominance" and identify one historical case in which a state lost escalation dominance despite material superiority.
5. From Lesson 24: How does cyber coercion differ from kinetic coercion with respect to attribution, reversibility, and the threshold of armed conflict?
6. From Lesson 24: What is the "attribution problem," and how does it constrain the range of responses available to a state that has suffered a cyber attack?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Why might a state with a smaller navy be able to deny a larger navy access to a maritime region, and what does this imply about the relationship between fleet size and strategic effectiveness?
2. How do maritime chokepoints convert geography into coercive leverage, and which actors are most vulnerable to disruption at each of the five major chokepoints?
3. What distinguishes gray-zone coercion from armed conflict under international law, and why does that distinction matter for alliance commitments and rules of engagement?
4. Why is space considered a military domain, and what are the strategic consequences if satellite-based ISR, PNT, or communications infrastructure is disrupted or destroyed?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Sea control / command of the sea**: The ability to use the sea for one's own purposes while denying its use to the adversary; the Mahanian baseline of maritime strategy, historically associated with fleet engagements and blockades.
- **Sea denial**: The ability to prevent an adversary from using the sea without necessarily being able to use it oneself; the strategy of weaker actors who cannot contest command but can raise the cost of access.
- **A2/AD (anti-access/area-denial)**: A layered strategy combining long-range missiles, mines, submarines, and integrated air defense to prevent an adversary from entering or operating within a maritime theater.
- **Chokepoint**: A narrow maritime passage through which a large share of global shipping must transit, creating geographic concentration that can be exploited for coercion or denial.
- **Gray-zone coercion**: Actions that achieve strategic objectives below the threshold of armed conflict, exploiting ambiguity about attribution, legality, and the definition of a use of force.
- **Maritime militia**: Civilian or paramilitary vessels operating under state direction to assert maritime claims, harass foreign vessels, or conduct surveillance while maintaining plausible deniability.
- **UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea)**: The 1982 treaty framework govern-

ing maritime zones, navigation rights, and resource jurisdiction; the legal baseline for most maritime disputes.

- **EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone)**: The maritime zone extending up to 200 nautical miles from a state's coast, in which the state has sovereign rights over resources but not full sovereignty.
- **ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance)**: The collection and processing of information about adversary forces and the environment, increasingly dependent on space-based assets.
- **PNT (Positioning, Navigation, Timing)**: Satellite-based services, such as GPS, that enable precise navigation and synchronization of military operations; a critical and vulnerable infrastructure.
- **ASAT (Anti-Satellite weapon)**: A weapon designed to destroy or disable satellites, creating debris and threatening the orbital infrastructure on which modern militaries depend.
- **Freedom of navigation (FONOP)**: Operations conducted to challenge excessive maritime claims and assert rights under UNCLOS, typically by naval vessels transiting disputed waters.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the causal mechanisms through which sea power translates into strategic advantage, distinguishing Mahan's command-of-the-sea logic—concentration of battle fleets, decisive engagement, and the opening or closing of oceanic systems—from Corbett's control-of-communications logic—selective, limited, and often indirect control of sea lanes for specific operational purposes—and specifying the scope conditions, including industrial capacity, geographic position, alliance structure, and technological environment, under which each applies rather than the other.

2. **Evaluate** the strategic significance of maritime chokepoints by linking geographic constriction to transit volumes, vulnerability, and the political economy of energy security, using EIA World Oil Transit Chokepoints data as an evidentiary baseline and identifying which chokepoints are substitutable through alternative routes and which are not.

3. **Compare** A2/AD strategies across Chinese, Iranian, and Russian cases, identifying the common mechanism—denial of access and freedom of action to a superior maritime power—and the divergent scope conditions: Chinese near-seas defense and blue-water transition, Iranian regional deterrence in the Gulf, and Russian Arctic and Black Sea bastion defense.

4. **Synthesize** gray-zone coercion as a distinct category of conflict that exploits thresholds of attribution, escalation, and legal status, drawing on coast guard, maritime militia, cyber, and economic instruments, and distinguishing it from both conventional warfare and peacetime competition.

5. **Apply** the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to a maritime case, reconstructing African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives, and adjudicating among them on the basis of evidence rather than assertion. Each objective is assessed through the worked example, problem pair, and independent memo that follow.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Sea power traditions: Mahan, Corbett, and the strategic logic of maritime dominance

Bolded Causal Claim: Maritime dominance is not a natural endowment of coastline or fleet size but a produced strategic condition: states that convert geographic position, industrial capacity, and institutional coherence into sustained control of sea communications gain disproportionate influence over trade, coercion, and alliance politics, while states that neglect any of these inputs see their maritime advantage decay even when their navies appear strong on paper.

Mechanism: The mechanism runs through three linked stages, and it is worth tracing each because the common error is to stop at the first. First, geographic position and physical conformation create differential access to sea lanes and chokepoints. Mahan's six determinants—geographic position, physical conformation, extent of territory, number of population, character of the people, and character of the government—are best read as a checklist of inputs rather than a ranking, and the last two, which concern national character and governmental capacity, are the ones most often neglected by analysts who prefer hardware metrics. Second, industrial and fiscal capacity converts these inputs into hulls, bases, and logistics; without this, geography is inert, which is why several states with excellent maritime geography have failed to become sea powers. Third, and most decisive, institutional coherence—naval doctrine, officer education, civil-military relations, and alliance management—determines whether the fleet is used to command the sea or merely to display it. Mahan's command-of-the-sea logic, developed in *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* (1890) in the context of late-nineteenth-century US naval expansion and the study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European powers, treats the decisive battle fleet as the instrument: concentrate superior force, destroy the enemy fleet, and thereby open the oceans to one's own commerce and close them to the adversary's. Corbett's control-of-communications logic, developed in *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (1911) in the context of British imperial defense and coalition warfare, treats the sea as a medium to be used rather than a territory to be owned; command is often partial, temporary, and exercised for specific operational purposes such as protecting an expeditionary force or interdicting a particular trade route. The two are not rivals so much as answers to different questions: Mahan asks how to win the war at sea, while Corbett asks how to use the sea to win the war. The mechanism of dominance, on either account, is the denial of use to the adversary combined with the preservation of use for oneself, sustained over time by logistics, bases, and the legal and commercial infrastructure that makes sea-borne trade predictable. A further element, often omitted, is the maritime-industrial complex itself: shipyards, ports, merchant marine, and the financial systems that underwrite them. Sea power is not a navy; it is a maritime system in which the navy is one component.

Scope Conditions: Mahan's logic applies most cleanly where (a) the state possesses or can seize a decisive material advantage in capital ships, (b) the theater permits concentration and a single climactic engagement, and (c) the political objective requires opening or closing entire oceanic systems. It weakens where fleets are dispersed by alliance obligations, where technology—submarines, mines, aircraft, and now precision missiles—fragments the battle space, or where the adversary adopts a sea-denial rather than sea-control posture. Corbett's logic applies more broadly, especially for medium powers, coalition warfare, and expeditionary operations, but risks underestimating the political value of visible dominance and the deterrent effect of a fleet-in-being. Both traditions assume a state-centric, Westphalian actor with a professional navy and a coherent national strategy; neither was designed for gray-zone competition in which coast guards and maritime militias carry the operational load, or for a world in which commercial shipping is globally distributed and legally regulated by international convention. Till's contemporary restatement in *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (2018) emphasizes that seapower today is a system of systems—naval, commercial, informational, and legal—and that the Mahan-Corbett debate is best treated as a spectrum rather than a

binary. The scope conditions have also shifted with nuclear weapons: a decisive fleet engagement between nuclear-armed states is now implausible, which pushes even great powers toward Corbettian limited control and deterrence rather than Mahanian annihilation.

Observable Implications: If Mahan's logic dominates in a given state's strategy, one expects fleet concentration, carrier strike group deployments, investments in capital ships, and a preference for decisive engagement; if Corbett's, one expects convoy systems, distributed maritime operations, emphasis on logistics and sustainment, and the use of the sea as a highway rather than a battlefield. Empirically, the US Navy's post-Cold War posture has oscillated between both: the 1990s and 2000s emphasized carrier-centric power projection that was Mahanian in form, while recent distributed maritime operations concepts and expeditionary advanced base operations reflect Corbettian adaptation to A2/AD environments. A further implication: states that score high on Mahan's determinants but low on institutional coherence—large populations, extensive coastlines, weak governance—should exhibit "hollow" maritime power, impressive on paper and fragile in use. This is observable in several post-colonial navies whose procurement outpaced training, maintenance, and doctrine. Conversely, states with modest determinants but high coherence, such as the United Kingdom in the nineteenth century or Japan in the early twentieth, can punch above their geographic weight. The observable test is not fleet size but sustained operational availability and the ability to project force at distance without external support.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). African maritime thought does not begin with Mahan or Corbett; it begins with the experience of the sea as a vector of extraction and domination. From the transatlantic slave trade through colonial partition and the post-independence scramble for offshore resources, the ocean was not a commons to be commanded but a corridor of dispossession. Post-independence African states inherited coastlines without the industrial or institutional capacity to police them, and the Mahanian ideal of a battle fleet was neither affordable nor strategically apt. African scholarship reframes sea power accordingly. Rodney's analysis of how colonialism underdeveloped African maritime capacity, and Nkrumah's insistence that political independence without economic control of sea-borne trade is incomplete, shift the question from commanding the sea to controlling the terms of one's own maritime participation. Bayart's work on the politics of extraversion and Mamdani's analysis of the colonial state's institutional legacies further illuminate why African maritime governance often operates through external dependency—foreign training, donated vessels, and intelligence sharing—rather than autonomous capacity. The contemporary African maritime agenda, visible in the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy and in regional frameworks such as ECOWAS, the Indian Ocean Commission, and the Gulf of Guinea Commission, centers on blue economy development, illegal fishing, piracy, maritime domain awareness, and the protection of offshore energy infrastructure rather than fleet battles. The African vantage point thus reveals what Mahan and Corbett occlude: that for most of the world's states, the problem is not commanding the sea but surviving its asymmetries. African navies and coast guards operate under severe resource constraints; their strategic logic is closer to Corbett's limited control than to Mahan's decisive engagement, but even Corbett presumes a state with choices, whereas many African maritime agencies are structurally dependent on external partners. This dependency is not merely a capacity gap; it is a sovereignty question, because the terms of external assistance shape whose priorities—counter-piracy, counter-narcotics, or great-power competition—define African maritime security.

Chinese. Chinese maritime strategy has moved from a Mahanian phase of fleet building and carrier acquisition toward a hybrid that uses Mahanian symbols—carriers, blue-water deployments, and a growing surface

fleet—to serve Corbettian and A2/AD purposes: near-seas control, denial of US access, and protection of sea lines of communication. Holmes and Yoshihara's analysis in *Red Star over the Pacific* (2017) emphasizes that Beijing's strategic culture blends Western-derived concepts with indigenous traditions, and that the "near seas"—the Yellow, East, and South China Seas—remain the priority even as blue-water ambitions grow. The Chinese perspective contributes the insight that maritime dominance is historically contingent and that a rising power can contest an incumbent's command without replicating its fleet structure, substituting missiles, submarines, and sensors for capital ships. It also reveals the political dimension of sea power: the construction of artificial islands and the use of coast guard and militia are not merely tactical choices but claims about sovereignty and order.

Russian. Russian maritime strategy, shaped by geographic enclosure, ice, and the legacy of continental defense, has historically emphasized bastion defense and sea denial rather than global command. The Arctic and Black Sea are treated as strategic sanctuaries; the Northern Fleet's ballistic-missile submarines require protected bastions from which to guarantee second-strike capability. Russian thought thus inverts Mahan: the goal is not to command the ocean but to deny an adversary the ability to threaten the homeland from it. This perspective highlights the defensive and deterrent dimensions that Mahanian triumphalism understates, and it reminds us that sea power can be exercised negatively—through denial—as well as positively—through control.

Western. The Western, and especially Anglo-American, perspective treats freedom of navigation and open sea lanes as foundational to global order and economic prosperity. Mahan's influence on US naval thought is direct and enduring; Corbett's is more visible in British and Commonwealth doctrine. The Western contribution is the institutionalization of maritime dominance through alliances, forward bases, and carrier strike groups, and the legal framing of the high seas as a global commons. Its occlusion is the tendency to universalize a historically specific, post-1945, US-led maritime order as natural or as the legal baseline, and to treat challenges to that order as threats to order itself rather than as competing claims about legitimate maritime governance.

UN. The UN perspective is legal-institutional: the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982) codifies maritime zones, freedom of navigation, and the common heritage of mankind. It provides the framework within which all other perspectives operate, but it lacks enforcement capacity and depends on state consent. The UN contribution is the attempt to convert maritime power into legal entitlement and to provide dispute-resolution mechanisms; its occlusion is the gap between law and power, visible when major states decline to ratify or comply, and the fact that legal frameworks can be invoked selectively by powerful states while weaker states lack the capacity to enforce their entitlements.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Chokepoints and maritime geography: Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, Malacca, Suez, Panama

Bolded Causal Claim: Maritime chokepoints are not merely narrow waterways; they are structural bottlenecks in the global economy, and their geography converts localized disruption into systemic leverage over energy prices, supply chains, and diplomatic bargaining. A state or non-state actor that can credibly threaten closure, harassment, or selective inspection at a chokepoint can impose costs far exceeding its conventional naval power, because global shipping and energy markets are organized around the assumption of continuous, low-friction transit through a small number of passages.

Mechanism: Chokepoints concentrate flows that are otherwise dispersed across oceans. Shipping routes are not random; they follow great-circle paths, canal shortcuts, and established lanes that minimize fuel, time, and crew costs. When a passage narrows, traffic density rises, maneuvering room shrinks, and the cost of delay compounds. The mechanism operates through several channels. First, volume concentration: a large share of global petroleum, liquefied natural gas, and container traffic moves through a handful of straits and canals, so disruption at one node affects many supply chains simultaneously. Second, inelastic short-run alternatives: rerouting around Africa or South America can add days or weeks, increase fuel consumption, disrupt port schedules, and strain crew rotations; pipelines and overland routes have limited spare capacity and cannot absorb sudden maritime shortfalls. Third, market amplification: energy and freight markets price expected continuity, so threats, inspections, or partial disruptions can raise spot prices, war-risk premiums, and insurance costs even without a formal closure. Fourth, operational friction: mines, small-boat attacks, drone strikes, or regulatory harassment can force convoys, reduce throughput, and create queues that propagate through just-in-time logistics. Fifth, legal and infrastructural leverage: straits used for international navigation are governed by transit-passage rules, while canals are sovereign infrastructure subject to fees, maintenance, and political control. The U.S. Energy Information Administration's *World Oil Transit Chokepoints* (2024) treats these passages as critical nodes in global petroleum logistics; their significance lies not only in volume but in the absence of ready substitutes at acceptable cost. Hormuz connects Gulf producers to the Arabian Sea and concentrates oil and gas exports behind a narrow maritime corridor. Bab el-Mandeb links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and therefore to the Suez route between Asia and Europe. Malacca connects the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and is central to East Asian energy and container flows. Suez is an artificial shortcut whose blockage or closure immediately lengthens Europe-Asia trade. Panama performs a similar function between the Atlantic and Pacific. Each chokepoint has distinct physical, legal, and political characteristics, but all share the same structural property: they make global commerce dependent on a small amount of geography.

Scope Conditions: Chokepoint leverage is strongest when traffic volume is high relative to physical capacity and scheduling tolerance; when alternatives are slow, expensive, or politically unavailable; when the commodity is energy or time-sensitive manufactures; when a disruptor can sustain low-cost harassment without triggering full-scale war; when naval protection is absent, stretched, or politically constrained; when the coastal state has legal or physical control over adjacent waters or canal infrastructure; and when insurance and financial markets amplify perceived risk. It weakens when strategic petroleum reserves buffer supply shocks; when pipelines, alternative ports, or canal expansions diversify routes; when multinational naval escorts restore throughput; when demand shocks reduce traffic; when legal frameworks and diplomacy de-escalate; and when technological change reduces dependence on a single passage. Chokepoints can be bypassed over decades, but not during a crisis. Some are natural straits whose legal status is contested; others are artificial canals whose vulnerability includes accidents, climate stress, and infrastructure failure as well as coercion.

Observable Implications: If chokepoint geography is strategically salient, one should observe naval deployments and multinational task forces near straits; spikes in war-risk insurance premiums after incidents; rerouting, delays, and port congestion; commodity price volatility correlated with threats rather than only with closures; investment in alternative routes, pipelines, ports, and canal expansions; legal disputes over transit passage, exclusive economic zone rights, and coastal-state security zones; assertions of fee, inspection, or regulatory control by littoral states; and the treatment of piracy, drone attacks, or harassment as strategic rather than merely criminal events. Chokepoint incidents should also internationalize quickly, because global markets transmit local disruption into price and risk signals far from the passage itself.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). For African states, chokepoints are not abstract nodes in a Western logistics map; they are spaces where African trade, food imports, fishing livelihoods, and port revenues are exposed to disruption. The Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb, the Gulf of Guinea, and the approaches to the Cape all matter because African economies are deeply integrated into maritime trade but often lack the capacity to secure their own waters. African scholarship on maritime security frequently begins from this capacity gap: many coastal states do not have enough vessels, surveillance systems, or legal institutions to police exclusive economic zones, so external navies operate in African waters under counter-piracy or maritime-security mandates. That creates a sovereignty dilemma in which protection against piracy, illegal fishing, or trafficking may come at the cost of ceding operational control to outside powers. The African perspective also emphasizes that chokepoint disruption is not only a great-power issue. Red Sea disruptions raise costs for African importers and exporters; Gulf of Guinea piracy has historically imposed costs on regional trade and coastal communities. From an African vantage, the central question is not simply which power controls a strait, but whether maritime governance protects coastal communities, artisanal fishers, port workers, and national revenues. Broader African international-relations scholarship—Grovogui on the coloniality of international order, Mbembe on necropolitics and the production of African space, Bayart on the historical sociology of the state, and Mamdani on the bifurcated state—suggests that chokepoints are embedded in an unequal global economy in which African states are often price-takers in markets whose volatility is generated elsewhere. Thinkers and analysts such as Aning and Danso on African maritime security highlight the need for regional cooperation, maritime domain awareness, and legal-institutional development rather than blue-water fleet competition. The African perspective therefore stresses frameworks such as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, coast-guard capacity, information sharing, and EEZ governance. Its contribution is to show that chokepoint politics is also a question of livelihoods and sovereignty; its occlusion in great-power debates is the reduction of African coastal security to piracy statistics or to basing opportunities for external powers.

Chinese. China's "Malacca dilemma" exemplifies chokepoint anxiety: a large share of its energy imports and trade passes through straits it does not control. Chinese strategy therefore combines naval modernization, port and infrastructure investments along the Belt and Road, pipeline diversification, and near-seas defense. Chokepoints are seen as vulnerabilities to be mitigated and, potentially, as leverage in regional crises. This perspective emphasizes economic security and the right to development, and it often frames external naval presence in Asian straits as threatening. Its contribution is to show that chokepoint dependence can drive both military and infrastructure policy; its occlusion is the concern of smaller littoral states whose waters are traversed by great-power competition.

Russian. Russia's maritime geography is shaped by ice, enclosed seas, and limited warm-water access. Chokepoints such as the Turkish Straits, Danish Straits, and Arctic passages matter for energy exports and naval mobility. Russian strategy uses energy exports as leverage and seeks to control or influence chokepoints and adjacent seas, including the Black Sea, Baltic, and Arctic. This perspective highlights how chokepoints can be weaponized through energy, sanctions, and naval presence; its occlusion is the cost imposed on importers and the legal norms of transit.

Western. Western maritime strategy treats chokepoints as nodes in a global commons requiring freedom of navigation. The United States and allies deploy carrier strike groups and multinational task forces to keep straits open, viewing closure as a threat to global commerce and alliance credibility. This perspective contributes operational capacity and legal advocacy for transit passage; its occlusion is the way "freedom of navigation" can be experienced by coastal states as external military presence, and the possibility that

Western energy-security interests do not align with local development.

UN. The UN perspective is legal-institutional: the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea defines transit passage through straits used for international navigation, exclusive economic zone rights, and the common heritage of the seabed. It provides the vocabulary for resolving chokepoint disputes and supports maritime-security resolutions. Its contribution is normative order; its occlusion is enforcement weakness and selective compliance, especially when major powers or canal authorities assert security exceptions.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — A2/AD and sea denial: Chinese, Iranian, and Russian strategies to contest US maritime primacy

Bolded Causal Claim: Anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) strategies do not require a weaker maritime power to defeat the U.S. Navy in open-ocean battle; they require only that it raise the cost, risk, and uncertainty of U.S. entry and operations in a defined theater sufficiently to deter or delay intervention during a crisis.

Mechanism: A2/AD is a compound strategy. Anti-access seeks to prevent an adversary from entering a theater; area denial seeks to degrade its operations once inside. The mechanism is not sea control in the Mahanian sense but sea denial: the weaker power does not need to command the ocean globally, only to deny the stronger power the ability to use a specific maritime space for a limited time. It works through cost-exchange asymmetry and geographic advantage. Land-based systems are often cheaper and more survivable than ships; missiles can be dispersed, hidden, and fired in salvos; sensors create targeting chains; and the defender operates near homeland bases with interior lines. The main mechanisms include long-range precision strike against ships, bases, and logistics nodes; integrated air defense that denies air superiority; submarines and mines that threaten sea lines of communication and carrier groups; coastal radar, satellites, and drones that provide over-the-horizon targeting; electronic and cyber warfare that disrupts communications, navigation, and command; and ambiguous "gray-zone" layers such as coast guard, militia, and fishing vessels that create friction below the threshold of armed conflict. Geography matters: the first island chain, the Persian Gulf, the Black Sea, and the Arctic allow land-based fires to cover maritime approaches and compress the attacker's maneuver space. Holmes and Yoshihara's work on Chinese maritime strategy emphasizes that sea denial is a classic asymmetric response to superior sea control, while Till's treatment of sea power distinguishes command of the sea from denial of its use. The strategic logic is therefore not to win a decisive fleet battle but to make intervention too costly, too slow, or too uncertain for the political objectives at stake.

Scope Conditions: A2/AD is most effective when the defender has secure land bases and interior lines; when the attacker depends on a small number of forward bases and long logistics chains; when missile and sensor networks are survivable, redundant, and well integrated; when the crisis is short and the political stakes are high; when the defender can tolerate escalation; and when geography constrains the attacker's approach. It is less effective when the attacker can operate from range, disperse forces, use stealth or autonomy, or rely on allied access; when cyber or kinetic strikes can degrade command and control; when economic blockade or attrition can outlast the denial bubble; when the defender's systems are vulnerable to preemption; or when a coalition imposes costs that exceed the defender's capacity. A2/AD is also not a static fortress. It is a contest between detection and concealment, offense and defense, and its effectiveness depends on the survivability of the kill chain. There is an additional instability: if the defender fears its A2/AD systems will be destroyed in a first strike, it may face "use it or lose it" pressure, increasing crisis instability.

Observable Implications: If A2/AD is shaping maritime competition, one should observe development and testing of anti-ship ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and hypersonic weapons; militarization of islands, reefs, and coastal positions; submarine and mine-warfare exercises; electronic-warfare incidents and navigation

interference; doctrinal adaptations by the United States and allies, such as distributed maritime operations, expeditionary advanced base operations, and long-range fires; allied base hardening and access agreements; changes in commercial routing and insurance pricing; and crisis simulations or war games showing delayed or denied intervention. One should also observe arms racing between denial systems and missile defense, as well as debates over whether A2/AD creates deterrence or merely shifts the locus of risk.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The A2/AD frame is largely a great-power concept, but African states encounter its logic in asymmetric and often non-military forms. African maritime insecurity is frequently characterized by "sea denial" exercised not by advanced missile networks but by pirates, insurgents, illegal fishers, traffickers, and weak governance. From an African perspective, the relevant question is who can deny use of coastal waters to whom: artisanal fishers may be denied access by industrial trawlers or security zones; coastal communities may be denied safety by piracy; states may be denied revenue by illicit trafficking. African scholarship on maritime security—Aning and Danso, among others—and broader critical international-relations work by Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, and Mamdani suggest that importing A2/AD vocabulary without attention to governance can misdiagnose African maritime problems as military gaps rather than political-economic ones. At the same time, African littorals are affected by great-power A2/AD dynamics: Red Sea and Gulf of Aden disruptions, foreign naval bases, and competition for port access can militarize African coasts. The African perspective reveals that sea denial is not only a strategy of rising powers against the United States; it is also a condition of weak maritime governance, where non-state actors deny states the ability to enforce law at sea. It also cautions that external powers' A2/AD competition can externalize risk onto African shipping lanes and ports. Thus African maritime strategy prioritizes coast-guard capacity, information sharing, legal frameworks, and regional mechanisms over participation in high-end denial contests. Its contribution is to restore the human-security dimension; its occlusion in great-power debates is the tendency to treat maritime space as a battlefield between fleets rather than as a space of livelihoods, food security, and state capacity.

Chinese. China's A2/AD strategy is framed as defensive and regional: to prevent U.S. intervention in a Taiwan or South China Sea crisis by making the costs prohibitive. It combines missiles, submarines, mines, air defenses, and island-based infrastructure. This perspective contributes the logic of cost-imposition and homeland defense; it occludes how regional neighbors experience these capabilities as offensive and how "defensive" denial can enable coercion short of war.

Russian. Russia uses A2/AD to protect strategic bastions and compensate for naval inferiority, especially in the Black Sea, Baltic, and Arctic. Coastal missiles, submarines, and air-defense systems create denial zones around Crimea, Kaliningrad, and the Northern Fleet. This perspective emphasizes geographic defense and escalation control; it occludes the destabilizing effects on NATO's eastern flank and on commercial shipping in enclosed seas.

Western. Western strategy sees A2/AD as a challenge to freedom of navigation, alliance credibility, and the ability to defend partners. Responses include distributed operations, long-range fires, missile defense, and allied capacity building. This perspective contributes operational innovation and deterrence; it occludes how Western forward presence itself may be perceived as threatening and how high-end competition can crowd out cooperative maritime security.

UN. The UN perspective focuses on legal constraints: the law of armed conflict at sea, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and maritime-security resolutions. A2/AD raises questions about escalation, civilian shipping, and the distinction between military and civilian infrastructure. Its contribution is

normative and humanitarian; its occlusion is limited enforcement and the tendency of major powers to treat legal frameworks as instruments rather than constraints.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Gray-zone coercion: below the threshold of armed conflict (coast guard, militia, cyber, economic)

Bolded Causal Claim: Gray-zone coercion achieves strategic gains by operating in the ambiguous space between peace and war, exploiting the adversary's reluctance to escalate, so that incremental faits accomplis accumulate without triggering collective defense or legal accountability.

Mechanism: The mechanism rests on three interacting elements that together convert ambiguity into territory, influence, or economic advantage. First, ambiguity of attribution and intent: actions are conducted by actors whose state affiliation is deniable or plausibly civilian—coast guard vessels, maritime militia, fishing fleets, cyber proxies, and state-owned enterprises—so that the victim cannot easily establish the legal predicate for a forceful response. The coercer deliberately blurs the line between state and non-state, military and civilian, public and private, which complicates both legal categorization and political decision-making. Second, threshold manipulation: each individual act is calibrated to remain below the level that would justify armed response under international law or alliance commitments, such as the armed-attack threshold that triggers Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty or collective self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter. The coercer studies the adversary's red lines and operates just beneath them, forcing the target to either accept the incremental loss or risk being seen as the escalator. Third, cumulative fait accompli: repeated small gains—feature construction on disputed reefs, harassment of fishing vessels, economic coercion through trade restrictions or tourism bans, cyber intrusions that impose costs without kinetic exchange—shift the status quo incrementally. Each step is small enough to be tolerated; the aggregate is large enough to be decisive. Reversal becomes costlier than acceptance, and the new baseline is treated as the starting point for the next round. Supporting instruments include economic leverage (debt, market access, sanctions), information operations that shape domestic and international narratives, and cyber operations that degrade infrastructure without crossing into armed attack. The mechanism is not deception alone; it is the structural exploitation of the gap between legal categories (peace versus war) and operational reality, combined with the adversary's own risk aversion and institutional constraints.

Scope Conditions: Gray-zone coercion is most effective when (a) the target's alliance commitments require a clear armed attack to trigger collective defense, creating a threshold the coercer can approach but not cross; (b) the target's domestic politics favor de-escalation and reward leaders who avoid war; (c) the coercer possesses escalation dominance in the local theater, meaning it can raise costs faster than the target can respond; (d) international institutions lack enforcement capacity, so legal protests do not translate into material consequences; and (e) the issue is salient to the coercer but not to third parties, limiting coalition formation. It fails when the target has pre-committed and credible red lines, when attribution becomes unambiguous and public, when the coercer overreaches and triggers a unified response, or when the target has high risk tolerance and is willing to absorb costs. It is also less effective against states with strong local capacity and against issues framed as existential by the target's public. The scope conditions imply that gray-zone coercion is a strategy of the relatively strong against the relatively constrained, not a universal tool.

Observable Implications: Indicators include increased coast guard and maritime militia activity in disputed waters; construction or fortification of features; economic coercion episodes such as trade embargoes, tourism bans, or regulatory harassment; cyber incidents below the threshold of armed attack; and diplo-

matic protests without military response. Metrics include the number of maritime incidents, area of feature construction, changes in bilateral trade volumes, and the frequency of coast guard encounters. Predictions: gray-zone activity intensifies where A2/AD protects the coercer and where the target lacks local capacity; it diminishes where the target has established credible red lines and rapid attribution capabilities. A key diagnostic is the gap between the coercer's public framing (routine law enforcement, rights protection) and the target's framing (coercion, aggression), which itself becomes a site of contestation.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). African states experience gray-zone coercion less as a strategic puzzle of great powers and more as a continuum of maritime insecurity that directly threatens livelihoods and sovereignty. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing by distant-water fleets, piracy, and unauthorized resource extraction in exclusive economic zones constitute gray-zone activity that is often normalized by its perpetrators as commercial or enforcement conduct. The African perspective emphasizes that the "gray zone" is frequently a luxury of powers that can afford ambiguity; for coastal African states, the same activities constitute existential economic harm and erosion of sovereign rights. Responses include regional maritime security architectures such as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and the ECOWAS integrated maritime strategy, alongside external partnerships with the European Union and the United States. This perspective contributes attention to non-state and criminal actors, to the economic dimension of maritime coercion, and to the reality that many African states lack the capacity to attribute or respond, making them structurally vulnerable. It occludes great-power strategic competition framing but reveals how gray-zone logic operates at lower levels of capability and how legal ambiguity can be exploited by commercial as well as state actors.

Chinese. China frames its maritime law-enforcement activities as legitimate rights protection within waters it claims, rejecting the "gray zone" label as a Western construct designed to delegitimize lawful conduct. The coast guard and maritime militia are presented as civilian instruments of sovereignty administration and public order, not as military assets. This perspective contributes a challenge to Western legal categorization and asserts that enforcement of claimed rights is not coercion. It occludes the coercive effect on neighboring states, the militarization of civilian agencies, and the cumulative fait accompli that results from sustained presence in disputed waters.

Russian. Russia employs gray-zone tactics in the Black Sea, the Arctic, and the Baltic, including the use of "little green men," maritime militia, economic pressure, and information operations. It frames these as defensive responses to NATO expansion and as protection of Russian interests or populations. This perspective contributes a demonstration of hybrid methods and a critique of Western double standards. It occludes state responsibility, the erosion of trust, and the destabilizing effect of plausible deniability on crisis management.

Western. Western analysts, notably Mazarr (2015) and Hoffman (2007), define the gray zone as deliberate competition below armed conflict, emphasizing the need for integrated deterrence, resilience, attribution capabilities, and whole-of-government responses. This perspective contributes conceptual clarity, policy frameworks, and a focus on the coercer's intent. It occludes the tendency to treat all non-Western maritime activity as gray-zone coercion, the possibility that Western states also operate in the gray zone, and the risk that the framework itself can be used to justify escalation.

UN. The UN perspective stresses legal thresholds: the prohibition on the use of force in Article 2(4) of the Charter, the law of armed conflict, and UNCLOS. Gray-zone activities challenge the binary legal framework by operating in the space between peace and war. This perspective contributes a normative anchor and a vocabulary for distinguishing lawful from unlawful conduct. It occludes the inability to adjudicate ambiguous

cases in real time and the lack of enforcement mechanisms when states exploit legal gaps.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Space as a military domain: ISR, PNT, communications, and anti-satellite weapons

Bolded Causal Claim: Space has become a warfighting domain because modern military operations depend on satellites for intelligence, navigation, and communications, and because anti-satellite weapons can deny these services, creating both first-mover incentives and deterrence dilemmas.

Mechanism: The mechanism is dependency coupled with vulnerability. Modern precision warfare, network-centric operations, and global power projection rely on space-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) for targeting and situational awareness; on positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT), principally through GPS and other global navigation satellite systems, for precision munitions, logistics, and command and control; and on satellite communications (SATCOM) for beyond-line-of-sight connectivity. Denying or degrading these services can paralyze conventional forces without any kinetic exchange on Earth, making space an attractive axis of attack. Anti-satellite (ASAT) capabilities—direct-ascent kinetic interceptors, co-orbital systems, directed-energy weapons, and cyber attacks on ground stations or satellite links—create a "use it or lose it" dynamic: because satellites are fragile, orbits are predictable, and constellations take years to rebuild, a state that fears losing its space assets in a crisis may be tempted to strike first. Conversely, mutual vulnerability may produce deterrence if both sides recognize that space warfare would degrade everyone's capabilities and generate debris that endangers all users. The domain is further complicated by dual-use assets (civilian and military satellites often share platforms and frequencies), congestion (tens of thousands of objects in orbit), and the difficulty of attribution for non-kinetic attacks. Space warfare thus couples tightly to terrestrial conflict: space is not a separate theater but an enabler whose disruption cascades through air, land, and maritime operations. The mechanism also includes the commercialization of space, which multiplies the number of actors and assets and blurs the military-civilian boundary further.

Scope Conditions: Space militarization escalates when (a) a state's military doctrine is heavily space-dependent, so that loss of space services would be operationally catastrophic; (b) ASAT capabilities are deployed and tested, demonstrating both intent and capacity; (c) crisis instability exists in terrestrial theaters, raising the premium on rapid, decisive action; and (d) no binding arms-control regime covers conventional space weapons, leaving the domain governed by unilateral restraint. It is constrained by mutual vulnerability, the risk of debris generation (the Kessler syndrome, in which cascading collisions render orbits unusable), the economic cost and long lead times of space assets, and the shared interest of all states in preserving access to space. The domain favors states with independent launch capacity, space situational awareness, and the industrial base to reconstitute constellations. It also favors states that can integrate commercial space services into military operations, as the United States has done extensively.

Observable Implications: Indicators include satellite launches by state and by sector (military, civil, commercial); ASAT tests, such as China's 2007 direct-ascent test, the United States' 2008 Operation Burnt Frost, India's 2019 Mission Shakti, and Russia's 2021 test; the establishment of dedicated space forces (the US Space Force in 2019, and analogous organizations elsewhere); doctrinal statements treating space as a warfighting domain; and the proliferation of commercial satellite constellations. Metrics include the number of satellites in orbit, launch rates, debris counts, and the share of military versus commercial launches. Predictions: increased hardening and redundancy of space assets, greater allied space cooperation and burden-sharing, development of on-orbit servicing and maneuver capabilities, and possible norms restricting debris-generating ASAT tests. A key diagnostic is the gap between states' public commitments to the peaceful use

of outer space and their actual military space programs.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). African states are increasingly space actors—Egypt, Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Rwanda among them—but primarily as users and emerging launchers rather than as militarized space powers. The African perspective emphasizes equitable access to space benefits, including communications, remote sensing for agriculture, climate monitoring, and disaster management, and the risk that orbital congestion and debris pose to all users regardless of their contribution to the problem. It stresses African participation in governance, exemplified by the African Space Agency established in 2018 and hosted in Egypt, and the need for capacity building rather than militarization. This perspective contributes a development and equity lens, highlighting how space militarization threatens a shared global commons on which developing states depend. It occludes great-power military competition but reveals how the weaponization of space could deny developing states the benefits of space-based services and how African states can leverage multilateral forums to shape norms.

Chinese. China frames space as a domain for peaceful development and national rejuvenation, while simultaneously building ASAT capabilities and space-force structures to counter US space dominance. It emphasizes sovereignty over space activities conducted from its territory and opposes what it characterizes as US pursuit of space dominance and the weaponization of space by others. This perspective contributes advocacy for multipolar space governance and for constraints on US missile defense and space-based systems. It occludes China's own ASAT tests, its military space programs, and the dual-use nature of its civilian space infrastructure.

Russian. Russia views space as strategic high ground and maintains ASAT capabilities, early-warning systems, and a space force, framing US missile defense and space militarization as threats to strategic stability. It has advocated for a treaty banning the placement of weapons in outer space (the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space Treaty, PPWT, proposed with China). This perspective contributes arms-control advocacy and a critique of US unilateralism. It occludes Russia's own ASAT tests, including the November 2021 test that generated significant debris, and its reliance on space assets for military operations.

Western. The Western, particularly US, perspective treats space as a warfighting domain requiring space superiority, reflected in the establishment of the US Space Force in 2019 and in allied cooperation frameworks. It emphasizes deterrence, resilience, and the integration of commercial space into military operations. This perspective contributes operational innovation and a focus on protecting space-enabled forces. It occludes how US space dominance drives other states' ASAT development, how commercial space complicates military control and attribution, and how the framing of space as a warfighting domain may itself accelerate militarization.

UN. The UN perspective centers on the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, which prohibits the placement of weapons of mass destruction in orbit and declares space the province of all mankind, and on the work of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). It also encompasses efforts to prevent an arms race in outer space (PAROS) and discussions of transparency and confidence-building measures. This perspective contributes a legal framework and a normative commitment to peaceful use. It occludes the treaty's silence on conventional (non-WMD) space weapons, the lack of verification and enforcement mechanisms, and the difficulty of adapting Cold War-era frameworks to contemporary commercial and military space activity.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on maritime, chokepoint, and space security begins from a fundamentally different ontological premise than the other four perspectives: the sea is not primarily a medium of power projection or a global commons to be policed, but a lived environment whose governance determines whether coastal communities survive. This premise, developed across African political thought from Fanon's analysis of colonial violence through Mbembe's necropolitics to contemporary African security scholarship, reframes every element of the lesson's five key ideas.

Consider sea power traditions. Mahan's (1890) argument that command of the sea determines national greatness, and Corbett's (1911) refinement that sea control must be exercised for specific strategic purposes, were formulated within imperial contexts in which African coastlines were objects of European naval strategy rather than subjects of their own maritime policy. The African perspective does not simply reject these traditions; it reveals their occlusion. Rodney's analysis of how European maritime expansion underdeveloped Africa, and Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism, show that sea power as historically practiced was inseparable from the extraction of African resources and the denial of African sovereignty over adjacent waters. Cabral's insistence that national liberation required the reclamation of both territory and culture extends to the maritime domain: the sea was not empty space to be commanded but a zone of African life and labor that colonial powers appropriated. Nyerere's ethic of self-reliance (ujamaa) translates into a maritime register as the demand that African states develop the capacity to govern their own waters rather than depend on external naval protection. The contemporary African maritime security agenda—articulated in the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy and the Lomé Charter—thus treats sea power not as dominance but as the capacity of African states to govern their exclusive economic zones, protect fisheries, and prevent the offshore looting of hydrocarbons. What the African vantage contributes that Western, Chinese, or Russian perspectives cannot is the recognition that maritime insecurity in Africa is less often a problem of great-power contestation than of state incapacity, corruption, and the externalization of environmental costs onto African coastal populations.

Chokepoints illustrate this reframing with particular clarity. The Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, Malacca, Suez, and Panama appear in Western and Chinese strategic discourse as nodes in global energy and trade networks whose disruption would cascade through the world economy. The African perspective adds that two of these chokepoints—Bab el-Mandeb and Suez—are adjacent to African territory, and that their disruption is not an abstract systemic risk but a direct threat to African economies and populations. The Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping from late 2023 onward, which prompted rerouting around the Cape of Good Hope, increased shipping costs and insurance premiums that were passed through to African importers and consumers, while also disrupting Ethiopian and Sudanese access to ports. The Cape route itself, historically the path around Africa, reminds us that African geography has always been central to global maritime circulation even when African agency was denied. Moreover, the African perspective highlights that chokepoint security is inseparable from the security of the coastal states that border them: Djibouti hosts multiple foreign military bases whose presence is justified by chokepoint protection but whose operations are governed by agreements that African governments have limited capacity to renegotiate. Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject, applied to maritime space, suggests that African coastal populations often experience chokepoint security as something done to them by external powers rather than by their own states.

The Gulf of Guinea provides the most developed African case. Piracy in the Gulf, which peaked in the early 2010s and has evolved into a complex of armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, and oil theft, is not merely

a law-enforcement problem but a symptom of the political economy of the postcolonial state. Bayart's analysis of the "politics of the belly" and the criminalization of the state helps explain how maritime criminal networks are embedded in elite political economies, with stolen oil laundered through international markets. Danso's work on African maritime security governance emphasizes that external naval interventions—such as the US-led Africa Partnership Station or European Union naval missions—can suppress symptoms without addressing the political roots, and may even displace criminal activity to less policed waters. Aning's research on African security governance reinforces this point: maritime insecurity is produced by the interaction of weak state capacity, elite predation, and global commodity markets, not simply by the absence of naval patrols. The African perspective thus contributes a causal mechanism that Western security studies often misses. What it may occlude is the extent to which non-state maritime violence also serves the interests of external actors who benefit from cheap security provision and continued access to resources, and the difficulty of disentangling local criminality from transnational networks that include foreign shipping companies and commodity traders.

A2/AD and sea denial, when viewed from Africa, appear less as strategies of great-power contestation than as extensions of a longer history of external powers using African coastal waters for their own strategic purposes. The US Africa Command's maritime security initiatives, the Chinese naval base in Djibouti, and Russian port access agreements in Sudan and elsewhere all represent forms of sea denial or access denial exercised by external powers on African territory. The African perspective reveals that A2/AD is not only something that China does to the United States in the Western Pacific; it is also something that all major powers do, in different registers, to African coastal states when they establish military facilities, conduct surveillance, or restrict African access to their own maritime resources. Grovogui's critique of sovereignty in international relations is pertinent here: the formal sovereignty of African states over their territorial waters is repeatedly qualified by the practical dominance of external naval powers and by the conditionalities attached to security assistance. The African Union's maritime strategy attempts to reclaim this sovereignty through regional cooperation, but its implementation is hampered by resource constraints and by the reluctance of member states to pool sovereignty. The "blue economy" discourse, promoted by the African Union and various international partners, offers a developmental framing for maritime governance, but the African perspective warns that without genuine African control, the blue economy risks becoming another vector for external extraction.

Gray-zone coercion is perhaps where the African perspective is most distinctive and most underappreciated in the broader literature. Western and Chinese discussions of gray-zone conflict typically focus on coast guard ramming, maritime militia, and cyber operations in the South China Sea or the Baltic. The African experience of gray-zone coercion is different in form but not in logic: foreign fishing fleets operating under flags of convenience, private military companies providing maritime security, and the use of economic leverage to secure port access and resource concessions. These activities occur below the threshold of armed conflict and are difficult to attribute, yet they systematically erode African coastal state sovereignty. Tamale's work on African feminism and Oyěwùmí's analysis of colonial epistemologies remind us that the "gray zone" is not a new phenomenon but a continuation of the ambiguous sovereignty that characterized colonial and neo-colonial relationships, in which African states were formally independent but practically subordinated. Fanon's analysis of the violence of colonialism, extended to the maritime domain, suggests that the gray zone is where the postcolonial state's weakness is most exploited: not through open conquest but through the accumulation of small, deniable encroachments that cumulatively undermine sovereignty. The African perspective thus contributes the insight that gray-zone coercion is not an innovation of twenty-first-century great-power competition but a persistent feature of the international order as experienced by weaker states.

Space as a military domain, viewed from Africa, raises questions of epistemic and developmental justice. African states are not major space powers; no African state has conducted an ASAT test, and African satellite programs are modest and primarily civilian. Yet African populations are deeply affected by space militarization: GPS and satellite communications underpin African financial systems, agriculture, and disaster response; satellite imagery is used in African conflicts by external powers; and the orbital slots and spectrum frequencies allocated to African states are often underutilized or contested. The African Union's space policy and the African Space Agency, headquartered in Egypt, represent efforts to claim a voice in space governance, but they operate within frameworks—the Outer Space Treaty, the International Telecommunication Union—designed by and for the major space powers. The African perspective reveals that the militarization of space is not only a strategic competition among the United States, China, and Russia; it is also a process that deepens the technological dependence of African states and excludes African priorities—such as earth observation for climate adaptation and agricultural monitoring—from the global space agenda. What this perspective may occlude is the agency that some African states are beginning to exercise through national space programs and through participation in multilateral forums, as well as the possibility that commercial space actors may offer African states alternatives to great-power dependence.

In sum, the African perspective on maritime, chokepoint, and space security contributes three things that the other four perspectives cannot: first, a historical memory of maritime power as extraction and domination, which disciplines celebratory accounts of sea power; second, an insistence that maritime security must be measured by its effects on coastal communities and state capacity, not only by great-power balances; and third, a recognition that the "gray zone" and space militarization are not new phenomena but continuations of older patterns of asymmetric subordination. Its occlusions include a tendency to understate the genuine security dilemmas faced by major powers, a risk of romanticizing African solidarity in the face of diverse national interests, and limited analytical attention to the technical military dimensions of A2/AD and ASAT systems that require specialized expertise. Nevertheless, as the longest and most developed of the five perspectives in this lesson, the African vantage is not a regional add-on but a constitutive lens: it shows that the global maritime order is not a neutral commons but a historically produced structure of inequality, and that any theory of maritime security that does not account for this is incomplete.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on maritime, chokepoint, and space security is organized around the concept of "near-seas defense" (jinhai fangyu) and the strategic imperative of breaking through what Chinese strategists describe as the "first island chain" constraint. This framework, articulated in successive defense white papers and in the writings of Chinese naval strategists, treats the Western Pacific as a zone in which China must be able to operate without interference, and the broader maritime domain as an arena in which China is transitioning from a continental to a maritime power.

Sea power traditions are received selectively. Mahan's emphasis on fleet concentration and decisive battle influenced early Chinese naval thinking, but contemporary Chinese strategy has moved toward Corbett's more nuanced conception of sea control as a means to specific ends, particularly the protection of sea lines of communication and the denial of adversary access. Holmes and Yoshihara's analysis of Chinese maritime strategy highlights this evolution: China's A2/AD complex—encompassing anti-ship ballistic missiles, submarines, mines, and integrated air defense—is designed not to achieve command of the global ocean but to make the cost of US intervention in the Western Pacific prohibitive. The Chinese perspective thus contributes a distinctive causal mechanism: sea denial as a defensive strategy of a rising power confronting an established maritime hegemon. What it occludes is the extent to which this "defensive" posture is perceived

as threatening by regional neighbors who do not share China's assessment of its own security needs.

Chokepoints are central to Chinese strategic anxiety. China imports roughly two-thirds of its oil, much of it transiting the Strait of Malacca, which Chinese strategists have long described as a strategic vulnerability—the "Malacca dilemma." The Belt and Road Initiative's maritime component, including port investments in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and elsewhere, represents an attempt to diversify routes and reduce dependence on chokepoints controlled by or vulnerable to US naval power. The African perspective's observation that Chinese port investments can constrain African sovereignty is, from the Chinese viewpoint, a byproduct of commercial strategy rather than a deliberate design; yet the Chinese perspective does not fully engage with the sovereignty concerns that these investments raise, nor with the possibility that commercial infrastructure can be converted to military use.

Gray-zone coercion is a signature Chinese strategy in the South China Sea. The use of coast guard vessels, maritime militia, and fishing fleets to assert claims without triggering armed conflict represents a deliberate exploitation of the threshold between peace and war. The Chinese perspective frames these activities as law enforcement and rights protection within China's claimed maritime jurisdiction, not as coercion. This framing contributes the insight that the "gray zone" is partly a product of legal ambiguity—particularly the unresolved status of maritime claims under UNCLOS—and that states will exploit this ambiguity to advance their interests. What it occludes is the coercive effect on smaller states, the erosion of the normative framework that China itself invokes when its own interests are at stake, and the way in which gray-zone tactics can escalate unpredictably.

Space is increasingly central to Chinese strategy. The BeiDou navigation system, China's ASAT test in 2007, and lunar and Mars exploration programs reflect a determination to achieve space independence and, ultimately, space leadership. The Chinese perspective treats space as a domain in which China must not be dependent on US systems, and in which it can challenge US information dominance. This contributes a multipolar vision of space governance that challenges US unilateralism. It occludes the debris and escalation risks of ASAT testing, the difficulty of reconciling competitive space programs with cooperative governance, and the possibility that China's space ambitions may generate the same security dilemmas that US space dominance has created for others.

In sum, the Chinese perspective contributes a coherent strategic logic—near-seas defense, A2/AD, and space independence—that explains much of contemporary maritime competition. Its occlusions include the security dilemmas it creates for neighbors, the legal ambiguity it exploits, and the gap between its defensive rhetoric and its expansive maritime claims.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on maritime, chokepoint, and space security is shaped by geography: Russia is a continental power with limited warm-water access, and its maritime strategy reflects a persistent anxiety about encirclement and a determination to secure the approaches to its territory. This geographic imperative, articulated in Russian naval doctrine and in the writings of Russian strategists, organizes Russian thinking across all five key ideas.

Sea power traditions are received through a continental lens. Russian strategists have historically been skeptical of Mahan's emphasis on global maritime dominance, preferring a more limited conception of sea power focused on coastal defense and the protection of adjacent seas. The Soviet navy's blue-water ambitions, developed under Gorshkov, represented a partial departure, but post-Soviet Russian naval strategy has returned to a focus on "near seas" and the protection of maritime approaches. Till's analysis of contemporary mar-

itime strategy notes that Russia's naval capabilities have declined relative to the Soviet era, but that Russia compensates through asymmetric means: submarines, mines, and coastal defense systems. The Russian perspective thus contributes a model of maritime power as denial rather than command—a strategy of making adjacent waters too dangerous for adversary operations rather than seeking global sea control.

Chokepoints matter to Russia primarily through the lens of the Black Sea and the Turkish Straits. Control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, governed by the Montreux Convention, is a persistent Russian concern, and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 was partly motivated by the desire to secure the naval base at Sevastopol and to control the maritime approaches to southern Russia. The Arctic, with the Northern Sea Route, represents a new chokepoint of sorts: as ice recedes, Russia seeks to control this route and to assert sovereignty over the continental shelf. The African perspective's observation about external powers using African waters applies here in reverse: Russia seeks to prevent external powers from using waters adjacent to its territory, and its Arctic claims are an assertion of sovereignty over a space that other states regard as a global commons.

A2/AD is a Russian specialty. The deployment of anti-ship missiles, air defense systems, and electronic warfare capabilities in Kaliningrad and Crimea creates "bubbles" of contested space that complicate NATO operations. Russian strategists describe this as defensive, but NATO perceives it as a threat to alliance freedom of movement. The Russian perspective contributes the insight that A2/AD is not only a Chinese strategy but a general approach available to any state with sufficient technological capacity and geographic advantage. What it occludes is the destabilizing effect of these deployments on regional security, the risk of inadvertent escalation, and the way in which Russian A2/AD can be used to coerce neighbors rather than merely to defend Russian territory.

Gray-zone coercion is central to Russian strategy, though the maritime dimension is less developed than the land and cyber dimensions. The use of "little green men" in Crimea, information warfare, and economic leverage has maritime analogues: the detention of Ukrainian naval vessels in the Kerch Strait in 2018, the use of fishing and research vessels for intelligence collection, and the deployment of private military companies in maritime contexts. The Russian perspective frames these activities as responses to Western encroachment and as assertions of legitimate interests. This contributes a narrative of defensive reaction that challenges Western accounts of Russian aggression. What it occludes is the coercive and destabilizing character of these activities, their contribution to a broader pattern of undermining the rules-based order, and the difficulty of distinguishing defensive from offensive intent when the same capabilities can serve both purposes.

Space is a domain of historical Russian strength and contemporary ambition. The Soviet space program's legacy, GLONASS as an alternative to GPS, and Russian ASAT capabilities reflect a determination to maintain space independence. The Russian perspective treats space as a military domain in which Russia must not be subordinate to the United States, and in which it can challenge US information dominance. Russian proposals for space arms control, including treaties to prevent the placement of weapons in space, are framed as genuine arms control initiatives but are also seen by Western analysts as attempts to constrain US advantages while preserving Russian capabilities. This contributes a legal and normative challenge to US space dominance. What it occludes is the gap between Russian arms control rhetoric and its own weapons development, the difficulty of verifying space arms control agreements, and the possibility that Russian space policy is driven more by the desire to maintain parity than by a genuine commitment to demilitarization.

In sum, the Russian perspective contributes a geographic and historical logic that explains Russian maritime and space behavior as defensive reactions to encirclement and Western expansion. Its occlusions include the aggressive character of its actions, the destabilizing effects of its A2/AD deployments, and the gap between its arms control rhetoric and its weapons programs.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on maritime, chokepoint, and space security is organized around the concept of the "global commons" and the normative commitment to freedom of navigation. This framework, rooted in the Mahanian tradition and developed through NATO maritime strategy and US naval doctrine, treats the oceans as a shared space whose openness is essential to global prosperity and security, and assigns to the United States and its allies the role of guarantor of that openness.

Sea power traditions are the foundation. Mahan's (1890) argument that command of the sea is the key to national greatness remains influential in US naval thought, though Corbett's (1911) more limited conception of sea control has gained ground in contemporary doctrine. The Western perspective treats sea power as a public good: US carrier strike groups, freedom of navigation operations, and maritime security partnerships are framed as protecting the global trading system from which all benefit. Till's analysis of maritime strategy in the twenty-first century notes the tension between this public-goods framing and the reality of US strategic interests. The Western perspective contributes a powerful normative claim: that maritime security is best served by a rules-based order in which no single state can deny access to others. What it occludes is the historical and contemporary reality that this "rules-based order" was constructed by and for Western powers, and that its application has been selective.

Chokepoints are central to Western strategic planning. The US Navy's maritime strategy identifies the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, Malacca, Suez, and Panama as critical nodes whose disruption would have global consequences. Western naval presence in these areas—Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, Combined Maritime Forces in the Gulf of Aden—is justified by the need to protect global commerce. The Western perspective contributes detailed operational and intelligence capabilities for monitoring and securing chokepoints. What it occludes is the extent to which this presence is perceived by regional states as an assertion of Western dominance rather than a neutral public good, the way in which chokepoint security can serve as a pretext for maintaining military access to strategically located territory, and the possibility that Western chokepoint security strategies may prioritize the flow of oil and goods over the security of coastal populations.

A2/AD is the primary challenge to Western maritime primacy. Chinese and Russian A2/AD systems are framed in Western doctrine as threats to the freedom of action that underpins the global order. The Western response has included investments in long-range precision strike, undersea warfare, and distributed maritime operations designed to penetrate A2/AD bubbles. Holmes and Yoshihara's work on Chinese maritime strategy is widely read in Western defense circles as a guide to understanding and countering this challenge. The Western perspective contributes a sophisticated operational and technological response. What it occludes is the possibility that A2/AD is, from the perspective of the states deploying it, a defensive response to Western forward presence, and that the Western framing of A2/AD as inherently aggressive may foreclose diplomatic solutions and accelerate arms racing.

Gray-zone coercion is a growing focus of Western strategy. The recognition that China and Russia operate below the threshold of armed conflict has prompted Western efforts to develop "integrated deterrence" and to strengthen the resilience of allies and partners. The Western perspective contributes a legal and normative framework for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate gray-zone activities, and operational concepts for responding. What it occludes is the extent to which Western states themselves engage in gray-zone activities—sanctions, cyber operations, information warfare—and the difficulty of maintaining a consistent standard when the definition of "gray zone" is itself contested. The Western perspective also struggles to address the possibility that some activities it labels as gray-zone coercion may be perceived by the states undertaking them as legitimate assertions of sovereignty or self-defense.

Space is a domain of US dominance and growing competition. The US Space Force, the commercial space revolution, and GPS as a global utility reflect a Western, and particularly American, vision of space as an enabler of military and economic power. The Western perspective treats space security as the protection of US and allied space assets and the maintenance of space dominance. This contributes unmatched capabilities in ISR, PNT, and communications. What it occludes is the extent to which US space dominance is perceived as threatening by other states, the debris risks of US ASAT development, the tension between commercial space exploitation and the Outer Space Treaty's principle of space as the province of all mankind, and the possibility that the militarization of space may undermine the very global commons that the Western perspective claims to protect.

In sum, the Western perspective contributes a powerful normative and operational framework for maritime and space security, centered on freedom of navigation and the global commons. Its occlusions include the selective application of rules, the imperial legacy of sea power, the difficulty of reconciling US strategic interests with the public-goods framing of maritime security, and the risk that Western strategies may accelerate rather than manage competition.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on maritime, chokepoint, and space security is institutional and legal, centered on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Outer Space Treaty, and a series of Security Council resolutions addressing piracy, maritime security, and space governance. This perspective treats the oceans and space as global commons governed by international law, and assigns to the UN system the role of framework-provider and, in limited cases, enforcer.

UNCLOS is the cornerstone. Adopted in 1982 and in force since 1994, it establishes the legal framework for maritime zones, navigation rights, and resource exploitation. The UN perspective treats UNCLOS as the "constitution of the oceans," providing a comprehensive regime that balances coastal state rights with the freedom of navigation. The 2016 arbitral ruling in the South China Sea case, issued under UNCLOS Annex VII, exemplifies the UN perspective's contribution: a legal determination that China's nine-dash line claims have no basis in international law. The UN perspective contributes a legal framework that can adjudicate disputes and establish norms. What it occludes is the lack of enforcement mechanisms: the ruling has not been implemented, and UNCLOS lacks a compulsory enforcement regime. The fact that the United States has not ratified UNCLOS further weakens its authority, creating a legitimacy deficit that undermines the UN perspective's claim to universality.

Maritime security resolutions extend the UN framework to specific threats. Security Council resolutions on piracy off the coast of Somalia, beginning with Resolution 1816 in 2008, authorized international naval operations and established a legal basis for action in Somali territorial waters. The UN perspective contributes a multilateral framework for addressing maritime security threats that transcend national jurisdiction. What it occludes is the dependence on member state contributions for enforcement, the risk that naval operations displace rather than resolve criminal activity, the limited attention to the root causes of maritime insecurity, and the possibility that UN-authorized operations may serve the strategic interests of contributing states rather than the affected populations.

Space governance is addressed through the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, the Moon Agreement, and the work of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. The UN perspective treats space as the province of all mankind and seeks to prevent an arms race in outer space. The PAROS agenda and discussions of transparency and confidence-building measures reflect this commitment. The UN perspective contributes

a normative framework and a forum for dialogue. What it occludes is the treaty's silence on conventional space weapons, the lack of verification mechanisms, the difficulty of adapting Cold War-era frameworks to contemporary commercial and military space activity, and the reality that major space powers are developing ASAT capabilities and militarizing space while participating in UN forums.

The UN perspective on gray-zone conflict is the least developed. The UN system has no clear framework for addressing activities that fall below the threshold of armed conflict but that coerce and destabilize. The UN perspective contributes the general principle that disputes should be resolved peacefully and that international law should govern state behavior. What it occludes is the gap between this principle and the reality of gray-zone competition, the inability of the UN system to address activities that are deliberately designed to evade legal categorization, and the risk that the absence of a gray-zone framework may encourage states to push the boundaries of acceptable behavior.

In sum, the UN perspective contributes an indispensable legal and institutional framework for maritime and space governance. Its occlusions include the lack of enforcement, the dependence on great-power consent, the difficulty of adapting legal frameworks to new forms of competition, and the gap between legal norms and state practice. The UN perspective is most effective when it can mobilize great-power consensus; it is least effective when great powers are in direct competition, as they are in the maritime and space domains today.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers the security of coastal and littoral states that bear the costs of great-power maritime competition; reveals how chokepoint disruptions cascade to non-combatant economies; foregrounds piracy, illegal fishing, and maritime governance gaps in the Gulf of Guinea and Red Sea	May underweight the strategic logic of great-power competition and the role of naval power in deterring aggression; risks treating all maritime insecurity as externally imposed	Maritime security is a common good requiring equitable governance; coastal states must have agency in security architectures	Gulf of Guinea piracy data; Red Sea shipping disruption impacts on African trade; AU 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy; Lomé Charter	Western: that without great-power naval presence, piracy and chokepoint coercion would be worse
Chinese	Articulates a coherent A2/AD doctrine that challenges US maritime primacy; demonstrates how technological innovation (missiles, submarines, mines) can offset conventional naval inferiority	Frames defensive measures as purely reactive; obscures expansionist implications of near-seas claims; underweights freedom of navigation for other states	Maritime sovereignty and near-seas defense are legitimate; US forward presence is destabilizing	DF-21D/DF-26 ASBMs; South China Sea militarized features; PLAN expansion; 2016 arbitral ruling non-compliance	Western: that A2/AD threatens global commons and commercial shipping

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Highlights Arctic and Black Sea maritime strategies; demonstrates how geographic chokepoints (Bosporus, Northern Sea Route, Kerch Strait) can be leveraged; shows gray-zone tactics	Underweights international law; frames expansion as historical entitlement; obscures economic motivations	Maritime access is a vital interest; NATO expansion threatens Russian security	Kerch Strait incident 2018; Arctic militarization; Black Sea Fleet operations; Northern Sea Route development	Western/UN: that actions violate UNCLOS and territorial integrity
Western	Provides the dominant framework of freedom of navigation, carrier strike groups, and maritime security operations; articulates the public-goods rationale for US naval primacy	May conflate US interests with global interests; underweights costs of maritime competition on littoral states; treats freedom of navigation as self-evident rather than contested	Open seas, freedom of navigation, and rules-based order are universal goods	US Fifth Fleet operations; Operation Prosperity Guardian; FONOPs in South China Sea; Operation Sentinel	Chinese/African: that "freedom of navigation" serves hegemonic interests and ignores coastal state rights

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	UNCLOS provides the legal framework; maritime security resolutions; institutional mechanisms for dispute resolution (ITLOS, arbitral tribunals)	Lack of enforcement; dependence on great-power consent; inability to address gray-zone activities deliberately designed to evade legal categorization	Law-based ocean governance; peaceful dispute resolution; common heritage of mankind	UNCLOS; ITLOS; 2016 South China Sea arbitral ruling; UNSC maritime security resolutions	All perspectives: that legal frameworks are ineffective without enforcement and great-power compliance

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Worked Example: Iran's Asymmetric Maritime Strategy in the Strait of Hormuz

Levels of analysis. The Strait of Hormuz case operates across all four levels. At the individual level, the strategic calculus of Iran's Supreme Leader and IRGC naval commanders shapes decisions to seize tankers or deploy mines; individual tanker captains and insurance underwriters at Lloyd's of London respond to perceived risk. At the state level, Iran's doctrine of asymmetric maritime warfare, the US Fifth Fleet's forward presence, and the interests of Gulf Cooperation Council states define the strategic environment. At the systemic level, the US-Iran rivalry, sanctions regimes, and the global oil market's sensitivity to supply disruptions create the structural conditions. At the transnational level, global energy supply chains, international maritime insurance markets, and UNCLOS-based legal frameworks connect the strait to economies far beyond the Gulf.

Mechanism. Iran's strategy rests on a cost-imposition logic: by deploying low-cost, high-leverage capabilities—fast attack craft, naval mines, anti-ship missiles, and tanker seizures—against a conventionally superior US Navy, Iran raises the price of US and allied maritime operations in the Gulf without triggering a full-scale war. The mechanism works through three channels. First, geographic compression: the strait's narrowness (approximately 21 miles at its narrowest point, with shipping lanes only two miles wide in each direction) negates US advantages in open-ocean maneuver and carrier aviation, compressing the battlespace into a littoral environment where small, fast, numerous Iranian craft can threaten larger vessels. Second, escalation ambiguity: tanker seizures and mine attacks occupy a gray zone below the threshold of armed conflict, forcing adversaries to choose between disproportionate military response and passive acceptance, thereby eroding deterrence credibility. Third, economic leverage: even the threat of disruption moves global oil prices and insurance premiums, imposing costs on the global economy that far exceed Iran's military expenditure. The EIA estimates that roughly 20-21 million barrels per day of oil

transited the Strait of Hormuz in recent years, representing approximately 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption. This concentration means that Iran does not need to close the strait to impose costs; it needs only to create sufficient uncertainty to raise risk premiums.

Specific incidents illustrate the mechanism's operation. In May and June 2019, attacks on the tankers *Kokuka Courageous* and *Front Altair*—attributed by the US to Iranian mines—demonstrated Iran's ability to strike commercial shipping while maintaining plausible deniability. In July 2019, Iran seized the British-flagged *Stena Impero* in retaliation for the UK's detention of the Iranian tanker *Grace 1* in Gibraltar, showing how tanker seizures serve as instruments of coercive diplomacy. In April 2023, Iran seized the *Advantage Sweet*, a Marshall Islands-flagged tanker chartered by Chevron, and in May 2023 seized the *Niovi*; in April 2024, Iran seized the *MSC Aries*, a Portuguese-flagged container ship. These seizures are not random piracy but calibrated signals: they impose costs on specific adversaries, demonstrate Iran's reach, and test the US and allied commitment to freedom of navigation without crossing the threshold that would justify major military retaliation. Till's analysis of seapower emphasizes that maritime strategy must account for the interaction between military capability and political purpose; Iran's strategy exemplifies this by subordinating naval operations to political signaling and sanctions relief objectives.

The mechanism is not unlimited. It depends on Iran's ability to maintain plausible deniability for gray-zone actions, on the US and its allies' reluctance to escalate, and on the global economy's continued dependence on Gulf oil. If any of these conditions shifts—if attribution becomes certain, if the US adopts more aggressive rules of engagement, or if global energy diversification reduces Hormuz dependence—the mechanism weakens. The US response, including Operation Sentinel (2019), multinational escort operations, and the forward deployment of carrier strike groups, aims to raise the cost of Iranian aggression while avoiding the escalation that Iran's strategy is designed to provoke. This creates a deterrence dilemma: too little response emboldens Iran; too much risks the war both sides wish to avoid.

Perspective reconstruction. The African perspective, which must be understood as primary in this analysis, reveals dimensions that the other four miss. From the vantage point of African coastal states and the AU's maritime security agenda, the Hormuz crisis is not merely a US-Iran confrontation but a node in a global maritime insecurity system that disproportionately harms non-combatant economies. African states importing Gulf oil face price spikes and supply uncertainty when Hormuz tensions escalate, just as Gulf of Guinea piracy raised shipping costs for West African trade. The African perspective highlights the asymmetry of maritime governance: while the US and Iran contest control of the strait, African coastal states have limited voice in the security architecture that determines their energy access. The AU's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy and the Lomé Charter reflect an insistence that maritime governance must be inclusive, not merely a great-power prerogative. The Red Sea shipping disruptions of 2023-2024 demonstrate how chokepoint insecurity compounds across African maritime space, affecting ports from Djibouti to Durban, framing Hormuz as a symptom of a global maritime order that systematically disadvantages non-great-power states.

The Chinese perspective interprets Iran's strategy through the lens of anti-hegemonic resistance and near-seas defense. Beijing views US naval primacy in the Gulf as analogous to US presence in the Western Pacific; Iran's asymmetric tactics provide a template for how a conventionally inferior power can contest maritime dominance. China's own A2/AD investments—anti-ship ballistic missiles, submarines, mines—mirror Iran's approach, and Chinese strategists have studied Iranian fast-boat swarms and mine warfare. At the same time, China is Iran's largest oil customer and has a direct interest in Hormuz stability, creating tension between strategic sympathy for Iranian resistance and economic interest in uninterrupted supply.

Holmes and Yoshihara's analysis notes that Beijing's approach combines Mahanian sea-control ambitions with Corbettian sea-denial tactics; Iran's Hormuz strategy offers a real-world demonstration of the latter.

The Russian perspective sees Hormuz through the prism of great-power competition and anti-US alignment. Moscow has supported Iran diplomatically and militarily, viewing US pressure on Tehran as part of a broader strategy to dominate Eurasian energy corridors. Russia's own maritime strategy—Arctic militarization, Black Sea Fleet operations, and the 2018 Kerch Strait incident—shares Iran's emphasis on using geographic chokepoints to offset conventional inferiority. Russian analysts frame Hormuz as evidence that US maritime hegemony is contestable, reinforcing Moscow's narrative that the unipolar moment has ended. However, Russia also has interests in stable oil prices and in maintaining its position as a major energy exporter, creating ambivalence about sustained Hormuz disruption.

The Western perspective, dominant in US and allied strategic discourse, frames Iran's strategy as a threat to freedom of navigation and the rules-based maritime order. The US Fifth Fleet's presence in Bahrain, Operation Sentinel, and escort operations for commercial tankers reflect a commitment to keeping the strait open. Western analysis emphasizes deterrence: maintaining sufficient naval presence to raise the cost of Iranian aggression while avoiding escalation. The perspective draws on Mahan's insight that sea power requires both fleet strength and the political will to use it. Its occlusion lies in treating US maritime primacy as synonymous with global public goods, underweighting how that primacy appears from Tehran or from African capitals.

The UN perspective approaches Hormuz through UNCLOS and the framework of maritime security. The strait is an international strait under UNCLOS Part III, guaranteeing transit passage; Iran's tanker seizures and mine attacks violate these norms. UN Security Council resolutions on maritime security provide a legal basis for collective action, but the UN system lacks enforcement mechanisms when a permanent member or its ally is the violator. The UN perspective contributes the essential insight that Hormuz governance requires multilateral frameworks, not merely bilateral US-Iran deterrence, but its effectiveness is constrained by great-power rivalry.

Explicit adjudication. The state-level perspective best explains Iran's asymmetric maritime strategy: Iran's doctrine is a deliberate, state-directed response to US military superiority and sanctions pressure, shaped by the IRGC's institutional interests and the Supreme Leader's strategic calculus. However, this perspective alone misses the systemic drivers—US-Iran rivalry, the sanctions architecture, and the global oil market's structural dependence on Hormuz—that make the strategy viable and consequential. It also misses the transnational effects: the insurance market's response, the cascade to African energy importers, and the erosion of UNCLOS norms. The African perspective, while not the primary explanatory lens for Iranian decision-making, provides the most complete account of the strategy's global costs and reveals what the Western and Chinese perspectives occlude: that Hormuz insecurity is not merely a great-power contest but a burden on non-combatant states. The Western perspective correctly identifies the threat to freedom of navigation but underweights the degree to which US primacy itself generates the resistance that Iran's strategy exploits. The Chinese perspective offers the most analytically productive analogy—A2/AD as a generalizable strategy—but risks normalizing coercive maritime behavior by framing it as defensive. The UN perspective identifies the legal violations but cannot enforce compliance. In sum, no single perspective fully captures the case; the state-level perspective explains Iranian agency, the systemic perspective explains the strategic environment, and the African perspective explains the distributional consequences that the other four underweight.

2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Mechanism mapping.** Identify the causal chain through which land reclamation, sensor and missile emplacement, and coast-guard/militia operations change the South China Sea from a contested maritime space into a continuously controlled one. Specify which levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, transnational—best explain each link.

2. **Threshold analysis.** Determine whether water-cannoning, ramming, and blockade-like interference against resupply missions constitute "armed conflict" under the UN Charter and UNCLOS, or whether they are better classified as gray-zone coercion. What legal and operational consequences follow from each classification?

3. **Perspective reconstruction.** For each of the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN), state one contribution and one occlusion in explaining the 2016 arbitral ruling and China's subsequent behavior.

4. **Evidence and falsification.** What observable evidence would support the claim that China's strategy is primarily defensive deterrence? What evidence would support the claim that it is revisionist territorial consolidation? Identify at least one falsifier for each.

5. **Comparative case.** Compare the South China Sea case with Iran's Hormuz strategy from the worked example. Which mechanisms are shared (asymmetric coercion below the armed-conflict threshold, exploitation of escalation reluctance), and which differ (geography, legal claims, actor types, global economic stakes)?

6. **Adjudication.** Given that the 2016 ruling rejected China's historic-rights claim yet militarization and gray-zone activity continued, adjudicate between legal-institutional and power-political explanations. State the scope conditions under which each would be more persuasive.

Model answer. The South China Sea case is best explained by a mechanism in which material transformation, legal ambiguity, and calibrated coercion interact across multiple levels of analysis. At the state level, China's reclamation and militarization of features convert temporary presence into persistent infrastructure, extending surveillance, air-defense, and missile coverage across a maritime space that was previously difficult to dominate continuously. At the transnational level, this infrastructure alters the operating environment for commercial shipping, fishing fleets, and naval vessels without necessarily closing sea lanes, thereby creating leverage through risk and uncertainty rather than through outright denial. At the systemic level, the strategy contests US maritime primacy by raising the cost of intervention and by complicating alliance reassurance, especially for states such as the Philippines and Vietnam that depend on external security guarantees. At the individual level, coast-guard and militia commanders operate under rules of engagement designed to harass, block, and signal resolve while remaining below the threshold that would trigger a military response or treaty obligations. The result is a fait accompli dynamic: each incident is small enough to be treated as a law-enforcement matter, but the cumulative effect is a shift in effective control.

The 2016 arbitral ruling illustrates the limits of legal adjudication when enforcement is weak. The tribunal rejected the historic-rights basis of China's claim and clarified maritime entitlements, but it could not compel compliance. China rejected the ruling's jurisdiction and legitimacy, and subsequent activity—militarized features, coast-guard interference, and administrative assertions—continued. From a Western perspective, this is a failure of the rules-based order: legal clarity was achieved, but without a coalition willing to enforce it, the ruling became a normative reference rather than a behavioral constraint. From a Chinese perspective,

the ruling is an externally imposed interpretation that disregards historical practice and sovereign equality; Beijing frames its actions as defensive near-seas management and domestic law enforcement. From a Russian perspective, the case confirms skepticism toward Western legal universalism and highlights the value of multipolarity in resisting externally adjudicated outcomes. From a UN perspective, the ruling demonstrates the capacity of UNCLOS dispute settlement to clarify law, while also exposing the enforcement gap between legal determination and state compliance. From an African perspective, the case resonates with post-colonial concerns about externally drawn maritime boundaries and the unequal capacity to enforce legal claims; African coastal states may support UNCLOS as a framework while remaining wary of great-power selectivity in compliance, and they may see in the South China Sea a warning about how powerful states can convert legal ambiguity into de facto control.

The strongest adjudication is that legal institutionalism explains the production of legal clarity but not the distribution of power, whereas power-political and gray-zone explanations better account for post-ruling behavior. Legal rulings matter most when backed by enforcement coalitions, domestic costs of noncompliance, or reputational incentives; where a state perceives a vital interest and faces no credible enforcement, the ruling becomes a background condition rather than a causal force. Falsifiers for the power-political explanation would include Chinese demilitarization of features, acceptance of delimited exclusive economic zones, or a sustained reduction in coast-guard incidents after legal or diplomatic pressure. Falsifiers for the legal-institutional explanation would include continued escalation despite multilateral enforcement, or a collapse of regional states' willingness to invoke UNCLOS. Compared with Iran's Hormuz strategy, the shared mechanism is calibrated coercion below the armed-conflict threshold, exploiting an adversary's reluctance to escalate and using asymmetric tools to impose costs. The differences are significant: Iran operates in a narrow chokepoint with immediate global oil-market leverage, relies heavily on speedboats, mines, and proxy forces, and faces a more direct military balance; China operates across a broad maritime space with legal claims, reclaimed territory, and a coast-guard/militia architecture, seeking incremental territorial and administrative consolidation rather than temporary disruption. Thus the South China Sea case is not merely a larger version of Hormuz; it is a distinct form of gray-zone coercion in which legal ambiguity, infrastructure, and persistent presence combine to reshape control without crossing the threshold of war.

2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In 2023–2024, Chinese coast-guard and maritime-militia vessels repeatedly interfered with Philippine resupply missions to Second Thomas Shoal, using water cannons, blocking maneuvers, and close-quarters harassment, while Beijing asserted administrative and law-enforcement authority over disputed features. Manila invoked the 2016 arbitral award and sought support from its US treaty ally; China framed its actions as routine enforcement within its jurisdiction. Regional states faced a choice between accepting incremental changes in effective control and risking escalation. Assess whether this pattern is best explained as defensive maritime management, revisionist territorial consolidation, or a hybrid strategy, and determine what evidence would most decisively distinguish among these explanations.

Mechanism:
Perspective reconstruction:
Historical analogue:
Falsifiers:

Self-check: Did you distinguish description (what happened), explanation (why), prediction (what next), and prescription (what should be done)?

2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which option best explains why the 2016 arbitral ruling did not reverse China's militarization and gray-zone activity in the South China Sea?

A. The ruling lacked effective enforcement mechanisms, and China rejected its jurisdiction and legitimacy, allowing power-political and gray-zone dynamics to dominate legal obligation.
B. The ruling was legally invalid because UNCLOS does not address territorial sovereignty at all.
C. China demilitarized its features after 2016 but resumed militarization solely because of US freedom-of-navigation operations.
D. The UN Security Council enforced the ruling, but China used its veto to nullify it.

Correct answer: A.

Distractor diagnoses:
- **B** conflates the tribunal's avoidance of territorial sovereignty with legal invalidity; the ruling addressed maritime entitlements and historic-rights claims, not sovereignty over land territory, and its legal force does not depend on resolving sovereignty.
- **C** is factually inconsistent with the continued and expanded militarization of features after 2016; US operations may have shaped Chinese rhetoric and risk calculations, but they do not explain the persistence of reclamation and infrastructure.
- **D** misattributes institutional authority; the UN Security Council did not enforce the ruling, and China's veto power is irrelevant to a tribunal constituted under UNCLOS Annex VII.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. Approximate oil transit through major maritime chokepoints (EIA, 2024 reporting of 2023 flows)

Chokepoint	Approx. volume (million b/d)	Strategic reading
Strait of Hormuz	20.9	Largest single oil chokepoint; Gulf producers' primary export route
Strait of Malacca	16.0	East Asian import artery; central to "Malacca dilemma" debates
Suez Canal / SUMED	8.8	Europe–Asia shortcut; bypassed by Cape route when disrupted
Bab el-Mandeb	8.8	Red Sea gateway; links Suez to Indian Ocean
Turkish Straits	3.4	Black Sea–Mediterranean connector
Danish Straits	3.2	Baltic export route
Panama Canal	2.0	Americas inter-ocean connector

Note: volumes are approximate and vary by year, product mix, and EIA methodology; the table is for structural comparison, not exact forecasting.

Table 2. Approximate active satellite population by state (UCS Satellite Database, recent counts)

State / operator group	Approx. active satellites	Interpretive note
United States	5,000+	Dominant in commercial, military, and intelligence constellations
China	600+	Rapid growth in ISR, PNT, communications, and remote sensing
Russia	150+	Legacy military space power; smaller commercial footprint
United Kingdom	100+	Commercial and government satellites; allied integration
India	60+	Regional space power with growing military applications
Other states and commercial operators	1,000+	Fragmented but strategically relevant, especially in LEO

Note: counts change quickly because of mega-constellations; "active" excludes defunct objects and many classified payloads.

Table 3. Selected maritime and space security indicators

Indicator	Approx. value	Source / basis
Gulf of Guinea piracy and armed robbery incidents	~22 in 2023	IMB annual reporting
Red Sea / Gulf of Aden attacks on commercial shipping	100+ since Oct. 2023	Public maritime incident reporting and naval advisories
Destructive ASAT tests, 2007–2024	4 major tests	China 2007; United States 2008; India 2019; Russia 2021
Non-destructive counterspace activity	Multiple states, recurring	Publicly reported rendezvous, jamming, and cyber incidents

Note: incident counts are undercounts where reporting is voluntary, AIS is spoofed, or attacks are misclassified as accidents or piracy.

Numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend:** Chokepoint volumes are highly concentrated, yet incident counts are episodic and geographically clustered. What does this mismatch imply about the difference between structural vulnerability and realized disruption?

2. **Level of analysis:** Are Red Sea attacks best explained by state sponsorship and regional war (state/systemic), by Houthi organizational strategy (sub-state), by global shipping market incentives (transnational), or by individual crew and vessel decisions (individual)?
3. **Perspective reconstruction:** How would the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each read Table 1 and Table 3 differently—especially on whether maritime security is primarily a problem of sovereignty, commerce, great-power competition, or collective governance?
4. **Interpretation:** Table 2 suggests that satellite infrastructure is becoming both more distributed and more militarized. Does this imply that space is stabilizing through redundancy, or destabilizing through new counterspace incentives?
5. **Limitation:** Which of the following are most likely missing from these tables: classified military satellite counts, underreported Gulf of Guinea incidents, non-kinetic interference such as jamming and spoofing, and the political classification of attacks as "terrorism," "piracy," or "war"?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1: Hand-drawn map of maritime chokepoints and volume concentration

Draw a simple world map in pencil or marker, using an oval for the globe and a few curved continental outlines rather than detailed coastlines. Mark the following points with small circles and labels: Hormuz, Malacca, Suez, Bab el-Mandeb, Panama, Turkish Straits, Danish Straits. Draw thick arrows through each chokepoint and write approximate volumes beside them: Hormuz 20.9, Malacca 16.0, Suez 8.8, Bab el-Mandeb 8.8, Panama 2.0, Turkish 3.4, Danish 3.2. Add a legend: "million barrels per day, approximate 2023 flows." Draw a dashed alternative route around the Cape of Good Hope to show bypass capacity. In one corner, draw a small box labeled "Gulf of Guinea" with a piracy icon and a note "incidents clustered, not just chokepoints." Annotate the map with perspective overlays: African perspective in green: "coastal security, piracy, Red Sea disruption"; Chinese perspective in red: "Malacca dilemma, near-seas defense"; Russian perspective in blue: "Arctic and Black Sea access"; Western perspective in black: "freedom of navigation, carrier mobility"; UN perspective in purple: "UNCLOS, collective maritime security."

Visual 2: Hand-drawn A2/AD and sea-denial diagram

Draw a horizontal sea surface line across the page. On the left, draw a coastline labeled "Contested littoral" with three nested curved arcs extending seaward, labeled "A2/AD layer 1: sensors," "A2/AD layer 2: missiles," and "A2/AD layer 3: submarines / mines." Place small icons for radar, mobile missile launchers, and submarines. On the right, draw a large ship icon labeled "Carrier strike group" approaching from open ocean, with a dashed line showing its operational range. Draw arrows from the littoral toward the carrier labeled "sea denial," and a smaller arrow from the carrier toward the coast labeled "power projection." Add a vertical scale on the right labeled "Distance from coast" with markers for territorial sea, EEZ, and high seas. Annotate perspectives: African: "coastal vulnerability and external intervention"; Chinese: "near-seas defense, anti-access"; Russian: "bastion defense, Arctic/Black Sea"; Western: "FON, carrier access"; UN: "law of the sea, EEZ rights."

Visual 3: Hand-drawn space domain stack

Draw three horizontal bands from bottom to top: "LEO," "MEO," and "GEO." In LEO, draw many small dots labeled "imaging, comms, mega-constellations"; in MEO, draw medium dots labeled "PNT / navigation"; in GEO, draw a few large dots labeled "strategic communications, early warning." Draw a ground station at the bottom with lines connecting to each band. Draw an ASAT vector as a dashed arrow from the ground or

from a co-orbital object toward a satellite, labeled “kinetic / non-kinetic counterspace.” Draw debris clouds around one destroyed satellite. Add a side panel labeled “Military uses: ISR, PNT, communications, missile warning.” Annotate perspectives: African: “space-enabled maritime domain awareness, but dependency on external providers”; Chinese: “space as sovereignty and security infrastructure”; Russian: “space as strategic stability and counterspace”; Western: “space as enabler of precision warfare”; UN: “outer space as global commons, debris governance.”

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue	Notes
What is sea power?	Sea power is not only fleet size; it includes bases, logistics, commerce, law, and alliance networks. Source: Mahan (1890); Corbett (1911); Till (2018).
Mahan vs. Corbett	Mahan emphasizes decisive battle and command of the sea; Corbett emphasizes control of communications and limited war. Scope: Mahan fits fleet-centric eras; Corbett fits coalition and maritime constabulary operations.
Chokepoint logic	Chokepoints concentrate risk because volume, geography, and politics coincide. EIA (2024) shows Hormuz and Malacca dominate oil flows; disruption can be physical, legal, or coercive.
A2/AD	Anti-access/area denial seeks to raise the cost of entry into a theater. Holmes and Yoshihara (2017) frame Chinese maritime strategy as layered, not merely missile-centric.
Gray zone	Actions below armed-conflict threshold: coast guard, militia, cyber, economic pressure. Mechanism: ambiguity delays response and splits coalitions.
Space domain	ISR, PNT, communications, and missile warning make space a military enabler; ASAT tests show counterspace is real but debris creates shared risk.
African perspective	Coastal security, Gulf of Guinea piracy, Red Sea disruption; emphasizes livelihoods, sovereignty, and uneven capacity. Sources: African maritime security scholarship and regional practice.
Chinese perspective	Near-seas defense, blue-water ambition, A2/AD; Malacca dilemma as strategic anxiety.
Russian perspective	Arctic and Black Sea maritime strategy; bastion defense and access denial.
Western perspective	Freedom of navigation, carrier strike groups, alliance logistics; often treats sea control as global public good.

Cue	Notes
UN perspective	UNCLOS, maritime security resolutions, collective governance; legal framing can lag behind gray-zone practice.
Data limits	Incident counts undercount; satellite counts omit classified systems; ASAT tests are visible but non-kinetic interference is harder to measure.

Summary: Maritime strategy links geography, technology, and law: chokepoints concentrate global commerce, A2/AD and gray-zone tools contest access without necessarily crossing into war, and space systems have become the nervous system of modern sea power. The five perspectives agree that the sea and space are strategically vital but disagree on whether security should be organized around sovereignty, commerce, deterrence, or collective governance. Data on flows, incidents, satellites, and ASAT tests reveal structure and trend, but they cannot by themselves settle questions of intent, legality, or proportionality.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon:** The ocean and space are like highways and nervous systems for modern states. A few narrow sea passages carry huge amounts of oil, so blocking or threatening them can hurt economies without a full war. Countries that feel weaker at sea can use missiles, mines, small boats, coast guards, or cyber tools to make entry expensive or politically awkward. Satellites help ships, planes, and missiles know where they are and what they see, so attacking or jamming satellites can weaken an opponent. The main debate is whether these tools deter war or make crises harder to control.

2. **Mark gaps:** I am less certain about the exact year-to-year EIA volumes, the precise number of active satellites, and how many maritime incidents go unreported. I also need to distinguish a legal chokepoint disruption from a physical one, and a destructive ASAT test from everyday satellite interference. Another gap is whether gray-zone actions are best seen as coercion or as routine sovereignty enforcement.

3. **Reread verification:** Rechecking the core sources confirms the conceptual distinction: Mahan and Corbett differ on command versus control of communications; EIA data show concentration but not intent; Holmes and Yoshihara emphasize layered Chinese maritime strategy rather than a single "wall"; and UNCLOS provides a legal vocabulary that does not fully capture coast-guard or militia ambiguity. The data tables support trend and structure, not causal proof.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits:** Think of a city with one bridge carrying most commuter traffic. A local power cannot defeat the whole city, but it can threaten the bridge, charge tolls, or create traffic jams. That captures chokepoint leverage and gray-zone pressure. The limit is that bridges are fixed and local, whereas sea lanes, alliances, rerouting, and international law make maritime coercion more complex and more reversible. Space is less like a bridge and more like the city's traffic lights and GPS: damaging it can cascade, but attribution and escalation are uncertain.

5. **Rewrite:** Maritime, chokepoint, space, and gray-zone conflicts are best understood as contests over

access rather than only contests over territory. Geography concentrates maritime risk; A2/AD and gray-zone tools exploit that concentration while staying below clear war thresholds; space systems extend and complicate both. African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each identify real features of this problem—coastal vulnerability, near-seas defense, bastion security, freedom of navigation, and collective governance—but none alone captures the full mechanism. Evidence on flows, incidents, satellites, and ASAT tests is indispensable, yet it must be paired with legal, historical, and strategic interpretation before it can support strong claims.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L25	Definition	What did Mahan mean by sea power?	Mahan treated sea power as a composite of national strength, maritime commerce, colonial access, and fleet capability; command of the sea was the enabling condition for global reach and sustained war.	Western imperial lineage; African reading stresses extraction and coastal dispossession.
L25	Mechanism	What is Corbett's distinction between sea control and sea denial?	Corbett separated command of the sea from denial of command; a weaker fleet can use a fleet-in-being to prevent an adversary from achieving decisive maritime control.	Useful for weaker navies and coastal states, including African littoral forces.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L25	Application	Why does the Strait of Hormuz concentrate escalation risk?	Hormuz is a narrow chokepoint through which a large share of global oil transits; geography compresses warning time, mixes commercial and military traffic, and magnifies the effect of small actions.	Energy importers, Gulf states, and Asian consumers experience the risk differently.
L25	Comparison	How do Mahan and Corbett differ on the purpose of naval force?	Mahan centers decisive battle and command of the sea; Corbett centers limited war, communications, and denial of the enemy's freedom of action.	Both are Eurocentric; African scholarship adds littoral social economies and informal maritime orders.
L25	Source	What does EIA chokepoint data actually measure?	EIA data measure transit volumes through chokepoints; high volume indicates systemic exposure, not the probability, duration, or cost of disruption.	Global South import dependence makes volume data politically consequential.
L25	Debate	Is A2/AD a "wall" or a contest?	A2/AD is better understood as a contest of ranges, sensors, targeting, logistics, and magazine depth; its effectiveness degrades under attrition and depends on ISR quality.	Chinese near-seas defense versus US carrier and alliance logistics.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L25	Reconstruction	How should African maritime security be framed from within?	African maritime security is shaped by coastal poverty, illegal fishing, piracy economies, and external intervention; patrols may suppress symptoms without changing incentives.	Primary lens: Gulf of Guinea, Red Sea, and western Indian Ocean.
L25	Occlusion	What does freedom-of-navigation framing often occlude?	Freedom-of-navigation rhetoric can obscure coastal-state concerns about resource jurisdiction, local harm, and the distribution of maritime policing authority.	UNCLOS ambiguity and Global South claims.
L25	Adjudication	What did the 2016 South China Sea arbitral award do?	The award rejected historic-rights claims and clarified EEZ entitlements, but its practical effect depends on diplomacy, power, and continued state behavior.	Legal authority versus geopolitical enforcement.
L25	Visual	What is an A2/AD “bubble”?	An A2/AD bubble is a layered zone of sensors, missiles, and electronic warfare; its boundary is fuzzy and its coercive value changes with attrition and countermeasures.	Chinese and Russian near-seas strategies.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L25	Definition	What is gray-zone coercion?	Gray-zone coercion uses force, pressure, or ambiguity below the threshold of armed conflict to change facts, extract concessions, or normalize new baselines.	Favors actors willing to exploit legal and political thresholds.
L25	Mechanism	How do coast guard and militia forces create gray-zone effects?	Civilianized or paramilitary maritime forces create attribution ambiguity and legal friction, slowing collective response and complicating escalation control.	South China Sea and East China Sea dynamics.
L25	Application	How does Iran exploit Hormuz asymmetrically?	Iran uses speedboat swarms, mines, seizures, and harassment to exploit Hormuz's narrowness and commercial density, raising transit costs without necessarily triggering war.	Asymmetric strategy against US maritime primacy.
L25	Source	What do ASAT test counts tell us?	ASAT tests demonstrate destructive capability and create debris risks, but counts alone do not measure intent, resilience, or the probability of orbital conflict.	Space as a shared but militarized domain.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L25	Comparison	How do ISR/PNT and ASAT capabilities interact?	ISR and PNT enable precision and coordination; ASAT weapons threaten those enablers; deterrence depends on redundancy, attribution, and escalation management.	All major space powers and dependent users.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score each 0–100)

Competency	Confidence (0–100)	Calibration Prompt
Define Mahan's and Corbett's sea-power logics and distinguish command from denial		Can you state the difference without naming a case?
Map chokepoint geography to transit risk and escalation dynamics		Can you explain why volume alone is not risk?
Explain A2/AD mechanisms and their scope conditions		Can you identify what would degrade an A2/AD system?
Reconstruct gray-zone coercion and attribution problems		Can you distinguish coercion from armed conflict?
Analyze space-domain dependencies and ASAT escalation		Can you explain why debris is strategically consequential?
Compare all five perspectives without caricature		Can you state each perspective's strongest internal argument?
Apply individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels of analysis		Can you assign one mechanism to each level?
Identify falsifiers for maritime and space claims		Can you name evidence that would disprove your conclusion?

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which concept did you define correctly but fail to connect to a causal mechanism?
2. Which perspective did you treat as an obstacle or bias rather than as a coherent argument with its own evidence?
3. What single piece of evidence would most strongly change your conclusion about Hormuz, the South China Sea, or space security?

7.3 Error-Log Table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Chokepoints guarantee disruption.	Geography raises probability and cost of disruption, but actors, insurance, rerouting, naval escorts, and stockpiles mediate outcomes.	EIA transit data show exposure; incidents show variability in duration and impact.
A2/AD makes US maritime power impossible.	A2/AD is a contest of ranges, sensors, logistics, and magazine depth; its coercive value degrades under attrition and countermeasures.	Holmes and Yoshihara (2017); Till (2018).
Gray-zone actions are "not really force."	They are coercive and may be armed; the threshold is political and legal, not the absence of harm.	L20 coercion framework; coast guard and militia incidents.
ASAT tests prove inevitable space war.	Capability demonstrations are not intent; debris, attribution, and escalation constraints shape decisions.	ASAT test record 2007–present; space-security assessments.
UNCLOS automatically resolves maritime disputes.	Law provides standards, but interpretation, enforcement, and power shape outcomes.	2016 South China Sea arbitral award and subsequent state behavior.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Maritime power, chokepoints, A2/AD, gray-zone coercion, space domain	Geography compresses warning time; denial raises access costs; ambiguity slows response; orbital dependence creates vulnerability	Mahan (1890); Corbett (1911); Till (2018); Holmes and Yoshihara (2017)	Hormuz; Bab el-Mandeb; Malacca; Suez; Panama; South China Sea; Gulf of Guinea; ASAT tests	Command versus denial; law versus power; near-seas defense versus blue-water ambition	No disruption despite high transit volume; failed swarm attack; ASAT capability without use; ruling ignored without escalation	L20 coercion; L22 conventional war; L24 cyber; L44 Hormuz/Bab el-Mandeb; L48 Indo-Pacific sea denial; L57 space
Sea power traditions	Composite national strength, decisive battle, fleet-in-being, sea control versus sea denial	Mahan (1890); Corbett (1911)	Historical British and US naval dominance; weaker-fleet denial strategies	Whether command of the sea remains decisive in missile age	Naval inferiority still achieves strategic objectives without battle	L22; L48
Chokepoint geography	Narrow passages concentrate traffic, reduce reaction time, and amplify small actions	Till (2018)	EIA World Oil Transit Chokepoints (2024); Hormuz, Malacca, Suez, Panama	Volume as exposure versus volume as destiny	Rerouting, stockpiles, or escorts prevent disruption	L44; energy security modules

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
A2/AD and sea denial	Layered sensors, missiles, submarines, mines, and electronic warfare contest access	Holmes and Yoshihara (2017); Till (2018)	Chinese near-seas posture; Iranian Hormuz strategy; Russian Black Sea and Arctic posture	Wall versus contest; defensive versus offensive intent	Sustained carrier operations inside contested zone; degraded ISR	L48; L22
Gray-zone coercion	Coast guard, militia, cyber, economic pressure, and ambiguity below armed-conflict threshold	L20 coercion framework; maritime security studies	South China Sea features and incidents; Gulf of Guinea piracy economies	Coercion versus crime; threshold identification	Clear attribution and collective response; no change in status quo	L20; L24; L44
Space as military domain	ISR, PNT, communications enable force; ASAT threatens enablers; debris and attribution constrain use	Space-security assessments; ASAT test record	Satellite launches by state; ASAT tests 2007–present	Commons versus warfighting domain; deterrence versus vulnerability	Redundant systems prevent operational paralysis; no ASAT use in crisis	L24; L57

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Timing	Concrete Action
R1	Same day, 20 minutes	Recite Mahan/Corbett definitions, draw a chokepoint map from memory, and state one mechanism for each key idea.

Interval	Timing	Concrete Action
R2	48 hours, 30 minutes	Reconstruct all five perspectives for Hormuz and the South China Sea without notes, then check for caricature.
R3	1 week, 45 minutes	Redo the Problem Pair case, compare with the model answer, and log one corrected misconception.
R4	2 weeks, 60 minutes	Complete the Data Lab: interpret EIA transit volumes, satellite launches, ASAT tests, and maritime incident counts; write three falsifiers.
R5	1 month, 90 minutes	Write an independent memo on a new case, such as Red Sea shipping disruptions, using the four levels of analysis and all five perspectives.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define sea power in Mahan's and Corbett's terms.
- ☐ I can distinguish sea control from sea denial.
- ☐ I can name and locate the five major chokepoints.
- ☐ I can explain why chokepoint volume is exposure, not destiny.
- ☐ I can describe A2/AD as a contest of systems, not a wall.
- ☐ I can identify scope conditions for Chinese, Iranian, and Russian sea denial.
- ☐ I can define gray-zone coercion and explain attribution ambiguity.
- ☐ I can analyze coast guard and militia roles in maritime coercion.
- ☐ I can explain ISR, PNT, communications, and ASAT interdependence.
- ☐ I can interpret ASAT test data without overstating intent.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary, not an add-on.
- ☐ I can steel-man Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
- ☐ I can apply individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels of analysis.
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
- ☐ I can write falsifiers for a maritime or space claim.
- ☐ I can complete the Data Lab without confusing correlation with mechanism.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Sea power theory - Mahan, A. T. (1890). *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660–1783*. - Corbett, J. S. (1911). *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy*. - Till, G. (2018). *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (4th ed.).

A2/AD, sea denial, and the South China Sea - Holmes, J. R., and Yoshihara, T. (2017). *Red Star over the Pacific* (2nd ed.). - U.S. Department of Defense. (2024). *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*. - Center for Strategic and International Studies, Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative. (2024). South China Sea feature and incident tracking.

Chokepoints and maritime security - U.S. Energy Information Administration. (2024). *World Oil Transit Chokepoints*. - International Maritime Bureau. (2024). *Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships* (annual report).

Maritime law and governance - United Nations. (1982). *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*.

Space security - Secure World Foundation. (2024). *Global Counterspace Capabilities: An Open Source Assessment*.

End of Lesson 25. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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27. Lawfare and the Ethics of War

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 26 — Lawfare and the Ethics of War
Module	Module 4: Security Studies and Warfare
Prerequisites	L2 (Charter), L9 (sovereignty), L20 (coercion)
Interleaved links	Forward to L37 (Ukraine lawfare), L44 (Hormuz and Yemen), L54 (autonomous weapons)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, visuals, flashcards, memo
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is whether international law constrains war or whether it is itself a weapon of war. Since 1945, the use of force has been governed by a dense legal architecture: the UN Charter's prohibition on the threat or use of force in Article 2(4), the limited exception of self-defence in Article 51, and the body of international humanitarian law (IHL) codified in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols. Alongside this, the Rome Statute of 1998 created the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) has become the forum for debating lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS). On paper, this architecture promises to humanise armed conflict, protect civilians, and hold perpetrators accountable. In practice, its application is strikingly uneven: some conflicts attract intense legal scrutiny and institutional intervention, while others proceed with near-total impunity; some states invoke legal categories to legitimise strikes that kill civilians, while others dismiss the same categories as Western instruments. The concept of "lawfare"—the use of law as a means of achieving

military or political objectives—captures this duality. Lawfare is not a deviation from the system; it is, on one reading, the system's normal operating mode. The lesson's task is to teach you to see law not as a neutral backdrop to war but as a contested terrain on which wars are fought, justified, and remembered.

The theoretical lineage matters because the same legal text supports incompatible interpretations. Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars* (1977) revived just war theory in the post-Vietnam era by arguing that the moral equality of soldiers (jus in bello) is separable from the justice of the cause (jus ad bellum), and that non-combatant immunity is the central moral constraint. Walzer's later work, including his 2015 reflections on targeted killing, pressed the question of whether precision weapons change the moral calculus of war. Helen Kinsella's *The Image of War* (2011) showed that the combatant/civilian distinction is not a natural fact but a historically constructed and gendered category, produced through colonial and racial hierarchies. David Luban's 2014 analysis of targeted killing argued that the legal category of "imminent threat" has been stretched beyond recognition in US drone practice, collapsing the distinction between war and law enforcement. Sagan and Valentino (2017) brought experimental evidence to bear on public attitudes, showing that American public support for the use of force is sensitive to casualty levels and to whether the enemy is perceived as violating norms. Together these works establish that the law of war is not self-interpreting: its categories are politically produced, its enforcement is selective, and its moral authority depends on who is speaking.

The African perspective is not one case among many; it is the vantage point that exposes the architecture's deepest tensions. The ICC's first decade of operations (2002–2012) saw all of its situations located in Africa, a pattern that African states and scholars read not as coincidence but as structural bias. The African Union's Assembly decisions in 2013 and 2014, including the call for mass withdrawal from the Rome Statute and the demand that sitting heads of state enjoy immunity, were not rejections of accountability per se but protests against a jurisdiction that appeared to discipline African leaders while exempting the powerful. The Malabo Protocol of 2014, which would extend the African Court of Justice and Human Rights to criminal matters, represents an attempt to build regional accountability on African terms rather than accept an externally imposed one. Scholars such as Siba Grovogui, Achille Mbembe, and Mahmood Mamdani have argued that international criminal law, however well-intentioned, operates within a colonial episteme that positions Africa as the site of atrocity and the West as the site of judgment. This critique does not deny that atrocities occur in Africa or that victims deserve justice; it insists that the institutional form of justice—who investigates, who prosecutes, who funds, who decides—reproduces the very hierarchies it claims to transcend. The African vantage point thus reframes the lesson's central puzzle: the question is not whether law can restrain war, but whose law, enforced by whom, against whom.

The other four perspectives illuminate different facets of the same problem. The Chinese perspective begins from non-interference and sovereignty (rooted in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence) but has evolved toward greater engagement with IHL through UN peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and participation in CCW discussions on LAWS; its contribution is to insist that legal frameworks not be used to override sovereignty, while its occlusion is a tendency to treat internal conflict as beyond international scrutiny. The Russian perspective treats lawfare as a Western instrument—pointing to the 2003 Iraq war, the 2011 Libya intervention, and the legal framing of sanctions and tribunals as tools of geopolitical competition; its contribution is to expose the instrumentalisation of legal categories, while its occlusion is the deflection of accountability for its own conduct, including in Ukraine. The Western perspective supplies the dominant IHL frameworks (Geneva Conventions, Rome Statute, CCW) and has produced genuine self-critique—on drone strikes, Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, and civilian casualties—but its occlusion is the tendency to treat Western legal practice as the universal standard against which others are measured. The UN perspective

centres on civilian protection, accountability mechanisms, and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), but is constrained by Security Council politics, funding dependence, and the gap between normative aspiration and enforcement capacity. Each perspective is internally coherent; none is sufficient alone.

The lesson is organised around five key ideas that move from the legal architecture of force to the ethics of its application. Key Idea 1 establishes the foundational distinction between jus ad bellum (the legality of going to war) and jus in bello (the legality of conduct in war), and the principle that the two are legally independent. Key Idea 2 examines targeting law—distinction, proportionality, precautions—and the shift toward "effects-based operations" that complicates traditional categories. Key Idea 3 surveys accountability mechanisms: the ICC, the ICJ, universal jurisdiction, and the politics of enforcement. Key Idea 4 addresses autonomous weapons and the LAWS debate, where the question of algorithmic killing forces a reconsideration of human judgment in war. Key Idea 5 turns to the politics of humanitarianism—aid, access, and the securitisation of relief—where the boundary between protection and control blurs. The worked example is the ICC's 2023 arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin, which crystallises lawfare, accountability, and the politics of universal jurisdiction in a single case. The problem pair is US drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, which test the legal and ethical boundaries of targeted killing outside traditional armed conflict. The data lab examines ICC investigations by region, IHL violations documented by UN commissions, LAWS discussions under the CCW, and civilian casualty records compiled by the Action on Armed Violence (AOAV).

By the end of this lesson you will be able to do four things that define post-doctoral competence in this area. First, you will distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in legal and ethical argumentation about war—recognising, for example, that describing a strike as "proportionate" is not the same as explaining why it occurred, predicting its consequences, or prescribing whether it should have occurred. Second, you will reconstruct each of the five perspectives from within, identifying what each contributes and what it occludes, rather than treating any as a strawman. Third, you will apply the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to a concrete case and adjudicate between competing theoretical explanations on the basis of evidence. Fourth, you will identify the falsifiers that would undermine each perspective's claims, and you will be able to state, in your own words, why the African critique of ICC selectivity is not a rejection of international law but a demand for its consistent application. These skills transfer directly to the forward-linked lessons on Ukraine lawfare (L37), Hormuz and Yemen (L44), and autonomous weapons (L54), and they underpin the memo and problem-pair assessments that follow.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. (L2) What does Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibit, and what is the principal exception recognised in Article 51?
2. (L2) How does the Charter distinguish between the Security Council's Chapter VII powers and the general prohibition on the use of force?
3. (L9) Define sovereignty in its internal and external dimensions, and explain why the tension between them matters for humanitarian intervention.
4. (L9) What is the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) doctrine, and how does it modify traditional sovereignty?
5. (L20) Distinguish compellence from deterrence, and give one example of each.
6. (L20) What is the difference between "hard" and "soft" coercion, and how does each operate in international relations?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Is international humanitarian law a constraint on war, an instrument of war, or both—and what evidence would distinguish these readings?
2. How does the African critique of ICC selectivity challenge the legitimacy of international criminal law without rejecting accountability?
3. What changes in the ethics of war when killing is delegated to autonomous systems?
4. Under what conditions does humanitarian aid become securitised, and who gains and loses from that transformation?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

1. **Jus ad bellum** — the body of law governing the legality of resorting to force; in the UN Charter era, primarily Articles 2(4) and 51.
2. **Jus in bello** — the body of law governing conduct during armed conflict; also called international humanitarian law (IHL).
3. **Distinction** — the IHL principle requiring parties to distinguish between combatants and civilians, and between military objectives and civilian objects.
4. **Proportionality** — the IHL rule that an attack is unlawful if expected civilian harm is excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated.
5. **Precautions in attack** — the obligation to take feasible measures to minimise civilian harm, including verification of targets and choice of means.
6. **Lawfare** — the use of legal processes, categories, and institutions as instruments to achieve military or political objectives.
7. **Targeted killing** — the intentional, premeditated killing of specific individuals by state actors, often outside traditional battlefield contexts.
8. **Universal jurisdiction** — the principle that certain crimes are so grave that any state may prosecute them regardless of where they occurred or the nationality of perpetrator or victim.
9. **Lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS)** — weapons that can select and engage targets without further human intervention once activated.
10. **Humanitarian access** — the ability of humanitarian actors to reach populations in need; often contested in conflict zones.
11. **Securitisation** — the process by which an issue is framed as an existential threat, justifying extraordinary measures outside normal politics.
12. **Effects-based operations** — military operations planned around desired strategic effects rather than attrition of enemy forces, complicating traditional targeting categories.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives After mastering this lesson, the student will be able to: (1) **Analyze** the structural separation between *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* and explain why conflating the two produces both legal error and moral catastrophe, drawing on the Charter framework and the Geneva tradition. (2) **Evaluate** the causal mechanisms through which legal categories shape state behavior in the use of force, including how powerful states exploit ambiguity in Article 2(4) and Article 51 while weaker states invoke the Charter as a shield. (3) **Apply** the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to a concrete

case of contested force, distinguishing the drivers that operate at each level rather than collapsing them into a single narrative. (4) **Compare** five perspective traditions on the ethics of war and identify, for each, what it contributes to our understanding and what it systematically occludes. (5) **Construct** a falsifiable claim about when legal constraint on the use of force genuinely constrains state behavior and when it is instrumentalized as lawfare, specifying the observable evidence that would distinguish the two. These objectives are assessable: the student should be able to produce a memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and to defend an adjudication among competing perspective traditions using evidence rather than assertion. The lesson assumes familiarity with the Charter (Lesson 2), sovereignty (Lesson 9), and coercion (Lesson 20); it feeds forward into Lesson 37 on Ukraine lawfare, Lesson 44 on Hormuz and Yemen, and Lesson 54 on autonomous weapons.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Jus ad bellum vs jus in bello: the legal architecture of the use of force Bolded Causal Claim: The legal architecture of the use of force separates the question of whether a war may be fought (*jus ad bellum*) from the question of how it may be fought (*jus in bello*), and this separation is the condition of possibility for both humanitarian restraint in warfare and for the instrumentalization of law as a weapon (lawfare); where the two are conflated, moral reasoning collapses into either pacifism that forbids all resistance or total war that licenses all means.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through the creation of distinct legal roles and permissions that distribute protections and liabilities independently of the justice of the cause. *Jus ad bellum* is codified primarily in the UN Charter: Article 2(4) prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state; Article 51 preserves the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs; Chapter VII authorizes the Security Council to determine threats to the peace and to authorize enforcement action. *Jus in bello* is codified in the Hague Regulations, the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, and their Additional Protocols, and it governs conduct during armed conflict regardless of how the conflict began. The critical mechanism is the independence thesis: the legal and moral status of a combatant does not depend on whether their state's cause is just. Walzer's (1977) formulation of the "moral equality of soldiers" captures this: combatants on both sides possess equal rights to fight and equal liabilities to be targeted, provided they distinguish themselves from civilians and obey the laws of war. This separation generates the category of the "civilian" as a protected person and the category of the "combatant" as a legitimate target, and it is through these categories that humanitarian restraint becomes possible. At the same time, the separation creates a structural vulnerability: because *jus in bello* applies to all parties equally, a state fighting an unjust war can claim the same protections as a state fighting a just one, and a state fighting a just war can be accused of violations with the same legal vocabulary used against aggressors. Lawfare—the use of legal process, legal claims, and legal institutions as instruments of coercion—exploits precisely this symmetry. Kinsella (2011) has shown how the civilian/combatant distinction is not a natural fact but a constructed legal category with gendered and colonial histories, which means the mechanism of protection is also a mechanism of exclusion: those who do not fit the category of "civilian" (irregular fighters, "unlawful combatants," populations in occupied territory) fall into protection gaps. Luban (2014) extends this by analyzing how legal reasoning about torture and interrogation during the "war on terror" demonstrated that the separation between *ad bellum* and *in bello* could be collapsed by executive lawyers who redefined categories to permit what the law appeared to forbid. The mechanism, then, is categorical: law creates roles, roles create permissions, and the manipulation of role-definitions becomes a mode of warfare.

Scope Conditions: The separation thesis holds most cleanly in interstate armed conflict between uniformed forces operating under clear command structures, where front lines exist and where both parties are states

bound by treaty. It weakens or breaks down under several conditions. First, in asymmetric conflict where one party is a non-state armed group not party to the Geneva Conventions: *jus in bello* still applies as customary international law, but enforcement and reciprocity fail. Second, in counterterrorism operations conducted outside recognized armed conflict: the legal question of whether an "armed conflict" exists at all determines whether *jus in bello* applies or whether human rights law (with its stricter lethal-force standard) governs. Third, in occupation: the occupier retains *ad bellum* authority (the war is over) but continues to exercise *in bello*-like control, blurring the temporal boundary. Fourth, where self-defense claims are stretched to cover anticipatory, preventive, or "unable or unwilling" host-state scenarios: the *ad bellum* category expands to swallow the *in bello* constraint. Fifth, in cyber and information operations where the threshold of "armed attack" is contested. The scope condition is therefore not merely legal but empirical: the separation holds where there is a shared recognition of conflict status, and it collapses where that recognition is absent or disputed.

Observable Implications: If the separation mechanism operates as described, several observable patterns should follow. States with weaker military capacity should invoke Charter prohibitions more frequently and more formally, because *ad bellum* law is their available shield; powerful states should more frequently reinterpret self-defense to accommodate their operations, producing a pattern of "legal entrepreneurialism" in which the same text (Article 51) supports divergent claims. Civilian casualty ratios should be higher in conflicts where the civilian/combatant distinction cannot be operationalized—urban warfare, counterinsurgency, drone strikes in non-battlefield settings—because the mechanism of protection requires a category that cannot be applied. Legal proceedings (ICC warrants, universal jurisdiction cases, ICJ provisional measures) should be used as instruments of pressure even where enforcement is impossible, which is the signature of lawfare. Public opinion in democracies should be sensitive to *in bello* violations but relatively insensitive to *ad bellum* illegality, because the moral equality of soldiers thesis resonates with intuitions about fair fighting; Sagan and Valentino (2017) have documented how publics in democracies weigh civilian casualties against military objectives in ways that track *in bello* proportionality rather than *ad bellum* legitimacy. Finally, if the mechanism is real, we should observe states investing in legal capacity—military lawyers, targeting lawyers, legal advisors—as a component of warfighting capability, which is precisely what has occurred in the US, UK, and Israeli militaries since the 1990s.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African perspective begins from the historical experience of colonial violence that was entirely legal under the international law of its time: the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 partitioned a continent without African consent, and the wars of conquest that followed were not "wars" in the legal sense but "police actions" or "pacification." This history produces a deep skepticism toward the claim that international law neutrally constrains violence. From this vantage point, the *ad bellum*/*in bello* separation appears not as a humanitarian achievement but as a framework that legitimized colonial violence by treating it as non-war. Contemporary African scholarship and diplomacy extend this critique: the African Union's resistance to ICC jurisdiction, the push for the Malabo Protocol (which would establish an African Court of Justice and Human Rights with criminal jurisdiction), and the broader argument that the international legal order reproduces racialized hierarchies of whose violence counts as "war" and whose counts as "terrorism" or "banditry." The African perspective also emphasizes that *jus in bello* protections have been systematically weaker for African civilians—not because the law differs but because enforcement is geopolitically selective. What this perspective reveals is the constitutive role of power in determining which legal categories are activated; what it risks occluding is the genuine humanitarian restraint that *in bello* law has produced even in African conflicts, and the agency of African states and civil society in shaping IHL.

Chinese. The Chinese perspective is anchored in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (1954) and in a strong reading of Article 2(4): non-interference and territorial integrity are paramount, and the use of force is legitimate only in self-defense against armed attack or with Security Council authorization. China has historically been suspicious of *ad bellum* expansion—opposing humanitarian intervention, the "responsibility to protect," and broad self-defense claims—and has emphasized that *jus in bello* must not be used to legitimize aggression. In recent years, however, China has increased its engagement with IHL: participation in UN peacekeeping, training in IHL for PLA personnel, and engagement with the CCW process on lethal autonomous weapons. The Chinese perspective contributes a state-centric, sovereignty-protective reading that resists the erosion of the *ad bellum* threshold; it occludes the protection needs of populations inside states where the government itself is the source of violence, and it has been criticized for prioritizing non-interference over civilian protection in cases such as Syria and Myanmar.

Russian. The Russian perspective treats international law, and particularly the *ad bellum*/*in bello* framework, as an instrument of Western power projection. Moscow argues that the West has systematically expanded the exceptions to Article 2(4)—humanitarian intervention, the "war on terror," "unable or unwilling" doctrines—while holding Russia to a strict reading, and that IHL discourse is deployed to delegitimize Russian military operations while excusing Western ones. The Russian critique of lawfare is explicit: legal institutions (ICC, universal jurisdiction) are portrayed as tools of geopolitical competition rather than neutral justice. This perspective contributes a realist corrective that exposes double standards in enforcement; it occludes Russia's own violations of *ad bellum* (the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, which most of the international community regards as a clear Article 2(4) violation) and its *in bello* conduct, and it risks reducing all legal constraint to power politics, leaving no normative ground for civilian protection.

Western. The Western perspective is the primary author of the contemporary *ad bellum*/*in bello* framework and treats it as a genuine, if imperfect, achievement of legal civilization. It emphasizes the Charter's prohibition on force, the development of IHL, and the institutionalization of accountability through the ICC and universal jurisdiction. At the same time, Western scholarship and policy have produced the most sustained self-critique: Walzer's (1977, 2015) just war theory has been challenged from within; Luban (2014) has analyzed the legal corruption of the torture debate; and the drone-strike and Guantánamo controversies have generated extensive internal criticism. The Western perspective contributes the richest legal and philosophical apparatus for analyzing war; it occludes its own role in creating the exceptions it now criticizes, and it tends to universalize a historically particular (European, post-1945) legal order.

UN. The UN perspective is institutional and charter-based: the Secretary-General, the Security Council, and the various commissions and special rapporteurs treat IHL and the Charter as the operative framework, emphasizing civilian protection, accountability, and the prevention of atrocity. The UN has documented IHL violations across conflicts and has been the forum for the CCW discussions on lethal autonomous weapons. Its contribution is the maintenance of a common legal vocabulary and monitoring capacity; its occlusion is structural: the UN cannot enforce against permanent members of the Security Council, and its IHL discourse often lacks the power to alter state behavior, producing a gap between norm and practice that the UN itself cannot close.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Targeting Law: Distinction, Proportionality, Precautions, and the Shift to Effects-Based Operations

Bolded Causal Claim: The legal regulation of targeting in armed conflict has undergone a structural transformation from a platform-centric, rules-based framework to an effects-based, network-centric one, driven by precision munitions, persistent surveillance, and the operational logic of effects-based operations; this transformation preserves the formal vocabulary of distinction and proportionality while systematically expanding the category of permissible military objectives and lowering, in practice, the threshold of acceptable civilian harm.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through four interacting legal-technical layers. First, distinction, codified in Additional Protocol I (1977) Article 48 and Article 52, requires parties to distinguish between combatants and civilians and between military objectives and civilian objects; a military objective is defined in Article 52(2) as an object which, by its nature, location, purpose, or use, makes an effective contribution to military action and whose total or partial destruction, capture, or neutralization offers a definite military advantage. Second, proportionality, in Articles 51(5)(b) and 57(2)(a)(iii), prohibits attacks expected to cause incidental civilian harm excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated. Third, precautions, in Article 57, oblige commanders to verify targets, choose means and methods to minimize harm, give effective advance warning where feasible, and cancel or suspend an attack if it becomes apparent that it would be disproportionate. These three rules were designed for an industrial, platform-centric battlefield in which the destruction of tanks, ships, and factories was the measure of military effect. The fourth layer is the shift to effects-based operations (EBO), developed in United States doctrine from the 1990s onward, which targets not platforms but systems, networks, and centers of gravity in order to produce desired strategic effects. Under EBO, a power grid, a banking network, a telecommunications node, or a transportation hub becomes a military objective not because it is a weapon but because degrading it produces systemic military advantage. This redefinition expands the target set dramatically: dual-use infrastructure, previously protected as civilian, is reclassified as military by virtue of its contribution to the enemy's war-sustaining economy. Proportionality calculation shifts accordingly from a strike-by-strike assessment of collateral damage to a cumulative, campaign-level assessment of systemic effects, in which the "concrete and direct military advantage" is measured in terms of network degradation rather than platform destruction. The mechanism is reinforced by precision munitions and remote sensing, which create the technical capacity to strike individual nodes with apparent surgical accuracy, and by the rise of targeted killing, in which the target is a person rather than an object. The legal result is a framework in which the formal rules remain intact but their application is mediated by intelligence assessments, algorithmic target nomination, and battle damage assessment that are largely opaque to external scrutiny.

Scope Conditions: The targeting rules apply most fully in international armed conflict; in non-international armed conflict, Common Article 3 and customary law apply a thinner version of distinction and proportionality, and the legal status of many actors is contested. The effects-based expansion of military objectives depends on reliable intelligence: where intelligence is poor or politicized, the proportionality calculation rests on false premises, as in strikes on civilian gatherings mistaken for militant meetings. The framework assumes a state with precision capabilities and persistent surveillance; non-state actors and less capable states operate under different constraints. Urban warfare and the presence of human shields compress the space in which distinction can be operationalized. The "near certainty" standard adopted by the United States for counterterrorism strikes outside areas of active hostilities is a policy constraint, not a legal rule, and applies only where the executive chooses to apply it.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include the documented rise in civilian casualties in precision-intensive urban campaigns such as Mosul (2016-2017), Raqqa (2017), and Gaza (2023-2024), where the combination of effects-based targeting and dense civilian presence produced harm that the formal rules did not prevent. They include the expansion of target lists to include "signature strikes" based on behavioral patterns rather than identified individuals, and the legal opinions justifying strikes on dual-use infrastructure such as power and water systems. They include the debate over whether proportionality should be assessed per strike or cumulatively across a campaign, with significant consequences for the legality of infrastructure destruction. They include the growing role of algorithms and machine learning in target nomination, raising questions about human judgment in the application of distinction. They include the recurring finding by UN commissions of inquiry and human rights organizations that states invoking precision and proportionality have caused civilian harm that appears excessive by any reasonable standard, suggesting a systematic gap between the legal framework and its operational application.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, which must be reconstructed from within rather than fitted to Western theory, begins from the experience of African populations as the objects of targeting regimes designed elsewhere. African scholars such as Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Mahmood Mamdani have emphasized that the legal categories of distinction and proportionality were developed in the context of interstate European warfare and map poorly onto African conflicts, where the line between combatant and civilian is blurred by colonial legacies, proxy forces, and the militarization of civilian life. The African vantage point reveals that effects-based operations, by targeting "war-sustaining" economies, have in practice targeted African civilian infrastructure and livelihoods, as in the destruction of economic nodes in Libya (2011) and the targeting of resource networks in the Sahel. African states and the African Union have pushed for stronger protection of civilians in urban warfare and for accountability when proportionality is violated, while noting that the states most capable of precision warfare are also those least subject to external accountability. The African perspective thus treats targeting law not as a neutral technical framework but as a historically situated practice that distributes the burdens of war onto populations with the least power to shape the rules. The Chinese perspective emphasizes state sovereignty and non-interference, treats targeting rules as applicable primarily in interstate conflict, and has been cautious about expanding IHL obligations to non-state actors or to counterterrorism contexts; China has engaged with CCW discussions on autonomous weapons but resists constraints that would limit its military modernization. The Russian perspective treats Western targeting doctrine, particularly effects-based operations and targeted killing, as instruments of hegemony that expand the permissible scope of force while holding adversaries to stricter standards; Russia has criticized the "humanitarian" framing of Western strikes as masking geopolitical objectives. The Western perspective is divided: legal scholars and military lawyers defend the IHL framework as the best available constraint on violence, while critics such as David Luban and Helen Kinsella have argued that proportionality is inherently indeterminate and that the shift to effects-based operations has eroded civilian protection in practice; the United States has developed extensive internal legal review processes (the "law of war manual") while resisting external accountability. The UN perspective, through the ICRC, special rapporteurs, and commissions of inquiry, treats distinction, proportionality, and precautions as binding customary and treaty law, emphasizes their application in all conflicts including NIACs, and has documented systematic violations; its occlusion is the lack of enforcement power, as UN findings on targeting violations rarely result in accountability.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Accountability Mechanisms: ICC, ICJ, Universal Jurisdiction, and the Politics of Enforcement

Bolded Causal Claim: International criminal accountability is structurally asymmetric: the institutions designed to enforce international humanitarian law and human rights law are most active against weak states and non-state actors, while powerful states and their allies enjoy de facto immunity, producing a system that legitimizes itself through selective enforcement rather than universal application.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three institutional channels and their political constraints. The first channel is the International Criminal Court, established by the Rome Statute (1998, entered into force 2002), which has jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression. The ICC's jurisdiction is triggered in three ways: state party referral, Security Council referral under Chapter VII, or proprio motu investigation by the Prosecutor. The principle of complementarity means the ICC acts only where national jurisdictions are unwilling or unable to prosecute genuinely. The ICC has no police force; it depends on state cooperation for arrests, evidence, and enforcement, and its arrest warrants are executed only when the target enters the jurisdiction of a cooperating state. The second channel is the International Court of Justice, which adjudicates state responsibility rather than individual criminal liability, and which has been used to address genocide, occupation, and the use of force; its judgments are binding but enforcement depends on the Security Council, where permanent members can veto. The third channel is universal jurisdiction, exercised by national courts, which permits prosecution of international crimes regardless of where they were committed or the nationality of the perpetrator or victim; this has been used by European courts to prosecute Syrian, Rwandan, and Congolese suspects, and occasionally to investigate officials of powerful states. The political constraint operates at every level: Security Council referrals are subject to the veto, as in the blocked referral of Syria; state party withdrawals and threats of withdrawal (Burundi, Philippines, South Africa's attempted withdrawal) reduce the Court's reach; powerful states that are not parties (United States, Russia, China, Israel, India) are effectively immune from ICC jurisdiction unless referred by the Security Council, which they can veto. The mechanism thus produces a pattern in which accountability is most likely against actors in weak states, particularly in Africa, and least likely against permanent members of the Security Council and their allies.

Scope Conditions: Accountability functions where there is political will, state cooperation, and a favorable power configuration; it fails where the target is powerful or protected. Complementarity means the ICC is a court of last resort, and its caseload reflects the failures of national systems as much as the gravity of crimes. Universal jurisdiction depends on domestic legal frameworks, prosecutorial discretion, and the political appetite of the forum state. The ICC's legitimacy depends on perceived impartiality; where it is seen as selective, its authority erodes. The ICJ's effectiveness depends on the willingness of states to comply and on Security Council enforcement. The mechanism is also shaped by the "peace versus justice" debate: accountability can be traded for peace agreements, as in the deferral of ICC investigations in exchange for cooperation, or can be used as a tool of pressure in ongoing conflicts.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include the historical concentration of ICC investigations in Africa, which produced the perception of an "African bias" and led to the African Union's push for the Malabo Protocol and the mass withdrawal threat of 2016. They include the ICC arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin (2023) and for Israeli and Hamas leaders (2024), which represent an expansion of the Court's reach toward more powerful actors but also expose its dependence on enforcement, as neither Russia nor Israel is a party and neither will cooperate. They include the ICJ's provisional measures orders in South Africa v. Israel (2024) and in Ukraine v. Russia (2022), which carry legal weight but lack enforcement.

They include the growth of universal jurisdiction cases in European courts, which have prosecuted Syrian officials and Rwandan génocidaires but have rarely reached officials of powerful Western states. They include the asymmetry in accountability for drone strikes, torture, and rendition, where internal investigations and settlements have substituted for criminal prosecution. They include the AU's adoption of the Malabo Protocol (2014), which would create an African criminal court with jurisdiction over international crimes, representing an attempt to reclaim accountability from the ICC.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, reconstructed from within, treats the ICC not as a neutral legal institution but as a political actor embedded in a global power structure that has historically targeted African leaders while exempting powerful states. African scholars such as Kamari Maxine Clarke, Makau Mutua, and Mahmood Mamdani have documented how the ICC's early caseload was overwhelmingly African, producing a legitimacy crisis that the Court has only partially addressed. The African Union's resistance, including the 2016 mass withdrawal threat and the Malabo Protocol, reflects a demand for accountability that is not selective but genuinely universal, and for African ownership of justice processes. The African vantage point reveals that the "international community" invoked by accountability mechanisms is itself a political construct that distributes the power to define crimes and to enforce judgments unevenly; it reveals that complementarity, in practice, often means African states are judged by external standards while powerful states judge themselves. The African perspective also emphasizes that accountability without structural transformation—addressing the economic and political conditions that produce violence—is incomplete, and that the focus on individual criminal responsibility can obscure collective and historical responsibility, including colonial violence. The Chinese perspective emphasizes sovereignty and non-interference, treats the ICC as a Western-dominated institution, and has refused to join the Rome Statute; China has engaged with the ICJ on territorial and maritime disputes but resists international criminal jurisdiction over its nationals. The Russian perspective treats the ICC as an instrument of Western lawfare, particularly after the Putin arrest warrant, and has withdrawn its signature from the Rome Statute; Russia argues that the Court applies double standards and serves geopolitical objectives. The Western perspective is internally divided: liberal internationalists defend the ICC and universal jurisdiction as essential to the rule of law, while realists and sovereigntists criticize them as overreach; self-critique exists, particularly regarding the failure to hold Western officials accountable for torture, rendition, and drone strikes, but it has rarely produced criminal accountability. The UN perspective treats the ICC and ICJ as essential components of the international legal order, supports accountability for atrocity crimes, and has been the forum for Security Council referrals; its occlusion is structural, as the UN cannot enforce against permanent members and its accountability discourse often lacks the power to alter state behavior, producing a gap between norm and practice.

That should be sufficient. Let me check word counts roughly. Each section is substantial. Good.

I should ensure no invented quotations. I used paraphrases. Good.

Now final output.### SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Targeting Law: Distinction, Proportionality, Precautions, and the Shift to Effects-Based Operations

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infrastructure destruction. They include the growing role of algorithms and machine learning in target nomination, raising questions about human judgment in the application of distinction. They include the recurring finding by UN commissions of inquiry and human rights organizations that states invoking precision and proportionality have caused civilian harm that appears excessive by any reasonable standard, suggesting a systematic gap between the legal framework and its operational application.

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SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Accountability Mechanisms: ICC, ICJ, Universal Jurisdiction, and the Politics of Enforcement

Bolded Causal Claim: International criminal accountability is structurally asymmetric: the institutions designed to enforce international humanitarian law and human rights law are most active against weak states and non-state actors, while powerful states and their allies enjoy de facto immunity, producing a system that legitimizes itself through selective enforcement rather than universal application.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three institutional channels and their political constraints. The first channel is the International Criminal Court, established by the Rome Statute (1998, entered into

force 2002), which has jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression. The ICC's jurisdiction is triggered in three ways: state party referral, Security Council referral under Chapter VII, or proprio motu investigation by the Prosecutor. The principle of complementarity means the ICC acts only where national jurisdictions are unwilling or unable to prosecute genuinely. The ICC has no police force; it depends on state cooperation for arrests, evidence, and enforcement, and its arrest warrants are executed only when the target enters the jurisdiction of a cooperating state. The second channel is the International Court of Justice, which adjudicates state responsibility rather than individual criminal liability, and which has been used to address genocide, occupation, and the use of force; its judgments are binding but enforcement depends on the Security Council, where permanent members can veto. The third channel is universal jurisdiction, exercised by national courts, which permits prosecution of international crimes regardless of where they were committed or the nationality of the perpetrator or victim; this has been used by European courts to prosecute Syrian, Rwandan, and Congolese suspects, and occasionally to investigate officials of powerful states. The political constraint operates at every level: Security Council referrals are subject to the veto, as in the blocked referral of Syria; state party withdrawals and threats of withdrawal (Burundi, Philippines, South Africa's attempted withdrawal) reduce the Court's reach; powerful states that are not parties (United States, Russia, China, Israel, India) are effectively immune from ICC jurisdiction unless referred by the Security Council, which they can veto. The mechanism thus produces a pattern in which accountability is most likely against actors in weak states, particularly in Africa, and least likely against permanent members of the Security Council and their allies.

Scope Conditions: Accountability functions where there is political will, state cooperation, and a favorable power configuration; it fails where the target is powerful or protected. Complementarity means the ICC is a court of last resort, and its caseload reflects the failures of national systems as much as the gravity of crimes. Universal jurisdiction depends on domestic legal frameworks, prosecutorial discretion, and the political appetite of the forum state. The ICC's legitimacy depends on perceived impartiality; where it is seen as selective, its authority erodes. The ICJ's effectiveness depends on the willingness of states to comply and on Security Council enforcement. The mechanism is also shaped by the "peace versus justice" debate: accountability can be traded for peace agreements, as in the deferral of ICC investigations in exchange for cooperation, or can be used as a tool of pressure in ongoing conflicts.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include the historical concentration of ICC investigations in Africa, which produced the perception of an "African bias" and led to the African Union's push for the Malabo Protocol and the mass withdrawal threat of 2016. They include the ICC arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin (2023) and for Israeli and Hamas leaders (2024), which represent an expansion of the Court's reach toward more powerful actors but also expose its dependence on enforcement, as neither Russia nor Israel is a party and neither will cooperate. They include the ICJ's provisional measures orders in South Africa v. Israel (2024) and in Ukraine v. Russia (2022), which carry legal weight but lack enforcement. They include the growth of universal jurisdiction cases in European courts, which have prosecuted Syrian officials and Rwandan génocidaires but have rarely reached officials of powerful Western states. They include the asymmetry in accountability for drone strikes, torture, and rendition, where internal investigations and settlements have substituted for criminal prosecution. They include the AU's adoption of the Malabo Protocol (2014), which would create an African criminal court with jurisdiction over international crimes, representing an attempt to reclaim accountability from the ICC.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, reconstructed from within, treats the ICC not as a neutral legal institution but as a political actor embedded in a global power structure that has historically targeted African leaders while exempting powerful states. African scholars such as Kamari

Maxine Clarke, Makau Mutua, and Mahmood Mamdani have documented how the ICC's early caseload was overwhelmingly African, producing a legitimacy crisis that the Court has only partially addressed. The African Union's resistance, including the 2016 mass withdrawal threat and the Malabo Protocol, reflects a demand for accountability that is not selective but genuinely universal, and for African ownership of justice processes. The African vantage point reveals that the "international community" invoked by accountability mechanisms is itself a political construct that distributes the power to define crimes and to enforce judgments unevenly; it reveals that complementarity, in practice, often means African states are judged by external standards while powerful states judge themselves. The African perspective also emphasizes that accountability without structural transformation—addressing the economic and political conditions that produce violence—is incomplete, and that the focus on individual criminal responsibility can obscure collective and historical responsibility, including colonial violence. The Chinese perspective emphasizes sovereignty and non-interference, treats the ICC as a Western-dominated institution, and has refused to join the Rome Statute; China has engaged with the ICJ on territorial and maritime disputes but resists international criminal jurisdiction over its nationals. The Russian perspective treats the ICC as an instrument of Western lawfare, particularly after the Putin arrest warrant, and has withdrawn its signature from the Rome Statute; Russia argues that the Court applies double standards and serves geopolitical objectives. The Western perspective is internally divided: liberal internationalists defend the ICC and universal jurisdiction as essential to the rule of law, while realists and sovereigntists criticize them as overreach; self-critique exists, particularly regarding the failure to hold Western officials accountable for torture, rendition, and drone strikes, but it has rarely produced criminal accountability. The UN perspective treats the ICC and ICJ as essential components of the international legal order, supports accountability for atrocity crimes, and has been the forum for Security Council referrals; its occlusion is structural, as the UN cannot enforce against permanent members and its accountability discourse often lacks the power to alter state behavior, producing a gap between norm and practice.

SECTION 2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Autonomous weapons and the LAWS debate: the ethical and legal status of algorithmic killing

Bolded Causal Claim:
The central ethical and legal problem of lethal autonomous weapon systems is not that machines might kill without human emotion, but that they may kill without a human being who can be held responsible under the legal and moral frameworks that make killing in war conditionally permissible.

Mechanism:
International humanitarian law presupposes a human decision-maker who can perceive a battlefield, interpret ambiguous cues, weigh military advantage against civilian harm, and bear responsibility for error. Distinction, proportionality, and precautions are not merely rules applied to outcomes; they are practices of judgment performed by agents who can be questioned, disciplined, and punished. Lethal autonomous weapon systems alter this architecture by shifting lethal authority from a human who decides to a system that executes according to pre-programmed parameters, sensor inputs, and machine-learning classifications. The mechanism of concern is therefore not simply automation of firing, but the relocation of morally and legally significant judgment into technical processes that may be opaque, brittle, and difficult to audit. A system trained on historical data may reproduce biases in target recognition; an adversarial environment may produce misclassification; and the speed of machine-to-machine engagement may compress the temporal space in which

human oversight could meaningfully intervene. The result is an accountability gap: if an autonomous system kills civilians, responsibility may be distributed so thinly across commanders, programmers, manufacturers, data providers, and political authorities that no single actor satisfies the legal or moral conditions for accountability. The emerging concept of "meaningful human control" attempts to close this gap by insisting that humans retain not merely a veto, but a substantive role in target selection and engagement decisions. Yet the concept remains contested because states disagree over whether control must be exercised before deployment, during engagement, or through post-hoc review, and because military incentives favor systems that can act faster than human cognition. The LAWS debate is thus not only a debate about technology; it is a debate about whether the legal and ethical legitimacy of lethal force depends on human agency in a way that cannot be transferred to machines without changing the nature of war itself.

Scope Conditions:
The problem is most acute where three conditions coincide: first, where systems can select and engage targets without real-time human authorization; second, where operational environments are complex, dynamic, and populated by civilians whose status is not easily computable; and third, where states possess advanced artificial intelligence, sensor fusion, and networked command systems. It is less acute for remotely operated weapons in which a human retains direct control over each engagement, and for defensive systems whose target sets are comparatively constrained. The debate also depends on definitional scope: some states and civil society actors define autonomy by the absence of human control over individual attacks, while others define it by the degree of machine learning or by the system's ability to adapt after deployment. These definitional differences matter because they determine whether existing weapons fall within the category and whether a new treaty is necessary. The issue is further shaped by the structure of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, where consensus-based decision-making allows a small number of technologically advanced states to slow or block binding regulation. Finally, the ethical problem intensifies in urban and asymmetric conflicts, where civilian presence, irregular combatants, and information ambiguity make distinction and proportionality especially demanding.

Observable Implications:
If the mechanism is operative, one should observe states investing in autonomous targeting aids while resisting legally binding prohibitions; civil society and humanitarian organizations campaigning for a ban on systems that target humans without meaningful human control; and international forums producing reports and principles but struggling to reach consensus on definitions or prohibitions. One should also observe national policy statements that permit autonomous functions under certain conditions while asserting compliance with international humanitarian law, as well as debates over whether "appropriate levels of human judgment" are sufficient to satisfy legal obligations. The accountability gap should appear in legal uncertainty about who is responsible when an autonomous system causes unlawful harm, and in the difficulty of applying individual criminal responsibility to distributed technical systems. In military practice, the pressure to shorten decision cycles may produce "human-on-the-loop" arrangements in which human oversight is technically present but operationally nominal. In diplomacy, the LAWS debate should reveal a divide between states that view autonomous weapons as a necessary response to strategic competition and those that view them as a threat to civilian protection and human dignity.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):
African (primary): African perspectives often stress that autonomous weapons risk extending patterns of externally imposed violence into new technological domains, particularly where systems are trained, tested, or deployed in contexts shaped by racialized or colonial assumptions about threat and civilian identity. African scholarship and diplomatic engagement frequently emphasize that governance of emerging military technolo-

gies must not be monopolized by technologically advanced states, and that African security concerns—such as border surveillance, counterterrorism, and protection of civilians in complex conflicts—should shape global rules rather than be treated as testing grounds. The demand for meaningful human control is therefore linked not only to humanitarian protection but also to equitable participation in the making of international security norms.

Chinese: China generally supports discussion of LAWS within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons while emphasizing state sovereignty, consensus, and the legitimacy of military modernization; it has often supported restrictions on use while resisting constraints that would impede lawful development or defensive applications. Its position reflects a broader commitment to non-interference and to preserving strategic flexibility in an era of great-power competition.

Russian: Russia typically argues that existing international humanitarian law is sufficient to regulate new weapons, opposes new binding prohibitions, and frames restrictions on autonomous systems as potentially undermining legitimate self-defense and military effectiveness. This position is consistent with a broader skepticism toward Western-led humanitarian disarmament initiatives and with an emphasis on state sovereignty.

Western: Western states are internally divided: humanitarian and legal communities often support a ban or strict regulation of lethal autonomous weapons, while defense establishments emphasize operational advantages, force protection, and the possibility of more precise targeting. The United States and several allies have resisted a binding prohibition while adopting internal policies requiring human judgment, revealing a tension between ethical aspiration and strategic competition.

UN: The United Nations, particularly through the Secretary-General and humanitarian agencies, has increasingly supported prohibitions on machines that target human beings without human control and has framed LAWS as a challenge to human dignity, civilian protection, and accountability. Its occlusion is structural: the UN can convene and articulate norms, but binding regulation depends on state consensus, and enforcement mechanisms remain weak.

SECTION 2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The politics of humanitarianism: aid, access, and the securitization of relief

Bolded Causal Claim:

Humanitarianism's claim to neutrality is operationally unsustainable in armed conflict; when relief is integrated into counterinsurgency, stabilization, sanctions, or border-control architectures, aid ceases to be merely protective and becomes a technique of governance that can intensify vulnerability, reshape political authority, and determine who is allowed to survive.

Mechanism:

Humanitarian action is conventionally organized around four principles: humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. In practice, these principles are not self-executing; they must be negotiated with armed actors, states, donors, and local communities. The mechanism of securitization begins when humanitarian access, logistics, and objectives are subordinated to security priorities. Aid may be used to win civilian support in counterinsurgency, to stabilize territories after military operations, to incentivize cooperation with authorities, or to manage refugee and migrant flows. In such settings, relief becomes a resource in political competition rather than a neutral response to need. Counterterrorism and sanctions regimes add a second mechanism: by criminalizing material support to designated groups or imposing compliance burdens on aid organizations, they restrict the ability of humanitarians to operate impartially in areas controlled by sanctioned actors. A third mechanism is the militarization of humanitarian space, in which military forces provide or protect aid, blurring the distinction between combatants and relief workers and exposing aid personnel to

attack. A fourth is the political economy of aid, in which external funding empowers certain local actors, creates parallel governance structures, and marginalizes others. The cumulative effect is that humanitarianism can protect lives while also reinforcing the very power structures that produce insecurity. The securitization of relief therefore does not require bad faith; it can emerge from the ordinary effort to deliver aid in environments where sovereignty, violence, and need are already politically contested.

Scope Conditions:
The mechanism is strongest in protracted conflicts, asymmetric wars, sieges, and counterterrorism campaigns, where armed groups control territory and civilian populations, and where states seek to combine military, political, and humanitarian tools. It is also strong where sanctions regimes are broad, where donor governments condition aid on political objectives, and where humanitarian corridors are negotiated as part of military strategy. It is weaker in natural disasters or conflicts where humanitarian actors can operate with genuine independence and where belligerents accept neutral access. The scope is further shaped by the legal status of humanitarian actors: their protections under international humanitarian law depend on distinction and on not taking part in hostilities, a boundary that becomes difficult to maintain when aid is visibly aligned with one side. Local context matters as well; in some settings, community-based and faith-based organizations sustain access where international agencies cannot, while in others they are co-opted or endangered by association with external agendas.

Observable Implications:
If the mechanism is operative, one should observe humanitarian access being conditioned on political or military cooperation; aid workers facing violence because they are perceived as aligned with one party; and counterterrorism laws creating delays, over-compliance, or withdrawal from high-risk areas. One should also observe the growth of "stabilization" and "resilience" programming that merges relief with governance and security objectives; the use of humanitarian corridors or pauses as tactical instruments; and the marginalization of local organizations despite rhetorical commitments to localization. Data should show disparities between needs and assistance, with populations in sanctioned or contested areas receiving less aid. The securitization of relief should also appear in debates over whether humanitarian principles are being eroded by donor priorities, and in the increasing professionalization of risk management, which can distance aid from affected communities. In extreme cases, aid diversion to armed actors or the use of starvation as a method of warfare should expose the limits of humanitarian protection when relief is embedded in coercive strategies.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):
African (primary): African perspectives frequently critique humanitarianism as a continuation of external governance, emphasizing that aid can reproduce dependency, empower intermediaries, and displace local political agency. African scholarship and practitioner experience highlight indigenous coping mechanisms, community solidarity, and local organizations that are often rendered invisible by international humanitarian architectures. At the same time, African states assert sovereignty over access and may view unrestricted humanitarian intervention with suspicion, particularly where it appears to bypass or undermine state authority. The African vantage point thus reveals that humanitarianism is not only a moral practice but also a field of power in which questions of who defines need, who controls resources, and who speaks for affected populations are deeply political.
Chinese: China emphasizes state sovereignty, non-interference, and the primary responsibility of the affected state for humanitarian response, while supporting assistance delivered with state consent. It is generally skeptical of humanitarian intervention and of the securitization of aid by Western actors, and it increasingly participates in peacekeeping and disaster relief as part of a state-led model of international engagement.
Russian: Russia often frames Western humanitarianism as a vehicle for intervention, regime change, or

geopolitical influence, and emphasizes sovereignty, state consent, and the dangers of politicized aid. It has supported humanitarian corridors and aid deliveries in conflicts where it is involved, while criticizing sanctions and counterterrorism frameworks as forms of collective punishment that harm civilians.
Western: Western perspectives are divided between humanitarian organizations that defend neutrality and independence and governments that integrate aid into stabilization, counterterrorism, and migration-control strategies. There is significant self-critique regarding militarized aid, donor conditionality, and the chilling effects of counterterrorism laws, but accountability for harmful practices remains uneven.
UN: The United Nations promotes humanitarian principles, civilian protection, and access negotiations through agencies such as OCHA, while recognizing that humanitarian space is shrinking. Its perspective is shaped by the tension between normative commitment to impartial relief and dependence on member states for security, funding, and political support; the UN can advocate for access but cannot compel sovereign states or armed groups to grant it.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point begins from a historical and structural critique of international law rather than from the assumption that the legal architecture of war is a neutral framework awaiting better compliance. From this perspective, *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* are not merely technical rules that separate lawful from unlawful force; they are part of a longer history in which sovereignty, humanity, and accountability have been distributed unequally across a racialized international order. Grovogui's argument that Africans were incorporated into international society as "quasi sovereigns" captures the foundational grievance: the legal order that now governs the use of force was built during an era in which African polities were denied the full sovereignty that European states claimed for themselves. Consequently, when contemporary African governments, jurists, and scholars assess lawfare, they do not ask only whether a particular strike, intervention, or prosecution complies with the Charter or the Geneva Conventions. They ask whose legal categories are being applied, by whom, against whom, and with what historical continuity. This makes the African perspective the most suspicious of formalism among the five: it treats legal rules as embedded in power, not as standing above it.

That suspicion is rooted in anti-colonial political thought. Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism warned that formal independence could coexist with continued external control through economic, military, and legal instruments; Rodney's account of underdevelopment showed how the international system extracted value while presenting its rules as universal; Fanon insisted that colonial order was maintained through violence that was then legalized and normalized; Cabral argued that liberation required cultural and political self-determination, not merely the transfer of administrative authority. Nyerere's emphasis on self-reliance and collective African agency, and Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject, add a crucial institutional insight: the post-colonial state often inherited legal systems that governed populations differently, producing citizens with rights and subjects administered by coercion. In the domain of war, this means that international humanitarian law can appear simultaneously as a protection for African civilians and as a continuation of external tutelage. The African perspective therefore does not reject IHL; rather, it insists that IHL be read through the history of empire, racial hierarchy, and unequal sovereignty.

This historical lens reshapes the interpretation of accountability mechanisms. African states were among the early supporters of the Rome Statute, and many African jurists and civil-society actors have been genuine

champions of international criminal justice. Yet the concentration of ICC investigations and prosecutions in Africa produced a sustained critique of selectivity. The African Union's pushback—withdrawal threats, non-cooperation debates, and demands for reform—should not be caricatured as simple impunity-seeking. It reflects a claim that the ICC's docket has tracked geopolitical power rather than the global distribution of atrocity. The Malabo Protocol, adopted in 2014 to extend the African Court of Justice and Human Rights' jurisdiction to international and transnational crimes, is best understood as an attempt to create continental ownership of accountability. It remains not fully operational, and its promise is constrained by funding, ratification, and political will. Still, it signals a demand that African institutions, not only The Hague, be the primary sites for judging African wars. The African perspective thus contributes a powerful corrective: accountability that is perceived as externally imposed can undermine the very legitimacy it seeks to establish.

Universal jurisdiction produces a similar duality. From one angle, European prosecutions of African officials or non-state actors can look like legal imperialism: extraterritorial courts applying Western legal standards to African conflicts while powerful states remain shielded. From another angle, African victims and human-rights advocates have supported universal jurisdiction precisely because domestic courts are often captured, under-resourced, or politically constrained. The African perspective therefore does not resolve the tension in favor of either sovereignty or justice; it reveals that the tension is structural. Sovereignty is both a shield against external domination and a potential cover for elite impunity. The African vantage point asks whether international law can be reformed so that accountability is neither a tool of powerful states nor a hollow promise to victims.

Targeting law is read through the same asymmetry. Distinction, proportionality, and precautions are formally universal, but their application in contemporary conflicts often depends on who possesses advanced surveillance, precision weapons, and legal advisory capacity. Effects-based operations and remote warfare—especially drone strikes in Somalia and other African theaters—transfer physical risk away from intervening forces and onto local populations. The legal categorization of conflict, the identification of "military objectives," and the assessment of "expected" civilian harm are not neutral technical exercises; they are shaped by intelligence asymmetries and by the political willingness of powerful states to tolerate civilian casualties. African scholars and policymakers have therefore emphasized that precision warfare can obscure rather than eliminate harm, and that legal compliance claims can function as moral alibis. The African perspective also highlights the gendered dimensions of targeting and humanitarian categorization. Tamale's decolonial feminist scholarship and Oyěwùmí's critique of the colonial invention of gendered categories remind us that legal distinctions between combatant and civilian, protector and protected, are not culturally neutral. Kinsella's work on the gendered image of the civilian similarly helps explain why humanitarian protection often reproduces hierarchies rather than dissolving them.

Humanitarianism is perhaps where the African perspective is most sharply critical. Aid, access, and relief are often presented as morally uncomplicated goods, yet African experience shows how humanitarian space can be securitized, militarized, and subordinated to donor priorities. Counterterrorism frameworks, migration-control agendas, and stabilization missions can reshape aid into an instrument of external security. Bayart's concept of extraversion helps explain how African elites and institutions may be incentivized to perform compliance with external agendas in order to secure resources and legitimacy. Mbembe's necropolitics adds a darker register: humanitarian governance can manage populations as "living dead," preserving life at the threshold of death without restoring political agency. The African perspective therefore insists that humanitarianism be evaluated not only by tons of aid delivered or corridors opened, but by whether it reinforces dependency, bypasses local institutions, or legitimizes coercive security architectures. At the same time, African actors are not merely critics. The African Union's humanitarian architecture, regional economic

communities, and local civil-society organizations have developed practices of protection and relief that are often more contextually grounded than externally designed interventions. The perspective thus calls for "African solutions to African problems" without romanticizing African state capacity.

On autonomous weapons, the African position is shaped by technological asymmetry and by the fear that algorithmic killing will further lower the threshold for the use of force in spaces already marked by intervention. Many African states participating in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons have supported meaningful human control and, in some cases, a ban on fully autonomous lethal systems. The concern is not only that machines cannot comply with distinction and proportionality, but that the diffusion of such systems will deepen global inequality: those who design, deploy, and legally justify autonomous weapons will not be those who suffer their errors. This is consistent with the broader African critique of lawfare as a practice that converts technological superiority into legal authority.

What the African perspective contributes that the other four cannot is a sustained insistence that international legal order is historically constituted by empire and that its contemporary enforcement reproduces global hierarchy. It foregrounds anti-colonial sovereignty, local ownership, victim-centered justice, and the political economy of aid. It reveals how legal categories can be used to legitimize remote warfare, selective accountability, and humanitarian securitization. Its occlusions are equally important. The perspective can sometimes understate intra-African violence, elite predation, and the genuine need for external accountability when domestic systems fail. Pan-African solidarity, while politically valuable, can be mobilized to shield perpetrators or to deflect criticism of African governments. The Malabo Protocol remains aspirational, and the African Union's non-indifference principle has been applied unevenly. Moreover, "the African perspective" is not monolithic: states, regional organizations, victims' groups, feminist scholars, and security professionals disagree about the balance between sovereignty and justice. The most defensible version of the perspective is therefore not a rejection of international law, but a demand that law be accountable to the histories and peoples it claims to protect.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on lawfare and the ethics of war is anchored in a strong commitment to state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference, combined with an increasingly active but state-centric engagement with international humanitarian law. Rooted in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the UN Charter, it treats the prohibition on the use of force as the cornerstone of international order. From this vantage point, *jus ad bellum* is not a flexible moral framework but a legal constraint: force is lawful only in self-defense or when authorized by the Security Council. Humanitarian intervention, regime change, and unilateral "lawfare" are viewed with deep suspicion because they can be used to undermine sovereign equality and to impose external political preferences. The Chinese position therefore contributes a powerful defense of legal restraint against the expansion of exceptions to Article 2(4).

On *jus in bello*, China supports the Geneva Conventions and the core principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions, while emphasizing implementation, capacity building, and the responsibilities of states to train and discipline their forces. It is generally critical of effects-based operations and remote warfare that risk civilian harm, particularly when conducted outside transparent legal frameworks. Chinese discourse tends to stress that technological precision does not automatically satisfy humanitarian obligations and that civilian protection requires political restraint, not only better targeting algorithms. This creates a point of convergence with African and Russian critiques of Western remote warfare, though China's emphasis is less on anti-imperial history and more on sovereignty and multilateral process.

Accountability is approached through complementarity and state consent. China is not a party to the Rome Statute and has been cautious about the ICC's exercise of jurisdiction, particularly where it might affect non-party states or be perceived as politicized. It generally favors domestic accountability, Security Council-based mechanisms, and UN fact-finding, while resisting universal jurisdiction as an infringement on sovereignty. At the same time, China has increased its participation in UN peacekeeping and has shown greater interest in IHL training, humanitarian assistance, and post-conflict reconstruction. Its contribution lies in insisting that accountability must be embedded in multilateral institutions and state consent rather than in ad hoc or selective enforcement.

On autonomous weapons, China participates in CCW discussions and has expressed support for maintaining meaningful human control over lethal force. It has warned against an unregulated arms race in autonomous systems and has emphasized that new weapons must comply with existing IHL. The Chinese position is not simply abolitionist; it is regulatory and sovereignty-preserving, seeking to prevent both humanitarian harm and strategic disadvantage. It contributes to the LAWS debate by highlighting the need for international consensus and by resisting unilateral technological dominance.

Humanitarianism, in the Chinese view, should be governed by state consent, non-politicization, and the integration of relief with development. China is skeptical of aid that is securitized, conditional, or used to advance regime-change agendas. It emphasizes sovereignty, equality, and mutual benefit in humanitarian and development cooperation. This perspective contributes a critique of Western donor conditionality and of the shrinking space for neutral relief, but it can occlude the vulnerabilities of populations living under abusive governments and the need for independent humanitarian access. Its state-centric bias may understate the role of non-state actors, local civil society, and victim-centered accountability. Nonetheless, the Chinese perspective is valuable because it insists that international humanitarian order must rest on sovereign equality and multilateral legitimacy rather than on the discretionary power of the strongest states.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective treats lawfare as a central instrument of contemporary geopolitical competition, particularly as a means by which Western states delegitimize adversaries, justify intervention, and constrain rivals through legal categories. It is rooted in a strong defense of sovereignty, multipolarity, and the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of force. From this vantage point, *jus ad bellum* exceptions have been expanded illegitimately through doctrines such as humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect, which are seen as pretexts for regime change. Russia emphasizes Article 2(4), self-defense under Article 51, and Security Council authorization as the only lawful bases for force. This position contributes a skeptical check on unilateralism and on the moralization of war, reminding the international community that legal exceptions can become tools of power.

On *jus in bello*, Russia supports IHL in principle but frequently frames Western practice as hypocritical. It points to drone strikes, targeted killings, Guantánamo, and civilian casualties in Western-led campaigns as evidence that powerful states invoke humanitarian law against others while exempting themselves. This critique has force as a charge of double standards, even when it is deployed selectively. Russia's own conduct in armed conflicts has also been subject to serious IHL allegations, and the perspective's credibility depends on whether it applies legal standards consistently rather than only to adversaries. The Russian view contributes an important warning: IHL loses authority when it is perceived as an instrument of geopolitical alignment rather than a universal constraint.

Accountability mechanisms are viewed with similar suspicion. Russia signed but did not ratify the Rome

Statute and withdrew its signature in 2016, reflecting its view that the ICC has become politicized. It is particularly critical of universal jurisdiction when used by Western courts against Russian or allied officials, seeing it as "lawfare" in the literal sense: the use of legal process as a weapon of statecraft. At the same time, Russia supports accountability when it aligns with Security Council processes or domestic jurisdiction, and it has used international legal forums to contest Western actions. The perspective thus reveals how accountability mechanisms can be perceived as extensions of power politics, but it occludes the need for independent justice when domestic systems are unwilling or unable to prosecute grave crimes.

On autonomous weapons, Russia has generally been cautious about new legally binding restrictions, emphasizing military necessity, state sovereignty, and the sufficiency of existing IHL. It participates in CCW discussions but has resisted approaches that it believes would constrain legitimate defense capabilities or create asymmetries favoring technologically advanced states. This position contributes a realist reminder that arms-control negotiations are shaped by strategic competition, yet it risks understating the humanitarian and accountability gaps created by algorithmic killing.

Humanitarianism, in the Russian view, must respect state consent and avoid politicization. It has emphasized humanitarian corridors, aid delivery, and the protection of civilians in conflicts where it is involved, while criticizing Western aid as an instrument of influence. The perspective contributes a defense of sovereignty in relief operations and a warning against the securitization of aid, but it can occlude the dangers of state obstruction, the needs of populations in contested territories, and the importance of independent humanitarian access. Its strongest contribution is the insistence that law and humanitarianism not be subordinated to unilateral geopolitical agendas; its greatest weakness is the tendency to exempt allied or self-interested conduct from the same legal scrutiny.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective is the most institutionally developed of the five, combining just-war theory, international humanitarian law, human-rights law, and a dense network of courts, military legal advisors, and civil-society organizations. It treats *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* as distinct but complementary: the legality of going to war does not determine the legality of conduct in war, and even unlawful wars are governed by humanitarian constraints. This separation, defended by Walzer and embedded in modern IHL, is a major contribution because it protects civilians regardless of the justice of the cause. Western states generally accept self-defense, collective security, and, in some cases, humanitarian intervention or responsibility to protect as lawful uses of force, though the latter remains contested. The perspective thus offers a rich legal and moral vocabulary for evaluating war, but it also carries the risk of expanding exceptions to the prohibition on force.

On targeting, the Western tradition has shaped the modern law of distinction, proportionality, and precautions, and has pioneered effects-based operations that seek to achieve military objectives with precision. Sagan and Valentino's research on civilian casualties highlights a central tension within this perspective: publics and policymakers may tolerate significant civilian harm when they believe it serves security goals, even while legal frameworks promise protection. The Western self-critique—evident in debates over drone strikes, Guantánamo, torture, and civilian casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan—acknowledges that legal compliance can be formalistic and that "precision" can mask structural violence. Luban's work on torture and the ethics of coercion underscores how emergency framing can erode legal constraints. This self-critique is a genuine strength: it produces internal accountability mechanisms, investigative journalism, and legal challenges that are less common in more closed systems.

Accountability is a core Western commitment, expressed through support for the ICC, universal jurisdic-

tion, military justice, and human-rights litigation. Many Western states have incorporated IHL into military doctrine and have developed legal review processes for weapons and targeting. Yet the perspective is also marked by ambivalence: the United States is not a party to the Rome Statute, and Western powers have been accused of double standards when their own personnel or allies are implicated. The Western contribution is therefore both substantive and contested: it has built much of the legal architecture of accountability, but its credibility depends on applying that architecture to itself.

On autonomous weapons, the Western debate is divided between those who support a ban on fully autonomous lethal systems and those who favor regulation with meaningful human control. The ethical concern is that algorithmic killing may sever the moral link between human judgment and lethal force, while the legal concern is that machines cannot reliably satisfy distinction, proportionality, and accountability. Western militaries, however, are also investing heavily in autonomous and semi-autonomous systems, creating a tension between ethical aspiration and strategic competition. The perspective contributes sophisticated legal and ethical analysis but must confront its own role in driving the technology it debates.

Humanitarianism, in the Western view, is grounded in principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence, and is supported by a large ecosystem of NGOs, donors, and international agencies. Yet Western states have also securitized aid, linked relief to counterterrorism, and used humanitarian language to justify intervention. The self-critique here is significant: scholars and practitioners increasingly warn that militarized aid, donor conditionality, and counterterrorism laws can shrink humanitarian space and endanger aid workers. The Western perspective thus offers both the strongest institutional support for humanitarian norms and the most visible examples of their erosion.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The United Nations perspective is institutional and normative rather than statist. It is built around the Charter's prohibition on the use of force, the Security Council's primary responsibility for international peace and security, the Geneva Conventions, and a growing body of civilian-protection and accountability norms. From this vantage point, *jus ad bellum* is a collective matter: unilateral force is presumptively unlawful, while collective security and self-defense are the recognized exceptions. The UN's contribution is to frame war not as a bilateral dispute but as a threat to international order, and to provide mechanisms—however imperfect—for authorization, mediation, and protection. This perspective is valuable because it resists both unilateralism and pure power politics, but it is constrained by the political divisions of member states.

On *jus in bello*, the UN promotes IHL as universally binding and emphasizes civilian protection, access, and accountability. UN commissions of inquiry, human-rights mechanisms, and peacekeeping mandates document violations and seek to deter them. The UN perspective supports distinction, proportionality, and precautions, and it has increasingly addressed effects-based operations and remote warfare through civilian-harm mitigation and protection-of-civilians frameworks. Its strength is normative consistency; its weakness is enforcement. The UN can name violations and establish standards, but it depends on states for implementation, funding, and political support.

Accountability is approached through complementarity. The UN supports the ICC, the ICJ, and ad hoc tribunals, while recognizing that national courts bear primary responsibility. It also supports universal jurisdiction in principle, though it does not control its exercise. The UN perspective contributes a multilateral framework for accountability, but it is vulnerable to the same selectivity and politicization that affect its member states. When powerful states block Security Council action or shield allies, the UN's accountability agenda is weakened. Conversely, when the Council acts, the UN can mobilize significant legal and opera-

tional resources.

On autonomous weapons, the UN has been the primary forum for CCW discussions on lethal autonomous weapons systems. The UN perspective emphasizes human control, compliance with IHL, and the need for international consensus. It has facilitated expert debates on the ethical and legal status of algorithmic killing, and it has highlighted the risks of an unregulated arms race. The UN cannot impose a ban without state agreement, but it provides the institutional space in which norms are negotiated and, potentially, hardened into law.

Humanitarianism is central to the UN perspective. Through OCHA and other agencies, the UN promotes humanitarian principles, negotiates access, and coordinates relief. It recognizes that humanitarian space is shrinking and that aid is increasingly politicized, securitized, and obstructed. The UN's contribution is to articulate and defend a global humanitarian norm, but its dependence on member states for security and funding means that it cannot compel sovereign states or armed groups to grant access. This creates a persistent gap between normative ambition and operational reality.

Overall, the UN perspective contributes a multilateral, law-based framework for evaluating war, accountability, and humanitarian protection. It occludes less than the statist perspectives in principle, but its effectiveness is limited by the very sovereignty it seeks to regulate. Its greatest strength is the ability to convene, standardize, and legitimize norms; its greatest weakness is the absence of independent enforcement power.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers ICC selectivity, AU pushback, and the Malabo Protocol; insists accountability must be even-handed and regionally legitimate	Can understate individual criminal responsibility and victim-centered justice when institutional bias becomes the dominant frame	Anti-impunity combined with anti-colonial sovereignty and regional ownership of justice	ICC's early Africa-only docket; AU withdrawals and threats of withdrawal; Malabo Protocol	Western: selectivity critique can shield perpetrators and weaken universal accountability

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Defends sovereignty and non-interference; engages IHL through multilateral forums while resisting judicial overreach	Weakens individual accountability and humanitarian intervention; treats state consent as a practical veto	State sovereignty, stability, and consent-based international law	Non-party status to the Rome Statute; CCW positions; emphasis on UN Security Council authorization	UN/Western: sovereignty absolutism can entrench impunity for atrocities
Russian	Exposes lawfare as an instrument of Western hegemony; highlights double standards in the application of international criminal law	Self-serving shield for state violence; delegitimizes accountability for its own conduct	Multipolarity, anti-hegemony, and great-power equality	Rejection of ICC jurisdiction; framing of the Putin warrant as political; references to Western wars	Western: tu quoque rhetoric avoids legal responsibility for documented crimes
Western	Provides IHL frameworks, targeting law, and self-critique of drones and Guantánamo	Exceptionalism and selective enforcement; conflates legal authority with power	Rule of law, humanitarian protection, and individual criminal responsibility	Rome Statute; military manuals; ICC referrals by European states	African/Russian: double standards undermine the legitimacy of universal justice
UN	Convenes multilateral norms, civilian protection, and accountability mechanisms	Dependent on member states for enforcement; cannot compel sovereigns or armed groups	Universal IHL, civilian protection, and complementar-ity	UN commissions of inquiry; ICC referrals; humanitarian law treaties	Realist/statist: normative ambition exceeds operational capacity

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Levels of analysis

The ICC arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin and Maria Lvova-Belova, issued in March 2023, can be analyzed at four levels. At the individual level, the warrant asserts personal criminal responsibility for alleged war crimes—specifically the unlawful deportation and transfer of children from occupied Ukrainian territory to Russia—rather than treating the war as an abstract state act. It names a sitting head of state and a senior official responsible for children's rights, signaling that individual agency, command responsibility, and bureaucratic implementation matter. At the state level, Russia's refusal to recognize ICC jurisdiction, its non-party status to the Rome Statute, and its non-cooperation illustrate how sovereignty and regime survival shape legal outcomes; Ukraine's 2014 and 2015 declarations accepting ICC jurisdiction and the referral by dozens of states show how a victim state can activate transnational legal institutions. At the systemic level, the warrant sits within great-power rivalry: Russia's permanent Security Council seat, Western support for accountability, Chinese and Global South ambivalence, and the broader contest over whether international criminal law is a neutral legal order or an instrument of hegemony. At the transnational level, the case involves cross-border child transfers, NGO and journalist documentation, diaspora and victim advocacy, family tracing across borders, and the ICC's dependence on state cooperation, civil society evidence, and diplomatic pressure.

Mechanism section

The mechanism is lawfare as judicialization combined with enforcement asymmetry. The ICC prosecutor's investigation and the Pre-Trial Chamber's warrant convert contested battlefield conduct into individualized criminal charges, creating legal stigma, travel constraints, and diplomatic costs for the accused. This operates through three channels: first, legal categorization, where facts are translated into Rome Statute crimes; second, institutional authorization, where a treaty body claims competence over a non-party's leader through territorial jurisdiction and state referrals; third, political enforcement, where the warrant's practical effect depends on whether states arrest, extradite, or politically isolate the accused. The mechanism does not require immediate arrest to matter. It can reshape diplomatic legitimacy, constrain summit participation, and provide evidentiary and moral resources to Ukraine and its allies. The warrant's limits are equally visible: Putin avoided the BRICS summit in South Africa in August 2023, yet traveled to Mongolia, an ICC state party, in September 2024 without arrest. These episodes demonstrate that the warrant partially constrains but does not compel sovereign behavior. Conversely, non-enforcement can strengthen the accused's narrative of Western hypocrisy and demonstrate the limits of international criminal law against powerful states. The case thus shows lawfare's dual character: it is simultaneously a legal process and a strategic resource in interstate conflict.

Perspective reconstruction

African perspective (primary): Many African jurists, civil society organizations, and victim advocates have supported accountability for atrocities in Ukraine, viewing the Putin warrant as evidence that the ICC can, in principle, reach powerful leaders outside Africa; this matters because African critiques have long centered on the court's selective docket and its disproportionate focus on African situations. At the same time, AU institutions and several African governments continue to argue that the ICC's legitimacy depends on even-handedness, complementarity, and respect for regional justice mechanisms such as the Malabo Protocol, so the warrant is read both as a corrective and as a test of whether the court applies the same standard to Western and non-Western powers. African scholarship on international criminal law often stresses that justice must not be reduced to a geopolitical weapon, and that accountability for Ukrainian children should not obscure unresolved accountability gaps in African conflicts. The African vantage therefore contributes a demand for consistency: if the ICC can indict a Russian president, it must also sustain credible, non-selective

pursuit of crimes by powerful actors in all regions. Its occlusion is that this critique can be appropriated by accused leaders to deflect responsibility, and that institutional bias arguments may inadvertently weaken victim-centered justice. Overall, the African perspective frames the warrant as a legitimacy test for universal criminal law rather than a settled triumph of justice.

Chinese perspective: Beijing generally treats the warrant through the lens of sovereignty and non-interference, emphasizing that Russia is not a party to the Rome Statute and that judicial action without state consent risks politicizing international law. China's growing engagement with IHL and humanitarian norms does not translate into support for ICC jurisdiction over non-consenting major powers, and it tends to privilege UN Security Council processes over treaty-based criminal enforcement. From this vantage, the warrant illustrates how legal institutions can be drawn into great-power conflict, potentially undermining their neutrality. The Chinese perspective contributes a statist caution about judicial overreach but occludes individual accountability for victims.

Russian perspective: Moscow rejects the warrant as illegitimate and frames it as Western lawfare, arguing that the ICC lacks jurisdiction over a non-party state and serves as an instrument of political coercion. Russian officials deny the underlying allegations and present the warrant as part of a broader campaign to isolate Russia, using it to mobilize domestic and international anti-Western solidarity. This perspective contributes a critique of hegemonic legal instrumentalization and highlights the enforcement gap between legal claims and sovereign power. Its occlusion is that it deflects from documented evidence and treats all accountability efforts as geopolitical attacks, thereby shielding potential perpetrators.

Western perspective: Many Western governments, especially European states, support the ICC investigation and see the warrant as an application of individual criminal responsibility to a permanent Security Council member, reinforcing the norm that leaders are not immune from accountability. The Western framework emphasizes IHL, victim protection, and the legal categorization of child transfers as war crimes, while also carrying self-critique regarding double standards, drone strikes, Guantánamo, and inconsistent support for international criminal justice. This perspective contributes robust legal architecture and institutional backing but occludes the ways Western power and selectivity weaken the court's claim to universality.

UN perspective: The UN system approaches the warrant through IHL, civilian protection, and accountability mechanisms, with commissions of inquiry and human rights bodies documenting violations and the ICC serving as a complementary accountability forum. The UN emphasizes the protection of children and the prohibition of forcible transfer, while acknowledging that enforcement depends on member states and that Security Council politics—especially Russian veto power—limit collective action. This perspective contributes a multilateral, norm-based framework but occludes less in principle than in practice, because its effectiveness is constrained by the sovereignty it seeks to regulate.

Explicit adjudication

The warrant is best explained by a synthesis, but if adjudication is required, the Western legal-institutional perspective best explains the warrant's issuance, while the African perspective best explains its contested legitimacy and the enforcement gap. Western legalism accounts for the specific charges, the role of state referrals, and the institutional logic of individual responsibility; it captures how law can be activated against a powerful leader. However, it underestimates the political asymmetry that makes such activation possible in some conflicts but not others, and it risks treating legal formality as legitimacy. The African perspective captures that asymmetry and the court's historical selectivity, explaining why the warrant is celebrated by some as overdue universality and suspected by others as geopolitical lawfare. The Russian and Chinese

statist perspectives best explain non-enforcement and the absence of arrest, but they are weaker on the merits because they treat jurisdictional objections as sufficient to negate accountability. The UN perspective provides the normative vocabulary but lacks independent enforcement. Therefore, the most adequate explanation is layered: legal formalism explains creation, political realism explains non-enforcement, and the African critique explains why the warrant's authority remains disputed even where its legal basis is strong.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Threshold classification.** Are the US strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia governed by international humanitarian law as part of an armed conflict, or by international human rights law as law enforcement? State the factual and legal criteria you would use to decide.
2. **Jus ad bellum.** Assess necessity, imminence, proportionality, and sovereignty/consent in at least one strike context. Does the expansion of "imminence" to cover continuous threats convert self-defense into a standing license to kill?
3. **Jus in bello.** Apply distinction, proportionality, and precautions to "signature strikes" and to strikes based on pattern-of-life analysis. What evidentiary standard should be required before a person is targeted?
4. **Accountability.** Evaluate domestic oversight, judicial review, international mechanisms, and the Rome Statute's complementarity principle. Which accountability gap is most consequential, and why?
5. **Ethical adjudication.** Compare Walzer's constraints on noncombatant immunity, Luban's critique of targeted killing as assassination, and the argument that drones can be more discriminate than alternatives. Which position best fits the evidence, and what would falsify it?
6. **Perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would each frame the strikes, then adjudicate which perspective captures the central mechanism and which occludes it.

MODEL ANSWER

The US drone campaign in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia illustrates how lawfare operates when the legal category of "armed conflict" is stretched across borders and time. At the threshold level, the central dispute is not simply whether force is permitted but which legal regime governs it. The US position treats Al-Qaeda and associated forces as parties to a non-international armed conflict of global and indefinite scope, thereby invoking IHL targeting rules and self-defense under the Charter. Critics respond that outside recognized battlefields, especially where no consent exists or where violence falls below the intensity threshold, the applicable framework is international human rights law, which permits lethal force only when strictly necessary to protect life and where no less harmful means are available. This is a mechanism-level disagreement: the same strike is lawful under one paradigm and presumptively unlawful under the other.

Jus ad bellum analysis focuses on sovereignty, consent, necessity, and imminence. Where host states consent, the legal objection weakens but does not disappear, because consent may be secret, revocable, or given by governments lacking democratic legitimacy. Where consent is absent, cross-border strikes require a credible claim of self-defense against an imminent threat; the expansion of "imminence" to include continuous threats and opportunity-based targeting is precisely the kind of legal innovation that opponents label lawfare.

Proportionality at this stage concerns whether the expected military advantage justifies the infringement of territorial sovereignty and the risk of escalation.

Jus in bello analysis turns on distinction, proportionality, and precautions. The difficulty is epistemic: remote operators depend on intelligence fusion, pattern-of-life analysis, and sometimes "signature strikes" based on behavior rather than identified status. Kinsella's history of the combatant-civilian distinction shows that the category of civilian is not self-evident; it is produced by legal and political practices that can be narrowed in asymmetric conflicts. Walzer's just war framework insists that even in a just war, noncombatant immunity imposes constraints that cannot be waived by military convenience. Proportionality is not a numerical ratio but a judgment about whether civilian harm is excessive relative to concrete military advantage; in practice, secrecy and classification make that judgment difficult to test. Sagan and Valentino's work on public attitudes suggests that democratic publics may tolerate substantial civilian harm when framed as counterterrorism, which means legal compliance and political legitimacy can diverge.

Accountability mechanisms are fragmented. Domestically, the US has relied on executive legal review, congressional funding and oversight, and judicial doctrines of state secrets and political question that limit adversarial testing. Internationally, the ICC's jurisdiction is constrained by state consent and Security Council politics; universal jurisdiction is theoretically available but practically rare, especially against officials of powerful states. The Rome Statute's complementarity principle means that genuine domestic investigation can bar international prosecution, creating incentives for states to conduct internal reviews that may be opaque. The UN human rights system has documented civilian harm and called for transparency, but lacks enforcement power. Thus accountability is often retrospective, partial, and politically contingent.

Ethically, the debate pits security consequentialism against deontological constraints. Proponents argue that drones reduce risk to operators and can be more discriminate than alternatives; critics, including Luban, warn that targeted killing outside combat zones resembles assassination and erodes the moral and legal distinction between war and policing. The "effects-based" turn in targeting—focusing on outcomes rather than platform—can obscure responsibility by distributing it across intelligence analysts, lawyers, commanders, and algorithms. This is where the LAWS debate becomes relevant by analogy: even where humans remain in the loop, automation of identification and recommendation can weaken meaningful human judgment.

A sound adjudication is that the strikes are best explained by a hybrid legal strategy: the US invokes armed-conflict rules to expand permissible force while retaining enough procedural control to avoid external accountability. The strongest counterargument is that some strikes occur in contexts of genuine armed conflict and state consent, and that IHL may be more protective than an unregulated law-enforcement alternative. Falsifiers include transparent, case-level publication of targeting criteria and civilian-harm assessments; independent judicial review; a sustained decline in civilian casualties after procedural reforms; or evidence that strikes were consistently limited to imminent threats. Absent such evidence, the critique of lawfare remains analytically stronger, though not morally absolute.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. An armed group based in State B carries out repeated cross-border attacks into State A, killing civilians and security personnel. State A responds with sustained drone strikes in State B, including in populated areas, without publicly acknowledged consent from State B's government. The strikes kill several group leaders but also produce disputed civilian casualties and disrupt humanitarian access. State A argues that it is engaged in a non-international armed conflict with the group and is exercising self-defense; State B denounces the strikes as violations of sovereignty and calls for regional mediation. A regional organization

debates whether to authorize a joint stabilization force, while the ICC prosecutor opens a preliminary examination into alleged crimes. Humanitarian agencies report that communities face threats from both the armed group and the strikes, and that relief operations have been suspended in affected districts. The case requires distinguishing legal description from causal explanation, predicting institutional responses, and prescribing policy without conflating them.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts.

- **Mechanism:** Explain the causal chain linking the legal classification of the conflict, the targeting decision, civilian harm, and the political backlash; identify the level(s) of analysis and the scope conditions under which your explanation holds.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Steel-man the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on the strikes and accountability; state what each reveals and what it occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the case to one prior episode of cross-border targeted killing or lawfare; specify what is similar, what differs, and why the analogy might fail.
- **Falsifiers:** List observable evidence that would weaken or refute your mechanism and your preferred adjudication.

(c) Self-check line. Self-check: Did you separate description of events, explanation of causes, prediction of outcomes, and prescription of policy, and did you avoid treating any single perspective as self-evidently correct?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which statement best captures the central legal disagreement over targeted killing outside traditional battlefields?

A. Whether international humanitarian law prohibits all uses of force by non-state actors.
B. Whether the violence is legally an armed conflict of global and indefinite scope or a set of localized law-enforcement problems.
C. Whether the ICC can prosecute individuals without state consent in every case.
D. Whether proportionality permits any civilian deaths at all.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **A** conflates the existence of non-state violence with the legal classification of the response; IHL can apply to non-state actors in armed conflict, but that is not the disputed issue.

- **C** mistakes an accountability mechanism for the threshold legal question; ICC jurisdiction is contingent and secondary to the classification problem.

- **D** misstates proportionality, which prohibits excessive civilian harm relative to military advantage rather than requiring zero civilian harm.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. ICC situations by region (public ICC situation list, approximate as of 2024)

Region	Approx. situations	Representative situations	Perspective issue highlighted by the data
Africa	10 of 17	Uganda, DRC, Sudan (Darfur), CAR I/II, Kenya, Libya, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burundi	African critique of selectivity and the "African bias" debate; AU pushback and the Malabo Protocol
Europe	2 of 17	Georgia, Ukraine	Lawfare as accountability for aggression; Russian critique of Western instrumentality
Asia / Middle East	4 of 17	Bangladesh/Myanmar, Afghanistan, Palestine, Philippines	Sovereignty, non-interference, and the politics of territorial consent
Americas	1 of 17	Venezuela I	Regional human-rights systems vs. ICC complementarity

Table 2. UN commissions of inquiry and documented IHL-relevant findings (illustrative)

Body	Conflict / period	Documented patterns (illustrative, not exhaustive)	Evidentiary status
Commission of Inquiry on Syria	Syria, 2011–present	Indiscriminate attacks, siege tactics, torture, sexual violence, attacks on medical facilities	UN-mandated; access constraints; state non-cooperation
Group of Eminent Experts on Yemen	Yemen, 2014–present	Airstrikes on civilians, starvation as method of warfare, arbitrary detention, torture	UN-mandated; limited access; competing narratives
Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar	Myanmar, 2017–present	Ethnic cleansing, sexual violence, forced displacement, attacks on Rohingya civilians	UN-mandated; restricted access

Body	Conflict / period	Documented patterns (illustrative, not exhaustive)	Evidentiary status
Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia	Ethiopia (Tigray and beyond), 2020–2023	Mass killings, sexual violence, starvation, obstruction of humanitarian access	UN-mandated; access and security constraints
Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine	Ukraine, 2022–present	Attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, torture, deportation, filtration	UN-mandated; access to occupied areas limited
Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory	OPT, 2021–present	Civilian harm, siege, displacement, accountability gaps	UN-mandated; highly contested political environment

Table 3. CCW discussions on lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS), 2017–2024

Phase	Output / deadlock	Representative positions	Core obstacle
2017–2018	Initial GGE discussions; no binding instrument	Ban advocates: Austria, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, New Zealand; Regulate: Germany, France, others; No new law: US, Russia, China, India, Israel	No agreed definition of autonomy or "meaningful human control"
2019	Eleven guiding principles adopted by consensus	Broad agreement on human responsibility; disagreement on legal implications	Principles non-binding; no compliance mechanism
2020–2022	Definitional and scope deadlock	Ban coalition expands; major military powers resist treaty	Consensus rule; strategic competition; classification of systems
2023–2024	Renewed calls for treaty; no consensus on prohibition	Civil society and some states push for legally binding instrument; major powers favor non-binding norms	Verification, definitional ambiguity, military utility

Table 4. AOAV explosive-violence civilian-harm patterns (illustrative, monitor-based)

Period	Recorded pattern	Civilian-harm indicator	Interpretive caution
2011–2015	High casualty levels in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Gaza	Large share of recorded casualties are civilians	Incident-based reporting; undercounting in inaccessible areas
2016–2020	Continued urban explosive violence; rise in drone and airstrike incidents	Civilian casualties concentrated in populated areas	Attribution of responsibility often contested
2021–2024	Shifts across Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, Myanmar, and other theaters	Civilian harm remains central to IHL debates	Data measure explosive violence, not all forms of war harm

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** The ICC situation list shows a strong African concentration in the Court's early and middle years, followed by more recent situations in Europe and the Middle East. What trend does this describe, and does the trend alone establish discriminatory intent, or does it also reflect referral patterns, state consent, Security Council referrals, and the geography of armed conflict?

2. **Level of analysis.** US drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia can be analyzed at the individual level (operators, legal reviewers), the state level (executive authorization and oversight), the systemic level (counterterrorism norms and great-power practice), or the transnational level (NGO advocacy, UN special rapporteurs, and transnational legal networks). Which level best explains the persistence of targeted killing outside declared armed conflict, and what does each level occlude?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** How would each perspective read the AOAV finding that most civilian casualties from explosive violence occur in populated areas? Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings without reducing any to a caricature.

4. **Interpretation.** Does a high civilian-casualty share in populated areas demonstrate a violation of distinction or proportionality, or can it be partially explained by urban warfare, human shielding, intelligence uncertainty, and the shift to effects-based operations? What evidence would be needed to adjudicate between these explanations?

5. **Limitation.** What do the CCW LAWS data and debates not tell us about actual battlefield autonomy, classified weapons programs, verification capacity, and the gap between diplomatic consensus and operational practice?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Legal Architecture of Force" (hand-drawn funnel / three-tier gate)

- **What to draw:** Draw a large inverted funnel or three stacked horizontal platforms descending from top to bottom. At the top, draw a wide rectangular box labeled **"Jus ad bellum (Resort to Force)"**.

Inside it, place two smaller boxes: **"UN Charter Art. 2(4): prohibition on use of force"** and **"Art. 51: self-defense / Security Council Chapter VII"**. Draw a downward arrow into a middle platform labeled **"Jus in bello (Conduct of Hostilities)"**, containing three smaller boxes: **"Distinction"**, **"Proportionality"**, and **"Precautions"**. Add a side arrow labeled **"Effects-based operations shift"** pointing into the middle platform. Draw a final downward arrow into a bottom platform labeled **"Accountability"**, containing three boxes: **"ICC"**, **"ICJ"**, and **"Universal jurisdiction"**.

- **How to label it:** Label the left margin **"Lawfare zone"** with a bracket spanning all three platforms. Label the right margin **"Legal thresholds"**. Place a small note under the middle platform: **"IHL applies even if jus ad bellum is contested."**

- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Use colored sticky-note shapes around the funnel: **African (primary):** "selective enforcement; AU/Malabo Protocol; ICC legitimacy"; **Chinese:** "sovereignty; non-interference; growing IHL engagement"; **Russian:** "lawfare as Western instrument; double standards"; **Western:** "IHL frameworks; self-critique of drones/Guantánamo"; **UN:** "civilian protection; accountability mechanisms."

Visual 2 — "Targeted Killing Decision Cycle" (hand-drawn circular flow)

- **What to draw:** Draw a circle divided into five nodes connected by arrows in clockwise order: **(1) Intelligence fusion**, **(2) Legal review**, **(3) Authorization**, **(4) Strike**, **(5) Battle damage assessment and accountability**. Between nodes (2) and (3), draw a gate labeled **"Distinction / Proportionality test"**. Between nodes (4) and (5), draw a gate labeled **"Civilian-harm assessment"**. Add a feedback arrow from node (5) back to node (1) labeled **"Lessons learned / targeting refinement."**

- **How to label it:** Label the center **"Targeted killing outside declared armed conflict"**. Label the outer ring **"Legal regimes in tension: IHL / IHRL / self-defense"**. Add small labels on the arrows: **"evidence quality," "command responsibility," "transparency,"** and **"remedy."**

- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Place five short annotations around the circle: **African:** "civilian harm in Somalia/Yemen; accountability gaps"; **Chinese:** "territorial sovereignty; consent; non-intervention"; **Russian:** "double standards; Western exceptionalism"; **Western:** "self-defense; oversight; IHL compliance"; **UN:** "right to life; civilian protection; remedy."

Visual 3 — "LAWS Autonomy Spectrum" (hand-drawn horizontal spectrum)

- **What to draw:** Draw a horizontal line from left to right. On the left end, draw a box labeled **"Human-in-the-loop: human selects and engages target."** In the middle, draw a box labeled **"Human-on-the-loop: machine selects; human can intervene."** On the right end, draw a box labeled **"Human-out-of-the-loop: machine selects and engages without real-time human control."** Shade the left third green, the middle third yellow, and the right third red. Above the line, place threshold markers: **"Meaningful human control," "Distinction,"** and **"Proportionality."** Below the line, place three CCW position labels: **"Ban," "Regulate,"** and **"No new law."**

- **How to label it:** Title the visual **"Autonomy is a spectrum, not a switch."** Label the vertical axis **"Human control / accountability"** and the horizontal axis **"Machine autonomy."** Add a note:

"Legal status depends on use, context, and control, not hardware alone."

- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Annotate with five short notes: **African:** "technology gap; coloniality of AI; unequal protection"; **Chinese:** "strategic competition; sovereignty; non-binding norms"; **Russian:** "opposition to binding prohibition; state autonomy"; **Western:** "ethical AI; military necessity; alliance interoperability"; **UN:** "human dignity; accountability gap; civilian protection."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (dense content + source log)
What is "lawfare"?	Lawfare is the use of law as a weapon or shield in conflict: legal claims, courts, tribunals, sanctions, and legal narratives shape coercion and legitimacy. Source log: Luban (2014); Kinsella (2011).
Jus ad bellum vs. jus in bello	Jus ad bellum governs resort to force (UN Charter Art. 2(4), Art. 51, Security Council authorization); jus in bello governs conduct in hostilities (distinction, proportionality, precautions). Key point: IHL applies independently of the legality of the war. Source log: Walzer (1977, 2015); Rome Statute; UN Charter.
Distinction	Combatants must distinguish between military objectives and civilians/civilian objects; attacks may be directed only at military objectives. Source log: Additional Protocol I (referenced in IHL doctrine); Walzer (1977, 2015).
Proportionality	Expected civilian harm must not be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated. Source log: IHL doctrine; Walzer (1977, 2015); Sagan and Valentino (2017).
Precautions	Parties must take feasible precautions in attack and against effects of attacks; includes verification, warnings, and choice of means/methods. Source log: IHL doctrine; UN commissions of inquiry.
Effects-based operations	Shift from destroying platforms to producing desired strategic effects; can blur target categories and complicate proportionality assessments. Source log: Luban (2014); Kinsella (2011).
ICC enforcement	ICC has jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, aggression; enforcement depends on state cooperation, Security Council referrals, and complementarity. Source log: Rome Statute; Luban (2014).

Cue (prompt)	Notes (dense content + source log)
Universal jurisdiction	Domestic courts may prosecute certain international crimes regardless of where committed or nationality of perpetrator/victim; politically contested and unevenly applied. Source log: Kinsella (2011); Luban (2014).
LAWS debate	Debate over lethal autonomous weapons centers on meaningful human control, distinction, proportionality, accountability, and whether to ban, regulate, or permit. Source log: UN CCW LAWS reports; Sagan and Valentino (2017).
Humanitarianism securitized	Aid, access, and protection can be politicized, militarized, or made conditional; humanitarian space shrinks when relief is treated as security strategy. Source log: Kinsella (2011); Luban (2014).
African perspective (primary)	Critique of ICC selectivity, AU resistance, Malabo Protocol, and demand for accountability that is not geopolitically skewed; emphasizes African agency and historical asymmetry. Source log: Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, Oyěwùmí (as named in the lesson's African-perspective mandate).
Adjudication rule	Do not infer violation from outcome alone; distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription; test claims against scope conditions and counterarguments. Source log: Walzer (1977, 2015); Sagan and Valentino (2017).

Summary (3–5 sentences): Lawfare and the ethics of war require separating the legality of resorting to force from the legality of conducting hostilities, while recognizing that both are enforced through politically uneven institutions. Targeting law turns on distinction, proportionality, and precautions, but effects-based operations and algorithmic systems strain these standards. Accountability mechanisms such as the ICC, ICJ, and universal jurisdiction are powerful in principle and fragile in practice, especially where great-power interests are involved. The LAWS debate and the securitization of humanitarianism show that new technologies and relief practices can either protect civilians or erode human control. A rigorous analysis must therefore reconstruct all five perspectives, specify mechanisms and scope conditions, and avoid conflating description with prescription.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon.
War is not just fighting; it is also law, language, and legitimacy. States and armed groups use legal rules

to justify force, restrict force, accuse enemies, and protect themselves from blame. The most important distinction is between deciding whether to go to war and deciding how to fight once war has started. Even an illegal war does not make every act in it legal or illegal by itself; the rules of fighting still apply. Those rules say do not target civilians, do not cause civilian harm that is clearly too large for the military gain, and take reasonable steps to avoid harm. But modern war makes this hard because cities are battlefields, intelligence is uncertain, and weapons can be precise in one sense while still killing many people. Courts and tribunals can punish atrocities, but they often lack power over strong states, so accountability is uneven. New weapons that choose targets with algorithms raise a deeper question: if a machine decides to kill, who is responsible? Humanitarian aid is also caught in this system because food, medicine, and access can be used as leverage or treated as security problems. The African critique is central here: international law often claims universality while enforcing accountability unevenly, especially against weaker states and actors.

Step 2 — Mark gaps.

- I am not yet certain how to distinguish a lawful proportionality judgment from an unlawful one when intelligence is incomplete.
- I need to clarify whether human rights law or IHL governs targeted killing outside declared armed conflict, and how the two interact.
- I have not fully resolved whether LAWS are best addressed by a total ban, regulation, or case-by-case review.
- I am unsure how to weigh AU/Malabo Protocol arguments against the claim that regional courts may weaken universal accountability.
- I need to test whether "effects-based operations" is a genuine legal problem or mainly a rhetorical critique of modern targeting.

Step 3 — Reread verification.

Reread Walzer (1977, 2015) on the moral equality of soldiers and the distinction between jus ad bellum and jus in bello; reread Kinsella (2011) and Luban (2014) on lawfare, humanitarianism, and legal responsibility; reread Sagan and Valentino (2017) on public attitudes toward civilian casualties and the ethics of war; consult the Rome Statute for ICC jurisdiction and complementarity; consult UN CCW LAWS reports for the status of autonomous-weapons diplomacy. Verify each claim against at least one named source before using it in an exam answer.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits.

A useful analogy is a referee in a violent sport: the referee does not decide whether the teams should have played at all, but once play begins, the referee enforces rules about dangerous contact, protects players, and can eject violators. The analogy helps separate "should the game have happened?" from "was the tackle illegal?" But it has limits: war is not a consensual game, referees in war are weak or absent, teams may write their own rules, and the "players" include civilians who never consented. The analogy also fails for algorithmic weapons because there is no clear human referee at the moment of engagement.

Step 5 — Rewrite.

Lawfare and the ethics of war study how legal rules, institutions, and narratives shape the use of force and its legitimacy. The core architecture separates jus ad bellum from jus in bello, so the legality of war and the legality of conduct in war are analyzed independently. Targeting law requires distinction, proportionality, and precautions, but effects-based operations, urban warfare, and algorithmic decision-making strain these standards. Accountability through the ICC, ICJ, and universal jurisdiction is legally significant but politically uneven, which fuels African critiques of selectivity and broader debates about double standards. The LAWS

debate asks whether machines can lawfully kill, while the securitization of humanitarianism asks whether aid can remain neutral when it is embedded in conflict. A strong answer must specify mechanisms, scope conditions, counterarguments, and the distinct contributions and occlusions of the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L26	definition	What is *jus ad bellum*?	The legal and moral criteria governing the resort to force: necessity, last resort, proportionality of ends, legitimate authority, and right intention, codified in UN Charter Article 2(4) and Article 51 self-defence, and developed in Walzer (1977). It asks whether a war may be fought at all, not how it is fought.	Western legalism treats it as Charter law; African and Russian perspectives stress that the Charter's exceptions have been selectively invoked against weaker states.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L26	definition	What is *jus in bello*?	The body of rules regulating conduct during armed conflict: distinction between combatants and civilians, proportionality of incidental harm, and precautions in attack, codified in the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocols. It applies equally to all parties regardless of the justice of their cause.	The UN perspective insists on equal application; Western self-critique (Guantánamo, drone strikes) tests whether powerful states accept symmetrical constraint.
L26	mechanism	State the three core IHL targeting rules.	Distinction requires parties to distinguish combatants from civilians and direct attacks only at military objectives; proportionality prohibits attacks where expected civilian harm is excessive relative to concrete military advantage; precautions require feasible measures to minimize civilian harm, including verification and choice of means.	African and Chinese perspectives note that “military advantage” and “feasible” are interpreted by the attacking state, creating asymmetry in practice.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L26	mechanism	What is an "effects-based operation" and why does it matter legally?	Effects-based operations shift targeting from destroying enemy forces to producing desired political or systemic effects, often via infrastructure or dual-use targets; this complicates proportionality because the "military advantage" becomes diffuse and long-term, expanding permissible harm.	Western militaries championed the concept; critics (Luban 2014) argue it erodes the civilian/combatant line by reclassifying civilian infrastructure as military objectives.
L26	application	What is the ICC and what is its jurisdiction?	The International Criminal Court, established by the 1998 Rome Statute, prosecutes individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression; it is complementary to national courts and has issued arrest warrants including for Vladimir Putin (2023) over alleged unlawful deportation of children.	African states critique selectivity and the AU has pushed the Malabo Protocol; Russia rejects the warrant as illegitimate; the UN supports accountability in principle.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L26	application	What is universal jurisdiction?	The principle that any state may prosecute individuals for certain international crimes (genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, torture) regardless of where the crime occurred or the nationality of perpetrator or victim, as exercised in cases such as Pinochet and various European prosecutions.	Western courts have been the main users; African and Russian perspectives see it as a tool of asymmetric accountability when powerful states are exempt.
L26	comparison	How do the ICC and ICJ differ?	The ICC is a criminal court prosecuting individuals for core international crimes under the Rome Statute; the ICJ is a civil court settling disputes between states and issuing advisory opinions, with no individual criminal jurisdiction and enforcement dependent on the Security Council.	The UN perspective treats both as complementary pillars; the African perspective notes that ICJ advisory opinions (e.g., on Palestine) lack enforcement while ICC warrants target weaker states.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L26	debate	What is the LAWS debate?	The debate over lethal autonomous weapons systems concerns whether machines may select and engage targets without meaningful human control; CCW discussions since 2014 have sought definitions and possible prohibitions, with no binding treaty yet.	African and Chinese positions stress human dignity and non-proliferation; Western states split between precautionary bans and capability development; Russia opposes new binding rules.
L26	reconstruction	Reconstruct the African perspective on international criminal justice.	African scholarship (Grovogui, Mamdani, Mbembe, Bayart) frames the ICC as an instrument of selective justice embedded in a colonial legal order; the AU's 2017 withdrawal strategy and the Malabo Protocol's proposed African Court with criminal jurisdiction reflect demands for regional ownership and equal application.	This perspective reveals how "universal" law can reproduce hierarchy; it is occluded by Western narratives of humanitarian progress.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L26	occlusion	What does the Chinese perspective occlude in IHL debates?	China's emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence) occludes scrutiny of its own conduct and limits support for individual criminal accountability, even as it engages increasingly with IHL in UN forums and peacekeeping.	It contributes a statist, anti-interventionist check on Western humanitarianism but risks shielding perpetrators when the state is the violator.
L26	adjudication	How does the Russian perspective frame "lawfare"?	Russian discourse treats Western legal instruments (sanctions, ICC warrants, human-rights conditionality) as "lawfare"—the weaponization of law to constrain adversaries—while defending its own actions as lawful self-defence or protection of nationals.	This exposes the instrumental use of legal norms; it occludes Russia's own violations and its rejection of accountability for aggression.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L26	source	What is Walzer's contribution to just war theory?	Walzer (1977, 2015) distinguishes *jus ad bellum* from *jus in bello*, argues for the "moral equality of soldiers," and in later work (2015) revises proportionality and targeted killing in light of terrorism and precision warfare.	Western canonical text; African and Russian critics read it as culturally specific, embedding liberal assumptions about legitimate authority.
L26	source	What does Kinsella (2011) argue?	Kinsella's *The Image Before the Weapon* argues that the civilian/combatant distinction is not a natural fact but a constructed, gendered, and historically contingent category, challenging the apparent neutrality of IHL's foundational distinction.	Feminist/constructivist critique; it destabilizes Western legal formalism and opens space for African and post-colonial readings of who counts as a civilian.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L26	mechanism	How is humanitarian aid securitized?	Aid becomes securitized when relief is conditioned on security objectives, when access is negotiated with armed actors as a bargaining chip, or when humanitarian space is militarized (e.g., "hearts and minds" operations), blurring the line between relief and counter-insurgency.	African perspectives (Aning, Danso) highlight how aid dependency and access denial in conflicts like Sudan or Somalia reproduce external control; UN agencies struggle to maintain neutrality.
L26	visual	What are the four levels of analysis in lawfare?	Individual (perpetrator intent and command responsibility), state (policy, rules of engagement, legal advice), systemic (Security Council politics, ICC jurisdiction), and transnational (NGO advocacy, universal jurisdiction, media framing).	The African perspective insists that the systemic level—great-power politics—determines which individuals are prosecuted, a point Western legalism often brackets.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Topic	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of Mastery	Gap to Close
Distinguishing *jus ad bellum* from *jus in bello*		Can state the separation principle and give one case where a just cause did not justify unjust means	Tendency to conflate legality of war with legality in war
The three IHL targeting rules (distinction, proportionality, precautions)		Can apply them to a novel strike scenario	Difficulty quantifying "excessive" civilian harm
ICC jurisdiction and complementarity		Can explain why the ICC issued the Putin warrant and its enforcement limits	Uncertainty about Article 16 deferral and state cooperation
Universal jurisdiction scope and limits		Can name two cases and one legal basis	Confusion about immunity of sitting heads of state
LAWS and "meaningful human control"		Can state the CCW debate positions	Vague on technical definitions of autonomy
African critique of ICC selectivity		Can name Malabo Protocol and AU withdrawal strategy	May overstate African unanimity
Chinese non-interference vs IHL engagement		Can contrast Five Principles with peacekeeping practice	Limited knowledge of China's CCW positions
Russian "lawfare" framing		Can define lawfare and give Russian examples	Risk of accepting the framing uncritically
Western self-critique (drones, Guantánamo)		Can cite Luban and Sagan & Valentino	May underweight institutional reform efforts
Securitization of humanitarian aid		Can give one case of aid militarization	Needs deeper knowledge of access negotiations

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to steel-man without caricature, and what specific claim within it most challenged your prior view?
2. Which mechanism did you most often conflate with an outcome—e.g., treating "ICC warrant issued" as equivalent to "accountability achieved"—and how would you now separate them?
3. What single piece of evidence would most strongly falsify your current view on whether international criminal law deters atrocities?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"A just cause makes any wartime conduct lawful."	*Jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* are independent; even a defensive war must obey distinction and proportionality.	Walzer (1977); Geneva Conventions Common Article 3
"The ICC can arrest anyone it indicts."	The ICC has no police force; enforcement depends on state cooperation and Security Council referrals; the Putin warrant remains unexecuted.	Rome Statute Arts. 59, 89; ICC press releases 2023
"Universal jurisdiction means no immunity for leaders."	Sitting heads of state generally retain immunity before foreign national courts for official acts; the Pinochet case turned on loss of immunity after leaving office.	ICJ *Arrest Warrant* (2002)
"Autonomous weapons are already banned."	No binding treaty bans LAWS; CCW discussions continue; some states oppose new law.	UN CCW LAWS reports 2014–2023
"Humanitarian aid is always neutral."	Aid is frequently conditioned, militarized, or denied as a tactic of war; neutrality is an aspiration, not a default.	Kinsella (2011); UN OCHA access reports
"IHL applies only to state armies."	Non-state armed groups are bound by Common Article 3 and customary IHL; the challenge is enforcement, not applicability.	ICRC customary IHL study

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Jus ad bellum vs *jus in bello*; distinction; proportionality; precautions; effects-based operations	Legal separation of resort to force from conduct in war; targeting rules constrain means even for just causes; effects-based targeting expands "military advantage"	Walzer (1977, 2015); Kinsella (2011)	Geneva Conventions; Additional Protocols; NATO targeting manuals	Whether proportionality can be quantified; whether effects-based operations erode civilian protection	Evidence that proportionality assessments are consistently applied across parties	L2 Charter; L9 sovereignty; L20 coercion
ICC; ICJ; universal jurisdiction; complementarity	Individual criminal accountability; state dispute settlement; national prosecution of international crimes; Security Council referral/deferral	Rome Statute; Luban (2014)	Putin warrant (2023); Pinochet; ICJ advisory opinions	Selectivity; African withdrawal strategy; Malabo Protocol	Data showing equal prosecution rates across regions	L37 Ukraine lawfare; L44 Hormuz/Yemen
LAWS; meaningful human control; CCW	Algorithmic target selection; human-in-the-loop/out-of-the-loop; possible prohibition or regulation	Sagan and Valentino (2017); UN CCW LAWS reports	CCW meetings 2014–2023; national LAWS policies	Ban vs regulation; dignity; accountability gaps	Evidence of reliable, accountable autonomous systems in combat	L54 autonomous weapons

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Securitization of humanitarian aid; access; neutrality	Aid conditioned on security goals; access denial as tactic; militarization of relief	Aning; Danso; UN OCHA	Sudan, Somalia, Yemen access reports	Whether humanitarianism can be neutral in politicized conflicts	Cases where aid delivery reduced violence without military embedding	L20 coercion; L44 Hormuz/Yemen
Five perspectives on lawfare	African critique of selectivity; Chinese non-interference; Russian lawfare framing; Western IHL + self-critique; UN civilian protection	Grovogui; Mamdani; Mbembe; Bayart; Nkrumah	AU withdrawal strategy; Malabo Protocol; CCW positions	Whether international law is universal or instrumental	Comparative data on enforcement across power asymmetries	L2 Charter; L9 sovereignty; L37; L44; L54

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 30 min):** Immediate recall—run all 15 flashcards without notes; mark any card missed twice for priority review.
- **R2 (Day 3, 45 min):** Reconstruct the worked example (ICC Putin warrant) from memory using the four levels of analysis and all five perspectives; compare against the model.
- **R3 (Week 1, 60 min):** Complete the problem pair (US drone strikes) independently, then check against the model answer; log errors in the error-log table.
- **R4 (Week 2, 90 min):** Write the independent memo on a fresh case; verify you distinguished description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
- **R5 (Month 1, 60 min):** Integrate with interleaved lessons (L37 Ukraine lawfare, L44 Hormuz/Yemen, L54 autonomous weapons); update the cheatsheet with new cases and re-score the confidence audit.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello* and state why they are legally independent.
☐ I can list and apply the three IHL targeting rules to a novel scenario.
☐ I can explain effects-based operations and their proportionality implications.
☐ I can describe ICC jurisdiction, complementarity, and the enforcement gap.
☐ I can distinguish the ICC from the ICJ and explain universal jurisdiction's limits.
☐ I can state the LAWS debate positions and the status of CCW discussions.

- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective (ICC selectivity, AU pushback, Malabo Protocol) from within.
- ☐ I can steel-man the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
- ☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to a lawfare case.
- ☐ I can adjudicate between competing explanations using evidence.
- ☐ I have completed the confidence audit and identified my largest gap.
- ☐ I have logged at least two misconceptions in the error-log.
- ☐ I can explain the securitization of humanitarian aid with one case.
- ☐ I can state what would falsify my view on international criminal law's deterrent effect.
- ☐ I have scheduled R1–R5 reviews in my calendar.
- ☐ I can connect this lesson to L2, L9, L20, L37, L44, and L54.
- ☐ I can produce a one-paragraph Feynman compression of the lesson's central puzzle.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Just war theory and IHL - Walzer, M. (1977) *Just and Unjust Wars*. Basic Books. - Walzer, M. (2015) *Just and Unjust Wars* (5th ed.). Basic Books. - Kinsella, H. M. (2011) *The Image Before the Weapon: A Critical History of the Distinction Between Combatant and Civilian*. Cornell University Press.

Lawfare, accountability, and targeted killing - Luban, D. (2014) *Torture, Power, and Law*. Cambridge University Press. - Sagan, S. D. and Valentino, B. A. (2017) "Revisiting Hiroshima in Iran," *International Security* 42(2).

Instruments and institutions - Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998). - UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) LAWS reports (2014–2023).

African perspectives - Grovogui, S. N. (2006) *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*. Palgrave. - Mamdani, M. (2009) *Saviors and Survivors*. Pantheon. - Mbembe, A. (2001) *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press.

End of Lesson 26. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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28. Colonial State Formation and the Coloniality of Borders

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 27 — Colonial State Formation and the Coloniality of Borders
Module	Module 5: African Geopolitical Architecture
Prerequisites	L8 (post-colonialism), L9 (Westphalian myth), L10 (Berlin Conference), L12 (decolonization)
Interleaved links	Forward to L28 (Pan-Africanism), L29 (conflict political economy), L30 (regional security complexes)

Field	Value
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, visuals, flashcards, worked example, problem pair
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple: why do African states still operate with borders, institutions, and economic structures inherited from colonial rule, and why has post-colonial sovereignty so often reproduced rather than dismantled the colonial order? The conventional answer — that European powers drew arbitrary lines at the Berlin Conference of 1884–85 and that these artificial borders cause contemporary conflict — is not wrong, but it is insufficient. It treats colonialism as an event rather than a process, borders as lines on a map rather than as embedded in institutions, economies, and identities, and it implies that "natural" or "correct" borders would resolve the problems that post-colonial states face. None of these implications survives scrutiny. African borders are not merely arbitrary; they are the spatial expression of a deeper colonial state formation that created extractive economies, ethnicized administrations, and hybrid political orders. Understanding why these structures persist requires moving beyond the artificiality thesis toward an account of coloniality — the durable, often invisible, reproduction of colonial logics after formal independence.

This lesson sits at the hinge of Module 5, African Geopolitical Architecture. It builds directly on four prerequisite lessons. From L8 on post-colonialism, it inherits the insight that formal independence did not end colonial power relations. From L9 on the Westphalian myth, it inherits the critique that the sovereign territorial state is a European norm projected globally, not a universal achievement. From L10 on the Berlin Conference, it inherits the specific history of the partition of Africa and the diplomatic fiction of effective occupation. From L12 on decolonization, it inherits the question of what was actually transferred at independence — flags and seats at the United Nations, or genuine sovereignty over territory, economy, and institutions. The lesson then feeds forward into L28 on Pan-Africanism, where the question of continental unity confronts the reality of inherited borders; into L29 on the political economy of conflict, where extractive institutions become drivers of war; and into L30 on regional security complexes, where the spatial logic of colonial state formation shapes contemporary security dynamics.

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to do five things that go beyond recall. First, they will be able to distinguish the weak artificiality thesis from stronger accounts of colonial state formation, and to explain why the former fails as both explanation and prescription. Second, they will be able to reconstruct the institutional mechanisms — indirect rule, assimilation, native administration, and the institutionalization of ethnicity — through which colonial powers governed African territories, and to trace how these mechanisms survived decolonization. Third, they will be able to analyze the extractive economy as a structural feature of colonial state formation, linking infrastructure design, monoculture, and dependent trade to contemporary underdevelopment. Fourth, they will be able to evaluate the doctrine of uti possidetis juris and explain why African states accepted inherited borders at independence, including the costs and benefits of that choice. Fifth, they will be able to describe hybrid orders — the coexistence of formal state, traditional

authority, religious networks, militias, and informal economies — not as state failure but as a durable mode of governance produced by colonial history.

The theoretical lineage of the lesson runs through six canonical scholars, each of whom reframes the problem. Jean-François Bayart's 1989 work on the state in Africa argues that African states are not weak copies of European states but distinctive political formations shaped by extraversion — the orientation of political elites toward external resources and patrons. Achille Mbembe's 2001 analysis of post-colonial power emphasizes commandement, the arbitrary and violent exercise of authority, and the necropolitical dimensions of colonial and post-colonial rule. Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui's 1996 critique of sovereignty challenges the Westphalian framework itself, showing how international law has historically excluded African polities from full sovereignty. Frederick Cooper's 2002 reassessment of colonialism asks what colonial states actually did, avoiding both the myth of total control and the myth of African passivity. Jeffrey Herbst's 2000 study of state-making in Africa highlights the spatial and demographic challenges that distinguish African state formation from the European experience. Mahmood Mamdani's 1996 analysis of citizen and subject demonstrates how colonial rule institutionalized a bifurcated state that separated urban citizens from rural subjects, producing the ethnicized identities that fuel post-colonial conflict.

The African perspective is primary in this lesson, and for good reason. Western institutionalist accounts tend to treat African states as failed or incomplete versions of a European ideal, measuring them against a Westphalian benchmark they were never designed to meet. The African vantage point, reconstructed from within through the work of Bayart, Mbembe, Grovogui, Mamdani, and others, reveals that colonial state formation was not a failed attempt at European statehood but a successful project of extraction and control that produced its own durable logics. What Western accounts read as weakness — hybridity, informal authority, ethnic politics — is better understood as the operating system of a state form designed for different purposes. The African perspective thus reframes the central question: not why African states failed to become European states, but how colonial and post-colonial actors have continuously reproduced a distinctive, extractive, and hybrid political order, and what alternatives have been imagined and suppressed.

Methodologically, the lesson insists on mechanism over outcome. It is not enough to observe that borders are inherited or that economies are dependent; one must specify how colonial institutions produced these outcomes, through what causal chains, under what scope conditions, and with what observable implications. Each key idea is therefore presented with a bolded causal claim, a mechanism, scope conditions, observable implications, and a perspective note. The worked example of the Democratic Republic of Congo from Leopold II to Mobutu demonstrates how colonial violence, extractive institutions, and post-colonial reproduction operated across levels of analysis. The problem pair on Rwanda and Burundi shows how colonial identity classification produced post-colonial violence. The data lab provides quantitative grounding for claims about borders, infrastructure, and trade. Throughout, the student is asked to adjudicate between competing explanations on the basis of evidence rather than to accept any single account as settled truth.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer the following questions from memory, drawing on Lessons 8, 9, 10, and 12. Do not consult notes. After attempting each, check your answer against the lesson materials.

1. **Westphalian myth (L9).** What is the "Westphalian myth," and why does the lesson argue that the 1648 Peace of Westphalia did not actually establish the sovereign territorial state system that international

relations theory attributes to it?

2. **Berlin Conference (L10).** What were the two core principles of the Berlin Act of 1884–85 regarding African territory, and how did the principle of "effective occupation" function in practice?
3. **Post-colonialism (L8).** Define post-colonialism as an analytical framework. How does it differ from the study of decolonization as a historical event?
4. **Decolonization and statehood (L12).** What did African states inherit at independence in the 1960s, and what did they not inherit? Distinguish formal sovereignty from substantive sovereignty.
5. **Mamdani's bifurcated state (L8/L12).** How does Mamdani distinguish "citizen" from "subject" in colonial Africa, and what institutional mechanism produced this distinction?
6. **Bayart's extraversion (L8).** What does Bayart mean by the "extraversion" of the African state, and how does this concept challenge the idea that African states are simply weak or failed?

1.2 Orientation Questions These questions frame the central puzzles of Lesson 27. Consider them before reading; return to them after completing the lesson.

1. If the artificiality thesis is insufficient, what stronger account explains why colonial borders and institutions have persisted for six decades after independence?
2. How did colonial governance mechanisms — indirect rule, assimilation, native administration — produce ethnic identities that outlasted the colonial period itself?
3. Why did African states accept inherited borders at independence under uti possidetis juris, and what were the consequences of that acceptance for continental unity and internal stability?
4. Is the hybrid order — formal state alongside traditional authority, religious networks, militias, and informal economies — a sign of state failure, or is it the durable operating system of a state form designed for extraction rather than development?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach Provisional definitions. These will be refined and contextualized in the lesson core.

- **Artificiality thesis:** The claim that African borders are arbitrary lines drawn by European powers without regard for ethnic, linguistic, or geographic realities, and that this arbitrariness explains post-colonial conflict. The lesson argues this thesis is necessary but insufficient.
- **Coloniality:** The durable reproduction of colonial logics — racial hierarchies, extractive economies, bifurcated states, epistemic subordination — after the end of formal colonial rule. Distinct from colonialism as a historical period.
- **Indirect rule:** A colonial governance strategy in which European powers ruled through existing or invented "traditional" authorities, delegating local administration while retaining control over external affairs, taxation, and coercion.
- **Assimilation:** The French colonial policy of extending French citizenship and cultural identity to colonial subjects who adopted French language and customs, theoretically integrating them into the French nation.

- **Native administration:** The British colonial practice of governing African populations through "native authorities" — chiefs, councils, and courts — under European supervision, codifying and often inventing customary law.
- **Institutionalization of ethnicity:** The process by which colonial administrative categories (tribe, race, ethnic group) became embedded in census, law, education, and political representation, transforming fluid identities into fixed, politically salient categories.
- **Extractive economy:** An economic structure designed to extract raw materials and agricultural commodities for export to the metropole, with infrastructure, labor regimes, and trade patterns oriented toward extraction rather than domestic development.
- **Uti possidetis juris:** The legal principle that newly independent states inherit the borders of their predecessor colonial territories. Adopted by the Organization of African Unity in 1964 to prevent territorial disputes.
- **Hybrid order:** The coexistence and interpenetration of formal state institutions with non-state forms of authority — traditional leaders, religious networks, militias, informal economies — producing a governance system that is neither fully state nor fully non-state.
- **Extraversion (Bayart):** The orientation of African political elites toward external resources, patrons, and markets as the primary source of power and wealth, rather than toward domestic taxation and legitimation.
- **Commandement (Mbembe):** The arbitrary, personalized, and often violent exercise of authority in post-colonial Africa, rooted in colonial practices of domination and reproduced through neopatrimonial networks.
- **Bifurcated state (Mamdani):** A colonial state structure that separated urban "citizens" (governed by civil law) from rural "subjects" (governed by customary law through chiefs), institutionalizing a dual legal and political order.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Explain** why the "artificiality thesis" of African borders is analytically insufficient, and reconstruct the stronger account offered by Bayart, Mbembe, and Grovogui, specifying the mechanism through which colonial state formation produced durable post-colonial institutional configurations. (Bloom: Explain/Analyze)
2. **Compare** the four colonial governance modalities—indirect rule, assimilation, "native administration," and the institutionalization of ethnicity—identifying how each produced distinct but overlapping legacies of hybrid authority, and evaluate which modality best explains a given post-colonial outcome. (Bloom: Compare/Evaluate)
3. **Analyze** the extractive economy as a colonial institution, tracing how infrastructure designed for ex-

traction, monoculture production, and dependent trade structures shaped post-colonial development trajectories, and assess the scope conditions under which these structures persist or are transformed. (Bloom: Analyze/Assess)

4. **Evaluate** the decision of African states to retain colonial borders under *uti possidetis juris*, weighing the OAU's 1964 Cairo resolution against the costs of border revision, and judge whether this choice was rational given the information and constraints available at decolonization. (Bloom: Evaluate/Judge)

5. **Synthesize** the concept of "hybrid orders" into a coherent analytical framework that integrates formal state institutions, traditional authority, religious networks, militias, and informal economies, and apply this framework to diagnose a specific post-colonial African state. (Bloom: Synthesize/Apply)

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The Artificiality Thesis and Its Limits

Bolded Causal Claim: The claim that African borders are "artificial" and therefore causally responsible for post-colonial state weakness and conflict is analytically insufficient; the stronger account locates the source of post-colonial dysfunction in the *mode* of colonial state formation and the institutional continuities it established, not in the geographic mismatch between borders and ethnic distributions.

Mechanism: The artificiality thesis operates through a seductive but shallow causal chain: European powers at the Berlin Conference (1884–1885) and subsequent boundary commissions drew lines across the African map without regard for pre-existing ethnic, linguistic, or political boundaries; these lines grouped disparate peoples within single states and divided coherent communities across multiple states; the resulting "mismatch" produced irredentism, secessionism, and civil war. The thesis is not entirely wrong—border-ethnic mismatch is real and has generated conflict (Somalia, Eritrea, the Biafran war). But African scholarship has demonstrated that this account mistakes a symptom for a cause and, more damagingly, treats African political communities as primordially ethnic units whose natural expression was thwarted by European cartography. Bayart's foundational argument in *The State in Africa* (1989) reframes the problem: the African state is not a failed import but a specific historical formation produced by the colonial encounter, one that fused imported bureaucratic forms with local logics of power, accumulation, and legitimacy. The state in Africa is, in Bayart's terms, a "rhizome"—a network of power that extends through formal institutions, informal networks, and social relations, drawing resources from multiple registers simultaneously. The artificiality thesis cannot explain why states with similarly "artificial" borders exhibit vastly different levels of stability and capacity, nor why conflict patterns track institutional legacies (colonial governance modality, extractive economy type) more closely than they track border-ethnic congruence. Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001) pushes further: the post-colonial state is not a deviation from a Western norm but a distinct political form characterized by what he calls "commandement"—a mode of rule that operates through violence, spectacle, and the instrumentalization of difference. The colonial state did not merely draw bad borders; it constituted subjects through specific technologies of power (census, classification, forced labor, taxation) that produced the very ethnic categories that the artificiality thesis treats as pre-existing. Grovogui's *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) adds the international dimension: the artificiality thesis is itself a product of a Western epistemology that denies African sovereignty by treating African states as incomplete or defective versions of the European state. The mechanism of colonial state formation, on this account, is not border-drawing but the production of a specific kind of political subjectivity—subordinated, racialized, and

governed through a combination of coercion and co-optation that outlived formal independence.

Scope Conditions: The stronger account applies most directly to states where colonial rule was prolonged and institutionally deep (British indirect rule in Northern Nigeria, French assimilation in Senegal, Belgian rule in the Congo), and where post-colonial elites inherited and reproduced colonial institutional structures. It applies less cleanly to cases of settler colonialism (Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa), where the racialized land question and settler political dominance created distinct dynamics, and to cases of very brief or shallow colonial rule (Liberia, Ethiopia, which was never formally colonized except for the 1936–1941 Italian occupation). The artificiality thesis retains partial explanatory power in cases of extreme border-ethnic mismatch combined with weak central institutions (Somalia, where the Ogaden region's division between Ethiopia and Somalia fueled decades of conflict), but even here, the institutional legacy of colonial governance (British indirect rule in the north, Italian direct rule in the south) better explains the differential capacity of Somali state institutions. The account also has limits: it risks overemphasizing continuity and underemphasizing post-colonial agency, innovation, and the genuine transformations produced by independence movements, Cold War geopolitics, and contemporary globalization.

Observable Implications: If the stronger account holds, we should observe that (a) post-colonial state capacity and stability correlate more strongly with colonial governance modality and extractive economy type than with measures of border-ethnic congruence; (b) conflict patterns should track institutional legacies—states with indirect rule should exhibit different conflict dynamics (ethnicized competition for state resources) than states with assimilationist or direct rule (centralized, often military, contestation); (c) post-colonial elites should reproduce colonial patterns of rule (clientelism, ethnic patronage, extraction) even where borders are relatively congruent with ethnic distributions; and (d) the "artificiality" discourse itself should be most prominent in Western academic and policy circles, where it functions to depoliticize African conflict by attributing it to primordial ethnic hatred rather than to historically specific institutional failures. These implications are broadly supported by comparative evidence: Mamdani's (1996) analysis of Uganda and South Africa demonstrates how indirect rule produced bifurcated states (citizens vs. subjects) that structured post-colonial politics along ethnic lines, while Cooper's (2002) comparative work shows that the extractive economy's persistence, not border artificiality, best explains divergent development outcomes across African states.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective, as developed by Bayart, Mbembe, and Grovogui, treats the artificiality thesis as a Western epistemological imposition that denies African historical agency and political complexity. On this view, African borders are no more "artificial" than European borders, which were also drawn through violence and negotiation; the difference is that European states had centuries to consolidate their territories while African states were given decades. The African vantage point reveals that the artificiality thesis functions as a form of epistemic violence: it treats African political communities as natural ethnic units whose authentic expression was thwarted by colonialism, thereby erasing the political creativity, negotiation, and hybridity that characterized both pre-colonial and post-colonial African statecraft. Bayart's "politics of the belly" and Mbembe's "commandement" are not pathologies but specific modes of power that must be understood on their own terms, not measured against a Western ideal type. Grovogui's critique of sovereignty discourse shows that the artificiality thesis is embedded in a broader international legal framework that denies African states full sovereign equality. This perspective's strength is its insistence on African agency and its refusal to treat African states as failed copies of European states; its risk is that an overemphasis on continuity can obscure genuine post-colonial transformations and the real achievements of independence movements.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective approaches the artificiality thesis through the lens of underdevelopment and non-interference. Chinese scholarship and policy discourse tend to treat African border conflicts as symptoms of underdevelopment and weak state capacity rather than as products of colonial cartography per se. The Chinese framework emphasizes that economic development, infrastructure investment, and state capacity-building are the appropriate responses to post-colonial instability, not border revision or external intervention. Non-interference means that China does not take positions on the legitimacy of African borders, treating them as settled facts of international law. This perspective contributes a materialist emphasis on economic transformation but occludes the specific institutional and political legacies of colonialism that shape how development resources are absorbed and distributed. It also tends to understate the role of political contestation and historical injustice in generating conflict, preferring a technocratic framing that treats all parties as equally positioned to benefit from growth.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames the artificiality thesis within a broader critique of Western neocolonialism. Russian scholarship and diplomatic discourse emphasize that Western powers continue to exploit African divisions—ethnic, regional, and border-related—for strategic and economic gain, and that the artificiality thesis itself is a Western narrative that justifies continued intervention in African affairs. The Russian view tends to treat African state weakness as a product of ongoing Western interference (sanctions, regime change, resource extraction by multinational corporations) rather than as a legacy of colonialism alone. This perspective contributes a valuable geopolitical corrective, highlighting the continuities between colonial and neocolonial extraction, but it risks reducing African agency to a pawn in great-power competition and can serve to legitimize Russian strategic interests in Africa under the guise of anti-imperial solidarity. It also tends to understate the internal dynamics of African politics and the role of African elites in reproducing extractive structures.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in its institutionalist variants, treats the artificiality thesis as one factor among many in explaining African state weakness. Western scholarship (Herbst 2000; Englebert 2009) has increasingly moved beyond the artificiality thesis toward institutionalist accounts that emphasize the "stickiness" of colonial institutions, the logic of political survival, and the rational choices of post-colonial elites. The Western perspective contributes rigorous comparative methodology and a focus on measurable institutional variables (bureaucratic capacity, fiscal extraction, military organization). However, it often retains a teleological assumption that African states are "developing" toward a Western ideal type, and it tends to understate the epistemic violence of colonial categories and the legitimacy of non-Western political forms. The Western perspective also tends to treat the retention of colonial borders as a rational choice by African elites (Englebert 2009) without fully examining the coercive international context that made border revision virtually impossible.

UN: The UN perspective approaches the artificiality thesis through the framework of statebuilding and peacebuilding. UN doctrine treats African borders as settled under international law and focuses on strengthening state institutions within existing borders. The UN perspective emphasizes capacity-building, good governance, and the rule of law as remedies for state weakness, and it tends to treat ethnic conflict as a management problem amenable to power-sharing, federalism, and institutional design. This perspective contributes practical tools for conflict management and a normative commitment to state sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, it occludes the deeper historical and structural causes of state weakness, treating symptoms (weak institutions) rather than causes (colonial state formation, extractive economies). It also tends to reproduce the Western teleological assumption that the goal is a Weberian state, and it can legitimize external intervention in the name of statebuilding that reproduces colonial patterns of external control over African political life.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Colonial governance: indirect rule, assimilation, "native administration," and the institutionalization of ethnicity

Bolded Causal Claim: Colonial governance in Africa did not merely fail to construct modern states; it actively produced a bifurcated political order in which a narrow stratum of "citizens" was governed through metropolitan law while the majority were administered as "subjects" through "customary" authorities, converting ethnicity from a fluid social repertoire into a fixed administrative technology of rule whose institutional residues continue to structure citizenship, authority, and violence. (Mamdani 1996; Grovogui 1996)

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with a fiscal and military constraint: colonial states claimed vast territories but lacked the personnel, revenue, and legitimacy to govern them directly. To reduce costs and secure extraction, they delegated coercive and administrative functions to intermediaries whose authority was simultaneously "traditional" and state-created. British indirect rule, most famously theorized by Lugard, did not simply discover chiefs; it reconstituted them as native authorities responsible for tax collection, labor recruitment, land allocation, and customary justice, making them accountable upward to colonial officials rather than downward to communities. French assimilation offered a formally universalist promise of citizenship, but in practice it created a small évolué elite while the rural majority remained subjects governed through cantons and chiefs; later association explicitly preserved "customary" structures. Belgian, Portuguese, and settler-colonial variants combined direct coercion with native administration, especially in labor reserves and land alienation. The crucial move was epistemic: colonial ethnography, censuses, missionary linguistics, and legal pluralism translated complex, overlapping identities into bounded "tribes," then attached rights to those categories. Land tenure, marriage, inheritance, criminal jurisdiction, and political representation were routed through ethnicity. Mamdani's (1996) concept of "decentralized despotism" captures the result: despotism was not abolished but localized, wrapped in the language of custom, and insulated from both metropolitan liberal norms and indigenous accountability. Bayart's (1989) analysis of extraversion and the political instrumentalization of social ties helps explain why post-colonial elites found these categories useful; Mbembe's (2001) account of commandement shows how colonial authority operated through a mixture of bureaucratic procedure, spectacle, and violence; Grovogui (1996) situates this within an international legal order that denied African sovereignty while claiming a civilizing mandate. The mechanism is therefore not just institutional but juridical and epistemic: colonial rule produced subjects by defining who counted as a political person and through which authority they could be governed.

Scope Conditions: The intensity and form of this mechanism varied. It was strongest where colonial states were fiscally thin, where precolonial authorities could be co-opted, and where land and labor were central to extraction. It was weaker or different in settler colonies with direct racial domination, in urban spaces governed by municipal law, and in areas of prolonged anti-colonial war. It also varied by colonial power: British indirect rule formalized chiefly intermediaries; French assimilation/association combined centralization with customary preservation; Belgian and Portuguese systems relied more heavily on coercive native administration. Post-colonial outcomes depended on whether new elites dismantled, instrumentalized, or democratized these structures. The mechanism is therefore not a universal law of colonialism but a historically specific pattern whose effects were mediated by local political ecologies and by the choices of post-colonial governments.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism holds, one should observe persistent legal pluralism, with customary courts and chiefs retaining jurisdiction over family, land, and local dispute resolution; ethnicized

census and identity categories that outlive colonialism; chiefs acting as brokers between communities and the state; differential citizenship in which urban, educated, or minority groups claim "civil" rights while rural populations remain "subjects"; and post-colonial constitutions that simultaneously promise universal citizenship and recognize "traditional" authority. One should also observe ethnic categories becoming politically salient during elections, land conflicts, and violence, not because they are primordial but because they are institutionalized gateways to resources and recognition. The Rwanda and Burundi cases, where colonial classification hardened Hutu and Tutsi identities into administrative and political categories, illustrate the lethal potential of this mechanism, though they are not its only outcome. More generally, the mechanism predicts that state weakness will be uneven: strong local control through chiefs alongside weak national legitimacy and accountability.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, reconstructed from within African scholarship, treats colonial governance as a generative structure rather than an absence of statehood. Mamdani's (1996) citizen/subject distinction shows that the post-colonial crisis is not simply ethnic hatred or institutional weakness but a historically produced bifurcation of political membership. Bayart (1989) adds that post-colonial elites often extraverted power and instrumentalized inherited social ties, meaning colonial categories were reproduced through African political practice rather than merely imposed from outside. Mbembe (2001) emphasizes that commandement fused bureaucracy, violence, and spectacle, so that authority was experienced as domination rather than service. Grovogui (1996) reminds us that this governance was legitimated by an international legal order that racialized sovereignty and placed Africans outside full political personhood. Together, these scholars suggest that the African vantage point reveals what Western institutionalism often misses: "traditional" authority is frequently a colonial artifact; ethnicity is politically constructed and institutionally rewarded; and the problem is not the absence of a Weberian state but the presence of a colonial state form that survived decolonization. Solutions therefore require deracializing citizenship, democratizing or transforming customary authority, and confronting the coloniality of law, not only building capacity. The Chinese perspective generally acknowledges colonial governance as a source of underdevelopment and weak institutions, but frames the remedy through sovereignty, non-interference, and material capacity-building rather than external political conditionality. It contributes an insistence that African states must control their own institutional choices and that infrastructure and growth matter, yet it can occlude the internal politics of ethnicity, citizenship, and accountability that colonial governance produced. The Russian perspective treats colonial administration as the origin of African instability and views Western statebuilding and democracy promotion as potential neocolonial continuations of external control. It contributes a critique of interventionist legitimacy and a defense of sovereignty, but it can reduce complex internal dynamics to great-power competition and may understate African agency in reproducing or reforming inherited institutions. The Western perspective, especially institutionalist and statebuilding scholarship, sees indirect rule and native administration as causes of weak, fragmented, or neo-patrimonial states, and proposes remedies such as rule of law, decentralization, power-sharing, and capacity-building. It contributes practical tools for managing ethnic diversity and improving governance, but it often treats ethnicity as a management problem and state weakness as a technical deficit, occluding the colonial production of the very categories and authorities it seeks to reform. The UN perspective inherits a trusteeship and statebuilding tradition that treats colonial administration as a precursor to international capacity-building, with contemporary frameworks emphasizing SDG 16, inclusive institutions, and transitional justice. It contributes norms of participation and accountability, but it can reproduce external oversight and may understate how international categories and interventions themselves participate in the coloniality of governance.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The extractive economy: infrastructure designed for extraction, monoculture, and dependent trade

Bolded Causal Claim: Colonial economies in Africa were organized as extractive enclaves oriented toward metropolitan markets, with transport networks, land regimes, labor systems, currencies, and trade rules designed to move primary commodities outward rather than to integrate African territories internally; this produced path-dependent structures of monoculture, enclave development, and dependent trade that constrained post-colonial industrialization and reproduced vulnerability to external price shocks and debt. (Cooper 2002; Herbst 2000)

Mechanism: The mechanism is spatial and institutional. Colonial infrastructure was built as a set of export corridors: railways and ports connected mines, plantations, and cash-crop zones to the coast, while lateral and interior links that would have created national markets were neglected. Roads often served feeder functions for railheads rather than regional integration. Land alienation in settler colonies and concession systems in others separated Africans from productive resources, pushing them into wage labor or cash cropping. Labor coercion—whether through taxation, pass laws, forced cultivation, or migrant labor systems—ensured that African labor served export sectors rather than domestic industrialization. Monetary and fiscal systems tied colonies to metropolitan currencies and budgets, while tariff structures favored manufactured imports from the metropole and discouraged local processing. The result was an enclave economy: a modern, capital-intensive export sector linked to global markets coexisted with a low-productivity subsistence or smallholder sector, with weak backward and forward linkages. Cooper (2002) emphasizes that colonial economies were not simply "underdeveloped" but actively reorganized around imperial needs, African labor, and global commodity chains; the colonial state was a broker between African producers and metropolitan capital. Herbst (2000) adds that Africa's demographic and geographic conditions—sparse populations, vast territories, and disease environments—made state control and infrastructure expensive, so colonial powers concentrated investment where extraction was profitable and left much of the territory lightly governed. Monoculture followed from comparative advantage as defined by imperial markets: groundnuts, cocoa, coffee, cotton, palm oil, copper, gold, and later oil became dominant exports, exposing economies to price volatility. Post-colonial governments inherited these structures. Even where they pursued import-substituting industrialization, they often relied on enclave revenues, foreign exchange from primary exports, and imported capital goods. When commodity prices fell or debt crises hit, structural adjustment programs frequently reinforced export orientation rather than diversification. The mechanism therefore operates across colonial and post-colonial periods: extraction created the physical and institutional skeleton of the economy, and subsequent policy choices were constrained by that skeleton.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism's strength varied. It was strongest in colonies with high-value minerals or plantation crops, in settler colonies with land alienation, and in economies tightly integrated into imperial currency and trade zones. It was weaker where colonial investment was minimal, where precolonial trade networks persisted, or where post-colonial governments successfully diversified. Geography mattered: coastal access, navigable rivers, and mineral deposits shaped infrastructure; landlocked states faced additional costs. Global commodity cycles, Cold War aid, and post-1970s neoliberalism also mediated outcomes. The mechanism does not imply that all African economies were identical or that post-colonial agency was irrelevant; rather, it identifies a structural bias that made certain development paths more costly than others.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism holds, one should observe export concentration in a small number of primary commodities; transport networks that run from interior extraction zones to ports rather than linking neighboring regions; urban primacy around ports and capitals; limited manufacturing value-added;

food import dependence despite agricultural potential; vulnerability to commodity price shocks; debt crises tied to export revenues; and large informal cross-border trade that compensates for missing formal integration. One should also observe enclave economies in which modern sectors (mining, oil, large plantations) generate foreign exchange but few jobs, while the majority work in low-productivity agriculture or informal services. Post-colonial development plans, structural adjustment, and contemporary infrastructure initiatives can be evaluated by whether they alter these spatial and sectoral patterns or reproduce them.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, drawing on African and Africanist scholarship, treats colonial extraction not as a stage of development but as a structure of underdevelopment. From this vantage point, the economy was not merely poor; it was organized to produce poverty and dependency. Bayart's (1989) analysis of extraversion suggests that post-colonial elites often continued to orient political accumulation toward external patrons and export rents, reproducing colonial patterns of dependency. Mbembe's (2001) work on the postcolony highlights how commandement and extraction were intertwined, so that economic life was governed by predation as much as by production. Grovogui (1996) situates this within an international order that legalized unequal exchange and denied African sovereignty over resources. This perspective reveals what market-oriented or institutionalist accounts often miss: infrastructure is not neutral; a railway to a port is also a political choice about who is connected and who is excluded; monoculture is not just comparative advantage but a coercive reorganization of land and labor; and "development" can reproduce extraction when it is measured by export volumes rather than by domestic capability. It also insists that African agency exists within constraints: post-colonial leaders made choices, but they chose within an inherited economic architecture that made diversification expensive and risky. The Chinese perspective frames colonial extraction as the root of African underdevelopment and presents contemporary infrastructure, trade, and investment as corrective. It contributes a focus on material connectivity and state-led development, and it challenges Western conditionality by emphasizing sovereignty and mutual benefit. However, it can occlude questions of labor standards, debt sustainability, environmental extraction, and whether new infrastructure reproduces enclave patterns if it is primarily oriented toward resource export. The Russian perspective treats colonial and neocolonial extraction as central to Western dominance, and supports African resource sovereignty and multipolar trade. It contributes a critique of unequal exchange and external control, but it can reduce African economic challenges to great-power rivalry and may understate internal governance, corruption, and the political economy of rents. The Western perspective, especially institutionalist and market-oriented accounts, often explains underdevelopment through weak institutions, corruption, and policy failure, and prescribes property rights, market liberalization, and good governance. It contributes attention to incentives and institutional quality, but it can treat colonial extraction as a distant background condition rather than a continuing structure, and it may underestimate how inherited infrastructure and trade patterns constrain choice. The UN perspective frames extraction and underdevelopment through the SDGs, sustainable development, and statebuilding, emphasizing inclusive growth, infrastructure, and global partnerships. It contributes normative goals and financing frameworks, but it can depoliticize extraction by treating it as a technical development gap rather than a historically produced structure of dependency, and it may reproduce external oversight through aid and conditionality.

SECTION 2.5 — KEY IDEA 4: *Uti possidetis juris* and the Inherited Borders

Bolded Causal Claim: The decision by African states at independence to accept colonial borders through the doctrine of *uti possidetis juris* was not a passive inheritance of arbitrary lines but a strategic, collective

choice that traded territorial revisionism for regime security and continental peace, producing a pattern of remarkable interstate border stability alongside persistent intrastate fragmentation.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates at three levels. At the international level, the Organization of African Unity's 1964 Cairo Resolution declared that "all Member States pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence," invoking *uti possidetis juris* — a doctrine borrowed from Latin American decolonization that freezes administrative boundaries at the moment of sovereignty transfer. This was not imposed by external powers; it was adopted by African leaders themselves, including Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, who had initially championed Pan-African unity but confronted the reality that redrawing borders would require war. The mechanism here is a coordination game: each state preferred its own territorial integrity, and the only equilibrium that avoided mutual predation was mutual recognition of the status quo. At the domestic level, accepting borders allowed new elites to consolidate authority without fighting irredentist wars on multiple fronts; the border became a resource for regime security rather than a problem to be solved. At the structural level, as Jeffrey Herbst (2000) argues, African borders were unusually "easy" to maintain because low population densities and limited state penetration meant that neither states nor challengers had strong incentives to fight over marginal territory; the cost of enforcing borders was low precisely because the state did not need to control all its territory to survive. The mechanism thus links a diplomatic norm (OAU Cairo Resolution), a strategic calculation (regime security over territorial revision), and a structural condition (low population density reducing enforcement costs) into a self-reinforcing equilibrium of border stability.

Scope Conditions: The *uti possidetis* equilibrium holds where three conditions coincide: (a) a continental or regional norm of mutual recognition is credibly enforced by a hegemonic or consensus-based organization (the OAU/AU); (b) the costs of territorial revision exceed the expected gains for all parties; and (c) no single state possesses the military capacity to redraw borders unilaterally. Where these conditions break down, borders become contested: Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia (1993) followed a thirty-year war; South Sudan's secession (2011) followed decades of civil war; Somaliland's unilateral declaration of independence (1991) has persisted without recognition. Conversely, where pre-colonial states had strong territorial identities (Ethiopia, Morocco, Egypt), borders were less contested because they mapped onto older political geographies. The doctrine also struggles where colonial borders split coherent communities (Somalia across five states) or enclosed groups with no shared political history (many West African states), producing internal rather than interstate conflict.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe: (1) very few interstate border wars in Africa after 1960 (confirmed: only Eritrea-Ethiopia 1998–2000 and Morocco-Western Sahara); (2) numerous secessionist movements that are militarily defeated or diplomatically isolated (Biafra 1967–70, Katanga 1960–63, Casamance, Anglophone Cameroon); (3) border disputes resolved through international arbitration rather than war (ICJ Cameroon v. Nigeria 2002 on Bakassi; Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission 2002); (4) persistent intrastate conflict along ethnic and regional lines within inherited borders; and (5) a growing gap between de jure sovereignty (recognized borders) and de facto control (areas governed by non-state actors). The African Union's 2002 Constitutive Act, which added a right of intervention in cases of war crimes and genocide, partially modified but did not abolish the Cairo principle.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective treats *uti possidetis* as a paradox at the heart of post-colonial sovereignty. On one hand, African leaders embraced the doctrine as a pragmatic shield against Balkanization and neo-colonial manipulation; Julius Nyerere famously acknowledged that African borders were "arti-

ficial" but insisted that accepting them was the price of peace. On the other hand, the same doctrine locked in colonial cartographies that divided peoples and created states without nations, a tension that Siba Grovogui (1996) traces to the imperial foundations of international law itself — *uti possidetis* is not a neutral legal principle but a mechanism through which colonial territoriality was converted into sovereign statehood without popular consent. Achille Mbembe (2001) extends this by showing how borders in the postcolony function not as lines of exclusion but as zones of extraction and predation, where sovereignty is exercised through the capacity to decide who may cross and who may not, often for profit. The African perspective thus sees border acceptance as simultaneously necessary (to prevent war) and tragic (because it foreclosed alternative political geographies), and it insists that the legitimacy of borders cannot be derived from colonial precedent alone.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity as foundational norms of international order, consistent with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. From this vantage, *uti possidetis* represents a legitimate exercise of sovereign self-determination by African states, and external attempts to redraw borders (whether through secessionist support or humanitarian intervention) are viewed with suspicion as violations of non-interference. The Chinese framework contributes stability and predictability but may occlude the internal legitimacy deficits of inherited borders and the grievances of populations trapped within them.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames *uti possidetis* through the lens of anti-imperialism and state sovereignty, drawing parallels with its own experience of Soviet collapse and border disputes. It supports territorial integrity as a bulwark against Western-sponsored fragmentation, while simultaneously invoking self-determination selectively (as in Crimea or South Ossetia) when strategic interests align. The Russian contribution is a critique of Western double standards on borders; its occlusion is the instrumentalization of sovereignty rhetoric for great-power purposes.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in institutionalist and state-consolidation theory (Herbst 2000), treats *uti possidetis* as a rational equilibrium that reduced the costs of state formation. It emphasizes that borders provided focal points for coordination and that African leaders wisely avoided the European path of territorial war. The Western contribution is analytical clarity about incentives; its occlusion is a tendency to treat borders as given rather than as sites of ongoing contestation, and to underestimate the human costs of locking in arbitrary boundaries.

UN: The UN perspective frames *uti possidetis* through international law, peaceful dispute settlement, and the maintenance of international peace and security. The ICJ and UN mediation have provided forums for resolving border disputes (Cameroon-Nigeria, Eritrea-Ethiopia). The UN contribution is procedural legitimacy and conflict prevention; its occlusion is a legalistic tendency to treat borders as technical matters rather than as expressions of political community, and a reliance on state consent that can leave non-state actors and marginalized populations without voice.

SECTION 2.6 — KEY IDEA 5: Hybrid Orders

Bolded Causal Claim: African states are not failed or incomplete versions of the Weberian state but hybrid political orders in which formal institutions, traditional authorities, religious networks, militias, and informal economies coexist and mutually constitute one another, so that what Western analysis labels "state weakness" is often a different, historically produced mode of political order.

Mechanism: The mechanism has colonial origins and post-colonial reproduction. Colonial rule in Africa was predominantly indirect: European powers governed through "native authorities" — chiefs, emirs, and customary leaders who were empowered, reorganized, and sometimes invented by colonial administrators. Mahmood Mamdani (1996) captures this as the "bifurcated state": a dual structure in which urban, modern, civic institutions governed citizens (usually European settlers and a small African elite) while rural, customary, decentralized institutions governed subjects (the African majority) through chiefs who were simultaneously traditional leaders and colonial functionaries. This bifurcation was not abolished at independence; post-colonial elites inherited and reproduced it because it provided low-cost control over rural populations and a reservoir of legitimacy. The mechanism of hybridity thus operates through institutional layering: formal state structures (parliaments, courts, armies) coexist with and depend upon informal structures (chiefly authority, religious networks, patronage systems, informal economies) that perform functions the formal state cannot or will not perform. Jean-François Bayart (1989) theorizes this as the "politics of the belly" and the "rhizome state" — power in Africa does not flow through a single hierarchical chain but spreads through multiple, overlapping networks that connect formal office to informal accumulation. Achille Mbembe (2001) adds the concept of "commandement" — the postcolony as a system of signs and practices in which authority is performed through spectacle, violence, and the manipulation of symbols rather than through bureaucratic rationality. The mechanism is reinforced by structural adjustment and globalization: as formal state capacity was eroded by SAPs in the 1980s–90s, hybrid arrangements expanded to fill gaps in security, justice, and service delivery, producing what Christian Lund (2006) calls "twilight institutions" — organizations that are neither fully state nor fully non-state but occupy the space between.

Scope Conditions: Hybridity is not uniform; it varies by region, sector, and historical trajectory. Where colonial indirect rule was strong and chiefs were deeply institutionalized (northern Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal), traditional authority remains a significant governance layer. Where colonial rule was more direct or where post-colonial states pursued radical centralization (Tanzania under Nyerere, Ethiopia under the Derg), hybridity takes different forms — party structures or military hierarchies may dominate. Religious networks are particularly significant in the Sahel (Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal, Mali), the Horn (Islamic courts in Somalia), and parts of East Africa (Pentecostal churches providing services). Militias and armed groups become governance actors where state security provision collapses (eastern DRC, Somalia, Libya, CAR). Informal economies are ubiquitous but vary in scale and integration with formal markets. The scope condition is thus: hybrid orders emerge where formal state capacity is insufficient to monopolize governance functions, and where pre-existing or newly formed non-state institutions can credibly provide them.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe: (1) multiple, overlapping security providers in most African states (police, military, private security, community militias, religious guards); (2) parallel justice systems (customary courts, religious courts, informal mediation) handling the majority of disputes; (3) informal taxation and revenue collection by non-state actors; (4) chiefs and religious leaders serving as intermediaries between communities and the state, often with formal recognition; (5) "state" services (health, education) delivered by NGOs, churches, and community organizations; and (6) a persistent gap between de jure state authority and de facto governance arrangements. The implication for policy is significant: statebuilding programs that ignore hybridity and attempt to impose Weberian templates often fail or produce perverse outcomes, as seen in Somalia, DRC, and South Sudan.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective is the most theoretically developed on hybridity, precisely because African scholars have insisted on theorizing African political reality on its own terms rather than as a

deviation from Western norms. Mamdani (1996) provides the foundational analysis of the bifurcated state and its colonial origins. Bayart (1989) theorizes the rhizome state and the politics of extraversion — how African elites navigate between domestic and international arenas. Mbembe (2001) offers the concept of the postcolony as a distinctive political formation with its own logics of power, violence, and subjectivity. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997) adds a gendered dimension, showing how colonial categories (including "traditional authority") were constructed through patriarchal assumptions that erased pre-colonial gender systems. Sylvia Tamale (2020) extends this to law and sexuality, showing how hybrid legal orders reproduce colonial and patriarchal norms. The African perspective's contribution is to treat hybridity not as pathology but as a creative, historically grounded mode of political life; its occlusion, if any, is a risk of romanticizing informality and underestimating the violence that hybrid orders can produce (militias, warlordism).

Chinese: The Chinese perspective approaches hybrid orders through the lens of stability and development, emphasizing engagement with whoever holds effective power and a reluctance to impose governance templates. China's infrastructure-for-resources deals and its non-interference principle lead it to work with hybrid authorities (chiefs, regional strongmen) when they control territory and resources. The contribution is pragmatic effectiveness and respect for local realities; the occlusion is a tendency to depoliticize hybridity by treating it as a technical matter of "who can deliver," ignoring questions of accountability and rights.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames hybrid orders through a critique of Western statebuilding and a preference for sovereignty and stability. It views Western attempts to impose Weberian state templates (as in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan) as destructive, and it supports working with existing power structures, including authoritarian and hybrid ones, to prevent chaos. The contribution is a realist skepticism of external engineering; the occlusion is a willingness to legitimate any authority that maintains order, regardless of its character.

Western: The Western perspective has historically treated hybridity as state weakness or failure, framing African states through concepts like "fragile states," "collapsed states," and "statebuilding." Institutionalists (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012) trace hybridity to extractive institutions and weak property rights. The contribution is attention to institutional quality and incentives; the occlusion is a normative bias toward the Weberian state as the only legitimate form of political organization, which can lead to misdiagnosis and counterproductive intervention.

UN: The UN perspective frames hybrid orders through statebuilding, security sector reform (SSR), and the "local turn" in peacebuilding. It increasingly recognizes that working with traditional and informal authorities is necessary for effective governance and service delivery. The contribution is practical adaptation and normative commitment to inclusive governance; the occlusion is a tendency to instrumentalize hybrid actors within externally designed frameworks, and a risk of reproducing dependency through aid and conditionality.

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Bolded Causal Claim: The decision by African states at independence to accept colonial borders through the doctrine of *uti possidetis juris* was not a passive inheritance of arbitrary lines but a strategic, collective

choice that traded territorial revisionism for regime security and continental peace, producing a pattern of remarkable interstate border stability alongside persistent intrastate fragmentation.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates at three levels. At the international level, the Organization of African Unity's 1964 Cairo Resolution declared that "all Member States pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence," invoking *uti possidetis juris* — a doctrine borrowed from Latin American decolonization that freezes administrative boundaries at the moment of sovereignty transfer. This was not imposed by external powers; it was adopted by African leaders themselves, including Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere, who had initially championed Pan-African unity but confronted the reality that redrawing borders would require war. The mechanism here is a coordination game: each state preferred its own territorial integrity, and the only equilibrium that avoided mutual predation was mutual recognition of the status quo. At the domestic level, accepting borders allowed new elites to consolidate authority without fighting irredentist wars on multiple fronts; the border became a resource for regime security rather than a problem to be solved. At the structural level, as Jeffrey Herbst (2000) argues, African borders were unusually "easy" to maintain because low population densities and limited state penetration meant that neither states nor challengers had strong incentives to fight over marginal territory; the cost of enforcing borders was low precisely because the state did not need to control all its territory to survive. The mechanism thus links a diplomatic norm (OAU Cairo Resolution), a strategic calculation (regime security over territorial revision), and a structural condition (low population density reducing enforcement costs) into a self-reinforcing equilibrium of border stability.

Scope Conditions: The *uti possidetis* equilibrium holds where three conditions coincide: (a) a continental or regional norm of mutual recognition is credibly enforced by a hegemonic or consensus-based organization (the OAU/AU); (b) the costs of territorial revision exceed the expected gains for all parties; and (c) no single state possesses the military capacity to redraw borders unilaterally. Where these conditions break down, borders become contested: Eritrea's secession from Ethiopia (1993) followed a thirty-year war; South Sudan's secession (2011) followed decades of civil war; Somaliland's unilateral declaration of independence (1991) has persisted without recognition. Conversely, where pre-colonial states had strong territorial identities (Ethiopia, Morocco, Egypt), borders were less contested because they mapped onto older political geographies. The doctrine also struggles where colonial borders split coherent communities (Somalia across five states) or enclosed groups with no shared political history (many West African states), producing internal rather than interstate conflict.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe: (1) very few interstate border wars in Africa after 1960 (confirmed: only Eritrea-Ethiopia 1998–2000 and Morocco-Western Sahara); (2) numerous secessionist movements that are militarily defeated or diplomatically isolated (Biafra 1967–70, Katanga 1960–63, Casamance, Anglophone Cameroon); (3) border disputes resolved through international arbitration rather than war (ICJ Cameroon v. Nigeria 2002 on Bakassi; Eritrea-Ethiopia Boundary Commission 2002); (4) persistent intrastate conflict along ethnic and regional lines within inherited borders; and (5) a growing gap between de jure sovereignty (recognized borders) and de facto control (areas governed by non-state actors). The African Union's 2002 Constitutive Act, which added a right of intervention in cases of war crimes and genocide, partially modified but did not abolish the Cairo principle.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective treats *uti possidetis* as a paradox at the heart of post-colonial sovereignty. On one hand, African leaders embraced the doctrine as a pragmatic shield against Balkanization and neo-colonial manipulation; Julius Nyerere famously acknowledged that African borders were "arti-

ficial" but insisted that accepting them was the price of peace. On the other hand, the same doctrine locked in colonial cartographies that divided peoples and created states without nations, a tension that Siba Grovogui (1996) traces to the imperial foundations of international law itself — *uti possidetis* is not a neutral legal principle but a mechanism through which colonial territoriality was converted into sovereign statehood without popular consent. Achille Mbembe (2001) extends this by showing how borders in the postcolony function not as lines of exclusion but as zones of extraction and predation, where sovereignty is exercised through the capacity to decide who may cross and who may not, often for profit. The African perspective thus sees border acceptance as simultaneously necessary (to prevent war) and tragic (because it foreclosed alternative political geographies), and it insists that the legitimacy of borders cannot be derived from colonial precedent alone.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity as foundational norms of international order, consistent with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. From this vantage, *uti possidetis* represents a legitimate exercise of sovereign self-determination by African states, and external attempts to redraw borders (whether through secessionist support or humanitarian intervention) are viewed with suspicion as violations of non-interference. The Chinese framework contributes stability and predictability but may occlude the internal legitimacy deficits of inherited borders and the grievances of populations trapped within them.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames *uti possidetis* through the lens of anti-imperialism and state sovereignty, drawing parallels with its own experience of Soviet collapse and border disputes. It supports territorial integrity as a bulwark against Western-sponsored fragmentation, while simultaneously invoking self-determination selectively (as in Crimea or South Ossetia) when strategic interests align. The Russian contribution is a critique of Western double standards on borders; its occlusion is the instrumentalization of sovereignty rhetoric for great-power purposes.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in institutionalist and state-consolidation theory (Herbst 2000), treats *uti possidetis* as a rational equilibrium that reduced the costs of state formation. It emphasizes that borders provided focal points for coordination and that African leaders wisely avoided the European path of territorial war. The Western contribution is analytical clarity about incentives; its occlusion is a tendency to treat borders as given rather than as sites of ongoing contestation, and to underestimate the human costs of locking in arbitrary boundaries.

UN: The UN perspective frames *uti possidetis* through international law, peaceful dispute settlement, and the maintenance of international peace and security. The ICJ and UN mediation have provided forums for resolving border disputes (Cameroon-Nigeria, Eritrea-Ethiopia). The UN contribution is procedural legitimacy and conflict prevention; its occlusion is a legalistic tendency to treat borders as technical matters rather than as expressions of political community, and a reliance on state consent that can leave non-state actors and marginalized populations without voice.

SECTION 2.6 — KEY IDEA 5: Hybrid Orders

Bolded Causal Claim: African states are not failed or incomplete versions of the Weberian state but hybrid political orders in which formal institutions, traditional authorities, religious networks, militias, and informal economies coexist and mutually constitute one another, so that what Western analysis labels "state weakness" is often a different, historically produced mode of political order.

Mechanism: The mechanism has colonial origins and post-colonial reproduction. Colonial rule in Africa was predominantly indirect: European powers governed through "native authorities" — chiefs, emirs, and customary leaders who were empowered, reorganized, and sometimes invented by colonial administrators. Mahmood Mamdani (1996) captures this as the "bifurcated state": a dual structure in which urban, modern, civic institutions governed citizens (usually European settlers and a small African elite) while rural, customary, decentralized institutions governed subjects (the African majority) through chiefs who were simultaneously traditional leaders and colonial functionaries. This bifurcation was not abolished at independence; post-colonial elites inherited and reproduced it because it provided low-cost control over rural populations and a reservoir of legitimacy. The mechanism of hybridity thus operates through institutional layering: formal state structures (parliaments, courts, armies) coexist with and depend upon informal structures (chiefly authority, religious networks, patronage systems, informal economies) that perform functions the formal state cannot or will not perform. Jean-François Bayart (1989) theorizes this as the "politics of the belly" and the "rhizome state" — power in Africa does not flow through a single hierarchical chain but spreads through multiple, overlapping networks that connect formal office to informal accumulation. Achille Mbembe (2001) adds the concept of "commandement" — the postcolony as a system of signs and practices in which authority is performed through spectacle, violence, and the manipulation of symbols rather than through bureaucratic rationality. The mechanism is reinforced by structural adjustment and globalization: as formal state capacity was eroded by SAPs in the 1980s–90s, hybrid arrangements expanded to fill gaps in security, justice, and service delivery, producing what Christian Lund (2006) calls "twilight institutions" — organizations that are neither fully state nor fully non-state but occupy the space between.

Scope Conditions: Hybridity is not uniform; it varies by region, sector, and historical trajectory. Where colonial indirect rule was strong and chiefs were deeply institutionalized (northern Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal), traditional authority remains a significant governance layer. Where colonial rule was more direct or where post-colonial states pursued radical centralization (Tanzania under Nyerere, Ethiopia under the Derg), hybridity takes different forms — party structures or military hierarchies may dominate. Religious networks are particularly significant in the Sahel (Sufi brotherhoods in Senegal, Mali), the Horn (Islamic courts in Somalia), and parts of East Africa (Pentecostal churches providing services). Militias and armed groups become governance actors where state security provision collapses (eastern DRC, Somalia, Libya, CAR). Informal economies are ubiquitous but vary in scale and integration with formal markets. The scope condition is thus: hybrid orders emerge where formal state capacity is insufficient to monopolize governance functions, and where pre-existing or newly formed non-state institutions can credibly provide them.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe: (1) multiple, overlapping security providers in most African states (police, military, private security, community militias, religious guards); (2) parallel justice systems (customary courts, religious courts, informal mediation) handling the majority of disputes; (3) informal taxation and revenue collection by non-state actors; (4) chiefs and religious leaders serving as intermediaries between communities and the state, often with formal recognition; (5) "state" services (health, education) delivered by NGOs, churches, and community organizations; and (6) a persistent gap between de jure state authority and de facto governance arrangements. The implication for policy is significant: statebuilding programs that ignore hybridity and attempt to impose Weberian templates often fail or produce perverse outcomes, as seen in Somalia, DRC, and South Sudan.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective is the most theoretically developed on hybridity, precisely because African scholars have insisted on theorizing African political reality on its own terms rather than as a

deviation from Western norms. Mamdani (1996) provides the foundational analysis of the bifurcated state and its colonial origins. Bayart (1989) theorizes the rhizome state and the politics of extraversion — how African elites navigate between domestic and international arenas. Mbembe (2001) offers the concept of the postcolony as a distinctive political formation with its own logics of power, violence, and subjectivity. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997) adds a gendered dimension, showing how colonial categories (including "traditional authority") were constructed through patriarchal assumptions that erased pre-colonial gender systems. Sylvia Tamale (2020) extends this to law and sexuality, showing how hybrid legal orders reproduce colonial and patriarchal norms. The African perspective's contribution is to treat hybridity not as pathology but as a creative, historically grounded mode of political life; its occlusion, if any, is a risk of romanticizing informality and underestimating the violence that hybrid orders can produce (militias, warlordism).

Chinese: The Chinese perspective approaches hybrid orders through the lens of stability and development, emphasizing engagement with whoever holds effective power and a reluctance to impose governance templates. China's infrastructure-for-resources deals and its non-interference principle lead it to work with hybrid authorities (chiefs, regional strongmen) when they control territory and resources. The contribution is pragmatic effectiveness and respect for local realities; the occlusion is a tendency to depoliticize hybridity by treating it as a technical matter of "who can deliver," ignoring questions of accountability and rights.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames hybrid orders through a critique of Western statebuilding and a preference for sovereignty and stability. It views Western attempts to impose Weberian state templates (as in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan) as destructive, and it supports working with existing power structures, including authoritarian and hybrid ones, to prevent chaos. The contribution is a realist skepticism of external engineering; the occlusion is a willingness to legitimate any authority that maintains order, regardless of its character.

Western: The Western perspective has historically treated hybridity as state weakness or failure, framing African states through concepts like "fragile states," "collapsed states," and "statebuilding." Institutionalists (Acemoglu and Robinson 2012) trace hybridity to extractive institutions and weak property rights. The contribution is attention to institutional quality and incentives; the occlusion is a normative bias toward the Weberian state as the only legitimate form of political organization, which can lead to misdiagnosis and counterproductive intervention.

UN: The UN perspective frames hybrid orders through statebuilding, security sector reform (SSR), and the "local turn" in peacebuilding. It increasingly recognizes that working with traditional and informal authorities is necessary for effective governance and service delivery. The contribution is practical adaptation and normative commitment to inclusive governance; the occlusion is a tendency to instrumentalize hybrid actors within externally designed frameworks, and a risk of reproducing dependency through aid and conditionality.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective on colonial state formation and the coloniality of borders begins from a refusal to treat the post-colonial state as a failed copy of a European original. It treats the state, its borders, and its institutions as products of a long history of conquest, extraction, racialization, and adaptation in which African societies were not merely acted upon but also negotiated, resisted, and reworked the terms of rule. This is not a single doctrine; it is a family of arguments running from anti-colonial nationalism through post-colonial critique, African feminism, and contemporary political economy. What unites them is an insistence that the colonial state must be understood from the vantage point of those who lived its violence and its afterlives, and that the categories of Western political science—state, nation, border, ethnicity, tradition—

are themselves historical artifacts of colonial power.

A first contribution is to displace the "artificiality thesis" as a sufficient explanation. The claim that African borders are artificial is true in a minimal sense: many were drawn by European powers with little regard for pre-colonial political geographies. But African scholarship argues that artificiality alone explains little. Bayart (1989) analyzes the African state as a site of "politics of the belly" and, later, of "extraversion," suggesting that the state's weakness or strength cannot be read off from the geometry of its borders; rather, political elites have historically converted external resources—aid, rents, military support, diplomatic recognition—into domestic power. Mbembe (2001) pushes further: the postcolony is not a belated or incomplete version of the Western state but a distinctive political formation marked by "commandement," the theatricalization of power, and the routinization of violence. On this view, the problem is not that borders are artificial but that colonial rule created a particular kind of political subject and a particular kind of state whose logics persist after independence. Grovogui (1996) adds the international-legal dimension: African polities were incorporated into international society as "quasi-sovereigns," recognized formally but denied the substantive equality that sovereignty implies. The border, then, is not merely a line on a map; it is a legal and racial technology that distributed sovereignty unequally. The artificiality thesis is therefore not wrong, but it becomes analytically useful only when linked to institutions, resources, and the international order that made those borders enforceable.

Second, African scholarship reconstructs colonial governance as a system of differentiated rule rather than as a uniform imposition. Mamdani (1996) is central here. His argument that late colonialism created a "bifurcated state"—dividing citizens in urban, "civil" spaces from subjects in rural, "customary" spaces—shows how indirect rule and native administration did not simply preserve tradition but invented and froze it. Ethnicity was not a primordial residue that colonialism found; it was institutionalized through chiefs, customary courts, land tenure, and native authorities. This matters for borders because the same logic of classification and territorialization that produced "tribes" also produced the administrative units that became post-colonial states. The African perspective thus sees ethnicity and statehood as co-produced. It also resists the easy contrast between British indirect rule and French assimilation: both were technologies for making populations legible and governable, and both left durable institutional residues. Assimilation promised citizenship but often delivered a racialized hierarchy; indirect rule promised respect for custom but often empowered compliant intermediaries and hardened group boundaries. The French indigénat and British native administration were not opposites; they were variants of a shared colonial project of differentiated sovereignty.

Third, the extractive economy is understood not as a background condition but as the material foundation of the colonial state. Rodney (1972) argued that Europe's development and Africa's underdevelopment were two sides of the same historical process: colonialism reorganized African labor, land, and trade to serve metropolitan accumulation. Nkrumah (1965) extended this into the post-colonial period, warning that political independence without economic sovereignty would reproduce dependency through neo-colonialism. From this vantage point, colonial infrastructure—railways running from mines to ports, roads designed for extraction, monocultural export economies—was not a neutral legacy but a spatial expression of an extractive political economy. The post-colonial state inherited not only borders but also a position in the global division of labor. Cabral (1973) and Fanon (1961) add that colonialism was not only economic but cultural and psychological: it produced alienated elites, devalued indigenous knowledge, and normalized violence as a mode of governance. The African perspective therefore treats the coloniality of borders as inseparable from the coloniality of knowledge, economy, and subjectivity. A border that encloses an extractive economy is not merely a territorial artifact; it is a mechanism for reproducing dependency.

Fourth, the acceptance of inherited borders by African states is read as a historically situated political choice, not as passive submission. At independence, African leaders confronted a dilemma: redrawing borders risked endless conflict, while accepting them risked freezing colonial injustices. The Organization of African Unity's 1963 commitment to territorial integrity reflected a pragmatic judgment that stability and anti-colonial solidarity required respecting the borders inherited from colonialism, even when they were unjust. Nyerere's (1968) reflections on nation-building and ujamaa, for example, emphasized the need to build unity within inherited states rather than to pursue secession. The African perspective does not celebrate this choice as ideal; it recognizes its costs, including the entrenchment of minority grievances and the mismatch between state boundaries and social geographies. But it also warns against treating secession as a simple remedy, noting that new borders can reproduce the same logics of exclusion and that external powers often exploit fragmentation. The stronger claim is that borders must be understood in relation to the political projects that animate them: a border is not merely colonial or post-colonial; it is a site of ongoing contestation over citizenship, resources, and belonging.

Fifth, hybrid orders are not treated as pathologies of weak states but as the normal condition of political life in Africa. The formal state coexists with customary authorities, religious networks, militias, informal economies, and transnational diasporas. African scholarship has long insisted that this hybridity is not a deviation from the Weberian ideal but a historically produced and often functional arrangement. Mbembe's (2001) discussion of "private indirect government" and Bayart's (1989) image of the state as a "rhizome" capture the way power circulates through multiple, overlapping authorities. Mamdani (1996) shows how the bifurcated state made customary authority indispensable to colonial rule, and how that authority survived into the post-colonial period. More recent African feminist and decolonial scholarship extends this analysis. Oyěwùmí (1997) demonstrates that colonial categories such as "woman" and "gender" were not universal but were imposed through colonial epistemologies, reshaping how authority and kinship were understood. Tamale (2020) argues for an Afro-feminist decoloniality that takes seriously the knowledge and agency of African women in informal and customary spaces. From this perspective, hybrid orders are not simply gaps in state capacity; they are arenas in which citizenship, justice, and survival are negotiated, often by actors excluded from formal institutions.

The African perspective contributes what the other four cannot: a historically grounded account of how colonial power continues to structure the present, an insistence that African agency and knowledge are central rather than peripheral, and a critique of the normative assumption that the European state is the universal standard of political modernity. It reveals the racialized and legal dimensions of sovereignty, the co-production of ethnicity and statehood, the materiality of extraction, and the legitimacy of hybrid political orders. It also frames the central puzzle of this lesson not as "why African states are weak" but as "how colonial state formation produced durable forms of power, inequality, and hybridity that outlived formal empire."

Its occlusions are equally important. The African perspective can risk overemphasizing continuity at the expense of variation: post-colonial states have diverged significantly in their institutional trajectories, and not all outcomes can be explained by colonial legacies. It can also romanticize pre-colonial or customary authority, obscuring internal hierarchies of gender, age, class, and caste that predate and survive colonialism. The category "African perspective" itself is a simplification; African scholars disagree sharply about the relative weight of structure and agency, the value of the nation-state, and the possibilities of decolonization. Finally, by centering coloniality, it may understate the role of post-colonial elites, regional dynamics, and global economic shifts that are not reducible to colonial inheritance. A rigorous use of this perspective therefore requires holding together critique and differentiation: colonial state formation created powerful constraints, but it did not determine every outcome.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on colonial state formation and borders is shaped by a historical experience of semi-colonialism, by a developmentalist state tradition, and by a contemporary foreign-policy commitment to sovereignty, non-interference, and South-South cooperation. It tends to read African colonial history through the lens of underdevelopment: colonialism disrupted autonomous development, imposed extractive structures, and created dependent economies. From this vantage point, the artificiality of borders is real but secondary to the deeper injury of economic subordination. The more important question is not whether borders were drawn arbitrarily but whether post-colonial states have gained the capacity to control their resources, infrastructure, and development trajectories.

This perspective strongly affirms the principle of territorial integrity and the acceptance of inherited borders. Chinese discourse treats uti possidetis not as a regrettable compromise but as a necessary condition for sovereignty and stability. Redrawing borders is seen as a recipe for fragmentation, external manipulation, and endless conflict. This aligns with China's own emphasis on national unity and its opposition to secessionism. The Chinese view therefore supports African states' post-independence decision to retain colonial borders, while criticizing external actors who exploit border disputes or support separatist movements. The mechanism is straightforward: sovereignty requires recognized territorial boundaries, and recognized boundaries require international restraint.

On colonial governance, the Chinese perspective is less attentive to the fine-grained institutional differences between indirect rule, assimilation, and native administration. It tends to group them under a broader category of imperial domination and racialized hierarchy. The contribution here is a focus on the material and geopolitical consequences of colonial rule: how colonial administrations reorganized land, labor, and trade to benefit metropolitan powers. The occlusion is a relative neglect of the internal politics of colonial rule—how African intermediaries, chiefs, and subjects negotiated, resisted, or were transformed by these systems. The Chinese perspective is stronger on structural inequality than on the micro-politics of colonial governance.

The extractive economy is central to this view. Chinese scholarship and policy discourse often frame African underdevelopment as the product of colonial and neo-colonial extraction, including unequal trade, debt, and control over strategic resources. Infrastructure is read politically: railways and ports built for extraction symbolize dependency, while new infrastructure can symbolize sovereignty and development. This is one reason Chinese engagement in Africa emphasizes large-scale infrastructure, industrial zones, and resource-backed development. The contribution is a materialist focus on connectivity, production, and state capacity; the occlusion is a tendency to treat infrastructure as inherently developmental without sufficient attention to debt sustainability, local labor conditions, or environmental costs.

Hybrid orders are viewed ambivalently. On one hand, China's own history of party-state penetration and local governance makes it attentive to the gap between formal institutions and informal power. On the other hand, its non-interference doctrine discourages deep engagement with internal political arrangements. Hybrid authorities—traditional leaders, religious networks, militias—are often treated as domestic matters unless they threaten stability or Chinese interests. The contribution is pragmatic flexibility and respect for sovereignty; the occlusion is a risk of working primarily with central governments while underestimating the role of local and informal actors in shaping outcomes. The Chinese perspective thus adds a developmental and sovereignty-centered lens, but it may flatten the political complexity of hybrid orders into a question of state capacity and investment climate.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on colonial state formation and borders is shaped by the Soviet Union's anti-colonial legacy, by contemporary Russian critiques of Western hegemony, and by a geopolitical emphasis on multipolarity and sovereignty. It tends to treat colonialism as a foundational injustice of the modern international order and to view African borders as products of imperial partition that were subsequently stabilized by anti-colonial solidarity. The Russian view does not deny the artificiality of borders, but it emphasizes that their acceptance by African states was a legitimate expression of self-determination and anti-imperial unity. From this vantage point, the more serious threat to African sovereignty today is not colonial borders but neo-colonial intervention, external manipulation, and the selective application of international norms.

This perspective is strongly critical of Western accounts that attribute African instability primarily to weak institutions or artificial borders. Russian discourse often argues that such accounts obscure the role of external powers in undermining states, supporting insurgents, or imposing political and economic conditionalities. The mechanism is framed as a continuation of colonial power by other means: financial leverage, military intervention, NGO networks, and normative pressure. The contribution is a reminder that African state weakness cannot be separated from global power asymmetries and that external actors have repeatedly profited from fragmentation. The occlusion is a tendency to instrumentalize anti-colonial rhetoric in service of Russian geopolitical interests, and to understate the agency of African elites and the internal dynamics of conflict.

On colonial governance, the Russian perspective is more comfortable with structural and geopolitical explanations than with institutional micro-analysis. It emphasizes that colonial administrations used divide-and-rule tactics, racial hierarchies, and economic extraction to maintain control. The institutionalization of ethnicity is read as a deliberate strategy of imperial management rather than as an accidental byproduct of administrative convenience. This aligns with a broader Russian critique of Western liberal interventionism: if colonial powers invented and hardened ethnic categories, then contemporary Western actors cannot credibly present themselves as neutral arbiters of ethnic conflict. The contribution is attention to the political construction of identity; the occlusion is a relative lack of engagement with the specific differences between British, French, Belgian, and Portuguese colonial systems.

The extractive economy is understood as part of a long history of resource plunder. Russian discourse often highlights the role of Western corporations, financial institutions, and military actors in sustaining dependent economies. Infrastructure is read as an instrument of control when it serves extraction and as a potential instrument of sovereignty when it supports autonomous development. The Russian perspective is sympathetic to African demands for resource sovereignty and to critiques of unequal trade. Its contribution is a geopolitical framing of economic dependency; its occlusion is a tendency to reduce complex development challenges to great-power competition, thereby understating domestic governance, regional trade, and African entrepreneurial agency.

Hybrid orders are interpreted through a lens of sovereignty and stability. Russian discourse generally prefers strong central states and is skeptical of externally imposed statebuilding models that privilege liberal institutions over local authority. It may view hybrid arrangements as pragmatic adaptations to post-colonial realities, especially where formal institutions are weak. However, it is also wary of non-state armed actors and of Western support for civil society or opposition movements that bypass the state. The contribution is a defense of state sovereignty against external interference; the occlusion is a limited engagement with the normative and practical challenges of hybrid governance, including accountability, human rights, and the protection of minorities. Overall, the Russian perspective adds a multipolar and anti-hegemonic critique,

but it risks substituting one external master narrative for another.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on colonial state formation and borders is rooted in comparative politics, historical institutionalism, and development economics. It tends to treat the state as a Weberian institution whose effectiveness depends on bureaucratic capacity, legitimacy, and the rule of law. Colonialism is understood as a critical juncture that shaped institutional trajectories, but the analytical focus is on how institutions persist, adapt, or fail. The artificiality of borders is acknowledged, yet it is often treated as less important than institutional quality, economic structure, and geopolitical context. From this vantage point, the central puzzle is why some post-colonial states consolidated while others fragmented or stagnated.

This perspective has a strong institutionalist account of colonial governance. It distinguishes between different colonial systems—direct versus indirect rule, settler versus non-settler colonies, extractive versus developmental states—and traces their long-term effects on property rights, education, and bureaucratic capacity. Mamdani (1996) is often read in this literature as a powerful account of how indirect rule institutionalized ethnicity and bifurcated citizenship. The Western contribution is comparative precision and attention to variation: not all colonial experiences were identical, and institutional legacies interact with post-independence choices. The occlusion is a tendency to treat the Weberian state as the implicit norm, which can make hybrid orders appear as deficiencies rather than as alternative forms of political organization.

On borders, the Western perspective generally supports the logic of uti possidetis. Scholars such as Herbst (2000) argue that African borders were not uniquely artificial and that the greater challenge was the low population density and limited infrastructural reach of many states. The acceptance of inherited borders is seen as a rational response to the risks of secession and border revision. The contribution is a sober assessment of the costs of redrawing boundaries; the occlusion is a tendency to understate the colonial violence embedded in those boundaries and the ways in which they continue to shape citizenship and resource access.

The extractive economy is analyzed through the lens of institutions and incentives. Acemoglu and Robinson's framework of extractive versus inclusive institutions, though not African-specific, is frequently applied to colonial Africa: colonial powers created institutions designed to extract resources rather than to protect broad-based property rights. Cooper (2002) adds historical nuance, showing that colonial economies were not simply extractive machines but also sites of negotiation, labor migration, and social change. The Western contribution is a clear causal mechanism linking institutions to development outcomes; the occlusion is a risk of economic reductionism, in which political legitimacy, cultural meaning, and racial hierarchy are treated as secondary to material incentives.

Hybrid orders are increasingly studied in Western scholarship under the rubric of "hybrid political orders," "informal institutions," and "twilight institutions." The contribution is empirical richness: detailed studies of how chiefs, militias, religious leaders, and informal economies interact with formal states. The occlusion is normative: hybridity is often framed as a problem to be solved through statebuilding, security sector reform, or institutional strengthening. This can lead to interventions that misunderstand local legitimacy and inadvertently undermine functional arrangements. The Western perspective thus provides powerful tools for comparing institutions and tracing causal effects, but its occlusion is a bias toward the Weberian state as the only legitimate form of political organization, which can produce misdiagnosis and counterproductive policy.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on colonial state formation and borders is shaped by the organization's own history as

a forum for decolonization, by its legal commitment to self-determination, and by its contemporary roles in peacekeeping, statebuilding, and development. It treats colonialism as a violation of the right to self-determination and views the transition to independence as a process of transferring sovereignty to formerly colonized peoples. The UN's legal framework strongly supports territorial integrity and the acceptance of inherited borders, especially through the principle of uti possidetis juris as applied in decolonization. From this vantage point, colonial borders are not ideal, but their revision would threaten international stability and the rights of minorities.

This perspective emphasizes the trusteeship legacy. The UN's early involvement in colonial territories, particularly through the Trusteeship Council, framed decolonization as a staged process of preparation for self-government. The contribution is a normative commitment to self-determination and international oversight; the occlusion is a tendency to treat sovereignty as a transfer of authority rather than as a transformation of the colonial state's underlying structures. The UN perspective often focuses on the moment of independence and the legal recognition of new states, while paying less attention to the colonial continuities in economy, administration, and violence that persist after the flag changes.

On colonial governance, the UN perspective is more comfortable with broad principles than with detailed historical analysis. It recognizes that colonial rule often institutionalized inequality and that post-colonial states must build inclusive institutions. But it is less likely to engage deeply with the specific mechanisms of indirect rule, native administration, or the invention of ethnicity. The contribution is a normative framework of human rights, inclusive governance, and equality; the occlusion is a risk of abstracting from the historical specificity of colonial institutions and treating all states as if they begin from a similar baseline.

The extractive economy is addressed primarily through development frameworks rather than historical critique. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals, for example, frame poverty, inequality, and infrastructure deficits as problems to be solved through global partnership, capacity-building, and financing. The contribution is a practical and normative agenda for addressing material deprivation; the occlusion is a tendency to depoliticize extraction by treating it as a development gap rather than as a historically produced structure of dependency. The UN perspective can thus acknowledge colonial economic legacies while still operating within a framework that assumes incremental reform rather than structural transformation.

Hybrid orders are increasingly central to UN practice, especially in peacebuilding and statebuilding. The "local turn" has encouraged engagement with traditional authorities, religious leaders, and informal actors in service delivery, dispute resolution, and security. The UN perspective contributes practical adaptation and a normative commitment to inclusive governance. Its occlusion is a tendency to instrumentalize hybrid actors within externally designed frameworks, and a risk of reproducing dependency through aid, conditionality, and donor-driven priorities. The UN view is therefore valuable for its legal and developmental tools, but it often struggles to reconcile respect for sovereignty with the transformative ambitions of international intervention.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reconstructs colonial state formation as continuous with post-colonial power, showing how extraction, hybridity, and extraversion reproduce domination rather than simply producing "weak states."	Can understate variation across African states and the weight of individual post-independence choices.	Anti-colonial sovereignty, historical justice, and critique of Eurocentric state norms.	Leopold's Congo Free State; Mobutu's patrimonial Zaire; indirect rule and ethnicized administration.	Western institutionalists argue it risks overemphasizing continuity and understating endogenous institutional failure.
Chinese	Links underdevelopment to colonial extraction, unequal trade, and external intervention; frames non-interference as a corrective to Western conditionality.	May understate domestic governance failures, human-rights abuses, and the possibility that sovereignty shields predation.	Development, sovereignty, non-interference, and state-led modernization.	Colonial infrastructure oriented to ports; commodity dependence; Cold War support for authoritarian rulers.	African and Western critics argue non-interference can legitimate authoritarian extraction and external resource deals.
Russian	Highlights Western neocolonialism, Cold War backing of dictators, and great-power resource plunder as drivers of post-colonial disorder.	May reduce African agency to victimhood and can obscure Russian or other great-power interests.	Anti-hegemony, multipolarity, sovereignty, and critique of Western intervention.	US and Belgian support for Mobutu; Katanga secession; Western mining interests in the Congo.	Western and African scholars argue it can externalize blame and understate local political dynamics.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Provides institutional analysis of state weakness, patrimonialism, fiscal incapacity, and the absence of Weberian bureaucracy.	Often treats colonialism as background rather than constitutive; can blame African institutions while ignoring historical violence.	Liberal institutionalism, good governance, market reform, and rule of law.	Mobutu's personalist rule; weak territorial administration; post-colonial economic collapse.	African scholars argue it treats an extractive colonial state as a neutral baseline and ignores colonial continuity.
UN	Emphasizes territorial integrity, peacekeeping, statebuilding, human rights, and development frameworks.	Tends to instrumentalize hybrid actors within donor-driven frameworks and struggles to address structural extraction.	International law, human security, inclusive governance, and SDG-oriented statebuilding.	ONUC in the Congo (1960–1964); later peacekeeping and statebuilding missions.	African critics argue it can reproduce dependency and externalize accountability while claiming neutrality.

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The Democratic Republic of the Congo from Leopold II to Mobutu

Levels of Analysis

At the individual level, the case turns on the agency of specific actors operating within coercive structures: Leopold II's personal sovereignty over the Congo Free State, Force Publique officers enforcing rubber quotas, concession-company agents, and later Mobutu's personalist rule, Zairianization, and patronage networks. At the state level, it involves the Congo Free State as a private colonial state, the Belgian Congo as an extractive territorial administration, the fragile post-independence state, and Mobutu's patrimonial state, all of which institutionalized violence, ethnicized categories, and rent-seeking. At the systemic level, the case is shaped by global demand for rubber and ivory, imperial competition, the Cold War, international commodity markets, and external financial support for authoritarian rule. At the transnational level, it includes missionary and humanitarian campaigns, concession companies, mining interests, Cold War alliances, and the circulation of ideas and resources across borders.

Mechanism

The central mechanism is the reproduction of extractive governance across the colonial–post-colonial divide. Under Leopold II, the Congo Free State made coercion routine through forced rubber collection, concession

companies, and the Force Publique, while infrastructure was oriented toward extraction and export rather than territorial integration. This did not merely weaken the state; it constituted a state form in which violence, rent extraction, and external dependence were normal. After independence, the new state inherited thin administrative capacity, extractive economic geography, and a coercive security apparatus. Mobutu then reproduced the colonial logic through personalist rule: he centralized patronage, used copper rents, aid, and Cold War support to maintain loyalty, and transferred assets through Zairianization to cronies rather than building fiscal capacity through domestic taxation. The result was not a simple collapse into anarchy but a durable patrimonial order in which the state remained an instrument for converting external rents into political loyalty, much as the colonial state had converted coerced labor into export wealth.

Perspective Reconstruction

The African perspective, which is primary here, treats the Congo not as a failed state but as a particular state form produced by colonial violence and reproduced through post-colonial extraversion. The Congo Free State and its Belgian successor were projects of violent extraction in which coercion became an ordinary technique of rule, while Bayart's notion of extraversion helps explain how Mobutu's Zaire governed through external rents, aid, and Cold War support rather than domestic accountability. Mbembe's analysis of the post-colonial state as an apparatus of predation captures the continuity between colonial violence and Mobutu's patrimonialism, while Mamdani's account of colonial indirect rule and the institutionalization of ethnicity illuminates how colonial categories became political resources in later conflicts. Herbst's emphasis on the difficulty of consolidating territory in low-population-density environments helps explain why the post-colonial state remained thin outside extractive corridors, and Cooper's insistence that colonial states were unfinished projects prevents treating Mobutu's Zaire as a deviation from a Weberian norm that never existed.

A Chinese reading would treat the Congo's underdevelopment as the cumulative result of colonial extraction and unequal integration into the world economy rather than as an indigenous institutional deficit. It would emphasize sovereignty and non-interference, noting that external powers repeatedly violated Congolese self-determination from Leopold through Cold War intervention. It would see Mobutu's rule as enabled by Western geopolitical priorities rather than as evidence of African incapacity. It would likely prescribe state-led development and infrastructure integration, while remaining cautious about political conditionality.

A Russian reading would frame Leopold's Congo and Mobutu's Zaire as episodes in a longer history of Western resource plunder and neocolonial domination. It would stress that Belgian colonial violence and subsequent Western support for Mobutu were geopolitical choices, not neutral development failures. It would interpret secessionist and regional conflicts as partly produced by external manipulation of Congolese sovereignty. It would advocate multipolarity and state sovereignty as safeguards against renewed extraction.

A Western institutionalist reading would focus on the absence of Weberian bureaucracy, fiscal capacity, and rule of law from the colonial period through Mobutu. It would treat the concession system and personalist rule as institutional pathologies that undermined state consolidation. It would emphasize Mobutu's patronage, corruption, and economic mismanagement as proximate causes of collapse. It would prescribe institutional reform, anti-corruption, and market liberalization, often understating the colonial origins of those weaknesses.

The UN perspective would emphasize territorial integrity and international responsibility, beginning with ONUC's effort to prevent Katanga's secession and preserve the new state. It would frame the Congo as a test of peacekeeping, statebuilding, and human-rights protection. It would highlight the gap between interna-

tional legal sovereignty and effective governance. It would prescribe inclusive institutions, security-sector reform, and development assistance, while struggling to reconcile external intervention with Congolese ownership.

Explicit Adjudication

The African perspective provides the strongest overall explanation because it connects colonial violence, extractive institutions, and post-colonial reproduction without treating Mobutu's rule as an aberration from a healthy state. It captures the mechanism by which coercion became governance and external rents replaced domestic accountability. However, it can understate the specific weight of Cold War geopolitics and Mobutu's individual agency, which the Russian and individual-level analyses respectively highlight. The Western institutionalist account is useful for describing state weakness but is weakest where it treats that weakness as endogenous and timeless. The UN perspective explains international responses but not the production of extractive power. A bounded verdict is that the Congo case is best explained as colonial state formation reproduced through post-colonial extraversion, with Cold War support and personalist agency as important amplifiers rather than root causes.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. Identify the specific colonial administrative mechanism — and the approximate date of its institutionalization — that transformed fluid, cross-cutting social categories in Rwanda and Burundi into fixed, mutually exclusive ethnic identities recorded on identity documents.
2. Explain how Belgian colonial practice (1916–1962) differed from German practice (1899–1916) in its treatment of Hutu and Tutsi, and why this difference matters for explaining the divergent trajectories of post-colonial violence in Rwanda and Burundi.
3. Trace the causal chain from colonial identity classification through the 1959 Hutu revolution to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (and, comparatively, to the 1972 genocide of Hutu in Burundi), specifying at least two intermediate mechanisms that converted colonial categories into post-colonial political mobilization.
4. Apply the five perspectives: reconstruct in two to three sentences each how an African scholar working in Mamdani's tradition, a Western institutionalist, a Chinese analyst, a Russian analyst, and a UN practitioner would explain the Rwandan genocide differently.
5. Evaluate the counterfactual: would mass violence have occurred in the absence of colonial identity classification? State the strongest evidence for and against this claim, and give a bounded verdict.
6. Assess the role of hybrid orders — combining formal state institutions, traditional authority, party networks, and militias — in reproducing colonial ethnic categories after independence, with specific reference to the interahamwe and the 1993 Arusha peace process.

Model Answer

The colonial transformation of Hutu and Tutsi from flexible, cross-cutting social categories into rigid, mutually exclusive ethnic identities is best understood not as the discovery of pre-existing tribes but as an act of statecraft. Under German rule (1899–1916), the colonial administration relied on indirect rule through Tutsi chiefs, but the categories remained relatively fluid, with significant intermarriage, social mobility, and a

shared Kinyarwanda language and culture; the German presence was thin and largely extractive, leaving local social hierarchies largely intact. Belgian rule after 1916 intensified this process dramatically through a series of administrative reforms that culminated in the 1933–35 identity card system, which fixed every Rwandan and Burundian as Hutu, Tutsi, or Twa for census and administrative purposes. Mamdani's (1996) analysis of indirect rule is directly applicable: colonial states governed through "decentralized despotism," empowering "customary" authorities whose power was in fact a colonial invention, and in Rwanda the Belgians elevated Tutsi chiefs as the sole legitimate intermediaries, thereby converting a socio-economic distinction — cattle-keeping versus cultivation, with substantial overlap and mobility — into a racialized political hierarchy. The mechanism ran through three channels. First, the administrative fixation of identity via census and identity cards eliminated the possibility of social mobility between categories and made ethnicity a permanent, legally inscribed status. Second, the educational and ecclesiastical privileging of Tutsi, particularly through Catholic mission schools, created a literate elite identified with colonial power and generated Hutu resentment that would later be mobilized along the very ethnic lines the colonial state had created. Third, land and labor policies tied Hutu cultivators to chiefly extraction, generating grievance that post-colonial elites could channel into ethnic majoritarianism. The post-colonial violence of 1959 (the Hutu revolution in Rwanda), the 1972 genocide of Hutu in Burundi, and the 1994 genocide of Tutsi in Rwanda cannot be explained without this colonial institutionalization of ethnicity, yet neither can they be reduced to it. The African perspective, following Mamdani, insists that colonial categories were not simply imposed on passive subjects but were appropriated, reworked, and weaponized by post-colonial elites who found in ethnic majoritarianism a route to power; the "Hutu" and "Tutsi" that killed in 1994 were colonial constructs that had been politicized through decades of post-colonial competition, including the 1959 revolution's reversal of Tutsi dominance and the subsequent cycles of violence and refugee flows. The Western institutionalist account, by contrast, tends to treat the violence as a failure of state capacity, democratic institutions, and early-warning systems, underweighting the colonial production of the categories themselves; it emphasizes the weakness of post-colonial institutions and the absence of power-sharing rather than the genealogy of the identities being shared. The Chinese perspective frames the violence through the lens of underdevelopment and external interference, emphasizing that colonial powers created the conditions for conflict and that post-colonial reconciliation requires sovereignty-respecting development assistance rather than Western-imposed governance models. The Russian perspective converges on the critique of Western colonial responsibility while adding a geopolitical reading: the genocide occurred in a context of Western-backed regime change and the collapse of the Arusha process, and external actors bear responsibility for the failure to prevent it. The UN perspective frames the violence through the lens of genocide prevention, peacekeeping, and state-building, often abstracting from the colonial genealogy in favor of operational lessons about early warning and rapid deployment. The strongest objection to a purely colonial-determinist reading is that it risks denying African agency: the 1994 genocide was planned and executed by Rwandan actors with specific political calculations, including the Hutu Power elite's decision to eliminate Tutsi and moderate Hutu after the assassination of President Habyarimana, and many Hutu resisted or were killed for protecting Tutsi neighbors. The evidence supports a conjunctural explanation in which colonial identity classification was a necessary but not sufficient condition, requiring post-colonial political crisis, elite manipulation, the collapse of the Arusha peace process in April 1994, and the mobilization of militias through radio and party networks to produce mass violence. Uti possidetis juris, which preserved colonial borders, meant that the inherited administrative categories survived into independence, providing the institutional scaffolding for ethnic politics; hybrid orders — combining formal state institutions, traditional authority, party networks, and militias such as the interahamwe — then reproduced these categories at the local level, drawing on both colonial-era chiefly structures and post-colonial party organization. The lesson is that colonial state formation did not merely

draw borders; it produced the social categories through which post-colonial politics would be conducted, and understanding this requires holding both colonial determination and post-colonial agency in view without collapsing into either.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. The Anglophone crisis in Cameroon (2016–present) originates in the colonial partition of the territory between French and British mandates after World War I, formalized by the League of Nations and later the United Nations. Southern Cameroons was administered by Britain as part of Nigeria until a 1961 plebiscite led to reunification with the French-speaking Republic of Cameroon under a federal constitution. The federal arrangement was abolished in 1972, centralizing power in Yaoundé and marginalizing the Anglophone minority, which constitutes roughly one-fifth of the population. Protests by lawyers and teachers in 2016 escalated into armed conflict between separatist militias and state forces, producing mass displacement and humanitarian crisis. The case raises questions about colonial border-making, the institutionalization of linguistic identity, hybrid orders combining formal state and militia networks, and the limits of post-colonial statebuilding.

(b) Required memo headings (write 200–300 words under each):

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking the colonial partition and post-colonial centralization to the 2016 escalation. Specify intermediate steps and scope conditions.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would each explain the crisis, in three to five sentences per perspective.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one historical analogue (e.g., Biafra, Eritrea, or another case) and specify what transfers and what does not.
- **Falsifiers:** State two or three observable implications that, if absent, would weaken your explanation.

(c) Self-check: Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen next), and prescription (what should be done) — and that no single paragraph conflates more than one of these.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which of the following best captures the central critique, advanced by Bayart, Mbembe, and Grovogui, of the "artificiality thesis" regarding African borders?

A. African borders are not artificial because they were drawn by African leaders at independence rather than by European colonial powers.

B. The artificiality thesis is insufficient because it treats colonial borders as the sole or primary cause of African state weakness, thereby ignoring the productive, hybrid, and contested character of post-colonial state formation and the agency of African actors in shaping their own political orders.

C. The artificiality thesis is fundamentally correct but needs to be supplemented with economic data on colonial extraction to become a complete explanation.

D. African borders are artificial, but this artificiality has no meaningful consequences for contemporary African politics or state capacity.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **Option A** is wrong because it misattributes the drawing of borders to African leaders; the borders in question were overwhelmingly drawn by European colonial powers at the Berlin Conference (1884–85) and subsequent agreements, and African leaders at independence generally accepted rather than redrew them under uti possidetis juris. The critique of the artificiality thesis does not rest on denying colonial authorship of borders.
- **Option C** is wrong because it concedes the artificiality thesis as "fundamentally correct" and merely calls for supplementation; the Bayart-Mbembe-Grovogui critique is stronger, arguing that the thesis itself is analytically insufficient and politically misleading because it reifies borders as the problem and obscures the productive politics of post-colonial state formation. Adding economic data does not address this theoretical objection.
- **Option D** is wrong because it claims artificiality has no consequences, which no serious scholar in this debate asserts; the critique is not that borders are inconsequential but that their consequences are mediated through post-colonial political processes, hybrid orders, and African agency, rather than flowing mechanically from colonial cartography.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. African state borders: pre-colonial polities, colonial partition, and post-independence stability (illustrative, drawn from Herbst 2000; Mamdani 1996)

Period	Number of polities / states	Border regime	Key event
Pre-colonial (c. 1880)	Hundreds of polities, empires, chiefdoms, city-states	Fluid, overlapping, negotiated	No fixed territorial sovereignty in the Westphalian sense
Colonial partition (1884–1914)	~50 colonial territories	Imposed by European powers; Berlin Conference 1884–85	Scramble for Africa; no African representation
Independence wave (1957–1965)	~35 new states	Inherited colonial borders	Ghana 1957; "Year of Africa" 1960
Post-independence (1963–present)	54–55 AU member states	OAU Charter 1963 affirms *uti possidetis juris*	Only Eritrea (1993) and South Sudan (2011) as new states via secession; border wars (e.g., Ethiopia–Eritrea 1998–2000)

Present	54–55 states	Largely unchanged colonial borders	AU Border Programme (2007) on delimitation/demotion

Table 2. Colonial railway orientation vs. present African rail infrastructure (illustrative, drawn from Cooper 2002; Herbst 2000)

Feature	Colonial era (c. 1890–1960)	Post-independence (1960–present)
Primary orientation	Port-to-interior (extraction corridor)	Largely inherited; some rehabilitation and new lines
Inter-African east–west links	Minimal or absent	Still limited; most networks remain national or port-oriented
Gauge standardization	Multiple colonial gauges (British, French, Belgian, Portuguese)	Persistent incompatibility; few cross-border standardization projects
Ownership/control	Colonial companies and metropolitan states	National railways; some privatization and foreign (Chinese) financed new lines
Documented pattern	Railways built to move cash crops and minerals to coast	Deterioration of many lines; selective new investment (e.g., Kenya SGR, Ethiopia–Djibouti)

Table 3. Agricultural export specialization by colonial power (illustrative, drawn from Cooper 2002; Rodney 1972)

Colonial power / zone	Dominant export commodities	Structural feature
British (West & East Africa)	Cocoa, cotton, tea, coffee, groundnuts	Peasant export agriculture; marketing boards
French (West & Equatorial Africa)	Cocoa, coffee, cotton, groundnuts, timber	Concession companies; forced labor (early); later peasant production
Belgian (Congo)	Rubber, copper, cobalt, palm oil, cotton	Concession/extraction; later state mining (Gécamines)
Portuguese (Angola, Mozambique)	Coffee, cotton, sisal, sugar	Settler agriculture; forced cultivation (*cultura obrigatória*)
German (Tanganyika, Cameroon, Togo, Namibia)	Cotton, sisal, coffee, diamonds	Short-lived; infrastructure for extraction

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Looking across Tables 1–3, what is the single most striking long-run pattern in African state formation and economic structure between 1884 and the present, and which table provides the strongest evidence for it? State the trend in one sentence and justify with two data points.

2. **Level of analysis.** The border stability shown in Table 1 and the rail orientation shown in Table 2 can each be explained at the individual, state, systemic, or transnational level. Assign the *primary* explanatory level to each pattern and defend your assignment in two to three sentences, noting which alternative level is most tempting and why it is insufficient on its own.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives would read Tables 1–3: (a) African (hybridity, colonial continuity, post-colonial critique); (b) Chinese (underdevelopment plus non-interference); (c) Russian (colonial legacy plus critique of Western neocolonialism); (d) Western (state weakness plus institutionalist accounts); (e) UN (trusteeship legacy, SDG and state-building frameworks). For each, state in two sentences what the data *support* and what they *occlude*.

4. **Interpretation.** What causal mechanism links the colonial infrastructure design documented in Table 2 to the post-colonial economic dependence implied by Table 3? Specify the mechanism in three to four sentences, name the theoretical tradition it belongs to (e.g., dependency, world-systems, or institutionalist), and identify one scope condition under which the mechanism would *not* hold.

5. **Limitation.** Identify the most important data limitation in Tables 1–3 for answering the lesson's central puzzle (why colonial borders and institutions persisted after independence). Explain in three to four sentences what is missing, why it matters, and what kind of evidence would be needed to overcome it.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Partition Overlay: Colonial Borders on Pre-Colonial Africa"

- **What to draw:** Outline the continent of Africa. Inside the outline, lightly sketch (dashed lines) the approximate boundaries of major pre-colonial polities and empires (e.g., Sokoto Caliphate, Asante, Kongo, Zulu, Ethiopia, Buganda, Mali/Songhai legacy zones). Over this, draw bold solid lines for the colonial borders as fixed by c. 1914, and shade each colonial territory with a different hatching or color keyed to the colonizing power (British, French, Belgian, Portuguese, German, Italian, Spanish).
- **Labels to place:** Title at top: "Colonial Borders Imposed on Pre-Colonial Political Geography (c. 1884–1914)." Legend box: colonizing powers with color key. Annotation arrows pointing to (a) a border that splits a pre-colonial polity, (b) a border that joins previously separate polities, (c) a border following a river or latitude line with no pre-colonial political meaning.
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** In the margin, write four short notes: "African: borders are colonial artifacts but became lived political realities (Mamdani 1996)." "Western: borders as institutional containers; weakness is governance, not lines (Herbst 2000)." "UN: borders as framework for sovereignty and development (SDG 16)." "Chinese/Russian: borders as evidence of imperial partition; non-interference protects them."

Visual 2 — "The Extraction Spoke: Colonial Railways and the Missing Web"

- **What to draw:** Draw a simplified map of a representative African region (e.g., West Africa or Central Africa). Mark the coastline with several port cities. From each port, draw thick arrows (rail lines) running inland to a single resource or cash-crop zone (mines, plantations). Show no east–west or inter-territorial connections. Add a second, lighter layer showing a few post-independence additions (dashed lines) and note where lines have been abandoned (broken lines).

- **Labels to place:** Title: "Colonial Rail as Extraction Corridor, Not Development Network." Label each spoke with commodity (e.g., "cocoa," "copper," "rubber"). Label ports. Add a small inset legend: solid thick = colonial rail; dashed = post-independence addition; broken = abandoned.
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Margin notes: "African: infrastructure as colonial continuity; post-colonial state inherits extractive skeleton (Bayart 1989; Mbembe 2001)." "Western: infrastructure gap as development constraint; institutionalist fix (property rights, regulation)." "Chinese: infrastructure as underdevelopment remedy; non-interference in internal affairs." "Russian: infrastructure as neocolonial dependency; critique of Western conditionality." "UN: infrastructure as SDG 9 (industry, innovation, infrastructure) and statebuilding."

Visual 3 — "The Hybrid Order: Layered Sovereignty in the Post-Colonial State"

- **What to draw:** Draw five overlapping, semi-transparent circles (Venn-style) labeled: (1) Formal state (bureaucracy, military, courts), (2) Traditional authority (chiefs, elders, customary law), (3) Religious networks (churches, mosques, Sufi orders, Pentecostal movements), (4) Militias / armed groups (rebel armies, warlords, private security), (5) Informal economy (smuggling, artisanal mining, street vending, remittances). Place a small central zone where all five overlap, labeled "Everyday governance / actual sovereignty." Add arrows showing flows of resources, legitimacy, and coercion between circles.
- **Labels to place:** Title: "Hybrid Political Order: Where Sovereignty Actually Resides." Label each circle. Label the central overlap. Add a side note: "Formal state is one node among several, not the container of all authority."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Margin notes: "African: hybridity is the norm, not failure; colonial state was always layered (Mamdani 1996; Mbembe 2001)." "Western: hybridity as 'state weakness' or 'fragility' to be fixed by institution-building." "UN: hybridity as challenge to SDG 16 and peacebuilding; engage non-state actors." "Chinese: hybridity as internal affair; stability through non-interference." "Russian: hybridity as consequence of Western-imposed state models; critique of liberal peacebuilding."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the "artificiality thesis" and why is it insufficient?	Claims African states are "artificial" because borders were imposed; insufficient because it treats borders as mere lines and ignores how colonial and post-colonial actors made them politically real. Sources: Mamdani (1996); Herbst (2000); Mbembe (2001).
What stronger account replaces the artificiality thesis?	Colonial state formation as a *process* of institutionalizing ethnicity, extracting resources, and creating hybrid orders; borders became lived through administration, war, and citizenship. Sources: Bayart (1989); Grovogui (1996); Cooper (2002).

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What were the main colonial governance modes?	Indirect rule (British), assimilation (French), "native administration" (Belgian/Portuguese variants); each produced different ethnic institutionalizations. Source: Mamdani (1996).
How did colonial rule institutionalize ethnicity?	Through customary law, native authorities, censuses, and identity cards; ethnicity became an administrative category with political stakes. Sources: Mamdani (1996); Bayart (1989).
What was the extractive economy?	Infrastructure (rail, ports) built for export; monoculture cash crops; dependent trade with metropole; limited industrialization. Sources: Rodney (1972); Cooper (2002); Herbst (2000).
Why did African states accept inherited borders (*uti possidetis*)?	OAU 1963: fear of endless war, need for sovereignty recognition, elite interest in territorial control; borders as political resource. Sources: Herbst (2000); Mamdani (1996).
What is a "hybrid order"?	Coexistence of formal state, traditional authority, religious networks, militias, informal economy; sovereignty is layered and negotiated. Sources: Mbembe (2001); Bayart (1989); Grovogui (1996).
What does the African perspective emphasize?	Colonial continuity, hybridity as norm, post-colonial critique of Western state models; African agency in making and remaking institutions. Sources: Grovogui (1996); Mbembe (2001); Bayart (1989).
What does the Western perspective emphasize?	State weakness, institutional deficits, "fragile states"; solutions via institution-building, good governance, aid conditionality. Sources: Herbst (2000); Cooper (2002).
What do Chinese and Russian perspectives emphasize?	Chinese: underdevelopment, non-interference, infrastructure-led development. Russian: colonial legacy, critique of Western neocolonialism, multipolarity. Sources: (general IR literature; no specific canonical citation required).
What is the UN perspective?	Trusteeship legacy, SDG/statebuilding frameworks, peacekeeping, border delimitation programs; sovereignty plus development. Sources: UN Charter; AU Border Programme.
What is the DRC case's lesson?	Leopold's Congo Free State → Belgian Congo → Mobutu: colonial violence and extractive institutions reproduced post-independently; state as predator. Sources: Mbembe (2001); Cooper (2002).

Summary (3–5 sentences): Colonial state formation in Africa cannot be reduced to the "artificiality" of

borders; it was a process of institutionalizing ethnicity, building extractive infrastructure, and creating hybrid political orders that outlived formal decolonization. African states accepted inherited borders through *uti possidetis* because borders had become political resources and because the alternative was endless territorial war. The DRC exemplifies how colonial violence and extraction were reproduced under Mobutu, while Rwanda and Burundi show how colonial identity classification could generate post-colonial catastrophe. Across the five perspectives, the African vantage point insists that hybridity is the norm and that colonial continuity, not just state weakness, explains contemporary outcomes.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Imagine someone drew lines across a continent they did not live in, built railways that only ran from mines to ports, and created identity cards that turned flexible groups into fixed tribes. After independence, the new governments kept those lines, those railways, and those categories because changing them seemed more dangerous than keeping them. The state that resulted was never just the government in the capital; it was also chiefs, religious leaders, militias, and market traders all sharing power in messy, overlapping ways. That is the story of colonial state formation: not a single event, but a set of institutions that were inherited and then remade by Africans themselves.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. (a) I have not yet explained *why* elites accepted borders they did not draw — is it fear, interest, or international pressure? (b) I have not distinguished indirect rule from assimilation sharply enough to show how each produced different ethnic outcomes. (c) I have not specified the mechanism by which colonial railways caused post-colonial dependence rather than merely correlating with it. (d) I have not addressed the strongest Western counterargument: that post-colonial governance failures are better explained by leadership choices than by colonial inheritance.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading Mamdani (1996) confirms that colonial governance modes (indirect rule vs. assimilation) produced structurally different ethnic institutionalizations, and that *uti possidetis* was accepted because borders had become the framework for sovereignty and elite competition. Re-reading Herbst (2000) confirms that low population density and the cost of extending state authority, not just colonial design, shaped where states could reach. Re-reading Mbembe (2001) confirms that post-colonial states often reproduced colonial violence through new idioms, and that sovereignty was performed as much as exercised. These checks fill gaps (a) and (b); gaps (c) and (d) remain partially open and require the dependency-theory and institutionalist literatures.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. *Analogy:* Colonial state formation is like inheriting a house built by someone else for a different purpose — the rooms are in the wrong places, the plumbing runs to the street not the garden, and the locks are on the wrong doors — but you keep living in it because rebuilding is costly and the neighbors recognize your address. *Limits of the analogy:* It overstates passivity (Africans remade institutions, not just inhabited them); it understates violence (the "house" was built through coercion and extraction, not mere poor design); and it implies a single owner where sovereignty was actually shared among multiple actors (hybrid order).

Step 5 — Rewrite. Colonial state formation in Africa was a process, not an event: European powers partitioned the continent, imposed borders, built extractive infrastructure, and institutionalized ethnicity through differentiated governance modes, but these structures became politically real only through African agency, elite competition, and everyday practice. African states accepted inherited borders under *uti possidetis* be-

cause borders had become the currency of sovereignty and the alternative was territorial chaos, not because the borders were just. The resulting states were hybrid orders in which formal government shared authority with chiefs, religious networks, militias, and informal economies. The DRC shows colonial violence and extraction reproduced under Mobutu; Rwanda and Burundi show colonial identity classification converted into post-colonial catastrophe. The African perspective insists this is colonial continuity and hybridity, not mere state weakness; the Western perspective sees institutional deficits; the Chinese and Russian perspectives frame underdevelopment and neocolonialism; the UN frames trusteeship and statebuilding. The strongest account integrates all five while centering African agency and the mechanisms by which inherited structures were remade.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L27	definition	What is the "artificiality thesis" in African border studies?	It claims colonial borders were arbitrary lines drawn without regard to African societies. The thesis is insufficient because it treats borders as merely geometric and ignores how colonial rule, extraction, and post-colonial statecraft made them socially and politically consequential.	African scholars such as Bayart and Mbembe stress that borders became lived institutions, not just lines.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L27	mechanism	How did indirect rule institutionalize ethnicity?	Colonial administrators governed through "customary" chiefs and classified populations into ethnic categories, making fluid identities administratively fixed and politically consequential. This created a machinery of rule that post-colonial states often inherited.	Mamdani's citizen/subject distinction is central here.
L27	mechanism	What is the extractive economy's spatial logic?	Railways, ports, and roads were built to move commodities from interior to coast, not to integrate African economies. Monoculture and dependent trade locked regions into external markets and weak industrial linkages.	Cooper's colonial political economy highlights uneven connection rather than simple underdevelopment.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L27	definition	What is *uti possidetis juris* in the African context?	It is the principle that colonial administrative boundaries become international borders upon independence. African states largely accepted it to avoid territorial wars, trading revision for stability.	Herbst frames this as a state-survival strategy, not merely external imposition.
L27	comparison	Artificiality thesis versus institutionalist account?	The artificiality thesis blames borders' geometry; institutionalism asks how states, economies, and identities were built around them. The latter better explains why borders persisted and became politically productive.	Western institutionalism and African critique converge on institutions but differ on agency.
L27	source	What does Mamdani (1996) argue about the colonial state?	Mamdani argues colonial rule created a bifurcated state: citizens in urban/civil arenas and subjects under customary authority. This dualism shaped post-colonial governance and conflict.	This is a foundational African critical-theory account.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L27	source	What does Mbembe (2001) add?	Mbembe analyzes post-colonial power as *commandement* and the "banality of power," showing colonial violence and extraction were reproduced through everyday state practices rather than only formal institutions.	This shifts attention from institutions to lived power.
L27	source	What does Grovogui (1996) contribute?	Grovogui critiques international law's complicity in imperial ordering and shows how sovereignty doctrines legitimized unequal global hierarchies. This frames borders as legal-political constructions, not neutral facts.	This is an African international-legal critique.
L27	source	What does Bayart (1989) argue?	Bayart's "politics of the belly" emphasizes extraversion, elite strategies, and the social logics of African states, resisting both culturalist and purely institutional explanations.	This foregrounds African political agency.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L27	source	What does Cooper (2002) argue?	Cooper examines colonialism's uneven transformations, showing how labor, infrastructure, and governance created connected but unequal worlds rather than a simple before/after.	This is Western historiography with an African focus.
L27	source	What does Herbst (2000) argue?	Herbst argues African state borders were often accepted because sparse populations and weak infrastructure made territorial control difficult; states prioritized survival over border revision.	This is Western state-building theory applied to Africa.
L27	application	DRC case: what reproduced colonial extraction?	From Leopold's concessionary violence to Mobutu's patrimonial rule, extractive institutions, weak territorial control, and elite predation reproduced colonial patterns. The state became a vehicle for resource extraction rather than public goods.	African hybridity and post-colonial critique are central.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L27	application	Rwanda/Burundi case: colonial identity classification?	Belgian administrative categories hardened Hutu/Tutsi distinctions and linked them to political privilege. Post-colonial elites mobilized these categories, contributing to violence; the mechanism is institutionalized identity, not ancient tribal hatred.	Mamdani's institutional analysis is key.
L27	comparison	Chinese versus Western perspectives on African borders?	China emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and development cooperation; Western accounts often stress state weakness and institutional reform. The former foregrounds external non-interference; the latter foregrounds internal capacity.	Both can occlude African hybrid governance.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L27	reconstruction	What does the African perspective reveal that others miss?	It reveals colonial continuity in everyday governance, hybrid authority, and the political productivity of borders. It challenges both Western state-weakness narratives and external frameworks that ignore African agency.	This is the primary perspective of the lesson.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100).

Skill or concept	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Next action
Artificiality thesis and its critique		Can explain why geometry alone is insufficient	Re-read Bayart and Mbembe notes
Indirect rule and ethnicity		Can trace classification into post-colonial politics	Map Mamdani's citizen/subject distinction
Extractive economy		Can link railway maps to export dependence	Compare colonial and present infrastructure
Uti possidetis juris		Can explain African acceptance of inherited borders	Review Herbst and OAU 1963 context
Hybrid orders		Can identify formal, traditional, religious, militia, informal layers	Apply to DRC or Rwanda/Burundi
DRC worked example		Can narrate Leopold to Mobutu at four levels	Practice levels-of-analysis answer
Rwanda/Burundi problem pair		Can distinguish classification from primordial hatred	Reconstruct Mamdani's argument

Skill or concept	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Next action
Five-perspective reconstruction		Can steel-man all five perspectives	Fill comparison matrix from memory
Data lab interpretation		Can move from trend to mechanism to limitation	Re-answer all five data-lab questions
Falsifier design		Can state evidence that would weaken each claim	Add one falsifier per key idea

7.2 Three-question debrief.

1. Which of the five perspectives was hardest to steel-man without caricature, and what evidence would make that perspective stronger?

2. Which mechanism did I initially describe as an outcome rather than explain causally, and how can I repair that explanation?

3. If I had to adjudicate between the African and Western perspectives on one case, what single piece of evidence would most change my conclusion?

7.3 Error-log table: Common Misconception | Correction | Evidence.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
African borders are merely artificial lines with no political effects.	Borders became institutionalized through colonial administration, post-colonial acceptance, and everyday governance; their effects are political, not just geometric.	Bayart (1989); Mbembe (2001); Herbst (2000)
Ethnic violence in Rwanda and Burundi reflects ancient tribal hatred.	Colonial identity classification and political mobilization institutionalized categories that later elites exploited.	Mamdani (1996, 2001)
Colonial infrastructure was primarily developmental.	Much infrastructure was spatially biased toward extraction, connecting interiors to ports rather than integrating domestic economies.	Cooper (2002); colonial railway maps
Uti possidetis was imposed on Africa only by outsiders.	African states and the OAU largely accepted inherited borders to reduce territorial conflict and prioritize state survival.	Herbst (2000)

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Hybrid orders are simply state failure.	They are layered modes of governance in which formal, traditional, religious, militia, and informal authorities coexist and compete.	Bayart (1989); Mbembe (2001)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Artificiality thesis; coloniality of borders; hybrid orders	Borders become lived institutions through rule, extraction, and acceptance	Bayart (1989); Mbembe (2001); Grovogui (1996)	Post-1960 border persistence; OAU acceptance	Artificiality versus institutionalization	Evidence that pre-colonial societies treated borders as irrelevant and post-colonial states ignored them	L9, L10
Indirect rule; bifurcated state; institutionalized ethnicity	Customary authority; administrative classification; citizen/subject dualism	Mamdani (1996)	Rwanda/Burundi identity categories; chiefly authority	Primordialism versus institutionalism	No colonial administrative ethnic records or no post-colonial mobilization of categories	L12, L29
Extractive economy; monoculture; dependent trade	Infrastructure to coast; commodity specialization; weak industrial linkages	Cooper (2002)	Colonial railway maps; agricultural export shares by colonial power	Development versus extraction	Balanced internal rail networks and diversified exports under colonial rule	L29

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Uti possidetis juris; inherited borders	Boundary inheritance; stability over revision; state survival	Herbst (2000)	African state borders pre/post-1960	Revisionism versus stability	Frequent successful post-independence border changes without major war	L9
Hybrid orders; formal state; traditional authority; militias; informal economies	Layered governance; coexistence and competition among authorities	Bayart (1989); Mbembe (2001)	DRC; militias; informal economies	State failure versus hybrid governance	Effective monopoly of violence and no non-state authority in practice	L28, L30

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 — 24 hours:** Re-read all fifteen flashcards and the error-log table; rewrite any back that you cannot reproduce from memory.
- **R2 — 3 days:** Reconstruct the DRC worked example at the individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels in continuous prose.
- **R3 — 1 week:** Rebuild the five-perspective comparison matrix from memory, then compare it with Section 2.7.6.
- **R4 — 2 weeks:** Re-answer all five data-lab questions, especially the limitation question, using one new piece of evidence.
- **R5 — 1 month:** Write the independent memo from scratch, including mechanism, perspective reconstruction, historical analogue, and falsifiers, then check that description, explanation, prediction, and prescription are separated.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can explain why the artificiality thesis is insufficient.

☐ I can define indirect rule and its ethnic institutionalization.

☐ I can explain the extractive spatial logic of colonial infrastructure.

☐ I can define *uti possidetis juris* and explain African acceptance.

☐ I can describe hybrid orders without reducing them to state failure.

☐ I can reconstruct the DRC case from Leopold II to Mobutu.

☐ I can explain Rwanda/Burundi through institutionalized identity.

☐ I can steel-man all five perspectives.

☐ I can identify what the African perspective reveals that others miss.

☐ I can use the four levels of analysis correctly.

☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

☐ I can design at least one falsifier for each key idea.

☐ I can interpret the data-lab tables without overclaiming.

☐ I can complete the Cornell notes cue column from memory.

☐ I can deliver the Feynman compression without jargon.

☐ I can identify my lowest-confidence concept and schedule repair.

☐ I can connect this lesson to L8, L9, L10, and L12.

☐ I can connect this lesson forward to L28, L29, and L30.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- **Colonial state formation:** Mamdani, M. (1996) *Citizen and Subject*; Cooper, F. (2002) *Africa since 1940*.

- **African post-colonial critique:** Bayart, J.-F. (1989) *The State in Africa*; Mbembe, A. (2001) *On the Postcolony*; Grovogui, S. N. (1996) *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*.

- **Borders, territory, and state survival:** Herbst, J. (2000) *States and Power in Africa*; Jackson, R. H., and Rosberg, C. G. (1982) *Personal Rule in Black Africa*; Englebert, P. (2009) *Africa: Unity, Sovereignty and Sorrow*.

- **Extractive economies and underdevelopment:** Rodney, W. (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; Amin, S. (1976) *Unequal Development*.

- **Rwanda and Burundi:** Mamdani, M. (2001) *When Victims Become Killers*.

- **Congo case studies:** Hochschild, A. (1998) *King Leopold's Ghost*; Wrong, M. (2000) *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz*.

End of Lesson 27. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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29. Post-Colonial Sovereignty and Pan-Africanism

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 28: Post-Colonial Sovereignty and Pan-Africanism
Module	Module 5: African Geopolitical Architecture
Prerequisites	L9 (sovereignty), L12 (decolonization), L27 (colonial state formation)
Interleaved links	Forward to L32 (African agency), L34 (Sahel), L49 (Global South)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, visuals, flashcards, worked example, problem pair, memo
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is a paradox that sits at the heart of African international relations: the same states that fought hardest to win sovereignty from colonial rule have repeatedly built institutions that both sacralize that sovereignty and, in moments of crisis, claim the right to override it. The Organization of African Unity (OAU), founded in 1963, elevated non-interference into a quasi-constitutional principle; the African Union (AU), launched in 2002, inserted into its Constitutive Act a right to intervene in member states in cases of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity (Article 4(h)), alongside a prohibition on unconstitutional changes of government (Article 4(p)). This is not merely institutional renovation. It is a normative rupture whose meaning remains contested: is Article 4(h) the logical completion of Pan-Africanism, or is it an elite bargain that preserves the sovereign shell while licensing selective intervention? Understanding that rupture requires tracing how sovereignty was constructed in Africa—not as an abstract legal status but as a hard-won political achievement against colonialism, neo-colonialism, and Cold War manipulation—and how that construction continues to constrain and enable collective action today.

This lesson sits in Module 5, African Geopolitical Architecture, and it builds directly on three earlier lessons. From L9 (sovereignty) you bring the distinction between legal sovereignty and empirical state capacity, and the recognition that sovereignty is always performed and contested. From L12 (decolonization) you bring the

historical experience of anti-colonial struggle, the Bandung moment, and the way newly independent states used international law to lock in territorial integrity. From L27 (colonial state formation) you bring the understanding that African states inherited extractive, externally oriented institutions whose borders were drawn without reference to social geography. The lesson therefore does not treat sovereignty as a given; it treats sovereignty as a political project whose African variant was forged in the crucible of anti-colonial nationalism and then institutionalized in the OAU. The forward links to L32 (African agency), L34 (Sahel), and L49 (Global South) mean that what you learn here about institutional path dependence and multi-alignment will reappear when you analyze how African states navigate great-power competition, regional security crises, and South-South cooperation.

The intellectual project of Pan-Africanism is older than the OAU and broader than the AU. W.E.B. Du Bois convened the Pan-African Congresses from 1900 onward, framing the "problem of the color line" as a global structure. Kwame Nkrumah, in *Africa Must Unite* (1963), argued that political unification was the only defense against neo-colonialism, proposing a continental government with a common market, currency, and defense force. Julius Nyerere, in the Arusha Declaration (1967) and his writings on ujamaa, advanced a more gradualist, socialist, and village-centered vision of African socialism that emphasized self-reliance over rapid political merger. These two visions—Nkrumah's continental state versus Nyerere's community of sovereign states cooperating functionally—have structured every subsequent debate about African unity. The OAU Charter (1963) represented a victory for the Nyerere-Monrovia group over Nkrumah's Casablanca bloc: sovereignty was preserved, non-interference was codified, and unity was deferred to functional cooperation. The AU Constitutive Act (2000) can be read as a partial, belated vindication of Nkrumah's insistence that sovereignty without collective capacity is hollow, but it stopped well short of continental government.

The Non-Aligned Movement and the Afro-Asian solidarity project provided the global context in which African sovereignty was asserted. The Bandung Conference of 1955 articulated a shared anti-colonial and anti-racist platform that linked African and Asian struggles, and the Belgrade summit of 1961 formalized non-alignment as a diplomatic strategy. For African states, non-alignment was never neutrality in the abstract; it was a positive project of preserving decision-making autonomy in a bipolar world. This matters for the lesson because it establishes that African sovereignty claims were always relational and strategic, not merely juridical. The Afro-Asian solidarity project also bequeathed a vocabulary—self-determination, neo-colonialism, solidarity—that continues to structure African diplomatic discourse, including contemporary critiques of conditionality and of great-power competition on the continent.

Institutional path dependence explains why the AU's normative ambitions have not been matched by enforcement capacity. The OAU's sovereignty norms were not accidental; they were functional responses to a continent of weak states facing internal and external threats. Once codified, they created constituencies—military elites, ruling parties, regional hegemons—that benefited from non-interference. The AU inherited this architecture: the Peace and Security Council (PSC) operates by consensus, suspensions for unconstitutional changes of government are the primary enforcement tool, and there is no supranational executive with independent coercive capacity. Murithi (2014) captures this tension by analyzing the AU's normative framework as ambitious but structurally under-resourced. The result is a pattern of inconsistent responses to crises—Mali (2020), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), Niger (2023), Gabon (2023)—where the AU suspends governments but struggles to restore constitutional order, and where regional economic communities (RECs) often act first and the AU follows.

Contemporary Pan-Africanism is being reconstituted through economic and normative projects rather than political unification. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), launched in 2019, represents the

most ambitious functional integration effort since the Lagos Plan of Action (1980) and the Abuja Treaty (1991). Agenda 2063, adopted in 2015, frames a fifty-year vision of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens." At the same time, African states are practicing multi-alignment—engaging China, Russia, the West, and the UN simultaneously without exclusive bloc membership. This is not a return to Cold War non-alignment but a strategic hedging in a multipolar order. The lesson asks you to evaluate whether AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 constitute a new phase of Pan-Africanism or a technocratic rebranding of old aspirations, and whether multi-alignment strengthens or dilutes African agency.

By the end of this lesson you will be able to reconstruct the OAU-to-AU transition as a case of normative innovation under structural constraint; to trace the intellectual lineage of Pan-Africanism through Du Bois, Nkrumah, and Nyerere; to explain the Afro-Asian solidarity project and its legacy; to analyze institutional path dependence in the AU's enforcement architecture; and to assess contemporary Pan-Africanism through AfCFTA, Agenda 2063, and multi-alignment. You will also be able to reconstruct five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on the lesson's central topic, to adjudicate between competing explanations using evidence, and to produce a policy memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription. The worked example walks through the OAU-to-AU transformation; the problem pair asks you to analyze the AU's inconsistent responses to unconstitutional changes of government; the data lab gives you suspension decisions, PSC communiqués, trade shares, and AfCFTA timelines to interpret.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer these questions from memory before reading further. They draw on Lessons 9, 12, and 27.

1. From L9 (sovereignty): What is the difference between internal and external sovereignty, and why does the Montevideo Convention (1933) matter for post-colonial states that inherited colonial borders?
2. From L9 (sovereignty): Distinguish sovereignty as a legal status from sovereignty as empirical state capacity. Which of these two is more frequently invoked by African governments in diplomatic forums, and why?
3. From L12 (decolonization): How did the UN Charter's Article 2(7) non-intervention principle interact with decolonization movements, and what tension did it create for newly independent states facing internal conflict?
4. From L12 (decolonization): What role did the Bandung Conference (1955) play in articulating Afro-Asian solidarity, and how did it shape the diplomatic vocabulary of non-alignment?
5. From L27 (colonial state formation): What is the "gatekeeper state" concept, and how did colonial fiscal extraction and border-making shape post-colonial state capacity and interstate relations?
6. From L27 (colonial state formation): How did arbitrary colonial borders contribute to the "tragedy of the commons" in African interstate relations, particularly regarding cross-border ethnic groups and resource disputes?

1.2 Orientation Questions These questions frame the puzzle you will work through in this lesson. Do not answer them fully yet; use them to guide your reading.

1. How can the AU claim a right to intervene in member states under Article 4(h) of the Constitutive Act while those same member states fiercely guard sovereignty and resist external scrutiny of their internal

affairs?
2. Does Pan-Africanism require political unification into a continental state, as Nkrumah argued, or can it be achieved through functional economic integration and normative solidarity, as Nyerere suggested?
3. Why did the OAU's non-interference norm persist for nearly four decades despite repeated coups, civil wars, and humanitarian crises, and what changed by 2000 to make normative innovation possible?
4. What does "multi-alignment" mean for African agency in a multipolar world, and does it strengthen continental bargaining power or fragment it across competing external partnerships?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach Provisional definitions to anchor your reading. Each term will be developed and contested in the lesson core.

- **Pan-Africanism**: A political and intellectual project asserting shared identity, solidarity, and collective action among peoples of African descent, ranging from anti-colonial nationalism to continental political unification and, in contemporary usage, to functional economic integration and normative solidarity.
- **Sovereignty**: The supreme authority of a state within its territory and its equality with other states in international law; in the African context, sovereignty is also a hard-won anti-colonial achievement and a shield against neo-colonial interference.
- **Non-interference**: The principle that states should not intervene in the internal affairs of other states; codified in the OAU Charter (1963) and retained in modified form in the AU Constitutive Act (2000).
- **Article 4(h)**: A provision of the AU Constitutive Act (2000) granting the Union the right to intervene in a member state in cases of war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, representing a normative break with OAU-era non-interference.
- **Unconstitutional change of government (UCG)**: The seizure of power by means other than constitutional processes; the AU's primary trigger for suspension of membership and diplomatic sanctions under Article 4(p) and the Lomé Declaration (2000).
- **AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area)**: A trade agreement launched in 2019 to create a single continental market for goods and services, representing the most ambitious functional integration project in African history.
- **Agenda 2063**: The AU's fifty-year strategic framework, adopted in 2015, envisioning "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens."
- **Multi-alignment**: The practice of engaging multiple external partners—China, Russia, Western states, and multilateral institutions—simultaneously without exclusive bloc membership, as a strategy of preserving agency in a multipolar order.
- **Institutional path dependence**: The process by which early institutional choices constrain later options; in the AU context, the OAU's sovereignty norms created constituencies and procedures that persist despite normative innovation.
- **Normative innovation**: The introduction of new principles or standards into an institutional framework; exemplified by the shift from OAU non-interference to AU intervention rights and UCG prohibitions.
- **Afro-Asian solidarity**: The political and diplomatic project linking African and Asian anti-colonial movements, crystallized at Bandung (1955) and formalized through the Non-Aligned Movement, which provided a shared vocabulary of self-determination and non-interference.
- **Ujamaa**: Julius Nyerere's concept of African socialism, emphasizing communal ownership, self-reliance, and rural development; a key variant of Pan-Africanist thought that prioritized social trans-

formation over rapid political unification.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the institutional transition from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU), identifying the specific normative innovations encoded in the Constitutive Act of 2000—particularly Articles 4(h) and 4(p)—and explaining the causal mechanisms through which a sovereignty-bound organization acquired interventionist language without acquiring matching enforcement capacity.
2. **Evaluate** the scope conditions under which Article 4(h) (intervention in grave circumstances) and Article 4(p) (rejection of unconstitutional changes of government) have been invoked, withheld, or selectively applied, using comparative evidence from AU Peace and Security Council communiqués and suspension decisions.
3. **Explain** the path-dependent constraints—budgetary dependence on external partners, reliance on Regional Economic Communities, consensus-based Assembly decision-making, and the diplomatic culture of non-interference inherited from the OAU—that limit the AU's enforcement capacity despite its normative ambition.
4. **Compare** the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on the OAU-AU transition, identifying what each reveals about sovereignty, intervention, and institutional legitimacy, and what each systematically occludes.
5. **Apply** the framework to novel cases, distinguishing whether a given crisis triggers Article 4(h) (mass atrocities), Article 4(p) (unconstitutional change of government), both, or neither, and predicting the likely AU response based on observable indicators of political will and capacity. Students will also be able to reconstruct the intellectual lineage of Pan-African institutionalism from Nkrumah's 1963 vision through the Sirte Declaration of 1999, and to adjudicate between competing explanations of AU weakness—capacity deficit versus political will deficit—on the basis of evidence.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — OAU to AU: institutional transition, sovereignty norms, and normative evolution (Art 4(h), 4(p))

Bolded Causal Claim: The transformation of the OAU into the AU was not a mere institutional rebranding but a normative rupture: the Constitutive Act of 2000 replaced the OAU's doctrine of absolute, non-derogable sovereignty with a regime of conditional sovereignty in which grave human-rights violations and unconstitutional changes of government became legitimate grounds for collective intervention—yet this normative innovation was structurally coupled to weak enforcement mechanisms, producing a persistent and predictable gap between proclaimed norms and practiced restraint.

Mechanism: The causal chain runs through four linked stages. First, the catalyst: the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the OAU's paralysis during it generated a crisis of legitimacy for the non-interference doctrine codified in Article III of the 1963 OAU Charter; African leaders concluded that sovereignty could no longer func-

tion as an absolute shield against mass atrocity. Second, the political entrepreneurship: Muammar Gaddafi's 1999 Sirte Declaration and the subsequent Lomé summit (July 2000) provided the institutional venue; the Constitutive Act was drafted in months, not decades, because a coalition of states—South Africa, Nigeria, Senegal, and others—pushed for a break with the OAU's "club of heads of state" model. Third, the codification: Article 4(h) granted the AU the right to intervene in a member state "pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances, namely: war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity," while Article 4(p) condemned and rejected unconstitutional changes of government; Article 30 barred governments that seized power unconstitutionally from participating in AU activities. Fourth, the enforcement deficit: the same states that wrote interventionist language refused to fund it. The Peace and Security Council (PSC), established in 2004, depends on member-state contributions and external financing (notably the European Union and the UN); the African Standby Force (ASF) has never reached full operational capacity; and Assembly decisions require consensus or a two-thirds majority, giving any determined minority a veto. Murithi (2014) captures this as a shift from "non-interference" to "non-indifference"—a normative advance that outran institutional capacity. The mechanism is therefore not hypocrisy but structural coupling: normative innovation was cheap (textual), while enforcement was expensive (military, financial, political), and the AU inherited the OAU's budgetary dependence and diplomatic culture. Path dependence compounded the problem: the OAU's non-interference norm had become embedded in the professional socialization of African diplomats, in the headquarters culture in Addis Ababa, and in the expectation that the AU would not challenge sitting heads of state. The result is that Article 4(p) (coups) is enforced more readily than Article 4(h) (atrocities), because coups are discrete, observable events with clear triggers, whereas "grave circumstances" require political judgment that sitting leaders are reluctant to make against peers.

Scope Conditions: Article 4(h) applies only when (a) the situation involves war crimes, genocide, or crimes against humanity; (b) the AU Assembly decides to intervene; and (c) the target is a member state. It has never been invoked for a unilateral AU military intervention without host-state consent or UN authorization: the AU's missions in Somalia (AMISOM/ATMIS), Sudan (Darfur, via the hybrid UNAMID), and the Central African Republic operated under Chapter VII UN mandates or host consent. Article 4(p) applies to unconstitutional changes of government—coups, refusals to relinquish power after elections, or constitutional manipulations to extend tenure—and triggers suspension under Article 30. Its scope is broader in practice because the trigger is less contested, but it is also politicized: the AU has been slower to condemn "constitutional coups" (term-limit extensions) than military coups, and has struggled to define the boundary between legitimate constitutional amendment and unconstitutional change. Both articles are further scoped by the AU's dependence on Regional Economic Communities (RECs) for operational capacity; the AU often delegates crisis response to RECs (ECOWAS in West Africa, SADC in Southern Africa), creating variable geometry in which enforcement depends on the political will of the relevant regional hegemon.

Observable Implications: If the causal claim holds, we should observe: (1) rapid AU suspension of member states after military coups (Mali 2020, Guinea 2021, Burkina Faso 2022, Niger 2023, Gabon 2023) but prolonged timelines for restoration and inconsistent pressure for return to civilian rule; (2) rhetorical invocation of Article 4(h) in crises (Darfur, Libya, South Sudan) without corresponding unilateral military action; (3) AU PSC communiqués that escalate in language but rarely authorize coercive measures beyond suspension and mediation; (4) member states invoking sovereignty to resist AU mediation or fact-finding missions; (5) persistent low intra-African trade (roughly 15–17 percent of total African trade) despite normative commitments to integration, indicating that institutional ambition has not translated into economic interdependence; and (6) a pattern in which the AU's strongest enforcement occurs where regional hegemons (Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya) have independent interests in stabilization, suggesting that capacity follows power rather than

norms.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From within the African vantage point, the OAU-AU transition is best understood as a maturation of sovereignty rather than its abandonment. The OAU's non-interference doctrine was not naivety but a hard-won shield: newly independent states, many of them artificial colonial creations with fragile legitimacy, required protection from external—especially Western—intervention masquerading as humanitarianism. The shift to conditional sovereignty in 2000 reflected African agency responding to African trauma (Rwanda 1994) and African political entrepreneurship (the Sirte Declaration), not external imposition. Murithi (2014) and the broader African scholarly tradition (Grovogui on the international as imperial; Mbembe on necropolitics; Mamdani on the colonial state) insist that the AU's enforcement gaps must be read against the structural constraints of post-colonial statehood—weak fiscal capacity, externally imposed economic adjustment, and a global order that funds African institutions conditionally. On this view, judging the AU by the enforcement standards of the European Union or NATO is a category error: the AU is an anti-colonial sovereignty project that has cautiously added interventionist tools, not a liberal security community. What this perspective reveals is the African authorship of normative innovation; what it risks occluding is the degree to which sitting heads of state have instrumentalized sovereignty rhetoric to protect themselves from accountability.

Chinese: Beijing's perspective emphasizes non-interference and sovereign equality as foundational principles, consistent with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. China supports the AU as the premier continental institution and has funded its headquarters and operations, framing cooperation through FOCAC and Agenda 2063 as "win-win" development. Chinese officials generally welcome Article 4(p) (anti-coup) as stabilizing but are cautious about Article 4(h), which could legitimate intervention precedents that might one day be turned against China or its partners. The Chinese perspective reveals the material basis of AU capacity (infrastructure, funding) but occludes human-rights conditionality and the political uses of sovereignty by African incumbents.

Russian: Moscow frames the AU as a partner in constructing a multipolar order and emphasizes sovereign choice, non-interference, and resistance to Western conditionality. Russia has cultivated bilateral security relationships (including in the Sahel) and presents itself as an alternative to Western institutional templates. The Russian perspective reveals the geopolitical competition embedded in AU politics but occludes its own interventions and the authoritarian implications of its "sovereign choice" framing.

Western: Western institutionalist assessments typically praise the AU's normative ambition (4(h), 4(p)) while criticizing enforcement gaps, treating the AU as a "failing" or "underperforming" institution measured against liberal governance standards. Conditionality debates—linking aid and partnership to democratic governance—are central. This perspective reveals institutional design flaws but occludes the colonial origins of African state weakness and the external funding dependencies that constrain AU autonomy.

UN: The UN perspective treats the AU as a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, emphasizing AU-UN partnership in peacekeeping (hybrid missions, UN support to AMISOM/ATMIS). The UN supports AU normative frameworks but insists on Security Council primacy in authorizing force. This perspective reveals the legal architecture of collective security but occludes African agency in defining which crises count as "grave circumstances."

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Pan-Africanism: Du Bois, Nkrumah, Nyerere, and the intellectual project of continental unity

Bolded Causal Claim: Pan-Africanism's most consequential causal contribution was to make continental unity a condition of sovereignty rather than an optional aggregation of already-sovereign states; by treating colonial partition as the original violence and racial capitalism as the continuing structure, it redefined legitimate authority as that which could secure collective self-determination across the continent and its diaspora.

Mechanism: The mechanism runs through three linked translations. First, W.E.B. Du Bois's Pan-African congresses, beginning in 1900 and continuing through the 1945 Manchester congress, converted dispersed anti-racist grievance into an organized transnational claim: the "problem of the color line" was not merely domestic discrimination but a global imperial order, and its remedy required coordinated political action by Africans and people of African descent. This created the discursive infrastructure—shared categories of race, empire, and self-determination—without which later continental projects would have lacked a common language. Second, Kwame Nkrumah translated that diasporic and intellectual Pan-Africanism into statecraft. In "Africa Must Unite" (1963) and "Neo-Colonialism" (1965), he argued that formal independence without continental political unification would reproduce subordination through economic dependence, military pacts, and elite collaboration; the mechanism here is structural: fragmented post-colonial states, with small markets and inherited colonial economies, could not bargain effectively with multinational capital or former metropoles, so sovereignty remained "flag independence" rather than substantive self-rule. Nkrumah's proposed remedy—a Union Government with a continental high command, common market, and unified foreign policy—was defeated at the 1963 Addis Ababa conference, but the argument survived as a normative standard against which later institutions were judged. Third, Julius Nyerere supplied a mediating mechanism: rather than immediate federal union, he proposed voluntary regional association and "Ujamaa" socialism, in which sovereignty could be pooled incrementally through consent and shared development goals. The Arusha Declaration (1967) framed freedom as inseparable from equality and from the dismantling of exploitative class structures; unity was thus not only geopolitical but socio-economic. The resulting institutional compromise—the OAU's loose association of sovereign states—preserved the radical vocabulary of Pan-Africanism while emptying it of federal compulsion. That compromise is itself a mechanism: it allowed anti-colonial solidarity to be institutionalized without threatening incumbent elites, but it also locked in a sovereignty-first architecture that later reformers had to work around. Theoretical lineage matters here: Fanon's analysis of national consciousness in "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961) warned that without social revolution, national liberation could produce a comprador elite; Cabral's "return to the source" insisted that culture and class, not only race, must anchor liberation; Rodney's "How Europe Underdeveloped Africa" (1972) supplied the historical-materialist account of why unity was economically necessary; Mamdani's later work on the bifurcated state showed how colonial legal distinctions between citizens and subjects survived independence, complicating any simple appeal to "the African people." Pan-Africanism therefore operated as a contested tradition, not a single doctrine: its federalist, socialist, liberal, and culturalist strands disagreed about whether sovereignty should be pooled, socialized, or merely coordinated.

Scope Conditions: The claim holds where colonial partition created economically unviable and ethnically cross-cutting states, where anti-colonial movements shared a racialized experience of imperial rule, and where leaders could plausibly present unity as protection against neo-colonialism. It is strongest in the 1950s–1960s, when decolonization was incomplete and Cold War pressures made collective bargaining attractive. It weakens where state elites fear loss of power, where regional hegemons are suspected of domination, where economic disparities make redistribution politically costly, and where internal conflicts make "continental" identity less salient than ethnic, national, or religious identities. It also differs across sites: Du Bois's Pan-

Africanism was diasporic and global, centered on racial solidarity and civil rights; Nkrumah's was state-led and continental; Nyerere's was regional and developmental. Treating these as one doctrine obscures their different scope conditions. Moreover, as Oyěwùmí's critique of gendered colonial categories and Tamale's Afro-feminist scholarship remind us, early Pan-Africanism often assumed a masculinized "African man" as the subject of liberation, occluding women's agency and the gendered distribution of sovereignty. The claim therefore applies unevenly: it explains elite diplomatic projects better than grassroots emancipation, and continental rhetoric better than local power relations.

Observable Implications: If Pan-Africanism genuinely shaped sovereignty norms, one should observe its vocabulary in foundational texts: the OAU Charter's references to African solidarity and liberation; the AU Constitutive Act's commitment to "greater unity and solidarity"; Agenda 2063's "Pan-African vision" and its emphasis on an integrated continent; and AfCFTA's economic logic of continental market-building. One should also observe the recurring gap between rhetorical unity and institutional capacity: the defeat of Nkrumah's union government, the OAU's non-interference, the AU's limited enforcement, and the persistence of bilateral deals over continental coordination. Another implication is generational: Pan-African language is invoked both by integrationists and by sovereignty hard-liners, because it can mean either pooled authority or collective defense of state independence. The concept is therefore not self-executing; its institutional effects depend on which strand—federalist, socialist, or sovereigntist—dominates at a given moment. Finally, one should see Pan-Africanism's afterlife in contemporary debates over reparations, racial justice, and Global South solidarity, where the diasporic strand remains active even when continental institutions are weak.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From within, Pan-Africanism is not a regional variant of Western internationalism but a response to racial capitalism, colonial partition, and the denial of African agency. It treats sovereignty as historically won and collectively fragile: Nkrumah's warning that political independence without economic and continental power becomes neo-colonialism, Nyerere's insistence that freedom must be social as well as political, and Du Bois's global color line all frame unity as emancipatory rather than merely administrative. African scholarship—Rodney on underdevelopment, Fanon on the pitfalls of national consciousness, Cabral on culture and class, Mamdani on the inherited state, Grovogui on quasi-sovereignty—shows that Pan-Africanism's power lies in naming structures that liberal state theory naturalizes. Its occlusion is internal: early formulations often centered male elites, understated gendered and ethnic hierarchies, and could convert solidarity into a disciplining discourse against dissent. The African vantage point reveals what Western institutionalism misses: that unity was a survival strategy against an international order built on racialized extraction, not a technocratic preference.

Chinese: China tends to read Pan-Africanism through the lens of South-South solidarity and mutual respect among developing nations. It supports AU and regional integration rhetorically, often framing its engagement as non-interfering partnership rather than conditionality. This perspective contributes a developmental and infrastructure-oriented reading of unity, but it can occlude the internal political contestation within Pan-Africanism and the asymmetries of China-Africa economic relations. It also risks treating "Africa" as a single counterpart, flattening the very diversity Pan-Africanists debated.

Russian: Russia frames Pan-Africanism as part of an anti-hegemonic, multipolar order in which sovereign equality and non-interference protect states from Western dominance. It emphasizes AU legitimacy and opposes external intervention, often aligning with African sovereignty rhetoric. This perspective highlights great-power contestation but occludes Russia's own strategic interests, its arms and security engagements,

and the possibility that multipolarity can reproduce rather than dissolve hierarchy.

Western: Western scholarship often treats Pan-Africanism as a normative aspiration or institutional project, assessing it by governance standards, economic integration metrics, and liberal peace criteria. It contributes comparative institutional analysis and attention to implementation gaps, but it frequently occludes the colonial and racial foundations of African state weakness and may measure Pan-Africanism against an idealized European integration model. Conditionality debates—linking partnership to democratic governance—are central, sometimes reducing Pan-Africanism to a performance indicator.

UN: The UN perspective treats Pan-Africanism as a regional identity that can support Chapter VIII cooperation, peacekeeping, and development agendas. It emphasizes AU-UN partnership and the legitimacy of regional organizations in addressing African crises. This perspective reveals the legal and operational architecture of collective security but occludes the radical anti-imperial content of Pan-Africanism and African agency in defining the terms of unity.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The Non-Aligned Movement and the Afro-Asian solidarity project

Bolded Causal Claim: The Non-Aligned Movement converted Afro-Asian solidarity from a diplomatic posture into a structural claim about international order, producing a sovereignty doctrine in which non-interference and collective bargaining were mutually reinforcing defenses against superpower domination.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the 1955 Bandung Conference, where twenty-nine Asian and African states articulated shared opposition to colonialism, racism, and great-power domination. Bandung did not create a military alliance; its mechanism was normative and diplomatic: by defining a "Third World" or "non-aligned" identity, it gave newly independent states a collective vocabulary that reduced the cost of resisting bloc pressure. The 1961 Belgrade conference formalized the Non-Aligned Movement, and subsequent summits institutionalized principles—sovereign equality, non-intervention, peaceful coexistence, disarmament, and economic justice—that were later echoed in the OAU Charter and in UN General Assembly resolutions. The causal chain runs from shared colonial experience to common diplomatic identity, from identity to coordinated voting and bargaining, and from bargaining to a normative environment in which sovereignty was understood not merely as non-interference but as freedom from structural dependence. Afro-Asian solidarity mattered because it expanded the coalition beyond Africa, giving African states leverage in forums where they were individually weak; the Group of 77, formed in 1964, carried this logic into trade and development negotiations, including demands for a New International Economic Order. For African sovereignty specifically, NAM reinforced the OAU's non-interference norm by framing external criticism or intervention as neo-colonial; it also provided diplomatic cover for states that were militarily or economically vulnerable. Yet the mechanism contained an ambiguity: non-alignment was defined negatively (not aligned with either bloc) rather than positively, allowing states with very different regimes and interests to claim the label. This ambiguity made the movement broad but shallow, and it meant that "sovereignty" could be invoked both to resist imperialism and to shield authoritarian rule. Theoretical lineage: Nkrumah's "Neo-Colonialism" (1965) treated non-alignment as insufficient without economic unification; Nyerere's "Ujamaa" linked sovereignty to self-reliance; Fanon warned that formal non-alignment without social transformation could leave colonial structures intact; Rodney's underdevelopment thesis explained why Afro-Asian states needed collective economic bargaining; Mamdani's later analysis of the bifurcated state showed that sovereignty claims often masked internal domination. Thus NAM's mechanism was not simply diplomatic solidarity but a contest over whether sovereignty meant state autonomy, popular emancipation, or both.

Scope Conditions: The claim is strongest during decolonization and Cold War bipolarity, when superpower competition made non-alignment a credible strategy and when newly independent states shared an anti-colonial identity. It weakens when bipolarity fades, when states become dependent on one patron, or when internal conflicts make collective identity less salient than regime survival. It also depends on the capacity to coordinate: NAM's effectiveness required at least minimal consensus on principles, which was repeatedly strained by the Sino-Soviet split, regional rivalries, and divergent development levels. Afro-Asian solidarity was further complicated by the fact that Asian and African states had different geopolitical positions; "Afro-Asian" could obscure African particularities, including the specific legacies of settler colonialism and racialized partition. The claim applies less well to cases where sovereignty is primarily threatened by internal collapse rather than external domination, and where non-interference norms protect incumbents at the expense of populations. In the contemporary multipolar era, non-alignment reappears as "multi-alignment," but the structural conditions—superpower blocs, colonial empires, and a clear Third World identity—are not identical, so analogies must be cautious.

Observable Implications: If the NAM/Afro-Asian solidarity thesis holds, one should observe Bandung principles in the OAU Charter's emphasis on sovereign equality and non-interference; in African diplomatic behavior, such as bloc voting in the UN General Assembly and collective positions on decolonization, apartheid, and Palestinian self-determination; and in the persistence of sovereignty-first language in AU responses to crises. One should also observe the movement's economic afterlife in demands for fair trade, debt relief, and reform of global financial institutions. Another implication is institutional: NAM's loose, summit-based structure prefigured the OAU/AU's preference for consensus and weak enforcement, because both were designed to accommodate sovereignty-sensitive states. Conversely, if NAM had been a deeply institutionalized alliance, one might expect stronger enforcement; its weakness is therefore consistent with its design. Finally, one should see contemporary invocations of non-alignment in African responses to great-power competition, where states seek to avoid choosing between China, Russia, and Western partners—though this "multi-alignment" is a descendant, not a replica, of Cold War non-alignment.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From within, NAM and Afro-Asian solidarity are best understood as strategies of survival in an international order that racialized and economically subordinated Africa. They gave newly independent states a collective voice and a normative shield against intervention, and they linked sovereignty to anti-racism and economic justice. African thinkers such as Nkrumah, Nyerere, Fanon, Rodney, and Cabral treated non-alignment not as neutrality but as refusal of subordination; Grovogui's work on quasi-sovereignty shows how international law itself encoded African inferiority, making solidarity a necessary corrective. The occlusion is that non-interference could protect authoritarian regimes and that "African" or "Afro-Asian" unity could flatten internal hierarchies of class, gender, and ethnicity. The African vantage point reveals that sovereignty was not an abstract legal status but a hard-won, continuously contested defense against renewed domination.

Chinese: China views NAM and Afro-Asian solidarity as part of the historical struggle against imperialism and as a foundation for contemporary South-South cooperation. It emphasizes mutual respect, non-interference, and development partnership, often presenting itself as a fellow developing country. This perspective contributes a narrative of shared anti-colonial legitimacy but can occlude power asymmetries in China-Africa relations and the fact that China's rise has transformed the very multipolar order NAM once contested. It may also instrumentalize solidarity for bilateral economic goals.

Russian: Russia frames NAM as an anti-hegemonic project and invokes multipolarity, sovereign equality,

and non-interference to contest Western dominance. It supports African positions in international forums and opposes unilateral sanctions and intervention. This perspective highlights great-power contestation and the demand for a more representative order, but it occludes Russia's own interventions, its security footprint, and the possibility that its multipolarity narrative serves state interests rather than African emancipation.

Western: Western analysis often treats NAM as a Cold War diplomatic coalition or a relic of bipolarity, assessing it by institutional effectiveness, economic outcomes, and governance standards. It contributes comparative diplomacy and attention to coordination problems, but it frequently occludes the colonial and racial dimensions of global inequality and may reduce Afro-Asian solidarity to tactical voting. Conditionality debates are central: Western actors often ask whether solidarity norms impede accountability and human rights.

UN: The UN perspective treats NAM as a member-state caucus operating within the Charter framework, emphasizing sovereign equality, peaceful settlement of disputes, and development cooperation. It supports regional and cross-regional solidarity as long as it respects Security Council primacy and international law. This perspective reveals the legal architecture of collective security but occludes the radical redistribution demands of the Afro-Asian project and African agency in defining which solidarities matter.

SECTION 2.5 — KEY IDEA 4: Institutional path dependence: why the AU retains weak enforcement and strong sovereignty norms

Bolded Causal Claim: The African Union's persistent combination of ambitious normative rhetoric and weak enforcement capacity is a path-dependent outcome of the Organisation of African Unity's founding sovereignty bargain, in which newly independent states exchanged supranational authority for mutual legitimation of territorial borders and non-interference, so that later reforms layered new norms atop an inherited architecture without redistributing power.

Mechanism: The theoretical lineage runs through historical institutionalism. Pierson's (2000) analysis of increasing returns and Mahoney's (2000) account of path dependence both predict that early institutional choices create self-reinforcing equilibria: actors invest in skills, expectations, and coalitions around existing rules, raising the cost of deviation. March and Olsen's (1989) "logic of appropriateness" adds that institutions shape what actors consider legitimate, so that sovereignty norms become taken-for-granted scripts rather than calculated preferences. Applied to Africa, the founding moment is the OAU Charter of 1963, adopted in Addis Ababa by thirty-two newly independent states. Its core principles—sovereign equality, non-interference in internal affairs, respect for territorial integrity inherited from colonial boundaries, and the peaceful settlement of disputes—were not incidental. They were the price of continental solidarity among regimes that had just emerged from colonial rule and feared both external intervention and internal secession. The OAU was designed as a club of governments, not of peoples: its legitimacy derived from recognizing states, not from holding them accountable.

This founding bargain generated increasing returns across four decades. Diplomatic habitus, staffing patterns, budget procedures, and legal vocabularies all accumulated around sovereignty protection. When the 1990s brought democratization pressures and the shock of the Rwandan genocide, a reform window opened, but elites channeled it into declaratory innovation rather than enforcement. The AU Constitutive Act of 2000 introduced genuinely novel norms—Article 4(h)'s right to intervene in grave circumstances (war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity) and Article 4(p)'s condemnation of unconstitutional changes of

government—alongside commitments to human rights, democracy, and good governance. Yet the Act preserved the Assembly of Heads of State and Government as the supreme organ, left the Commission as a secretariat with limited autonomous authority, and made the Peace and Security Council dependent on Assembly endorsement for sanctions. The African Standby Force was conceived as a rapid-response capacity but remains dependent on regional economic communities and member-state troop contributions. In other words, the reform layered new norms onto the old sovereignty architecture: the language changed, the power distribution did not.

Murithi (2014) captures this as "normative overreach"—the AU declares principles it cannot enforce, producing a credibility gap between promise and practice. Tieku's (2019) work on the AU Commission shows how member states deliberately constrain the Commission's autonomy through budget control, staffing politics, and the requirement that key decisions pass through intergovernmental bodies. The result is an institution that can suspend a member state from its own activities but cannot compel a junta to hold elections, cannot fund its own peace operations, and cannot prevent member states from ignoring its rulings. External funding reinforces the pattern: donors finance programs (peacekeeping, health, agriculture) but not coercive capacity, so the AU's operational dependence on partners deepens without a corresponding increase in autonomous enforcement. The mechanism is therefore not incompetence but rational institutional reproduction: sovereignty norms serve the interests of incumbent elites, and reform that threatened those interests was designed to be unenforceable.

Scope Conditions: Path dependence of this kind is strongest where (a) the founding coalition retains veto power over reform, as the Assembly does; (b) no hegemonic member state is willing to fund and staff autonomous enforcement; and (c) member states face high domestic insecurity and therefore value non-interference as insurance. It is weaker where regional hegemons can mobilize coalitions with stronger enforcement traditions—ECOWAS in West Africa has historically been more interventionist than the AU continental level, and the AU often defers to such sub-regional bodies. The argument also assumes that institutional culture is sticky; it would not apply to a scenario in which a critical juncture produced a genuine redistribution of power, such as a funded, supranational executive with independent revenue. No such juncture has occurred. The scope condition fails, finally, if external actors condition large-scale funding on enforcement reform in ways that alter domestic incentives; to date, donor conditionality has targeted policy areas (governance benchmarks, economic reform) rather than institutional power redistribution.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism holds, several patterns should be visible. First, AU suspensions of member states after coups should be temporary and frequently lifted after nominal transitions rather than full restoration of constitutional order—consistent with the record in Mali (2020–2022), Burkina Faso (2022), and Guinea (2021). Second, Peace and Security Council communiqués should call for restoration of constitutional order while rarely imposing material sanctions beyond suspension from AU activities; financial or trade sanctions should be exceptional. Third, AU peace operations should depend on member-state troop contributions and external funding, as with ATMIS in Somalia. Fourth, member states should be able to ignore AU Commission rulings without consequence, as seen in debates over International Criminal Court withdrawals and in the sidelining of the AU's Libya peace plan in 2011. Fifth, the AU budget should remain heavily dependent on partner funding, limiting autonomous action. Each of these is observable in the record and is predicted by path dependence rather than by a simple capacity-gap explanation.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* Sovereignty is treated as a hard-won achievement of decolonization, and non-interference protects postcolonial states from external—especially Western—intervention. From this vantage, the AU's weakness is not a failure but a deliberate preservation

of state autonomy and collective legitimation; reformers such as Murithi and Tieku argue for "responsible sovereignty" but acknowledge elite resistance. This perspective reveals African agency in designing norms and the political rationality of sovereignty protection; it occludes internal accountability and the costs borne by citizens under authoritarian or military rule. *Chinese:* Non-interference aligns with Beijing's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence; AU weakness is acceptable because the partnership model favors state-to-state relations, and stronger enforcement would threaten Chinese investments and access. This reveals a stability preference and respect for formal sovereignty; it occludes human rights and democratic accountability. *Russian:* The sovereign-choice narrative treats weak enforcement as a bulwark against Western-style interventionism and supports a multipolar order in which African states retain decision-making autonomy. This reveals an anti-hegemonic logic; it occludes democratic backsliding and the instrumental use of sovereignty by elites. *Western:* Institutionalist assessments frame the problem as capacity gaps and governance deficits, with conditionality debates over whether aid should be tied to reform benchmarks. This reveals organizational and resource constraints; it occludes the colonial and racial dimensions of global inequality and African normative agency. *UN:* The UN treats the AU as a regional partner under Chapter VIII, supporting capacity building while respecting sovereignty; AU weakness creates burden-sharing gaps in peace and security. This reveals the legal architecture of collective security; it occludes African-defined priorities and the political economy of enforcement.

SECTION 2.6 — KEY IDEA 5: Contemporary Pan-Africanism: AfCFTA, Agenda 2063, and the politics of multi-alignment

Bolded Causal Claim: Contemporary Pan-Africanism has shifted from Nkrumah's political federation to economic integration and multi-alignment, with the African Continental Free Trade Area and Agenda 2063 representing a pragmatic, sovereignty-compatible reimagining of continental unity that trades federalist urgency for incremental, market-mediated cooperation among states that retain full autonomy.

Mechanism: The theoretical lineage combines functionalist integration theory (Mitrany 1943; Haas 1958) with African political economy. Functionalism predicts that cooperation in technical, economic domains generates spillover into political integration; neo-functionalism adds that supranational institutions and interest groups drive the process. In the African case, however, the mechanism has been deliberately "intergovernmental functionalism": states cooperate where gains are clear and sovereignty costs are low, while reserving political authority. The shift was driven by three structural changes. First, the end of the Cold War removed the superpower competition that had subsidized ideological Pan-Africanism and exposed the fiscal unsustainability of federalist projects. Second, structural adjustment programs in the 1980s and 1990s weakened state capacity and redirected African governments toward market-led growth and regional economic communities as survival strategies. Third, the rise of China, India, Brazil, and the Gulf states diversified Africa's external partnerships, making multi-alignment—engaging multiple partners simultaneously to maximize bargaining power and avoid conditionality—a rational strategy.

Agenda 2063, adopted by the AU in 2015, frames a fifty-year vision of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens." It is aspirational and indicator-based, with flagship projects including the AfCFTA, the African passport, high-speed rail, and the Grand Inga Dam. The AfCFTA, signed in 2018 and commencing trade in January 2021, is the most concrete mechanism: it aims to create a single market for goods and services across fifty-four countries, with protocols on trade in goods, services, dispute settlement, and (in progress) digital trade and women and youth. The economic logic is that intra-African

trade—roughly fifteen to seventeen percent of total African trade, compared to roughly sixty percent within Europe—can be raised by reducing tariffs and non-tariff barriers, thereby diversifying economies away from commodity dependence and external markets. The political logic is that economic interdependence creates constituencies for cooperation without requiring sovereignty pooling.

Yet the mechanism faces well-documented constraints. Tariff liberalization is the easy part; non-tariff barriers, rules of origin, customs capacity, and infrastructure deficits are harder. The Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, adopted in 2018, has been ratified by only a minority of states. Implementation depends on regional economic communities, which have uneven capacity and overlapping memberships that create confusion. Multi-alignment, meanwhile, generates its own tensions: African states negotiate simultaneously with the EU (Economic Partnership Agreements), China (Belt and Road Initiative), Russia (arms and security), and Gulf states (investment and ports), which can fragment continental bargaining positions and create debt and dependency risks. The mechanism therefore produces integration in rhetoric and partial, uneven integration in practice, with sovereignty fully preserved.

Scope Conditions: This model works where (a) regional economic communities have functional institutions and political commitment; (b) infrastructure and customs capacity exist or are financed; (c) domestic political economies can absorb competitive pressures from liberalization; and (d) external partners do not impose exclusive arrangements that undermine continental coherence. It fails where conflict disrupts trade corridors, where protectionist lobbies dominate, where rules of origin are too complex for small firms, and where multi-alignment tips into dependency on a single partner. The model also assumes that economic integration can proceed without political federation; if security crises or great-power competition intensify, the absence of political authority may limit crisis response. The scope condition is therefore contingent on a relatively stable geopolitical environment, which the Sahel crises and great-power rivalry increasingly challenge.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism holds, several patterns should be visible. First, AfCFTA trading should begin with limited actual shipments, concentrated in a few corridors and large firms, with intra-African trade shares rising only slowly—consistent with the modest initial volumes reported since January 2021. Second, Agenda 2063 flagship projects should show uneven progress, with some (AfCFTA) advancing and others (African passport, high-speed rail) stalled. Third, African states should maintain multiple, sometimes contradictory, external partnerships simultaneously, as seen in the coexistence of EU EPAs, Chinese infrastructure finance, Russian security cooperation, and Gulf investment. Fourth, sovereignty norms should remain intact: no transfer of tariff-setting or border control to supranational bodies. Fifth, implementation gaps should correlate with REC capacity and conflict exposure, with the Sahel and Horn of Africa lagging. These patterns are observable and distinguish the contemporary model from both Nkrumah's federalism and from genuine supranational integration.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* Contemporary Pan-Africanism is read as a pragmatic adaptation to post-Cold War realities: unity through commerce and diplomacy rather than federation, preserving sovereignty while building collective bargaining power. African scholars and policymakers emphasize "African solutions" and multi-alignment as agency, not dependency. This perspective reveals the rationality of incrementalism and the diversity of African strategies; it occludes the risk that economic integration without political authority may reproduce inequality and that multi-alignment may fragment continental coherence. *Chinese:* AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 are welcomed as frameworks for partnership and market access; China positions itself as a supporter of African integration through infrastructure finance and the Belt and Road Initiative. This reveals an economic opportunity framing; it occludes concerns about debt sustainability and asymmetric dependence. *Russian:* Multi-alignment is endorsed as evidence of a

multipolar world in which African states exercise sovereign choice; Russia offers security and energy partnerships as alternatives to Western conditionality. This reveals an anti-hegemonic narrative; it occludes the limited scale of Russian economic engagement and the risks of security dependency. *Western:* Institutionalists assess AfCFTA as a positive but implementation-challenged project, with conditionality debates over governance, labor, and environmental standards in trade agreements. This reveals technical and regulatory concerns; it occludes the historical role of Western trade policy in fragmenting African markets and the political economy of conditionality. *UN:* The UN supports Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA as contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing trade facilitation, peace and security, and development cooperation. This reveals a multilateral development framing; it occludes the geopolitical competition embedded in multi-alignment and African agency in defining integration priorities.

SECTION 2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective on post-colonial sovereignty and Pan-Africanism begins from a premise that the other four perspectives often treat as background: sovereignty in Africa was not a natural inheritance of statehood but a hard-won, historically contingent, and deeply contested achievement. From this vantage point, the OAU Charter of 1963 was not merely a regional treaty; it was a defensive settlement against recolonization, neo-colonial penetration, and the fragmentation of newly independent states. Its core norms—sovereign equality, territorial integrity, non-interference, and the inviolability of borders—were not abstract legal preferences. They were political shields forged in the immediate aftermath of colonial rule, when external powers retained economic leverage, military bases, and covert influence, and when secessionist movements threatened to reproduce the balkanization that colonialism had already imposed. The African perspective therefore treats sovereignty as both emancipatory and protective: it is the legal and political condition under which African states could claim agency in an international system that had historically denied them standing.

This perspective is not monolithic, and it must be reconstructed from within rather than reduced to a single official position. One strand, associated with Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism, treats sovereignty at the level of the colonial state as insufficient and even dangerous. Nkrumah's argument in *Africa Must Unite* was that political independence without continental unity would leave African states vulnerable to neo-colonial manipulation, economic dependency, and external military intervention. For this strand, the nation-state is a colonial artifact whose borders divide peoples, markets, and security communities; true sovereignty requires the pooling of sovereignty into continental institutions. A second strand, associated with Nyerere's gradualism, accepts the nation-state as the immediate arena of liberation and development while insisting that African solidarity should be built through practical cooperation, non-alignment, and regional economic integration rather than immediate political federation. Nyerere's Ujamaa vision linked sovereignty to self-reliance and social equality, but it also recognized that premature continental union could become a vehicle for domination by stronger states. A third strand, statist and defensive, treats sovereignty as non-negotiable and views supranational authority with suspicion. This strand dominated the OAU's early decades and continues to shape the AU's enforcement gaps. The African perspective is therefore internally plural: it contains federalists, gradualists, sovereigntists, and feminists who do not agree on whether sovereignty should be pooled, protected, or transformed.

The intellectual lineage of this perspective extends well beyond the founding fathers. Du Bois's Pan-African

congresses established the idea that African liberation was a global racial and anti-imperial project, not merely a diplomatic rearrangement among states. Cabral's insistence that national liberation required a "return to the source" and a theory of the concrete conditions of each society challenged both romantic nationalism and imported ideology. Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and the postcolonial state warned that formal independence could reproduce colonial hierarchies under new elites. Rodney's historical materialist account of underdevelopment showed that African poverty was not a pre-modern residue but a product of the Atlantic slave trade, colonial extraction, and unequal exchange. Mamdani's work on the bifurcated colonial state explained how colonial rule created "citizens" and "subjects," leaving postcolonial states with authoritarian administrative inheritances. Bayart's analysis of the "politics of the belly" highlighted the informal and clientelist logics that often substituted for formal institutional capacity. Mbembe's postcolonial theory emphasized the "banality of power" and the ways in which sovereignty in Africa has been performed, contested, and hollowed out by both internal and external forces. Grovogui's argument that Africans have been treated as "quasi-sovereigns" in international law captures the structural inequality that makes sovereignty claims in Africa simultaneously legal and aspirational. Tamale and Oyěwùmí, among others, have shown that the postcolonial state and its sovereignty claims are gendered: the "African state" often rests on patriarchal authority, and Pan-African unity has historically marginalized women's political agency. These scholars do not merely add African examples to Western theory; they reframe the basic categories of sovereignty, statehood, and international order.

From this perspective, the transition from the OAU to the AU is best understood as normative innovation under constraint. The OAU's sovereignty norms were effective at protecting states from external intervention, but they also shielded regimes from accountability and limited collective responses to mass atrocities, unconstitutional changes, and cross-border crises. The AU Constitutive Act of 2000 introduced a significant shift: Article 4(h) asserts the Union's right to intervene in grave circumstances such as war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity, while Article 4(p) condemns and rejects unconstitutional changes of government. These provisions represent an African attempt to redefine sovereignty as responsibility rather than mere non-interference. They also reflect a continental judgment that the OAU's strict non-intervention norm had become morally and politically untenable in the face of Rwanda, Somalia, and other crises. Yet the African perspective insists that this innovation must be read against its historical context. Article 4(h) has remained largely dormant as a coercive military tool, and Article 4(p) has been applied unevenly. The gap between norm and practice is not simply hypocrisy; it is the product of institutional path dependence, member-state resistance, funding limitations, and the AU's dependence on the political will of the very states it is meant to discipline.

The African perspective also reframes the Non-Aligned Movement and Afro-Asian solidarity. Non-alignment was not neutrality or passivity; it was a strategy of strategic autonomy in a bipolar world. African states used the Bandung moment and subsequent NAM forums to resist superpower proxy conflicts, demand economic justice, and assert a collective voice in international institutions. The Afro-Asian project contributed to the delegitimation of colonialism and helped create diplomatic space for African sovereignty claims. However, the African perspective is also critical of NAM's limitations: it lacked enforcement mechanisms, was often captured by elite diplomacy, and could not prevent economic dependency or Cold War interventions. Non-alignment provided rhetorical autonomy but not always material autonomy. This is why contemporary African discourse increasingly speaks of multi-alignment rather than non-alignment: the goal is not to stand between blocs but to engage multiple partners—China, Russia, Western states, and multilateral institutions—on terms that preserve African agency.

Contemporary Pan-Africanism, expressed through Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade

Area, is understood from this perspective as an attempt to convert political sovereignty into economic and strategic sovereignty. AfCFTA is not merely a trade agreement; it is a response to the colonial fragmentation of African markets and to the external imposition of economic structures that have kept intra-African trade low. Agenda 2063 frames integration as a long-term political project of "The Africa We Want," linking peace, governance, infrastructure, and industrialization. Multi-alignment is similarly framed as agency: African states seek to avoid exclusive dependence on any single external power and to leverage competition among partners for developmental gains. Yet the African perspective also recognizes the risks: multi-alignment can become incoherent if it lacks continental coordination; external partners may exploit divisions; and integration can reproduce inequalities if it is driven by elites without popular accountability.

What the African vantage point contributes that the other four cannot is a historically grounded theory of sovereignty as both shield and project. It reveals that international norms are not neutral standards applied to Africa; they are products of colonial hierarchies, anti-colonial struggle, and postcolonial negotiation. It shows that the AU's weaknesses are not simply technical failures but the institutional residue of a sovereignty consensus that was necessary for survival. It also reveals the gendered, class-based, and ethnic dimensions of sovereignty: the state that claims sovereignty often excludes large segments of its own population, and Pan-African unity has sometimes been pursued at the expense of democratic participation. The African perspective therefore offers a double critique: it defends African sovereignty against external paternalism while insisting that sovereignty must be democratized, gendered, and made accountable to African peoples rather than only to states.

What this perspective occludes is equally important. Because it is rooted in anti-colonial defense, it can understate the ways in which sovereignty norms protect authoritarian regimes and obstruct humanitarian protection. It can romanticize continental unity and obscure power asymmetries among African states, such as the influence of regional hegemons or the marginalization of smaller states. It can treat "Africa" as a coherent actor when African interests are in fact fragmented by regime type, economic structure, and geopolitical alignment. It may also underemphasize the agency of non-state actors—women's movements, labor, civil society, and diaspora communities—in shaping sovereignty and integration. Finally, by foregrounding historical injustice, it can sometimes treat contemporary governance failures as primarily externally caused, thereby deflecting responsibility from African elites. A rigorous African perspective must therefore be self-critical: it must defend sovereignty without sacralizing the state, and it must pursue Pan-Africanism without erasing internal contestation.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on post-colonial sovereignty and Pan-Africanism is anchored in a normative vocabulary of sovereignty equality, non-interference, mutual benefit, and development-centered partnership. From this vantage point, the African state is the legitimate bearer of sovereignty, and external actors should not use human rights, governance, or security concerns as pretexts for intervention. This position draws on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and on China's own historical experience of colonial and semi-colonial subjugation. It resonates strongly with the defensive strand of African sovereignty: many African governments welcome a partner that does not impose political conditionality and that frames cooperation in terms of infrastructure, trade, and state capacity. The Chinese perspective therefore treats the OAU-AU transition not as a story of Western-style normative convergence but as an African-led institutional evolution in which sovereignty remains central.

In practice, this perspective is expressed through state-to-state engagement, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, infrastructure finance, and support for African integration initiatives such as Agenda 2063 and

AfCFTA. China's construction of the AU headquarters in Addis Ababa is often cited as a material symbol of partnership, while Chinese officials routinely emphasize respect for African choices and opposition to external interference. The normative claim is that development, not conditionality, is the foundation of stability: poverty and underdevelopment are treated as root causes of conflict, and economic cooperation is presented as a contribution to peace. This reveals something the Western perspective often underestimates: the demand among many African elites for partners who deliver tangible infrastructure and financing without requiring domestic political reform as a precondition.

The Chinese perspective also contributes a multipolar framing. It presents China-Africa relations as part of a broader shift away from Western-dominated global governance and toward a more equitable international order. In this framing, African multi-alignment is not a problem to be managed but a legitimate expression of sovereignty in a multipolar world. China's support for AU positions in multilateral forums, its emphasis on the UN Charter, and its opposition to unilateral sanctions are read by some African governments as evidence of a partner that amplifies African voice rather than constraining it. The perspective thus aligns with contemporary Pan-Africanism's desire to diversify partnerships and reduce dependency on any single external actor.

What this perspective occludes is equally significant. Its emphasis on non-interference can function as a shield for authoritarian governance and can limit scrutiny of debt sustainability, labor practices, environmental impacts, and transparency in large-scale projects. Critics argue that state-to-state deals may bypass African civil society, legislatures, and local communities, reproducing the very exclusion that African feminist and democratic scholars have identified as a problem of sovereignty. The "no conditionality" stance can also obscure asymmetries: African states may gain infrastructure but lose bargaining power in opaque contracts, while Chinese firms and financiers may secure long-term resource and market access. The debt-trap narrative is contested and often overstated, but concerns about debt distress, collateralization, and refinancing dependence are real and cannot be dismissed as mere Western propaganda. Moreover, China's own strategic interests—including access to minerals, markets, and maritime routes—are not absent from the partnership, even when framed as mutual benefit.

The Chinese perspective is therefore best understood as a partial but important lens. It reveals the material and diplomatic value of a non-conditionality partnership and the legitimacy of African demands for infrastructure and financing. It occludes the internal governance, accountability, and distributional questions that African scholars have raised about both the state and external engagement. A balanced assessment must recognize that Chinese engagement has expanded African options while also creating new dependencies that require stronger African institutional capacity to manage.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on post-colonial sovereignty and Pan-Africanism is framed through the language of sovereign choice, anti-hegemony, and multipolarity. From this vantage point, the international system is characterized by Western dominance, unilateral sanctions, and interventionist norms that undermine the sovereignty of states in the Global South. Russia presents itself as a partner that respects state sovereignty, opposes regime change, and supports a multipolar order in which African states can pursue independent foreign policies. This framing resonates with African grievances about Western double standards, especially where Western governments have supported or tolerated unconstitutional changes in allied states while condemning others. The Russian perspective thus treats the AU's sovereignty norms not as obstacles to progress but as legitimate defenses against external interference.

Historically, the Soviet Union supported African liberation movements and anti-colonial struggles, creating a reservoir of goodwill that contemporary Russian diplomacy invokes. Today, Russia's engagement is concentrated in security cooperation, arms sales, grain and energy diplomacy, and political support in multilateral forums. Russian officials frequently emphasize that African states have the right to choose their partners without Western pressure. This aligns with the African perspective's insistence on agency and with contemporary multi-alignment strategies. In crisis contexts, Russia has often opposed or diluted Western-backed resolutions, framing them as violations of sovereignty or as disguised regime-change efforts. For some African governments, this provides diplomatic cover and an alternative source of security assistance.

The Russian perspective also contributes a critique of Western institutionalism. It highlights the inconsistencies of conditionality, the selectivity of human rights advocacy, and the securitization of African crises. It reveals that Western support for democracy and governance is often subordinated to strategic interests, and that African states have legitimate reasons to diversify security partnerships. In this sense, the Russian lens exposes the geopolitical content of norms that are sometimes presented as neutral or universal.

What this perspective occludes is substantial. Its emphasis on sovereign choice can be used to legitimize authoritarian consolidation and to deflect attention from domestic accountability. Security partnerships, including the activities of Russian security contractors reported in several African contexts, have been associated with human rights concerns, resource extraction, and the entrenchment of regimes facing internal opposition. The Russian perspective tends to treat all external criticism of African governments as neo-colonial interference, which can obscure legitimate African civil society demands for accountability. It also offers limited economic depth compared to other partners: trade and investment volumes are smaller, and the relationship is often concentrated in commodities, arms, and security services. Furthermore, Russia's own great-power interests—including access to strategic minerals, naval facilities, and diplomatic support—are not absent from its Africa policy, even when framed as solidarity.

The Russian perspective is therefore a useful but incomplete lens. It reveals the legitimacy of African demands for sovereign choice and the hypocrisy of selective Western interventionism. It occludes the risks of security dependency, the accountability deficits of opaque security arrangements, and the possibility that anti-Western framing can be instrumentalized by African elites to resist democratic reform. A rigorous assessment must distinguish between the valid critique of Western double standards and the instrumental use of sovereignty rhetoric to shield repression.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on post-colonial sovereignty and Pan-Africanism is rooted in institutionalism, liberal internationalism, and conditionality. From this vantage point, the AU's normative evolution—from non-interference to intervention rights and the rejection of unconstitutional changes—is a positive development that aligns African institutions with global norms of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. Western governments and institutions have supported the AU's Peace and Security Architecture, capacity building, election observation, and peacekeeping missions, often providing substantial funding. The Western perspective treats sovereignty as responsibility: states that commit atrocities or seize power unconstitutionally forfeit the protection of non-interference. This is the logic behind support for Article 4(h) and Article 4(p), and behind sanctions, diplomatic pressure, and aid conditionality in response to coups.

This perspective contributes a strong emphasis on accountability and institutional quality. It reveals governance deficits, corruption, and the weaknesses of AU enforcement mechanisms. It also highlights the importance of civil society, independent media, and judicial institutions in making sovereignty meaningful

for citizens rather than only for states. Western trade and development policies—such as preferential market access, development assistance, and technical cooperation—are framed as supporting African integration and growth. The institutionalist strand of this perspective sees the AU as a partner in regional stability and treats African integration as compatible with global economic governance.

However, the Western perspective is not a single viewpoint. European and American approaches differ on trade, migration, security, and development. The European Union's Economic Partnership Agreements, for example, have been criticized for fragmenting African markets and undermining regional integration, while the United States has combined security assistance with democracy promotion in inconsistent ways. Western conditionality can also be applied selectively: governments that are strategically important may face less pressure than those that are not. This selectivity weakens the credibility of the normative claims and fuels African perceptions of hypocrisy.

What the Western perspective occludes is its own historical role in producing the conditions it now seeks to manage. Colonialism created the fragmented state system, arbitrary borders, and extractive economies that continue to shape African politics. Postcolonial Western policies—including support for authoritarian allies during the Cold War, structural adjustment programs, and trade rules that disadvantage African producers—contributed to state weakness and economic dependency. The Western perspective often treats these as past events rather than as ongoing structures, and it can frame African governance failures as primarily domestic without acknowledging external complicity. It also tends to underestimate the legitimacy of African demands for policy space, industrial policy, and sovereign control over resources. Conditionality, even when well-intentioned, can be experienced as an infringement on sovereignty and can provoke nationalist backlash.

The Western perspective is therefore both indispensable and limited. It contributes technical expertise, funding, and normative pressure for accountability. It occludes the historical and structural dimensions of African underdevelopment and can reproduce paternalistic assumptions about African capacity. A balanced assessment must recognize that Western institutional support has strengthened the AU in important ways while also acknowledging that conditionality and selectivity have often undermined the legitimacy of those same norms.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on post-colonial sovereignty and Pan-Africanism is organized around Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which recognizes regional arrangements as instruments for peace and security, and around the broader UN agenda of development, human rights, and multilateral cooperation. From this vantage point, the AU is a regional partner whose normative evolution—from non-interference to intervention and anti-coup norms—must be reconciled with the UN Charter's principles of sovereignty, non-use of force, and Security Council primacy. The UN perspective treats the OAU-AU transition as a case of regional normative innovation that requires coordination with global institutions to be effective and legitimate. It emphasizes partnership, burden-sharing, and the division of labor between the UN and regional organizations.

In practice, this perspective is expressed through AU-UN cooperation in peacekeeping and peacebuilding, joint missions, technical assistance, and development frameworks. The UN supports Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA as contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals, and it frames African integration as a means of reducing conflict, improving governance, and fostering inclusive growth. The UN perspective also values the AU's role in early warning, mediation, and regional legitimacy: AU missions and positions often provide political cover and local knowledge that the UN lacks. In this sense, the UN perspective reveals the practical necessity of regional ownership in African security and development.

The UN perspective contributes a multilateral and legal framing. It insists that regional intervention norms must operate within the UN Charter, and that the Security Council retains primary responsibility for international peace and security. This can be a source of tension: AU Article 4(h) asserts a right to intervene that may not align with UN authorization requirements, and AU suspensions of member states raise questions about due process and collective legitimacy. The UN perspective therefore seeks to harmonize regional and global norms, emphasizing consultation, joint planning, and respect for international law. It also highlights the resource dimension: AU missions often depend on UN funding, logistics, and authorization, creating an asymmetry in which African agency is constrained by global financial and political structures.

What this perspective occludes is the extent to which UN primacy can reproduce global hierarchies. The Security Council's composition and veto power mean that African security concerns are filtered through the interests of permanent members. Funding asymmetries mean that the AU's ambitions often exceed its capacity, and partnership can become dependency. The UN perspective also tends to frame African integration in developmental terms, which can understate its political and sovereignty dimensions. Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA are not merely technical projects; they are claims about African self-determination and the reordering of global economic relations. By emphasizing cooperation and development, the UN perspective can depoliticize these claims and treat African agency as implementation rather than authorship.

Moreover, the UN perspective can obscure the geopolitical competition embedded in multi-alignment. When the UN supports AU initiatives, it does so within a framework that assumes multilateral consensus, but contemporary African foreign policy is increasingly shaped by competition among China, Russia, Western states, and regional powers. The UN's emphasis on partnership may not fully capture the strategic choices African states are making among competing external actors. Finally, the UN perspective can understate the gendered and social dimensions of sovereignty and integration, even though UN frameworks on women, peace, and security exist; the translation of these frameworks into African institutional practice remains uneven.

The UN perspective is therefore essential but incomplete. It provides legitimacy, resources, and a global legal framework for AU action. It occludes the power asymmetries of the UN system itself and can reduce African political projects to developmental partnerships. A rigorous assessment must recognize that AU-UN cooperation strengthens both institutions while also revealing the limits of global multilateralism in accommodating African sovereignty claims.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reconstructs sovereignty as hard-won and normative innovation as endogenous; centers African agency in creating AU intervention and democracy norms	Can understate external normative pressure and donor influence on institutional design; risks romanticizing continental unity	Sovereignty as achievement; solidarity as obligation; unity as unfinished project	AU Constitutive Act Art. 4(h), 4(p); Sirte Declaration (1999); Mbeki's African Renaissance	Western: overstates autonomy; ignores conditionality and funding dependence
Chinese	Non-interference plus partnership framing; treats AU as sovereign equal and vehicle for multipolarity	Understates internal African debates about intervention; conflates state sovereignty with regime security	Sovereign equality; non-interference; development through partnership	FOCAC; China-AU strategic partnership; support for AU Agenda 2063	African: non-interference can shield authoritarian regimes; partnership may create debt dependence
Russian	Sovereign choice plus multipolarity narrative; frames AU as counterweight to Western unilateralism	Treats African states as instruments of great-power competition; understates African normative innovation	Multipolarity; anti-hegemonism; respect for sovereign choice	Russia-AU dialogue; BRICS expansion; UN voting alignment	Western: multipolarity rhetoric masks transactional interests; undermines human rights norms
Western	Institutionalist assessments; conditionality debates; funding and technical support for AU bodies	Reduces African projects to developmental partnerships; can treat sovereignty as obstacle to governance	Liberal internationalism; democratic governance; human rights; institutional capacity	Donor funding of AU Commission; APRM; PSC support programs	African: conditionality undermines sovereignty; institutionalism ignores power asymmetries

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	AU-UN partnership; Chapter VIII cooperation; legitimacy and global legal framework	Understates power asymmetries of UN system; can reduce African political projects to developmental partnerships	Collective security; subsidiarity; multilateral legitimacy	AU-UN Joint Task Force; UN Security Council resolutions on AU missions; Agenda 2063-SDG alignment	African: UN system itself embodies inequality; partnership can be paternalistic

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The transformation of the OAU (1963) into the AU (2000-2002) — the politics of normative innovation

Levels of Analysis

The transformation of the Organization of African Unity into the African Union can be analyzed at four levels. At the individual level, the process was driven by specific leaders whose visions and rivalries shaped the outcome: Kwame Nkrumah's earlier continental-government advocacy provided the ideological backdrop; Julius Nyerere's defense of sovereignty and the nation-state set the sovereigntist baseline; Thabo Mbeki's "African Renaissance" supplied the reformist intellectual framework; Muammar Gaddafi's push for a "United States of Africa" forced the federalist question onto the agenda; Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria brokered the compromise. Legal drafters and AU Commission officials also mattered as institutional entrepreneurs. At the state level, the transformation reflected the interests of member states in preserving sovereignty while gaining collective capacity: no state wished to surrender the hard-won sovereignty of the post-colonial order, yet all faced the costs of continental instability. At the systemic level, the end of the Cold War removed superpower patronage that had sustained authoritarian regimes and proxy conflicts; the unipolar moment and the rise of liberal internationalism created both pressure and opportunity for normative change; globalization intensified economic interdependence and the costs of fragmentation. At the transnational level, Pan-African civil society, diaspora networks, regional economic communities (ECOWAS, SADC, EAC), and transnational norms such as the emerging responsibility to protect and democratic governance standards created a normative environment in which the OAU's non-interference principle became increasingly untenable.

Mechanism

The mechanism of normative innovation combined five elements. First, crisis as catalyst: the 1994 Rwandan genocide exposed the OAU's paralysis—its Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim acknowledged the organization's failure—and the subsequent wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, and

Liberia demonstrated that sovereignty-as-non-interference could not prevent mass atrocities or state collapse. Second, leadership agency: Mbeki articulated the African Renaissance and NEPAD, framing integration as self-directed development rather than external imposition; Gaddafi convened the Sirte Declaration of September 9, 1999, calling for an African Union; Obasanjo and Bouteflika mediated between federalist and sovereigntist camps. Third, institutional entrepreneurship: the Lomé Summit of July 2000 adopted the Constitutive Act, drafted by legal experts who encoded compromise—stronger norms without supranational authority. Fourth, external normative pressure: post-Cold War liberal internationalism, donor conditionality, and the emerging R2P discourse created an environment favoring intervention and democracy norms, though African leaders insisted on African ownership. Fifth, the resulting hybrid: the Constitutive Act's Article 4(h) granted the Union the right to intervene in grave circumstances (war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity), Article 4(p) condemned unconstitutional changes of government, and Article 30 excluded coup regimes from participation—yet enforcement remained dependent on Assembly consensus and member-state contributions, preserving sovereignty in practice.

Perspective Reconstruction

The African perspective, which is primary, reconstructs the transformation as endogenous normative innovation. On this view, the AU was not a donor project but an African response to African crises, driven by African leaders and legitimized by African ownership. Sovereignty is understood as hard-won through anti-colonial struggle, and the Constitutive Act's intervention clause represents not an abandonment of sovereignty but its redefinition: sovereignty now includes the responsibility to protect populations, a normative shift that Grovogui's analysis of sovereignty as constructed and contested helps illuminate. Mamdani's work on the bifurcated post-colonial state explains why the OAU's non-interference norm protected regimes rather than peoples, and why the AU's new norms aimed at reconstituting the state-citizen relationship. Nkrumah's continental-government vision, though not realized, provided the ideological horizon; Nyerere's insistence on the nation-state as the unit of liberation set the sovereigntist constraint that the AU had to accommodate. Murithi's analysis of the AU's normative framework treats the Constitutive Act as a deliberate, African-authored innovation. The African perspective's strength is its recovery of agency; its risk is understating the extent to which external normative pressure and donor funding shaped institutional design.

The Chinese perspective frames the transformation through non-interference plus partnership. Beijing supported the AU's formation as a sovereign equal and vehicle for multipolarity, consistent with its Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. China's engagement deepened through FOCAC and the China-AU strategic partnership, treating the AU as a partner in a post-Western order. This perspective contributes an emphasis on sovereign equality and development through partnership, but it occludes internal African debates about intervention and can conflate state sovereignty with regime security.

The Russian perspective reads the transformation as sovereign choice within a multipolar narrative. Moscow framed the AU as a counterweight to Western unilateralism and supported African self-determination in institutional design. Russia's later engagement with the AU emphasized anti-hegemonism and respect for sovereign choice. This perspective contributes a critique of Western dominance, but it treats African states as instruments of great-power competition and understates African normative innovation.

The Western perspective offers an institutionalist assessment. Donors funded AU bodies and technical capacity; conditionality debates shaped expectations about governance and human rights. Western analysts often viewed the AU as a democratization vehicle and were skeptical of enforcement capacity. This perspective contributes resources and institutional expertise, but it reduces African projects to developmental

partnerships and can treat sovereignty as an obstacle to governance.

The UN perspective situates the transformation within Chapter VIII cooperation. The UN supported AU formation as a regional arrangement under the UN Charter, and the AU-UN partnership framework provided legitimacy and resources. This perspective contributes a global legal framework and multilateral legitimacy, but it can understate the power asymmetries of the UN system and reduce African political projects to developmental partnerships.

Explicit Adjudication

The African perspective best explains the case. The normative innovations of the Constitutive Act—intervention in grave circumstances, condemnation of unconstitutional changes of government, democratic governance objectives—emerged from African crises and African leadership, not from external imposition. The Sirte Declaration, the Lomé process, and the Mbeki-Obasanjo-Bouteflika compromise were African initiatives. However, the African perspective alone misses the systemic opportunity structure: the end of the Cold War and the rise of liberal internationalism created the conditions under which sovereignty-as-non-interference became delegitimized, and donor funding shaped institutional capacity. The Western perspective correctly identifies resource dependence and conditionality but overstates their causal role in normative content. The Chinese and Russian perspectives are more relevant to post-2002 AU diplomacy than to the 2000-2002 transformation itself. The UN perspective captures the legal framework but not the political dynamics. The best explanation is therefore African agency operating within a transformed systemic context: African leaders seized a post-Cold War moment to redefine sovereignty, producing a hybrid institution that innovated norms while preserving state autonomy in enforcement.

2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Mechanism.** The AU's formal rule against unconstitutional changes of government is triggered by coups, yet Mali (2020), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), Niger (2023), and Gabon (2023) produced different combinations of suspension, sanctions, regional military threats, and eventual re-engagement. Identify the intervening variables that best explain this variation, and distinguish the legal trigger from the political discretion exercised by the AU Peace and Security Council.

2. **Levels of analysis.** Analyze the five cases at the individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels. Which level carries the greatest explanatory weight for why Niger attracted sharper external pressure than Gabon, and why Mali's transition became more prolonged than Guinea's?

3. **Perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN actors would each justify or criticize the AU's uneven practice. For each perspective, identify what it foregrounds and what it occludes.

4. **Historical analogue.** Compare the AU's post-2000 anti-coup practice with the OAU's 1963 non-interference norm. Does the variation across the five cases show normative evolution, institutional path dependence, or a hybrid of the two?

5. **Falsifiers.** Specify two pieces of evidence that would falsify the claim that AU inconsistency is primarily driven by sovereignty-preserving path dependence rather than by pragmatic security calculations.

6. **Adjudication.** Render a bounded verdict: is the AU's inconsistency better understood as adaptive

multilateralism under constraint, or as selective sovereignty protection by powerful member states?

MODEL ANSWER

The AU's formal architecture clearly condemns unconstitutional changes of government. The Lomé Declaration of 2000, the AU Constitutive Act's Article 4(p) commitment to democratic principles, and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance together create a normative expectation that coups will be suspended, sanctioned, and reversed. Yet the five cases show that the legal trigger is only the beginning of the causal chain. Mali in 2020 was suspended and subjected to regional pressure, but its transition was later accepted with extended timelines; Guinea in 2021 was suspended while its junta negotiated a longer transition; Burkina Faso in 2022 was suspended amid a deteriorating security environment; Niger in 2023 was suspended and became the focus of ECOWAS sanctions and a threatened regional military intervention; Gabon in 2023 was also suspended, but with less coercive regional pressure and a quicker movement toward a transitional roadmap. The variation is best explained by the interaction of regional hegemon preferences, counter-terrorism imperatives, and institutional path dependence. At the transnational level, ECOWAS under Nigerian leadership treated Niger as a more direct threat to regional order, while Central African dynamics around Gabon produced a less militarized response. At the state level, juntas in Mali and Burkina Faso could invoke security crises to justify prolonged transitions, whereas Gabon's coup occurred in a different political context with less regional spillover. At the systemic level, the AU lacks supranational enforcement capacity and depends on member-state consent, which means the PSC can announce norms but cannot independently impose them. At the individual level, coup leaders' willingness to negotiate, their international recognition strategies, and their domestic coalitions shape how quickly the AU moves from suspension to re-engagement.

The African perspective treats this pattern as evidence of normative innovation constrained by hard-won sovereignty. From this vantage point, the AU has moved decisively beyond the OAU's 1963 non-interference doctrine, but it cannot override member states without risking institutional fracture; inconsistency is therefore a political price of continental ownership, not proof of hypocrisy. The Chinese perspective emphasizes non-interference, stability, and partnership, supporting AU-led processes while resisting external coercion; it would read the Niger case as dangerous escalation and would prefer negotiated transitions over sanctions. The Russian perspective frames the issue through sovereign choice and multipolarity, often portraying regional pressure as Western-aligned overreach, especially where ECOWAS sanctions are involved. The Western perspective stresses institutionalism, conditionality, and democratic accountability, and would likely criticize the AU for accepting extended transitions that dilute the anti-coup norm. The UN perspective emphasizes Chapter VIII cooperation and regional ownership, supporting AU leadership while worrying that inconsistent enforcement undermines civilian protection and democratic legitimacy.

Historically, the OAU Charter of 1963 entrenched non-interference as a shield against neo-colonial intervention, reflecting the African experience of externally imposed regime change. The AU Constitutive Act of 2000 and subsequent instruments introduced Article 4(h) and 4(p) innovations, allowing intervention in grave circumstances and affirming democratic governance. The five cases therefore show a hybrid: genuine normative evolution in the formal rules, but institutional path dependence in enforcement. The AU can suspend, but it cannot easily coerce; it can condemn, but it must negotiate with juntas and regional powers. This is not a simple abandonment of the anti-coup norm, because suspensions remain frequent and rhetorically central. Nor is it a fully effective enforcement regime, because transitions are often prolonged and sanctions unevenly applied.

The claim that inconsistency is driven primarily by sovereignty-preserving path dependence would be falsified if the AU consistently imposed identical sanctions and transition deadlines across all five cases regard-

less of security context, regional hegemon preferences, or junta cooperation. It would also be weakened if evidence showed that AU decisions tracked a transparent, rules-based algorithm rather than PSC discretion and bilateral bargaining. Conversely, the claim that inconsistency is purely pragmatic would be falsified if the AU refused to suspend any coup regime, or if it suspended all five without variation in sanctions or re-engagement. The observed middle pattern supports a bounded verdict: the AU's inconsistency is best understood as adaptive multilateralism under constraint, in which formal democratic norms are filtered through regional power politics, security imperatives, and the institutional legacy of sovereignty. It is neither a coherent strategy of multipolar non-interference nor a fully institutionalized enforcement regime; rather, it is a transitional form of continental governance in which normative ambition and political limitation remain in tension.

2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Case description. In 2023, Niger experienced a military takeover that removed an elected president, prompting the AU Peace and Security Council to condemn the unconstitutional change, suspend Niger from AU activities, and endorse ECOWAS sanctions and a threatened regional military intervention. In the same year, Gabon's military takeover also produced AU suspension, but with less coercive regional pressure and a quicker acceptance of a transitional roadmap. Compare these cases with Mali (2020), Guinea (2021), and Burkina Faso (2022), where suspensions were followed by prolonged transitions, partial sanctions relief, and eventual AU re-engagement. Your memo should explain why the AU's formal anti-coup norm produces uneven enforcement, reconstruct the five perspectives, identify the closest historical analogue, and state what evidence would falsify your explanation.

Mechanism: Explain the causal chain from the legal trigger (unconstitutional change) through AU PSC discretion, regional hegemon preferences, security imperatives, and recognition politics to the observed variation in suspension, sanctions, and re-engagement.

Perspective reconstruction: Steel-man African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of the same pattern, identifying what each foregrounds and what it occludes.

Historical analogue: Compare the case to an earlier episode of OAU/AU normative change or non-interference, specifying what is similar, what differs, and why the analogy holds or fails.

Falsifiers: List observable evidence that would weaken or refute your mechanism, including at least one quantitative indicator and one counterfactual condition.

Self-check: Did you separate description of what happened, explanation of why it happened, prediction of what follows, and prescription of what should happen?

2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which explanation best accounts for the AU's inconsistent responses to unconstitutional changes of government in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon between 2020 and 2023?

A. The AU has abandoned its anti-coup norm and now accepts military rule whenever it is regionally popular.
B. Variation is driven mainly by the legal clarity of each coup: only clearly unconstitutional seizures trigger suspension.
C. The AU's formal norm is filtered through regional hegemon interests, security imperatives, and institu-

tional path dependence, producing selective enforcement.
D. Inconsistency reflects a deliberate AU strategy to replace democracy promotion with multipolar non-interference.

Correct answer: C.

Distractor diagnoses:
- **A** conflates uneven enforcement with norm abandonment; it ignores repeated suspensions, sanctions, and the continued centrality of the anti-coup norm in AU rhetoric.
- **B** treats the legal trigger as sufficient; all five cases involved unconstitutional changes, yet responses varied, so legal clarity alone cannot explain the pattern.
- **D** attributes a coherent strategic shift to the AU that is not evidenced; it conflates member-state multi-alignment with institutional doctrine and overlooks the AU's continued formal commitment to democratic governance norms.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1: AU Suspension Decisions for Unconstitutional Changes of Government (selected, 2010–2023)

Country	Year of UCG	AU Response	Reinstatement / Status
Mali	2012	Suspended	Reinstated 2013 after elections
Mali	2020	Suspended	Partially lifted 2022; elections delayed
Mali	2021	Suspended	Remains suspended; transition extended
Guinea	2021	Suspended	Remains suspended; transition timeline contested
Burkina Faso	2022	Suspended	Remains suspended; transition extended
Niger	2023	Suspended	Remains suspended; ECOWAS sanctions lifted Feb 2024
Gabon	2023	Suspended	Remains suspended; transition announced

Note: Table is illustrative; exact dates and statuses drawn from AU PSC communiqués and secondary reporting. Suspensions are the AU's primary enforcement tool under Art. 30 of the Constitutive Act.

Table 2: Intra-African Trade as Share of Total Trade (indicative, ~2022)

Grouping	Intra-regional trade share (%)
Africa (continental)	~15–17

Grouping	Intra-regional trade share (%)
European Union	~60
USMCA (North America)	~40
ASEAN	~25
ECOWAS	~10–12
SADC	~20–25

Source: UNCTAD/AfCFTA Secretariat estimates; figures are approximate and vary by year and methodology.

Table 3: AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 Implementation Timeline

Milestone	Date	Status
AfCFTA Agreement signed (Kigali)	March 2018	44 countries signed
Entered into force	May 2019	22 ratifications achieved
Trading under AfCFTA begins (Guided Trade Initiative)	January 2021	Operational
Phase II protocols (IP, investment, competition)	2022–2024	Negotiations ongoing
Agenda 2063 First Ten-Year Implementation Plan	2014–2023	Completed
Agenda 2063 Second Ten-Year Plan	2024–2033	Launched
Target: intra-African trade doubled	2035	Projected

Analysis Questions

1. **Trend.** The AU suspension data show a sharp increase in UCG cases after 2020 (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Gabon) compared to the 2010–2019 period. What does this trend suggest about the relationship between the AU's normative framework (Art. 4(h), 4(p)) and the actual incidence of coups? Does the framework deter, or does it merely document?

2. **Level of analysis.** The AU's weak enforcement is often explained at the systemic level (lack of great-power backing) or the state level (member-state sovereignty). Which level of analysis best explains why suspensions are imposed but rarely followed by restoration of constitutional order? Defend your choice with evidence from the table.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each perspective would read Table 1: (a) African: suspension as normative innovation but sovereignty-constrained; (b) Chinese: non-interference plus partnership stability; (c) Russian: sovereign choice and multipolarity; (d) Western: institutionalist assessment plus conditionality; (e) UN: Chapter VIII cooperation and AU-UN partnership.

4. **Interpretation.** The gap between suspension rhetoric and reinstatement practice (e.g., Mali's transition extended repeatedly) implies that the AU's sovereignty norm (Art. 4(b)) functions as a veto on deeper intervention. Is this a failure of institutional design or a deliberate feature of post-colonial sovereignty?

5. **Limitation.** What are the key limitations of using AU suspension decisions as a proxy for AU enforcement capacity? Consider selection bias (only UCG cases), omitted variables (economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure), and the difference between suspension and restoration.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1: OAU-to-AU Normative Transition Timeline (1963–2002)

- **What to draw:** A horizontal timeline arrow from 1963 to 2002, with vertical markers at key dates. At 1963, draw a small shield labeled "OAU Charter: sovereignty, non-interference (Art. III)." At the 1990s, draw a dashed line labeled "Post-Cold War normative opening." At 2000, draw a larger shield labeled "AU Constitutive Act: Art. 4(h) intervention, 4(p) unconstitutional change." At 2002, draw a star labeled "AU launched, Durban."
- **How to label it:** Title at top: "From Sovereignty to Responsibility? OAU→AU Normative Shift." Label the arrow "Time." Add a legend: solid line = binding norm; dashed line = emerging norm.
- **Perspective overlay:** Annotate in the margin: "African: hard-won sovereignty; Western: institutionalist progress; UN: Chapter VIII partner." Use color: green for African, blue for Western, purple for UN.

Visual 2: Map of Africa — AU Suspension Cases (2010–2023)

- **What to draw:** Outline map of Africa. Shade countries with UCG suspensions in red (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Gabon, Sudan, etc.). Use a darker red for cases with repeated suspensions (Mali). Add a small icon (gavel) in the capital of each. Draw a legend box: red = suspended; dark red = repeatedly suspended; white = not suspended.
- **How to label it:** Title: "AU Suspensions for Unconstitutional Change of Government, 2010–2023." Label each country. Add a note: "Suspension = primary enforcement tool; reinstatement varies."
- **Perspective overlay:** Annotate: "African: sovereignty-constrained enforcement; Chinese: stability concern; Russian: sovereign choice; Western: conditionality gap; UN: peacekeeping nexus." Use small colored dots in a legend.

Visual 3: AfCFTA Trade Integration Diagram

- **What to draw:** A circle representing Africa. Inside, draw thick arrows between regional blocs (ECOWAS, SADC, EAC, COMESA) labeled "intra-African trade ~15-17%." Outside the circle, draw thinner arrows to Europe, China, US labeled "extra-African trade ~83-85%." Add a dashed arrow labeled "AfCFTA target: double intra-African trade by 2035."
- **How to label it:** Title: "Intra- vs. Extra-African Trade Flows." Label percentages. Add a small box: "Agenda 2063: continental integration."
- **Perspective overlay:** Annotate: "African: economic sovereignty; Chinese: partnership market; Russian: multipolar trade; Western: liberalization; UN: SDG alignment." Use color-coded margin notes.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue	Notes (with source log)
OAU Charter 1963 — core norms	Sovereignty, non-interference, territorial integrity (Art. III). Source: OAU Charter (1963).
AU Constitutive Act 2000 — innovations	Art. 4(h) right to intervene in grave circumstances; Art. 4(p) condemnation of unconstitutional change of government. Source: AU Constitutive Act (2000).
Nkrumah's pan-Africanism	Continental unity, political federation, "Africa must unite." Source: Nkrumah (1963).
Nyerere's ujamaa and regionalism	African socialism, regional cooperation, gradualism. Source: Nyerere (1967).
Du Bois and pan-African congresses	Intellectual origins, diaspora, anti-racism. Source: general pan-African scholarship.
Non-Aligned Movement	Afro-Asian solidarity, Bandung 1955, sovereignty, anti-colonialism. Source: general IR scholarship.
Institutional path dependence	OAU norms persist in AU; weak enforcement; sovereignty as hard-won. Source: Murithi (2014).
AU PSC and suspension mechanism	Art. 30 suspension; PSC communiqués; inconsistent reinstatement. Source: AU Constitutive Act (2000); AU PSC records.
AfCFTA	Continental free trade area; intra-African trade target; implementation timeline. Source: AU Agenda 2063; AfCFTA Secretariat.
Agenda 2063	Long-term vision; First/Second Ten-Year Plans; flagship projects. Source: AU Agenda 2063.
Multi-alignment	African states engaging multiple powers; non-exclusive partnerships. Source: contemporary IR scholarship.
Five perspectives	African (primary), Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — each with distinct normative stance. Source: lesson framework.

Summary (3-5 sentences): Post-colonial sovereignty in Africa is hard-won and institutionally entrenched, shaping the OAU-to-AU transition as normative innovation within sovereignty constraints. Pan-Africanism evolved from intellectual project to institutional architecture, yet the AU retains weak enforcement due to path dependence. Contemporary initiatives like AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 reflect multi-alignment and economic sovereignty ambitions, while suspension decisions reveal the tension between normative ambition and state sovereignty.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** The African Union replaced the old Organization of African Unity to add new rules—like the right to intervene in grave crises and to suspend governments that take power unconstitutionally—but it kept the old rule that member states are sovereign and cannot be forced. So the AU can name and shame, but rarely can it make a country change course. Pan-Africanism is the idea that Africa should work together as one, from early thinkers like Du Bois and Nkrumah to today's free-trade area. The Non-Aligned Movement was about African and Asian countries refusing to pick sides in the Cold War. The AU is weak at enforcing its rules because the old sovereignty habits are deeply built in. Today, Africa tries to trade more with itself and engage many partners at once.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure about the exact number of AU suspensions since 2000; I need to verify the reinstatement timelines for Mali 2020/2021 and Niger 2023. I also need to check whether Art. 4(h) has ever been invoked in practice. I should verify the precise intra-African trade percentage and the AfCFTA ratification count.

3. **Reread verification.** After rereading: Art. 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act provides for intervention in grave circumstances (war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity); Art. 4(p) condemns unconstitutional changes of government. The AU has suspended members under Art. 30 but has not invoked Art. 4(h) for military intervention. Nkrumah (1963) called for continental unity; Nyerere (1967) emphasized gradual regionalism. Murithi (2014) documents the OAU-to-AU normative shift and its limits. Agenda 2063 sets out long-term continental goals including AfCFTA.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** The AU is like a homeowners' association that can fine a member for breaking rules but cannot evict them or enter their house—because every member helped write the rules to protect their own property. This captures the sovereignty constraint but misses the pan-African solidarity aspiration and the external (UN, donor) pressures that also shape behavior.

5. **Rewrite.** The AU embodies a post-colonial compromise: it innovated norms (intervention, anti-coup) that the OAU lacked, yet it remains bound by the sovereignty principle that African states fought to win. Enforcement is therefore symbolic and diplomatic rather than coercive. Pan-Africanism persists as both ideology and institutional project, now expressed through AfCFTA and Agenda 2063, while multi-alignment lets African states engage China, Russia, the West, and the UN without exclusive commitment. The African perspective sees this as sovereignty-preserving agency; other perspectives read it as institutional weakness or strategic hedging.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L28	Definition	What is Article 4(h) of the AU Constitutive Act?	Article 4(h) grants the AU the right to intervene in a member state pursuant to a decision of the Assembly in respect of grave circumstances: war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. It is the most significant normative innovation over the OAU Charter, which contained no such provision.	African perspective: read as a hard-won sovereign concession, not an external imposition; the AU asserts the right to intervene, not a duty imposed by outsiders.
L28	Definition	What is Article 4(p) of the AU Constitutive Act?	Article 4(p) commits member states to condemn and reject unconstitutional changes of government. It is the legal basis for AU suspension of states following coups, as applied to Mali (2020), Guinea (2021), Burkina Faso (2022), Niger (2023), and Gabon (2023).	African perspective: the clause reflects an internal African normative consensus; Western readings often treat it as a conditionality tool, occluding its endogenous origins.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L28	Mechanism	How did the OAU Charter (1963) constrain collective action?	The OAU Charter enshrined non-interference in internal affairs (Article III(2)) and required consensus for decisions, giving each state an effective veto. This institutional design made the OAU a forum for sovereign equality but paralyzed it during crises such as Rwanda (1994).	African perspective: the constraint was deliberate, protecting newly independent states from external intervention; it was not merely dysfunction.
L28	Mechanism	What institutional mechanism explains the AU's weak enforcement of its own norms?	Path dependence: the AU inherited the OAU's member-state-centric structure, consensus decision rules, and dependence on member contributions. The Peace and Security Council (PSC) can authorize intervention but lacks independent funding and troops, relying on Regional Economic Communities and ad hoc coalitions.	African perspective: weak enforcement is a rational adaptation to sovereignty concerns and fiscal constraints, not a failure of will.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L28	Application	How does the AU respond to an unconstitutional change of government under Article 4(p)?	The AU typically suspends the member state from participation in AU organs, demands a transition timeline, and may impose sanctions. In practice, responses vary: Mali (2020) was suspended and later readmitted after elections; Niger (2023) faced suspension plus ECOWAS sanctions, producing a protracted standoff.	African perspective: suspension is a diplomatic instrument, not a military one; its effectiveness depends on regional alignment, not AU capacity alone.
L28	Comparison	How did Nkrumah's and Nyerere's visions of Pan-Africanism differ?	Nkrumah advocated a continental union government with supranational authority, arguing that political unity was a prerequisite for economic development. Nyerere favored a looser federation of sovereign states cooperating through regional communities, prioritizing national self-determination and gradual integration.	African perspective: both positions are internal African debates; neither is a Western import, and the AU's design reflects a Nyererean compromise.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L28	Source	What is the core argument of Nkrumah's "Africa Must Unite" (1963)?	Nkrumah argued that political fragmentation inherited from colonialism made African states vulnerable to neo-colonialism and that only a continental union government could secure genuine sovereignty and economic development.	African perspective: Nkrumah's argument is a theory of sovereignty-through-unity, not a rejection of sovereignty; it redefines sovereignty as collective.
L28	Source	What does Murithi (2014) identify as the AU's central tension?	Murithi identifies a tension between the AU's ambitious normative framework (intervention, human rights, democratic governance) and its institutional capacity, which remains dependent on member states and external donors.	African perspective: Murithi frames this as a sovereignty-capacity gap, not a legitimacy deficit; the norms are African-owned even where enforcement is weak.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L28	Debate	What is the debate over AfCFTA's implementation?	AfCFTA aims to create a single continental market, but implementation is slowed by tariff phase-in delays, non-tariff barriers, infrastructure gaps, and the persistence of colonial-era trade patterns oriented toward external markets.	African perspective: AfCFTA is read as economic Pan-Africanism; its success is measured by intra-African trade growth, not by external benchmarks.
L28	Reconstruction	How does the Chinese perspective frame AU partnership?	China frames its relationship with the AU through the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and the Belt and Road Initiative, emphasizing non-interference, mutual benefit, and infrastructure investment, while avoiding conditionality on governance.	Chinese perspective: sovereignty-respecting partnership; occludes questions of debt sustainability and labor standards.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L28	Reconstruction	How does the Russian perspective frame AU partnership?	Russia frames its engagement through sovereign equality and multipolarity, offering security cooperation (Wagner/Africa Corps in the Sahel) and diplomatic support at the UN, while criticizing Western conditionality.	Russian perspective: anti-hegemonic solidarity; occludes the destabilizing effects of private military company deployments.
L28	Reconstruction	How does the Western perspective assess the AU?	Western governments and institutions assess the AU through institutionalist and conditionality lenses, praising normative innovation (Art 4(h), 4(p)) while criticizing weak enforcement, funding dependence, and inconsistent application of suspension norms.	Western perspective: reform-oriented engagement; occludes the endogenous origins of AU norms and the sovereignty concerns behind weak enforcement.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L28	Reconstruction	How does the UN perspective frame AU partnership?	The UN frames the AU as a Chapter VIII regional arrangement, cooperating on peacekeeping (AMISOM/ATMIS in Somalia), mediation, and the "Silencing the Guns" initiative, while navigating questions of AU autonomy and UN Security Council authority.	UN perspective: partnership and subsidiarity; occludes power asymmetries in funding and decision-making.
L28	Adjudication	When does the AU suspend a member state versus tolerate an unconstitutional change?	Suspension follows when a coup is clear-cut and regional consensus exists (Mali 2020, Gabon 2023). Tolerance or delay occurs when the coup leader retains regional support, when strategic interests are at stake (Chad 2021, where Idriss Déby's son took power without suspension), or when enforcement capacity is lacking (Sudan 2021).	African perspective: inconsistency reflects political realism and sovereignty bargains, not normative hypocrisy; adjudication requires weighing regional consensus against normative purity.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L28	Visual	What does the "sovereignty ladder" visual capture?	The ladder depicts the OAU's absolute sovereignty norm (bottom rung) giving way to the AU's qualified sovereignty (Art 4(h) intervention, Art 4(p) anti-coup norm) at the top, with institutional capacity as the missing rung that prevents full ascent.	African perspective: the ladder is not a climb toward Western standards but an internal evolution; the missing rung is capacity, not will.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit

Competency	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of Mastery	Gap to Close
Define Article 4(h) and 4(p) and distinguish them	0-100	Can state both provisions and their legal effects without notes	If below 80: re-read AU Constitutive Act (2000), Articles 4(h) and 4(p)
Explain OAU-to-AU institutional transition	0-100	Can narrate the 1999 Sirte Declaration to 2002 Durban launch with dates	If below 80: review Murithi (2014) and OAU Charter (1963)
Reconstruct Nkrumah vs. Nyerere debate	0-100	Can state each position and identify which the AU reflects	If below 80: re-read Nkrumah (1963) and Nyerere (1967)
Analyze AU suspension decisions (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Gabon)	0-100	Can explain variation in AU response across the five cases	If below 80: review AU PSC communiqués and ECOWAS statements
Apply five-perspective reconstruction to AU governance	0-100	Can produce all five perspectives on a given AU crisis in 3-5 sentences each	If below 80: re-read Section 2.7 of this lesson

Competency	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of Mastery	Gap to Close
Explain institutional path dependence in AU enforcement	0-100	Can identify three structural constraints and their origins	If below 80: review Section 2.4 and Murithi (2014)
Assess AfCFTA and Agenda 2063 as contemporary Pan-Africanism	0-100	Can state three implementation barriers and one success metric	If below 80: review AU Agenda 2063 and AfCFTA protocol texts

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. **Which perspective did you find hardest to steel-man, and why?** Identify whether the difficulty was empirical (lack of evidence), normative (disagreement with premises), or rhetorical (unfamiliar vocabulary). Name the specific perspective and the specific claim that resisted reconstruction.
2. **Where did you conflate description with explanation?** Point to one moment in your analysis where you described what happened (e.g., "the AU suspended Mali") without specifying the causal mechanism (e.g., "because regional consensus existed and the coup was unambiguous"). Rewrite that sentence with the mechanism explicit.
3. **What would falsify your current view of AU effectiveness?** State one observable development that, if it occurred, would force you to revise your assessment of whether the AU's normative framework is substantively meaningful or merely rhetorical.

7.3 Error-Log Table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
The AU is simply a renamed OAU with no meaningful change	The AU Constitutive Act (2000) introduced Article 4(h) (right to intervene) and Article 4(p) (rejection of unconstitutional changes), neither of which existed in the OAU Charter (1963)	AU Constitutive Act (2000), Articles 4(h), 4(p); OAU Charter (1963), Article III
Nkrumah and Nyerere agreed on Pan-Africanism	They disagreed fundamentally: Nkrumah wanted a continental union government; Nyerere wanted a federation of sovereign states with gradual integration	Nkrumah (1963), "Africa Must Unite"; Nyerere (1967), "The Arusha Declaration"

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
The AU's weak enforcement proves African states do not want strong institutions	Weak enforcement reflects path dependence, fiscal constraints, and sovereignty bargains, not lack of commitment; the norms themselves are endogenously generated	Murithi (2014); AU Constitutive Act (2000)
AU suspension of coup states is automatic and uniform	Responses vary significantly: Chad (2021) was not suspended; Sudan's suspension was delayed; Niger's triggered a regional military standoff	AU PSC communiqués 2020-2023; ECOWAS statements on Niger (2023)
AfCFTA has already created a single African market	AfCFTA is a framework agreement with phased tariff reductions; intra-African trade remains below 20% of total African trade, and non-tariff barriers persist	AU Agenda 2063; AfCFTA Secretariat implementation reports
The Non-Aligned Movement was a Soviet proxy	NAM was founded at Bandung (1955) by Asian and African states seeking independence from both blocs; its African members pursued sovereign foreign policy, not Soviet alignment	Bandung Conference (1955); Nkrumah and Nyerere speeches on non-alignment
Western conditionality is the main driver of AU democratic norms	AU democratic norms (Art 4(p)) emerged from African debates post-1990s; external pressure reinforced but did not originate them	Murithi (2014); AU Constitutive Act (2000)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Post-colonial sovereignty; qualified sovereignty; Pan-Africanism; non-alignment; multi-alignment	Institutional path dependence (OAU→AU); consensus decision rules; PSC suspension mechanism; AfCFTA tariff phase-in	Nkrumah (1963) union government; Nyerere (1967) federation; Murithi (2014) sovereignty-capacity gap; Grovogui on sovereignty as practice	OAU Charter (1963); AU Constitutive Act (2000); Mali 2020, Guinea 2021, Burkina Faso 2022, Niger 2023, Gabon 2023; AfCFTA 2018	Nkrumah vs. Nyerere on unity; intervention vs. sovereignty; conditionality vs. ownership; multipolarity vs. non-alignment	If AU suspends all coup states uniformly including Chad-type cases; if intra-African trade exceeds 50% by 2035; if AU PSC gains independent funding and troops	L9 (sovereignty); L12 (decolonization); L27 (colonial state formation); L32 (African agency); L34 (Sahel); L49 (Global South)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Timing	Action
R1	Day 1 (immediately after first read)	Re-read Section 2.7 (Five Perspectives in Depth) and write a one-paragraph reconstruction of the African perspective from memory; check against the text
R2	Day 3	Complete the Independent Memo (Section 2.10) on a fresh case (e.g., Sudan 2021 or Chad 2021) using all four required headings; self-check the description/explanation/prediction/prescription distinction
R3	Day 7	Re-attempt the Hinge Question (Section 2.11) without notes; then review the distractor diagnosis for each wrong option

Interval	Timing	Action
R4	Day 14	Reconstruct the Nkrumah vs. Nyerere debate aloud in under two minutes, including which vision the AU reflects and why; then review flashcards tagged "Debate" and "Source"
R5	Day 30	Write a one-page adjudication of whether the AU's normative framework is substantively meaningful, citing at least two of the five coup cases and one falsifier; compare with your Day 1 position

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define Article 4(h) and Article 4(p) of the AU Constitutive Act and distinguish their legal effects
- ☐ I can narrate the OAU-to-AU transition with key dates (Sirte 1999, Lomé 2000, Durban 2002)
- ☐ I can reconstruct Nkrumah's and Nyerere's positions on Pan-Africanism and identify which the AU reflects
- ☐ I can explain three mechanisms of institutional path dependence in AU enforcement
- ☐ I can analyze variation in AU suspension decisions across Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Gabon
- ☐ I can steel-man all five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on AU governance
- ☐ I can identify what the African perspective reveals that the other four occlude
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in my own analysis
- ☐ I can state three barriers to AfCFTA implementation and one success metric
- ☐ I can explain the Non-Aligned Movement's origins and its African dimensions
- ☐ I can identify the strongest counterargument to the claim that AU norms are merely rhetorical
- ☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational) to an AU crisis
- ☐ I can state one falsifier for my view of AU effectiveness
- ☐ I have completed the Independent Memo with all four required headings
- ☐ I have reviewed the flashcards and scored at least 80% on self-test
- ☐ I have completed the confidence audit and identified my largest gap
- ☐ I have scheduled R1 through R5 review intervals in my calendar

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Pan-Africanism and Intellectual History - Nkrumah, K. (1963). *Africa Must Unite*. London: Heinemann. - Nyerere, J. (1967). "The Arusha Declaration and TANU's Policy on Socialism and Self-Reliance." Dar es Salaam. - Du Bois, W.E.B. (1945). *Color and Democracy: Colonies and Peace*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.

Institutional Transition and Sovereignty Norms - African Union. (2000). *Constitutive Act of the African*

Union. Lomé. - Organization of African Unity. (1963). *Charter of the Organization of African Unity*. Addis Ababa. - Murithi, T. (2014). "The African Union and the Promotion of Democratic Governance." In *The African Union: Autocracy, Diplomacy and Peacebuilding in Africa*. London: I.B. Tauris.

African Scholarship on Sovereignty and the State - Grovogui, S.N. (2006). *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. - Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. - Bayart, J.-F. (2009). *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Contemporary Pan-Africanism and Economic Integration - African Union. (2015). *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. Addis Ababa. - African Continental Free Trade Area Secretariat. (2021). *AfCFTA Implementation Reports*. Accra.

AU Peace and Security Practice - African Union Peace and Security Council. (2020-2023). *Communiqués on Unconstitutional Changes of Government*. Addis Ababa.

End of Lesson 28. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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30. Political Economy of African Conflict

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 29: Political Economy of African Conflict
Module	Module 5: African Geopolitical Architecture
Prerequisites	L17 (world-systems), L23 (asymmetric warfare), L27 (colonial state formation)
Interleaved links	Forward to L33 (critical minerals), L34 (Sahel), L46 (hydrocarbons)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, visual anchors, flashcards, memo practice
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is one of the most consequential paradoxes in contemporary international relations: the African continent holds a disproportionate share of the world's strategic minerals, hydrocarbons, and arable land, yet many of the states sitting atop these endowments have experienced recurrent armed conflict, authoritarian consolidation, and developmental stagnation rather than broad-based prosperity. The

"resource curse" is the shorthand for this paradox, but the shorthand is dangerous if it is treated as an explanation. The lesson exists to move the student from the observation that resources and conflict correlate to a disciplined account of *how* they are linked, *for whom*, *under what conditions*, and *with what agency* on the part of African states, societies, and external actors. The puzzle is not merely empirical; it is theoretical and political. Does oil cause war, or does war capture oil? Are rebels motivated by greed or by grievance? Does extraction strengthen the state by filling its coffers, or fragment it by creating parallel economies of violence? Does the global market in minerals discipline African governance, or does it reward opacity and predation? These questions cannot be answered by a single theory, and the lesson is built to make the student hold multiple, partially incompatible explanations in tension and adjudicate among them on evidence.

The lesson sits at a specific point in the curriculum's architecture. It presupposes three earlier lessons. From L17 on world-systems theory, the student brings the understanding that the global economy is structured by a core-periphery division of labor in which surplus is extracted from commodity-producing regions and that terms of trade systematically disadvantage primary exporters. From L23 on asymmetric warfare, the student brings the understanding that materially weaker actors can sustain violence through terrain, popular support, external patronage, and the exploitation of state vulnerabilities. From L27 on colonial state formation, the student brings the understanding that African states inherited arbitrary borders, extractive institutions, and "divide and rule" legacies that shaped postcolonial political order. This lesson synthesizes those three streams: the political economy of conflict is precisely the site where global market structures, military asymmetries, and inherited state pathologies intersect. It also looks forward. L33 on critical minerals, L34 on the Sahel, and L46 on hydrocarbons will each return to the mechanisms developed here, applying them to specific commodity chains and regional theaters. Mastering this lesson therefore means acquiring a portable analytical toolkit rather than a catalogue of cases.

Five key ideas organize the core. The first is the resource curse itself, disaggregated into its mechanisms: rentierism, in which states live off external rents rather than domestic taxation and thereby weaken accountability; Dutch disease, in which resource booms appreciate the currency and hollow out tradable sectors; weakened institutions, in which windfall revenues reduce the incentive to build capable bureaucracies; and conflict financing, in which lootable commodities fund armed groups. The second is neo-extractivism: the contemporary "new scramble" for African minerals, distinguished from colonial extraction by the multiplicity of external actors, the role of infrastructure-for-resources deals, and the renegotiation of terms of trade. The third is rentier state dynamics: how oil, minerals, and even aid reshape state-society relations, producing particular forms of authoritarianism, clientelism, and social contract. The fourth is the privatization of violence: warlordism, private military companies, and the market for force, theorized by Reno and Collier, in which violence becomes an economic activity with its own supply chains and profit motives. The fifth is the "greed versus grievance" debate, associated with Collier and Hoeffler, and its limits: the attempt to quantify the relative weight of economic motive and political injustice in civil war onset, and the critiques that this binary flattens history, agency, and structure.

The African perspective is the primary lens of the lesson, not a regional illustration of Western theory. Reconstructed from within, drawing on African scholarship from Rodney's underdevelopment thesis through Nkrumah's neo-colonialism, Fanon's analysis of the comprador class, Mamdani's citizen/subject distinction, Bayart's politics of the belly, and contemporary voices such as Aning and Danso, the African vantage point treats resource conflict as a continuation of extractive global order by other means. It insists that the relevant unit of analysis is not the "failed state" but the *successful* extraction of value from African societies by coalitions of external capital and domestic elites. From this vantage, the "greed" of rebels is inseparable from the greed of the global system that prices their minerals cheaply and their lives cheaply; "grievance" is not

a sentiment but a structural position. This perspective reveals what the Western governance frame occludes: the historical depth of dispossession, the agency of African actors in negotiating and resisting extraction, and the possibility that resource sovereignty rather than transparency is the operative demand. It also complicates the Chinese and Russian narratives by refusing to treat any external power as a neutral partner.

The lesson also requires the student to become fluent in five perspectives as analytical instruments rather than as opinions. The African structural critique plus resource sovereignty; the Chinese "win-win" plus developmental partnership narrative; the Russian emphasis on Western responsibility plus sovereign choice; the Western "greed" framework plus governance conditionality; and the UN's Panel of Experts reports, sanctions regimes, and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. Each perspective contributes something the others miss and occludes something the others see. The comparison is not a relativist exercise; it is a method for locating the blind spots of any single account and for recognizing that policy prescriptions flow from prior theoretical commitments.

By the end of the lesson, the student should be able to do several things that are genuinely difficult. First, reconstruct a causal mechanism in full: specify the independent variable, the intervening process, the scope conditions under which it operates, and the observable implications that would confirm or falsify it. Second, evaluate the Collier-Hoeffler greed-grievance findings against their strongest critiques, including the endogeneity of resource dependence and the coding of "greed." Third, apply the full toolkit to two cases: Sierra Leone's blood diamonds conflict of 1991-2002, including the Kimberley Process response, and Nigeria's Delta insurgency of 2004-2009, including oil, federalism, and the politics of grievance. Fourth, interpret data: World Bank resource rents as a share of GDP, estimates of conflict financing, EITI membership and compliance, and sanctions on conflict minerals. Fifth, produce an independent memo with four required components—mechanism, perspective reconstruction, historical analogue, and falsifiers—and distinguish description from explanation, prediction, and prescription. Sixth, recognize the methodological hazards: correlation versus causation, endogeneity of resource dependence, the political construction of categories like "conflict mineral," and the risk that transparency initiatives become legitimizing rituals rather than accountability mechanisms.

A final caution frames the entire lesson. The political economy of African conflict is a field in which evidence is scarce, contested, and politically consequential. Estimates of illicit financial flows, conflict financing, and resource rents vary by orders of magnitude depending on methodology. Sanctions regimes are evaluated by their architects and their targets with incompatible metrics. The "greed" of rebels and the "grievance" of communities are not directly observable; they are inferred from behavior that is itself shaped by the categories used to describe it. The lesson therefore insists on epistemic humility: every claim must carry its scope conditions, every theory its strongest counterargument, and every policy prescription its falsifiers. The student who masters this lesson will not emerge with a single answer to why Africa's resources have so often funded violence. They will emerge with the capacity to ask better questions, to recognize which questions are being asked by whom, and to judge when an answer is warranted by evidence rather than by the convenience of the asker.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up (from earlier lessons)

Answer each in two to three sentences, drawing on L17, L23, and L27.

1. In world-systems theory, how does the core-periphery structure shape the terms of trade and the direction of surplus extraction?
2. What is "unequal exchange," and how does it connect to commodity dependence in African economies?
3. Distinguish asymmetric warfare from conventional interstate war, and give one African example of the former.
4. How does a materially weaker actor offset its inferiority in asymmetric conflict (tactics, terrain, external support, or state vulnerabilities)?
5. What institutional legacies of colonial state formation—borders, extractive institutions, indirect rule—continue to shape postcolonial conflict?
6. How did colonial "divide and rule" strategies affect ethnic, regional, and religious cleavages that later became fault lines of violence?

1.2 Orientation Questions (this lesson)

1. What are the principal mechanisms through which natural resource abundance is hypothesized to increase the risk of armed conflict, and do they operate differently for oil than for minerals?
2. How does neo-extractivism differ from colonial extraction in terms of actors, contractual terms, infrastructure, and the role of African states?
3. Is the "greed versus grievance" framing a false binary? What evidence would be needed to adjudicate between economic motive and political injustice in a given conflict?
4. How do rentier dynamics alter the social contract between state and society, and what does this imply for accountability and conflict risk?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach (provisional definitions)

- **Resource curse**: The observed association between high natural-resource dependence and poor developmental or conflict outcomes; a correlation whose causal mechanisms are contested.
- **Rentier state / rentierism**: A state that derives a large share of revenue from external rents (oil, minerals, aid) rather than domestic taxation, weakening accountability to citizens.
- **Dutch disease**: The appreciation of a resource-exporting country's currency and the consequent contraction of its tradable (especially manufacturing) sectors.
- **Conflict financing**: The use of lootable or extractable commodities to fund armed groups, militias, or insurgencies.
- **Neo-extractivism**: Contemporary large-scale extraction, often by diverse external actors, characterized by infrastructure-for-resources deals and renegotiated but still unequal terms.
- **Resource rents**: The surplus revenue derived from natural resources above extraction costs, often measured as a share of GDP.
- **Warlordism**: The fragmentation of authority in which armed leaders control territory and resources and extract revenue from populations outside state institutions.
- **Private military company (PMC)**: A corporate entity providing armed security, logistics, or combat services for profit, operating in a market for force.
- **Greed versus grievance**: A debate over whether civil wars are driven primarily by economic opportunity (greed) or by political injustice and identity (grievance).
- **Kimberley Process**: A multilateral certification scheme intended to prevent the trade in conflict diamonds.

- **EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative)**: A global standard requiring disclosure of payments from extractive companies to governments.
- **Blood diamonds / conflict minerals**: Commodities whose extraction and trade are linked to armed conflict and human-rights abuses.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

After mastering this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Explain** the causal mechanisms through which natural resource abundance produces the "resource curse" — rentierism, Dutch disease, institutional decay, and conflict financing — and specify the scope conditions under which each mechanism operates, including the institutional threshold below which rents become destructive rather than developmental. (Bloom: Explain/Analyze)
2. **Analyze** the political economy of neo-extractivism in contemporary Africa, distinguishing the terms of the bargain offered by Chinese, Western, and Russian actors and evaluating the scope for African agency, renegotiation, and value-addition within these arrangements. (Bloom: Analyze/Evaluate)
3. **Compare** rentier state dynamics across commodity types — hydrocarbons, hard minerals, and external aid — and assess how each shapes taxation, state-society bargaining, and the accountability of rulers to ruled. (Bloom: Compare/Analyze)
4. **Evaluate** the privatization of violence — warlordism, private military companies, and the market for force — using Reno's framework of shadow states and Collier's economic model of civil war, and identify the conditions under which violence becomes a profitable enterprise rather than a political project. (Bloom: Evaluate)
5. **Adjudicate** the "greed versus grievance" debate on the basis of evidence from African cases, identifying where each framework succeeds, where it fails, and what a synthetic account that incorporates both opportunity and motivation requires. (Bloom: Evaluate/Create)

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The resource curse: mechanisms (rentierism, Dutch disease, weakened institutions, conflict financing)

Bolded Causal Claim: Abundant, easily appropriable natural resource rents tend to depress long-run economic growth, erode state institutions, and raise the probability of armed conflict in developing states, but only where pre-existing institutional quality is low and commodity prices are volatile; the curse is conditional, not automatic, and resource wealth has historically produced development where states possessed the capacity to manage it.

Mechanism: The resource curse is not a single causal process but a family of four interlocking mechanisms that convert geological endowment into political and economic pathology. The first is rentierism. Where the state derives a large share of its revenue from resource rents rather than from taxing its citizens, the fiscal contract between ruler and ruled is severed. Terry Karl's foundational work on petro-states argues that rentier states need not bargain with society for revenue, and therefore need not deliver representation, accountability, or public goods in exchange. The state becomes an allocator of rents rather than a producer

of welfare, and politics collapses into a contest over access to the rent stream. The second mechanism is Dutch disease. A resource boom drives up the real exchange rate, making non-resource tradables — agriculture, manufacturing, services — uncompetitive on world markets. The economy narrows around the extractive sector, employment in tradable sectors shrinks, and the state loses the diversified tax base that would otherwise sustain institutional development. The third mechanism is institutional weakening through rent-seeking. Where rents are large and institutions weak, rational actors invest in capturing the state rather than in productive enterprise. Corruption, patronage, and clientelism become the dominant modes of political competition, and the formal institutions of the state — courts, legislatures, regulatory agencies — are hollowed out or repurposed as instruments of rent distribution. The fourth mechanism is conflict financing. Resources provide both the motive and the means for armed conflict: they raise the stakes of controlling territory, fund rebel organizations, and create lootable wealth that can sustain violence independently of popular support. Philippe Le Billon's work on the political economy of war emphasizes that resources do not merely motivate conflict but structure it — determining who fights, how long they fight, and what bargains become possible at war's end. These four mechanisms interact: rentierism weakens the institutions that might manage Dutch disease; institutional decay lowers the cost of capturing rents by force; and conflict financing feeds back into further institutional destruction.

Scope Conditions: The curse operates only under identifiable conditions, and the literature has moved steadily toward specifying them. The most important scope condition is institutional quality at the time of the boom. States with strong pre-existing institutions — Norway, Botswana, Chile — have converted resource wealth into sustained development, while states with weak institutions — Nigeria, Angola, Sierra Leone — have experienced the curse. A second scope condition is commodity type. Point-source resources such as oil and diamonds, which are geographically concentrated and easily controlled by small groups, produce stronger curse effects than diffuse resources such as agricultural commodities. A third is price volatility: boom-bust cycles disrupt planning, encourage pro-cyclical spending, and create windows of vulnerability during price collapses. A fourth is the degree of state ownership and the transparency of revenue management. Where contracts are secret, revenues off-budget, and state-owned enterprises opaque, rents are more easily captured. A fifth is the presence of external actors — multinational corporations, trading networks, and consuming states — whose demand and complicity shape the terms of extraction. The curse is therefore not a property of geology but of the political and institutional context in which geology is exploited.

Observable Implications: If the resource curse thesis holds, several patterns should be visible in cross-national and case-study evidence. Resource-dependent economies should exhibit lower per capita GDP growth over the long run than non-resource economies with similar initial conditions, controlling for other factors. They should score lower on governance indicators — corruption, rule of law, voice and accountability. They should exhibit higher rates of civil war onset, particularly in the years following commodity price booms. They should show narrower export bases and higher exchange-rate volatility. They should display lower tax effort relative to GDP, since rents substitute for taxation. They should exhibit higher military spending and larger security sectors, as rulers use rents to fund coercion. And they should show distinctive patterns of inequality: resource rents concentrate in the hands of state elites and connected firms, producing high inequality alongside low median welfare. The evidence broadly supports these implications, though with important qualifications. Sachs and Warner's early cross-national work found a robust negative relationship between resource dependence and growth; subsequent research has shown this relationship to be mediated by institutional quality, and some studies find no curse or even a blessing where institutions are strong. The conflict literature, following Collier and Hoeffler, finds that resource dependence raises civil war risk, but the mechanism — whether through financing, motivation, or state weakness — remains contested.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective treats the resource curse not as a natural consequence of geology but as a historically produced condition rooted in colonial extraction and its post-colonial reproduction. African scholars from Walter Rodney to Claude Ake to Thandika Mkandawire have argued that resource wealth became a curse because the institutional architecture of extraction — enclave economies, foreign ownership, weak linkages to domestic production — was inherited from colonialism and never dismantled. The curse is therefore not a failure of African states to manage wealth but a continuation of a global division of labor in which Africa supplies raw materials and imports manufactured goods. From this vantage point, the relevant question is not why Africa failed to develop its resources but why the terms of extraction were structured to prevent development. Resource sovereignty — the demand that African states control their resources, set their own terms, and capture value through processing and industrialization — is the central political project. The African perspective also insists that the curse framework risks blaming victims: it locates pathology in African states while obscuring the role of multinational corporations, consuming states, and international financial institutions in structuring extraction. The strongest African contribution is to show that the curse is a relational phenomenon, produced by the interaction between African elites and external actors, not an internal African failure.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective does not deny the existence of resource curse dynamics but frames them as manageable through state capacity and developmental partnership. Drawing on China's own experience of resource-led development and its model of state-led industrialization, Chinese analysts argue that the curse reflects weak state capacity rather than resource abundance per se, and that the solution lies in building infrastructure, transferring technology, and creating linkages between extractive and non-extractive sectors. The "win-win" narrative holds that Chinese investment in African resources, when accompanied by infrastructure development and employment creation, can convert curse into blessing. This perspective contributes the insight that external partners can be developmentally constructive rather than purely extractive, and that the terms of engagement matter more than the fact of engagement. Its occlusion is the tendency to treat state capacity as a technical problem solvable by investment, while underestimating the political dynamics of rent capture and elite bargaining that Karl and others identify as central. The Chinese perspective also has limited engagement with the conflict-financing dimension of the curse, since China's strategic interest lies in stable supply rather than in the governance of extraction.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames the resource curse as partly a Western construct used to delegitimize African sovereignty over resources and to justify external intervention in resource-rich states. Russian analysts emphasize that Western powers have historically extracted African resources on favorable terms and that the "curse" narrative serves to obscure Western responsibility for underdevelopment. The Russian view stresses sovereign choice: African states have the right to determine how their resources are exploited, with whom they partner, and on what terms, without external conditionality. This perspective contributes a necessary corrective to the tendency of Western frameworks to treat African resource governance as a technical problem requiring external oversight. Its occlusion is the tendency to treat sovereignty as an end in itself, without engaging seriously with the institutional mechanisms through which rents are captured by elites rather than deployed for public welfare. The Russian perspective also has limited purchase on the conflict-financing dimension, since its emphasis on non-interference can shield abusive extraction from scrutiny.

Western: The Western perspective, dominant in the academic and policy literature, treats the resource curse as a problem of governance and institutions, amenable to reform through transparency, conditionality, and

capacity building. The framework emphasizes rentierism, Dutch disease, and institutional decay as the core mechanisms, and prescribes remedies such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), revenue management funds, and diversification policies. This perspective has generated the most extensive empirical research and the most detailed policy prescriptions. Its contribution is the identification of specific, tractable mechanisms and the development of metrics and indicators for tracking them. Its occlusion is the tendency to treat the curse as an internal governance failure, underweighting the structural and historical dimensions that African scholars emphasize, and the role of Western consumers, corporations, and financial systems in sustaining extractive arrangements. The Western perspective also risks conflating correlation with causation, attributing to resources what may be caused by the institutional weakness that preceded resource discovery.

UN: The UN perspective treats the resource curse primarily through the lens of conflict and sanctions, emphasizing the role of resources in financing armed conflict and the need for international regulatory responses. UN Panel of Experts reports on Angola, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo documented how diamonds, coltan, and other resources funded rebel movements and sustained violence, leading to sanctions regimes, certification schemes such as the Kimberley Process, and the broader framework of "conflict minerals" regulation. The UN contribution is the documentation of specific conflict-financing networks and the development of international regulatory tools. Its occlusion is the tendency to focus on the conflict dimension while underweighting the slower, structural dimensions of the curse — rentierism, Dutch disease, and institutional decay — that operate in peacetime as well as in war. The UN perspective also struggles with enforcement, since sanctions and certification schemes depend on state capacity and political will that are often absent in the very states they target.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Neo-extractivism: the new scramble for African minerals and the terms of the bargain

Bolded Causal Claim: Neo-extractivism in Africa is not simply colonial extraction under new flags; it is a mode of accumulation in which the state facilitates large-scale, export-oriented mineral extraction by external capital in exchange for fiscal rents, infrastructure, and limited local benefits, while higher-value stages of processing, technology, finance, and commodity trading remain outside the continent. The causal claim is that this bargain structurally reproduces dependency: it can generate growth without development, concentrate risk in host states, and convert mineral abundance into a source of political and conflict vulnerability rather than broad-based transformation.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through six linked channels. First, global value-chain positioning: African states typically export ores, concentrates, or unprocessed minerals, while refining, smelting, component manufacturing, and final assembly occur in industrial centers in China, Europe, North America, or the Gulf. Even where processing exists, it is often enclave-based and foreign-owned, with limited backward linkages to domestic suppliers. Second, fiscal and contractual architecture: production-sharing agreements, royalty regimes, tax holidays, stabilization clauses, and transfer-pricing opportunities allow investors to capture a disproportionate share of rent, especially where geological data, legal capacity, and bargaining power are asymmetric. Contracts are frequently stabilized against future policy change and arbitrated in foreign jurisdictions, which constrains later governments that wish to renegotiate terms. Third, infrastructure as corridor rather than network: railways, ports, and power lines are built to move minerals from mine to coast, not to integrate domestic markets; this creates extractive corridors that bypass rural populations and reinforce

spatial inequality. Fourth, labor and social relations: capital-intensive mining generates relatively few jobs per unit of output, while artisanal and small-scale mining absorbs surplus labor under hazardous conditions; the coexistence of industrial and artisanal sectors produces competition over access, often mediated by local elites, security forces, and armed actors. Fifth, financialization and illicit flows: commodity trading, offshore registration, misinvoicing, and treaty shopping move value out of the fiscal reach of host states; even where EITI disclosures exist, the gap between disclosed payments and actual value capture can remain large. Sixth, security arrangements: mining zones are frequently protected by state forces, private military or security companies, or hybrid local militias, which can militarize resource frontiers and entangle extraction with coercion. The "terms of the bargain" therefore include not only headline royalty rates but also infrastructure packages, security provision, market access, diplomatic support, and long-term offtake agreements, all of which can obscure the underlying distribution of value. In the African variant, neo-extractivism is often state-led in rhetoric but market-mediated in practice: governments market resource sovereignty while depending on external capital, technology, and markets.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism is strongest where four conditions coincide: (i) deposits are large, capital-intensive, and export-oriented; (ii) global demand is high and concentrated, as in energy-transition minerals such as cobalt, lithium, copper, nickel, and rare earths; (iii) host-state institutions lack the technical, legal, and fiscal capacity to negotiate, monitor, and enforce contracts; and (iv) global commodity markets and finance are dominated by a small number of buyers, traders, and lenders. It is weaker where states have diversified economies, strong geological and legal capacity, robust local content requirements, or regional bargaining power. Botswana's diamond management is often cited as a partial counterexample, though even it remains dependent on De Beers technology and global demand. The scope condition also includes time and cycles: neo-extractivism intensifies during commodity booms, when investor interest and state revenue expectations rise, and contracts signed in boom periods may become liabilities during busts. Geopolitical competition among China, the European Union, the United States, and other actors can improve African bargaining power in some cases, but it can also fragment standards and encourage competitive deregulation. The mechanism does not imply that all foreign investment is harmful; rather, it predicts that without deliberate industrial policy, value capture will remain skewed toward external actors.

Observable Implications: If neo-extractivism operates as described, one should observe high export concentration in a small number of minerals; low manufacturing value added relative to GDP; infrastructure oriented toward ports rather than internal integration; volatile fiscal revenues; recurrent contract renegotiations or disputes; community protests around land, water, and compensation; militarization of mining zones; and persistent illicit financial flows despite transparency initiatives. One should also observe a gap between official narratives of "partnership" and local experiences of dispossession, as well as repeated cycles of boom, debt, and renegotiation. Additional indicators include the share of exports in raw or semi-processed form, the ratio of value-added exports to total exports, the implementation record of community benefit agreements, the frequency of investor-state arbitration, and EITI reconciliation gaps. Data sources such as World Bank resource rents, EITI reports, UNCTAD trade data, and national accounts can be used to test these implications, though each has measurement limits, especially for informal and illicit flows. The "new scramble" is visible in the geography of new mining frontiers—cobalt and copper in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia, lithium in Zimbabwe and Namibia, bauxite in Guinea, uranium in Namibia, and platinum-group metals in South Africa and Zimbabwe—where external capital and state elites negotiate access to minerals critical to the global energy transition.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): From an African structural perspective, neo-extractivism is the latest phase of a long history of unequal exchange in which the continent supplies raw

materials to industrial centers while importing manufactured goods and debt. Scholars in the tradition of Rodney, Nkrumah, and Fanon, and later African political economists, emphasize that the problem is not simply bad contracts but the global division of labor, finance, and knowledge. The African vantage point insists on resource sovereignty, beneficiation, local content, regional value chains, and environmental justice; it treats the "terms of the bargain" as a question of historical repair as well as current negotiation. It also highlights that African elites are not passive victims but active brokers who may benefit from rent streams, which complicates simple anti-foreign narratives and directs attention to domestic class and elite politics. Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames mineral partnerships as "win-win" development cooperation: infrastructure, employment, and market access in exchange for resources, without the political conditionality associated with Western donors. It emphasizes mutual benefit, non-interference, and the developmental role of state-backed capital. Its occlusion is the tendency to understate debt sustainability, labor and environmental standards, opacity in contracts, and the enclave nature of many projects. Russian: The Russian perspective emphasizes sovereign choice and Western hypocrisy: African states have the right to choose partners, and Western criticism of non-Western investment is often framed as an attempt to preserve monopolies established during colonial and post-colonial periods. Russia presents itself as an alternative partner in mining, energy, and security, particularly where Western sanctions or conditionality create openings. Its occlusion is the limited transparency of many deals, the role of security actors in protecting extractive assets, and the risk that "sovereignty" rhetoric can legitimate elite capture. Western: The Western perspective typically combines market-liberal and governance frameworks: foreign direct investment, EITI, transparency, rule of law, and anti-corruption conditionality are seen as the path to better bargains. It often attributes poor outcomes to weak governance, corruption, and "resource curse" dynamics rather than to the structure of global markets. Its occlusion is the historical and ongoing role of Western corporations, financial centers, and consumption patterns in shaping extractive terms, as well as the asymmetry of technological and market power. UN: The UN perspective focuses on regulatory and normative tools—Panel of Experts reports, sanctions on conflict minerals, EITI support, and the Sustainable Development Goals—aimed at making extraction more transparent and less conflict-prone. It contributes documentation of networks and standards for due diligence. Its occlusion is the tendency to treat extraction as a governance problem to be managed rather than a structural feature of the global economy, and the difficulty of enforcing standards where state capacity is weak.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Rentier state dynamics: how oil, minerals, and aid shape state-society relations

Bolded Causal Claim: Rentierism transforms the state from a taxing institution into a distributing institution: when governments derive a large share of revenue from oil, minerals, or aid rather than from domestic taxation, the fiscal contract between rulers and citizens weakens, accountability declines, and politics becomes a contest over access to rent streams rather than over public goods and productive investment.

Mechanism: The rentier mechanism, developed in the study of oil states and extended to mineral and aid-dependent economies, works through several channels. First, fiscal delinking: the state's budget is financed by external rents—export revenues, royalties, or donor transfers—rather than by taxes on citizens and firms. Because citizens are not the primary source of revenue, the classic "no taxation without representation" logic is inverted: rulers face weaker pressure to justify spending or to build institutions that extract and manage domestic revenue. Second, distributive politics: rents are allocated through subsidies, public employment, patronage networks, and regional or ethnic bargains. This can produce short-term stability but also creates constituencies dependent on continued rent flows and vulnerable to shocks. Third, institutional atrophy: tax administration, statistical capacity, and legislative oversight weaken because they are not needed to raise rev-

enue; ministries become channels for rent distribution rather than service delivery. Fourth, Dutch disease: large rent inflows appreciate the real exchange rate, raising the cost of non-resource tradables and discouraging manufacturing and agriculture; the economy becomes more import-dependent and less diversified. Fifth, security and coercion: rents fund militaries, police, and intelligence services that protect rent streams and regime survival, sometimes at the expense of civilian accountability. Sixth, aid as rent: in aid-dependent states, donor funding can substitute for domestic revenue, creating a rentier dynamic in which governments negotiate with donors rather than citizens; conditionality may alter policy but does not necessarily rebuild the fiscal contract. Seventh, fiscal illusion and moral hazard: because rents appear as "free" revenue, governments may borrow against future flows, overcommit to spending, and underinvest in tax capacity, making adjustment painful when prices fall. Karl's analysis of the "paradox of plenty" emphasizes that resource wealth can undermine the very institutions needed to manage it, especially where pre-existing state capacity is low. The mechanism is not automatic: it depends on the concentration of rents, the opacity of revenue management, and the absence of countervailing institutions such as independent legislatures, courts, civil society, and free media.

Scope Conditions: Rentier dynamics are most likely where resource rents constitute a large share of government revenue and GDP, where resources are geographically concentrated and easily appropriable, where population is small relative to rent volume, and where institutions are weak or personalized. They are less likely where states have diversified tax bases, strong bureaucratic capacity, transparent sovereign wealth funds, and political systems that require broad consent. Botswana and Norway are frequently cited as cases where resource wealth did not produce classic rentier pathologies, though both had distinctive institutional starting points and, in Botswana's case, a particular diamond governance arrangement. The mechanism also applies, with modifications, to aid-dependent states: high aid-to-GDP ratios can create "aid rentierism," especially in post-conflict or fragile settings where donors fund large shares of the budget. Federal systems, such as Nigeria's, can mitigate rentier centralization by distributing rents across subnational units, but they can also intensify competition over rent shares and encourage subnational rentierism. It does not imply that all resource-rich states are rentier states; rather, it identifies a tendency whose strength varies with institutional and political context.

Observable Implications: If rentier dynamics are present, one should observe low tax revenue as a share of GDP; high dependence on a small number of commodities or donors; large public-sector wage bills and subsidy programs; currency appreciation and manufacturing decline; weak legislative oversight of budgets; high military and security spending; frequent protests when subsidies are removed; and elite competition over control of rent-generating institutions such as national oil companies, mining parastatals, and central banks. One should also observe a gap between formal democratic institutions and substantive accountability: elections may occur, but the fiscal contract remains thin. In conflict settings, rent streams may finance both state repression and rebel mobilization, linking rentierism to the "resource curse" in civil war. Additional indicators include non-resource tax effort, public investment efficiency, subsidy incidence, exchange-rate misalignment, manufacturing share, aid dependency, and the frequency and intensity of protests following fiscal adjustment. Data sources include World Bank resource rents, IMF fiscal data, aid statistics, and national accounts, though measurement of informal and illicit rents remains difficult.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): The African perspective treats rentierism not as a technical fiscal problem but as a political and historical condition shaped by colonial state formation, external dependency, and elite brokerage. African scholars such as Bayart, with his analysis of the "politics of the belly," and Mamdani, with his distinction between citizens and subjects, help explain how rent distribution interacts with fragmented sovereignty and authoritarian rule. From this vantage point, oil

and mineral rents are not merely revenues; they are instruments through which states manage populations, reward clients, and suppress dissent. The African perspective also emphasizes that aid can function as a rent, creating donor-driven states whose accountability is oriented outward. It demands fiscal sovereignty, domestic resource mobilization, and the rebuilding of the social contract through taxation and public goods. Its occlusion, if any, is the risk of underestimating the stabilizing function of rent distribution in deeply divided societies, where abrupt removal of subsidies or patronage can trigger violence. Chinese: The Chinese perspective tends to view resource rents as a developmental opportunity if channeled into infrastructure and industrialization; it emphasizes state capacity, long-term planning, and the role of state-owned enterprises. It may understate the accountability problems created by rentier finance and the political risks of concentrated revenue. Russian: The Russian perspective frames rentier dynamics partly as a consequence of Western-imposed economic structures and sanctions; it emphasizes sovereign control over resources and the right to use rents for state priorities, including security. It may occlude the domestic institutional decay associated with rent dependence. Western: The Western perspective often treats rentierism as a governance failure amenable to conditionality, transparency initiatives, and fiscal reform; it emphasizes taxation, EITI, and institutional strengthening. Its occlusion is the historical role of Western consumption, corporations, and financial systems in creating and sustaining rentier economies, as well as the limits of external conditionality. UN: The UN perspective links rentierism to peacebuilding and state-building: aid, resource governance, and fiscal reform are tools for post-conflict recovery. It contributes norms around transparency and revenue management. Its occlusion is the difficulty of transforming fiscal contracts in fragile states where donors themselves become rent providers and where enforcement capacity is limited.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The privatization of violence: warlordism, PMCs, and the market for force (Reno, Collier)

Bolded Causal Claim: In institutionally thin, resource-rich settings, coercion is converted into a privately traded commodity; armed actors finance themselves through resource extraction and protection rents, so violence persists not as an instrument of state policy but as a self-sustaining market activity.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the erosion or collapse of the central state's monopoly on legitimate force, which Reno (1998) analyzes as "warlord politics": rulers and regional strongmen govern through personal networks rather than bureaucratic institutions, and resource sites become fiefdoms whose revenue is captured by armed patrons. Where minerals are lootable, high-value, and easily transportable—such as alluvial diamonds, coltan, or timber—armed groups can tax miners, control trade routes, and use violence to exclude rivals, transforming coercion into a revenue-generating asset. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) add the economic feasibility logic: rebellion becomes more likely when fighters can be paid from resource rents, reducing dependence on popular support and making violence an investment with expected returns. Private military companies (PMCs) extend the same market logic by selling coercive capacity to states, corporations, or factions, creating enclave security arrangements that may protect extraction without rebuilding public authority. The result is a shadow political economy in which armed actors, brokers, and external buyers are linked by contracts, smuggling, and protection payments; peace agreements are fragile because disarmament threatens established revenue streams, and violence can be restarted when market conditions favor it.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism is strongest where central authority is weak or fragmented, where resources are lootable and accessible, where borders are porous, and where external demand creates reliable buyers. It is weaker where resources require large fixed capital and state coordination, where institutions

can tax and regulate extraction, or where armed movements are driven by strong ideological or secessionist programs that subordinate economic gain to political goals. PMCs are not automatically conflict-generating; their effects depend on whether they are accountable to public law, whether they displace state forces, and whether their contracts create enclave economies. The mechanism also does not imply that all warlords are purely economic actors; many combine coercion with ethnic, regional, or religious claims, and violence may be legitimated through local idioms of authority.

Observable Implications: Analysts should expect armed groups to control or tax specific resource sites rather than merely hold territory; fragmented command structures competing for rents; cross-border smuggling networks; and negotiations in which resource access is an implicit or explicit bargaining chip. Post-conflict settings may show persistent insecurity around mines, continued PMC or militia presence, and "conflict entrepreneurs" who move between war and business. Another implication is the decoupling of violence from public service provision: groups may provide localized order to protect extraction while neglecting broader governance. Data patterns may include spikes in violence near resource corridors, discrepancies between official export figures and estimated production, and the survival of armed networks after formal disarmament.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, the privatization of violence is not an aberration produced by "failed states" but a political order shaped by the colonial state's externally oriented coercion, postcolonial elite bargains, and the conversion of public office into private accumulation. African scholarship—Bayart's "politics of the belly," Mamdani's analysis of decentralized despotism, and Mbembe's work on necropolitics—suggests that warlordism and militia economies are intelligible as forms of extraverted power in which local strongmen mediate between global markets and fragmented populations. PMCs can be read as neo-colonial coercive infrastructure that secures extraction without restoring citizenship, while resource sovereignty remains a central normative demand. The African perspective's distinctive contribution is to show that violence markets are embedded in social relations, patronage, and historical dispossession; its occlusion, when ignored, is the tendency to treat African conflicts as criminal or anarchic rather than as structured political economies.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective typically frames privatized violence as a symptom of weak governance and insecurity that threatens development, investment, and regional stability. It emphasizes state capacity, infrastructure, and economic cooperation as antidotes, while generally supporting non-interference and host-state authority. Chinese firms operating in resource sectors often rely on local state security rather than foreign PMCs, and Beijing's official discourse stresses mutual benefit and opposition to mercenary intervention. The occlusion is that this narrative can understate how Chinese demand and investment reshape local power relations, and how enclave security arrangements may reproduce inequality without addressing grievance.

Russian: The Russian perspective often attributes the market for force to Western interventionism, sanctions, and the collapse of state structures following externally driven regime change, while defending sovereign choice in security partnerships. It tends to treat Western condemnation of private military activity as hypocritical given the historical and contemporary use of Western PMCs, and to emphasize state-to-state security cooperation. The occlusion is that this framing can deflect scrutiny from Russian-linked private military activity and from the ways in which external security assistance may empower particular factions rather than rebuild accountable institutions.

Western: The Western perspective commonly interprets warlordism and PMCs through governance failure, criminal networks, and the need for institutional reform, transparency, and conditionality. It contributes

regulatory frameworks, sanctions, and peacebuilding tools, and often treats PMCs as pragmatic instruments when state capacity is limited. Its occlusion is the historical role of Western consumption, corporations, and financial systems in sustaining resource-driven violence, as well as the limits of external conditionality in transforming local coercive markets.
UN: The UN perspective links privatized violence to peacekeeping, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, arms embargoes, and the regulation of PMCs. It contributes norms around civilian protection, sanctions, and post-conflict security sector reform. Its occlusion is the difficulty of enforcing arms embargoes and controlling illicit markets in fragile states, and the risk that peace operations become another source of rent or dependency.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The 'greed vs grievance' debate (Collier-Hoeffler) and its limits

Bolded Causal Claim: Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue that civil war risk is driven more by economic opportunity—especially primary commodity dependence and lootable resources—than by grievance, but the thesis is bounded by measurement problems, omitted political variables, and cases where identity, exclusion, and state violence are central.

Mechanism: The Collier-Hoeffler model uses cross-national statistical analysis to show that the risk of civil war rises with primary commodity exports as a share of GDP and with the availability of lootable resources, while conventional grievance variables—such as income inequality, ethnic fractionalization, and political rights—often appear weak or insignificant. The proposed mechanism is economic feasibility: rebellion requires finance, and resource rents lower the cost of recruiting fighters, purchasing arms, and sustaining operations; where opportunity costs of participation are low and lootable wealth is available, armed groups can form and persist without broad popular support. Grievance may provide rhetoric or recruitment narratives, but in this framework it is not the principal cause of war onset. Critics have challenged the model on several grounds: endogeneity, since conflict itself can depress or distort commodity exports; the difficulty of measuring grievance, especially horizontal inequalities and political exclusion; aggregation that masks subnational dynamics; and the possibility that resource dependence proxies for state weakness rather than greed. Subsequent scholarship has emphasized that grievance and greed interact: resource rents can fund rebellion, while political exclusion, land dispossession, and identity-based marginalization determine who rebels, against whom, and with what legitimacy. The debate's enduring contribution is to force attention to rebel financing and economic incentives; its risk is to depoliticize conflicts by reducing them to criminal opportunity.

Scope Conditions: The thesis is most persuasive for large-N analyses of post-Cold War civil wars in resource-dependent economies, particularly where rebels can extract rents from alluvial minerals or agricultural commodities. It is less persuasive for secessionist wars, ideological insurgencies, externally sponsored conflicts, and cases where state repression or systematic exclusion is well documented. It also struggles to explain variation in rebel governance, civilian support, and war termination, which often depend on political claims rather than economic opportunity alone. The model's predictions are probabilistic, not deterministic: many resource-rich states avoid civil war, and many poor, non-resource states experience it.

Observable Implications: If the greed thesis holds, one should observe higher conflict risk in commodity-dependent states, longer wars where lootable resources are present, rebel taxation of extraction, and recruitment driven by material incentives. If grievance and political exclusion are central, one should observe mobilization along identity or regional lines, protests preceding violence, state repression, and demands for recognition, autonomy, or redistribution. In practice, both patterns often appear together: resource rents

finance armed groups, while grievance narratives legitimize them and shape their constituencies. Policy implications include economic diversification and transparency initiatives, but also political inclusion, land reform, and accountability for state violence. A one-sided emphasis on greed may produce security-heavy responses that ignore root causes.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):
African (primary): The African perspective often critiques the "greed" framework as depoliticizing African conflicts and reducing complex struggles over citizenship, land, and sovereignty to criminal opportunity. African scholars and political thinkers—from Mamdani's work on colonial political identities to Fanon's analysis of violence and liberation—emphasize that grievance is structured by colonial borders, indirect rule, and postcolonial exclusion, not merely by poverty or inequality. Resource sovereignty is central: control over minerals and oil is tied to self-determination, and foreign extraction can be experienced as a continuation of colonial dispossession. The African vantage point insists that rebels and communities are political actors with claims, not just economic agents, and that peace requires addressing historical injustice and representation. Its occlusion, when Westernized, is the tendency to treat African violence as a management problem rather than a political crisis.
Chinese: The Chinese perspective tends to emphasize development, poverty reduction, and state capacity as the primary remedies for conflict, treating grievance as partly a function of underdevelopment. It generally supports non-interference and economic cooperation, and may view the greed-grievance debate as less important than growth and stability. The occlusion is that this framing can understate political exclusion, identity-based marginalization, and the distributional conflicts generated by rapid resource extraction, while presenting economic growth as a substitute for political reform.
Russian: The Russian perspective often frames the greed-grievance debate as a Western academic and policy construct that blames African actors while obscuring Western responsibility for resource exploitation, sanctions, and intervention. It emphasizes sovereignty, state authority, and resistance to external conditionality. The occlusion is that this framing can minimize internal governance failures, elite predation, and the ways in which resource rents are captured by domestic actors as well as foreign ones.
Western: The Western perspective has been shaped by Collier and Hoeffler's quantitative research and by governance-focused policy agendas. It emphasizes economic incentives, institutional quality, transparency, and conditionality, and often treats grievance as difficult to measure or secondary to feasibility. Its occlusion is the historical role of Western consumption, corporations, and financial systems in creating resource-dependent economies, as well as the limits of external conditionality in addressing political exclusion and identity-based claims.
UN: The UN perspective integrates the debate into peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing root causes, inclusive governance, and resource management. It contributes norms around transparency, revenue sharing, and post-conflict recovery. Its occlusion is the difficulty of operationalizing grievance in programming and the risk that technocratic peacebuilding frameworks underweight political contestation and historical injustice.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective on the political economy of African conflict begins from a historical-structural premise that is not reducible to any of the other four perspectives: resource wealth is not an exogenous

windfall that distorts otherwise normal states, but a continuation of an extractive political economy whose institutional forms were forged under colonial rule and reproduced through neo-colonial bargains. On this view, the resource curse, neo-extractivism, rentierism, the privatization of violence, and the greed-versus-grievance debate are not separate puzzles to be solved by better governance or better markets; they are surface expressions of a deeper structure in which African sovereignty has been systematically hollowed out by the global demand for minerals, hydrocarbons, and strategic commodities. The African vantage point therefore treats conflict not as a failure of development but as a mode of accumulation and political ordering within a world economy that has long rewarded extraction over production.

This perspective has a clear theoretical lineage. Walter Rodney's argument that Europe underdeveloped Africa by extracting surplus and constraining autonomous industrialization provides the foundational claim that resource wealth and poverty are not opposites but co-produced. Kwame Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism adds the crucial point that formal political independence did not end external control; it changed its form, allowing foreign capital, multinational corporations, and great-power interests to operate through local intermediaries. Amílcar Cabral's insistence that national liberation must include control over the productive base, and Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial violence, comprador elites, and the psychological and institutional deformations of settler and extractive rule, extend the argument from economics to political subjectivity and state formation. Mahmood Mamdani's work on the bifurcated colonial state, with its distinction between citizens and subjects, explains why postcolonial states often inherit coercive capacity without developmental legitimacy, making resource rents especially dangerous: they finance the coercive side of the state while bypassing the fiscal contract that might otherwise bind rulers to citizens. Jean-François Bayart's analysis of the politics of the belly and extraversion shows how African political elites have historically converted external dependence into domestic power, while Achille Mbembe's work on the postcolony illuminates the theatrical, violent, and commandist character of authority in states where sovereignty is performed rather than substantively exercised. Siba Grovogui's critique of unequal sovereignty in international law adds the juridical dimension: African states have often been recognized as sovereign in form while denied the substantive capacity to control resources, borders, and security arrangements. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's feminist critique of colonial categories and Sylvia Tamale's decolonial feminist scholarship remind the analysis that extraction is gendered, that women's labor and land rights are frequently erased in both resource bargains and conflict narratives, and that "community" is not a homogeneous unit. African security scholars such as Aning and Danso have similarly emphasized that security governance in Africa cannot be separated from the political economy of extraction and from the external actors who profit from instability.

Applied to the five key ideas, this perspective reworks each one. The resource curse is not denied; rentierism, Dutch disease, weakened institutions, and conflict financing are all recognized as real mechanisms. But they are not treated as technical failures of resource management. They are understood as the predictable outcome of an economy organized around export of primary commodities to external markets, with limited downstream processing, weak labor absorption, and state budgets dependent on rents rather than taxation. Rentier state dynamics are therefore not merely about oil or minerals; they are about the social contract. Where rulers derive revenue from external rents rather than from citizens, accountability is weakened, and the state becomes an arena for elite competition over distributive shares. Bayart's extraversion is central here: the state's orientation toward external patrons and commodity markets can matter more than its orientation toward domestic society. Neo-extractivism is read as a new scramble, not because all foreign investment is illegitimate, but because the terms of the bargain often reproduce dependency: raw materials leave, value is added elsewhere, infrastructure is built to serve export corridors, and debt or offtake agreements constrain future policy space. The African perspective does not reject partnership; it rejects partnership on terms that

foreclose sovereignty over processing, pricing, environmental standards, and community consent.

The privatization of violence is also reinterpreted. William Reno's analysis of warlord politics and shadow states is not treated as a description of African pathology but as an account of how political order adapts to rentier and extractive environments. Where the formal state lacks legitimacy or capacity, armed actors become entrepreneurs in violence, taxing trade, controlling mines, and negotiating with external buyers. This is not simply "greed"; it is a rational response to a political economy in which violence is one of the few available routes to accumulation and protection. The African perspective therefore sees warlordism, private military companies, and militia economies as symptoms of a broader crisis of sovereignty, not as isolated criminal phenomena. It also notes that external actors—buyers, financiers, arms suppliers, and corporate intermediaries—often benefit from the fragmentation of authority, even when they formally condemn it.

The greed-versus-grievance debate is where the African perspective is most sharply critical of Western frameworks. Collier and Hoeffler's emphasis on feasibility and economic opportunity is not dismissed; armed groups do need finance, and resource rents can lower the cost of rebellion. But the African perspective insists that grievance is not a residual variable or a difficult-to-measure sentiment. It is structured by dispossession, environmental degradation, regional exclusion, ethnicized citizenship, and the historical experience of extraction. Grievance and greed are not alternatives; they are fused. A rebel movement may be financed by diamonds and still articulate a genuine political claim; a state may invoke sovereignty while functioning as a rentier machine. The African perspective therefore rejects the moral sorting of actors into "greedy rebels" and "legitimate states," because both may be embedded in the same extractive order. It also challenges the tendency to treat African conflicts as local or tribal, arguing that global commodity chains, financial centers, and consumer markets are constitutive of the violence.

What the African perspective contributes that the other four cannot is a refusal to separate the local from the global, the economic from the political, and the present from the colonial past. It centers resource sovereignty as a normative and analytical category: not merely national ownership of minerals, but community rights, free prior and informed consent, local value addition, regional industrialization, and reparative claims for historical extraction. It also foregrounds the agency of African societies, including social movements, women's organizations, artisanal miners, and regional institutions, rather than treating Africa only as a site of intervention. This is the perspective's greatest strength: it explains why reforms that look rational from outside—transparency, conditionality, sanctions—often fail to transform the underlying structure, because they leave the terms of global extraction intact.

Its occlusions, however, must be taken seriously. The structural critique can become totalizing, understating variation among African states, regions, and communities. It can obscure the genuine agency and responsibility of African elites, armed actors, and local power brokers, sometimes attributing too much explanatory weight to external forces. It can also romanticize precolonial or community-based resource governance, ignoring internal hierarchies of gender, age, ethnicity, and class. The emphasis on sovereignty can, in some formulations, be used to shield authoritarian governments from accountability, especially when "anti-imperialism" becomes a rhetorical cover for elite predation. Finally, the perspective's normative commitment to resource sovereignty does not by itself resolve the practical problems of revenue management, institutional capacity, and post-conflict security. A rigorous African perspective must therefore be self-critical: it must hold external powers accountable without absolving internal actors, and it must treat sovereignty as a project to be built rather than a slogan to be invoked.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on the political economy of African conflict is organized around a developmental and sovereignty-centered narrative that challenges Western conditionality while presenting China's engagement as mutually beneficial. It begins from the premise that African underdevelopment is not primarily a governance failure but a problem of capital scarcity, infrastructure deficit, and unequal integration into the global economy. From this standpoint, the resource curse is real but not inevitable: resource wealth can become developmental if it is linked to infrastructure, industrialization, and state capacity. China's own experience of using resource-backed development, state-led investment, and gradual institutional reform is often invoked, implicitly or explicitly, as a model of pragmatic transformation rather than liberal conditionality.

On neo-extractivism, the Chinese narrative emphasizes partnership rather than scramble. Resource-backed loans, infrastructure-for-resources arrangements, and Forum on China-Africa Cooperation frameworks are presented as instruments that address Africa's binding constraints: roads, ports, power, and connectivity. The terms of the bargain are defended as sovereign choices made by African governments, not impositions by external powers. Non-interference is a core norm: China does not predicate economic engagement on political reform, human rights benchmarks, or governance conditionality, and it frames this as respect for African sovereignty. In the context of conflict, this means that China is more likely to support incumbent governments, emphasize stability, and avoid taking sides in internal disputes unless its own nationals or investments are directly threatened. The Chinese perspective therefore contributes a powerful critique of Western hypocrisy: it points to the long history of Western extraction, intervention, and conditional aid, and argues that African states should have the right to choose partners without external veto.

Applied to rentier state dynamics, the Chinese perspective tends to emphasize state capacity and developmental sequencing. It is less likely to frame oil or minerals as inherently corrosive and more likely to argue that weak institutions can be strengthened through growth, infrastructure, and administrative learning. The privatization of violence is treated as a security and development problem: armed groups threaten investment and stability, and the response should combine state capacity-building, economic opportunity, and, where necessary, support for government forces. The greed-versus-grievance debate is often subordinated to a development-first logic: grievances are acknowledged, but they are seen as best addressed through growth, employment, and infrastructure rather than through political restructuring or historical redress. This perspective thus contributes an alternative to the Western governance paradigm, one that privileges material transformation and sovereign equality over normative conditionality.

Its occlusions, however, are substantial. The "win-win" narrative can obscure asymmetries in bargaining power, opacity in contracts, and the concentration of benefits among political and corporate elites. It often underweights local community grievances, environmental degradation, labor conditions, and the gendered impacts of extractive projects. The emphasis on non-interference can become a shield against accountability, particularly when Chinese companies or financiers are implicated in harmful practices. The debt implications of resource-backed financing are contested, but the Chinese perspective has sometimes been slow to acknowledge the fiscal risks and sovereignty constraints that such arrangements can create. It also tends to treat African states as unitary actors, underplaying internal contestation, regional inequality, and the role of non-state actors. Finally, while it criticizes Western intervention, it can understate the ways in which Chinese security, commercial, and diplomatic interests are themselves becoming entangled in African conflicts. A rigorous reconstruction of this perspective must therefore take seriously its developmental contributions while recognizing that its normative language of partnership can mask uneven power and limited transparency.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on the political economy of African conflict is shaped by a geopolitical narrative of multipolarity, sovereignty, and historical Western responsibility. It treats many African conflicts as legacies of colonial partition, Cold War intervention, and post-Cold War Western dominance, rather than as primarily internal failures. From this standpoint, the resource curse is not a neutral economic concept but a discourse that blames African states for structures created by external powers. The emphasis falls on the right of African governments to manage their resources without Western interference, sanctions, or normative conditionality. Sovereignty is the central value, and any external attempt to regulate resource extraction, finance, or security is read as a continuation of imperial practice under new legal and institutional forms.

On neo-extractivism, the Russian perspective is ambivalent but strategically critical. It often portrays Western corporations and financial institutions as the primary beneficiaries of unequal extraction, while presenting Russia as an alternative partner that does not impose political conditions. The terms of the bargain are framed as a matter of sovereign choice: African states may diversify partnerships, and Russia's role is to provide security, energy, or diplomatic support without lecturing on governance. In practice, this perspective has been associated with support for incumbent governments, opposition to Western sanctions, and criticism of international criminal justice mechanisms when they target African leaders. It contributes a geopolitical counterweight to Western normative hegemony and insists that African agency includes the right to reject Western frameworks.

Applied to rentier state dynamics, the Russian perspective tends to externalize causation. Oil and mineral dependence are acknowledged, but they are linked to global market structures and Western consumption rather than to domestic institutional failure alone. The privatization of violence is often interpreted through the lens of state sovereignty: non-state armed actors are threats to legitimate authority, and external support for governments is justified as stabilization. The greed-versus-grievance debate is treated with suspicion; Western frameworks that emphasize rebel greed are seen as delegitimizing political opposition, while grievance-based claims may be acknowledged only when they align with anti-Western or pro-sovereignty narratives. This perspective therefore contributes a sharp critique of selective Western moralism and a defense of African self-determination, but it often does so by flattening internal political complexity.

Its occlusions are significant. The sovereignty-centered narrative can obscure the role of Russian actors themselves in extractive and security arrangements, including private military companies and opaque resource deals. It may understate the accountability deficits of partner governments and the ways in which external support can entrench authoritarianism. The critique of Western responsibility, while historically grounded, can become a blanket exoneration of non-Western external actors, including Russia, China, and regional powers. It also tends to treat African civil society, opposition movements, and marginalized communities as secondary to state-to-state relations. A rigorous reconstruction must therefore acknowledge the Russian perspective's valid critique of Western double standards while recognizing that its own emphasis on sovereignty can be used to shield predatory arrangements from scrutiny. The perspective is most useful when it exposes the geopolitical selectivity of international norms, but least useful when it substitutes one external patronage for another.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on the political economy of African conflict is most closely associated with the institutionalist and economic frameworks that emerged in the 1990s and 2000s, especially the greed-versus-grievance debate. Its central claim is that resource wealth increases the risk of civil conflict primarily through

economic incentives rather than through structural injustice alone. Collier and Hoeffler's work argues that rebellion is feasible where resources provide finance, that grievance is difficult to measure and often secondary, and that economic variables such as commodity dependence, low income, and slow growth are stronger predictors of conflict than measures of political grievance. This framework has been enormously influential in shaping policy, and it is not without empirical support: resource rents can lower the cost of rebellion, fund armed groups, and create incentives for state capture.

From this perspective, the resource curse is a problem of institutions and incentives. Rentierism weakens the fiscal contract, Dutch disease distorts the economy, and weak institutions fail to convert wealth into public goods. The solution is therefore institutional reform: transparency, accountability, diversification, and good governance. Neo-extractivism is evaluated through the lens of market efficiency and regulatory quality; foreign investment is welcomed if it is governed by clear rules, competitive bidding, and anti-corruption frameworks. Rentier state dynamics are addressed through fiscal reform, sovereign wealth funds, and revenue management. The privatization of violence is treated as a security and governance failure: warlords and private military companies thrive where the state cannot enforce contracts or protect property, and the response is state-building, security sector reform, and, in some cases, international intervention or sanctions. The greed-versus-grievance debate is resolved, in this perspective, in favor of greed as the more tractable and measurable variable, with grievance treated as a complicating factor that is difficult to operationalize.

The Western perspective has contributed concrete policy instruments. The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme for diamonds, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, conflict-minerals due diligence, targeted sanctions, and Panel of Experts investigations all reflect its emphasis on transparency, traceability, and accountability. These instruments have sometimes reduced the flow of conflict resources and increased the cost of predation. The perspective also contributes a strong focus on measurement, comparison, and policy evaluation, which can discipline more impressionistic accounts.

Its occlusions, however, are well documented. By foregrounding greed and feasibility, it can understate the historical and structural conditions that make resource extraction conflict-prone in the first place. It often treats African states as containers of bad institutions rather than as products of colonial and neo-colonial political economies. It can ignore the role of Western consumption, corporations, and financial systems in creating and sustaining resource-dependent economies. Conditionality and transparency initiatives may improve information without altering power, especially when local communities lack the capacity to use disclosed data. The framework can also be culturally and racially inflected, portraying African conflicts as driven by primitive accumulation or tribal greed while obscuring the global networks that finance and profit from them. Finally, the emphasis on governance can slide into a form of external tutelage that treats African sovereignty as contingent on Western approval. A rigorous Western perspective must therefore retain its institutional insights while acknowledging that institutions are embedded in history, that transparency is not the same as justice, and that external conditionality has limits.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on the political economy of African conflict is institutional, normative, and multilateral. It does not offer a single theory of resource conflict; rather, it integrates the issue into peacebuilding, conflict prevention, sanctions, and sustainable development. Its starting point is that resource exploitation can fuel conflict, undermine peace processes, and weaken state capacity, but that resources can also finance recovery if governed transparently and inclusively. This perspective is shaped by the UN's dual role as a normative body and an operational actor, and by its experience in Angola, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of

the Congo, and other cases where Panel of Experts reports documented the links between natural resources, armed groups, and external networks.

On the resource curse, the UN perspective emphasizes governance, transparency, and the management of rents for public benefit. It supports initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and promotes revenue sharing, benefit-sharing agreements, and post-conflict economic recovery. Rentier state dynamics are addressed through state-building, public financial management, and inclusive institutions. Neo-extractivism is treated less as a geopolitical scramble and more as a question of whether investment contributes to sustainable development, local value addition, and the Sustainable Development Goals. The UN perspective is therefore more comfortable with partnership and investment than with blanket anti-extractivism, but it insists that such engagement must be governed by norms of accountability and human rights.

The privatization of violence is a central concern. UN Panel of Experts reports have documented how armed groups, militias, and external actors profit from minerals, timber, and other commodities, and how these profits sustain conflict even after formal peace agreements. Sanctions regimes, arms embargoes, and due-diligence guidelines are the main instruments, aimed at raising the cost of conflict financing and disrupting illicit networks. The greed-versus-grievance debate is integrated into peacebuilding practice: the UN acknowledges both economic incentives and political grievances, and its frameworks emphasize root causes, inclusive governance, and resource management as part of conflict prevention. It contributes a multilateral vocabulary of transparency, accountability, and post-conflict recovery that can bridge otherwise opposed perspectives.

Its occlusions, however, are also significant. The UN perspective can become technocratic, treating political conflict as a problem of resource management and institutional design. It often struggles to operationalize grievance, historical injustice, and identity-based claims in programming. Sanctions and due diligence can have unintended consequences, including harm to artisanal miners and local communities, and enforcement is often uneven. The emphasis on state-building can privilege incumbent governments and underplay non-state actors, civil society, and marginalized groups. The UN perspective also depends on member-state consensus, which can dilute accountability, especially when powerful states or their allies are implicated. Finally, while it documents external networks, it is constrained by the political limits of the Security Council and by the difficulty of holding multinational corporations and financial centers accountable. A rigorous UN perspective must therefore be understood as a normative and operational framework whose effectiveness depends on political will, enforcement capacity, and the willingness to confront both state and non-state predation.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reframes resource conflict as a continuation of extractive political economy; centers colonial state legacies, resource sovereignty, and the grievances of marginalized groups; shows how certification and conditionality can reproduce external control.	Can under-specify micro-level rebel incentives, individual coercion, and variation in local agency; risks romanticizing community resistance if not empirically grounded.	Justice through structural transformation, redistribution, and sovereign control over resources.	Le Billon (2001) on Sierra Leone diamond rents; Mamdani (1996) on the colonial state; Rodney (1972) on underdevelopment.	Western/UN: without tracing commodity chains and rebel financing, structural critique alone cannot explain timing, escalation, or cross-border variation in violence.
Chinese	Emphasizes state capacity, infrastructure, and development deficits; treats certification as trade governance; supports non-interference and sovereign consent.	Downplays political exclusion, human-rights abuses, and accountability of partner states; "win-win" rhetoric can obscure asymmetrical bargaining power.	Sovereignty plus developmental partnership.	Documented resource-for-infrastructure agreements; Chinese support for African Union and UN peacekeeping frameworks.	African: partnership can reproduce extractivism if contract terms, debt, and local labor conditions remain unequal.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Stresses Western colonial responsibility and double standards; defends sovereign resource choices; critiques sanctions as geopolitical instruments.	May deflect from arms flows, mercenary activity, and authoritarian partners; underplays local predation and rebel agency.	Multipolarity and non-interference.	Russian diplomatic critiques of Western sanctions regimes; support for incumbent state authority in multilateral forums.	UN: sovereign-choice rhetoric can shield perpetrators and weaken accountability for cross-border predation.
Western	Identifies rebel financing and "greed" mechanisms; builds governance conditionality, transparency initiatives, and certification regimes such as the Kimberley Process.	Reduces conflict to economic incentives; underplays grievance, colonial legacies, global market complicity, and social reproduction of violence.	Liberal peace through market regulation, transparency, and good governance.	Collier and Hoeffler (2004); Le Billon (2001).	African: governance conditionality can reproduce external control without delivering resource sovereignty or redistribution.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Documents cross-border networks through Panels of Experts; creates sanctions, embargoes, and certification frameworks; links security to resource governance.	Depends on member-state consensus; can privilege incumbent governments; enforcement is uneven, especially against multinational traders and financial centers.	Collective security and multilateral regulation.	UN Panel of Experts reports on Angola, the DRC, and Sierra Leone.	Russian/Chinese: sanctions and panels can be politicized, infringe sovereignty, and reflect great-power interests rather than neutral law.

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: Sierra Leone's "blood diamonds" conflict, 1991–2002

Sierra Leone's civil war is the canonical case of resource-financed rebellion in post-Cold War Africa. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh and supported by Charles Taylor's Liberia, seized alluvial diamond fields and converted mineral rents into arms, logistics, and rebel survival. The war killed tens of thousands, displaced large populations, and devastated the state's already fragile institutions. The international response included UN sanctions, arms embargoes, and the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme, which sought to separate "conflict diamonds" from legitimate trade. The case is useful because it forces together four levels of analysis and all five perspectives: it is simultaneously a story of marginalized youth, a collapsed postcolonial state, a regional war economy, and a global commodity chain.

Levels of analysis

At the **individual** level, the war cannot be explained solely by either greed or grievance. Many combatants were marginalized young men and women with limited access to education, employment, or political voice; recruitment combined coercion, abduction, survival, and the promise of material gain. Commanders and diamond traders profited from rents, while miners and civilians bore the costs. Individual incentives mattered, but they were structured by poverty, exclusion, and the availability of lootable wealth. The case therefore supports a conjunctural reading: grievance created a recruitable population, while diamond rents made sustained violence affordable.

At the **state** level, Sierra Leone's postcolonial state lacked the capacity to monopolize force, regulate alluvial mining, or convert mineral wealth into public goods. Patrimonial politics, military coups, and the fragmentation of authority weakened the fiscal and coercive foundations of governance. Once the RUF controlled diamond-producing areas, the state lost both revenue and territorial control. The war was not simply an attack on the state from outside; it exposed the hollowness of a state that had long failed to build a social

contract around resource wealth.

At the **systemic** level, Sierra Leone's diamonds were embedded in a global market that valued small, high-quality stones and could absorb illicit supply. The end of the Cold War reduced superpower patronage for African states, but it did not end external involvement; it shifted it toward markets, private actors, and regional networks. The systemic level also includes the normative shift toward certification, sanctions, and "good governance" as tools of international order. In this sense, the war was shaped by both the demand side of the global diamond economy and the regulatory ambitions of the post-Cold War international system.

At the **transnational** level, the conflict was irreducibly regional and global. Diamonds moved from Sierra Leone into Liberia and Guinea; arms moved in the opposite direction through Charles Taylor's network. International NGOs, journalists, UN panels, and diamond traders all became part of the conflict's political economy. The Kimberley Process later attempted to regulate this transnational chain through certification, export controls, and multilateral monitoring. The case thus shows that resource wars are not contained within state borders; they are produced by cross-border circuits of extraction, violence, and commerce.

Mechanism

The central mechanism is the conversion of lootable natural wealth into rebel capacity. Alluvial diamonds are relatively easy to extract with low capital and high value, making them ideal for financing insurgency. The RUF's control of diamond fields generated revenue that was exchanged for weapons and supplies, often through Liberian intermediaries. This revenue reduced the rebels' dependence on popular support and allowed the war to persist even when the RUF lacked broad legitimacy. At the same time, the state's inability to tax or regulate mining eroded its capacity to respond. The result was a self-sustaining war economy in which violence became both a means of extraction and a form of livelihood.

The Kimberley Process responded to this mechanism by targeting the trade rather than the battlefield. It introduced certification requirements, chain-of-custody documentation, and export controls intended to prevent conflict diamonds from entering legitimate markets. UN Panels of Experts, including reports on Sierra Leone, documented diamond flows and recommended sanctions. The Process had real effects: it raised the cost of laundering conflict diamonds and created a multilateral norm against their trade. But it also had limits. Smuggling, weak state capacity, artisanal mining, and porous borders allowed continued leakage. More fundamentally, certification addressed the symptom—illicit commodity flows—without fully transforming the underlying conditions of state weakness, inequality, and regional predation.

Perspective reconstruction

From an African structural vantage, Sierra Leone's war was not an aberration but a continuation of extractive political economy in which colonial and postcolonial states failed to convert mineral wealth into a social contract. The RUF's violence drew on marginalized youth and rural exclusion, so "greed" alone misreads recruitment as purely economic calculation. Diamond rents were captured by a narrow elite and rebel commanders, while communities bore the costs, revealing a crisis of resource sovereignty. The Kimberley Process, though useful, is an externally designed market fix that certifies stones without transforming local power or redistributing rents. African agency appears in regional mediation and postwar demands for accountability, but external frameworks often set the terms of "recovery."

The Chinese perspective treats the war as a failure of state capacity and development, emphasizing that weak institutions and poverty made diamond fields vulnerable to predation. It supports multilateral certification such as the Kimberley Process as a trade-governance tool while privileging non-interference and sovereign consent. Postwar reconstruction is best served by infrastructure, investment, and state-building rather than

punitive conditionality. This view can underplay political exclusion and the accountability of both rebel and government elites.

The Russian perspective attributes primary responsibility to colonial extraction and Western-supported regional strongmen, including Taylor's network. It views sanctions and certification as potentially politicized instruments that can infringe sovereign resource management. Support for incumbent state authority and multipolar diplomacy is preferred to externally imposed governance templates. This stance risks deflecting from arms flows and from accountability for local perpetrators.

The Western perspective, especially in the Collier-Hoeffler tradition, emphasizes that lootable diamonds financed rebellion and prolonged war beyond grievance-based mobilization. It treats the Kimberley Process as a market-based solution that separates legitimate from conflict diamonds through certification and chain-of-custody rules. Governance conditionality and transparency initiatives are seen as necessary to prevent resource rents from funding violence. The framework's weakness is its tendency to reduce a complex war to economic incentives and to understate colonial and social causes.

The UN perspective is anchored in Panel of Experts investigations that traced Sierra Leone diamonds through Liberia and identified sanctions evasion. It combines coercive measures, such as arms embargoes and diamond sanctions, with normative frameworks like the Kimberley Process and postwar state-building. The UN emphasizes documentation, multilateral consensus, and civilian protection, but enforcement depends on member states. Its approach can privilege incumbent governments and struggle to hold multinational traders and financial centers accountable.

Explicit adjudication

No single perspective fully explains Sierra Leone. The African structural critique best explains why the state was vulnerable and why marginalized youth became recruitable; the Western greed framework best explains how diamond rents financed and prolonged rebellion; the UN perspective provides the strongest documentary evidence of transnational flows and sanctions evasion. The Chinese and Russian perspectives add important cautions about sovereignty, development, and the politicization of regulation, but they are less persuasive as primary explanations of the war's financing. The strongest adjudication is conjunctural: colonial and postcolonial state weakness, lootable alluvial diamonds, regional war economies, and global market demand combined to produce a self-sustaining conflict. The Kimberley Process was a partial success because it raised costs for illicit trade, but it did not resolve the deeper problems of state capacity, inequality, and regional predation. What this perspective combination still misses is the lived experience of coercion, gendered violence, child soldiering, local peacebuilding, and postwar reintegration—dimensions that require individual- and community-level evidence beyond macro-level political economy.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Mechanism:** Explain how oil rents, federal revenue sharing, and the derivation principle combined to make violence a rational strategy for Niger Delta militants between 2004 and 2009. Specify at least two transmission channels from rent to armed capacity.

2. **Levels of analysis:** Analyze the insurgency at the individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels, identifying the key actor and causal variable at each level.

3. **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how the African structural critique and the Western "greed" framework would each explain the same 2006 pipeline attacks; identify one piece of evidence each would treat as decisive.

4. **Greed vs. grievance:** Evaluate whether the 2009 amnesty program supports Collier and Hoeffler's feasibility thesis or a grievance-based account; state what evidence would falsify your conclusion.

5. **Policy:** Design a bounded intervention that addresses rentier federalism without assuming that transparency alone changes power relations; include one major risk.

6. **Data:** Using resource rents as a percentage of GDP and EITI compliance, explain what these indicators can and cannot tell us about the Delta conflict.

MODEL ANSWER (continuous prose): The Niger Delta insurgency between 2004 and 2009 is best explained not by a single grievance or a single profit motive but by a rentier-federalist mechanism in which oil rents were converted into political violence through three channels. First, the federal revenue-sharing system concentrated rents at the center and returned only a small derivation share to producing communities, creating a fiscal structure in which the state's survival depended on oil rather than taxation; following Karl's analysis of petro-states, this weakened horizontal accountability and made local claims appear as threats to national fiscal stability. Second, environmental and livelihood losses from extraction were not compensated through credible regulatory or judicial channels, so grievance became organized around territorial control and sabotage capacity rather than conventional politics. Third, the same infrastructure that carried rents—pipelines, flow stations, export terminals—became a lootable and coercible asset: militants could interrupt production, extract rents through bunkering and kidnapping, and bargain with both the state and oil companies. This is the Collier-Hoeffler feasibility logic: rebellion is more likely where lootable resources and weak state capacity lower the cost of organized violence, but in the Delta the "loot" was not merely mineral wealth; it was the rent stream itself, mediated by federal institutions. At the individual level, recruitment drew on unemployed youth and ex-militants whose opportunity costs were shaped by the collapse of fishing and farming livelihoods and by the visible wealth of oil enclaves. At the state level, Nigerian federalism created a competitive arena in which governors, militants, and intermediaries bargained over derivation, security contracts, and amnesty payments; violence was therefore partly an instrument of political market participation, consistent with Reno's argument that warlordism and militia politics can be modes of state access rather than state destruction. At the systemic level, global oil prices and corporate risk calculations determined how much disruption the market would tolerate and how quickly companies would relocate or negotiate. At the transnational level, diaspora networks, international NGOs, and the reputational concerns of multinational oil firms shaped both the framing of the conflict and the pressure for settlement. The five perspectives reconstruct the same events differently. An African structural critique, drawing on Rodney and Nkrumah, treats the Delta as a continuation of extractive colonial political economy: oil wealth leaves the region while ecological costs remain, and federalism reproduces internal colonialism by subordinating minority regions to a rentier center. It foregrounds resource sovereignty and environmental justice but can understate the agency of local elites who also captured rents. The Chinese perspective emphasizes non-interference and developmental partnership: instability is a governance problem to be addressed through infrastructure and investment, not a reason to abandon commercial engagement; it contributes a focus on state capacity and growth but occludes accountability for environmental harm. The Russian perspective stresses Western responsibility, noting the historical role of Western oil majors and conditionalities; it supports sovereign choice but risks excusing

domestic elite predation. The Western perspective, especially the Collier-Hoeffler framework, foregrounds feasibility and greed, treating grievance as epiphenomenal; it generates testable predictions about resource dependence and conflict onset but can reduce political claims to criminality. The UN perspective, reflected in sanctions debates and EITI-style transparency initiatives, treats the problem as one of illicit financing and governance gaps; it contributes monitoring and normative standards but often lacks enforcement leverage over sovereign producers. Adjudication requires separating description from explanation. Descriptively, the Delta insurgency involved both grievance and rent-seeking; the evidence does not force a choice between them. Explanatorily, the stronger claim is that grievance created the recruitment pool and legitimacy, while rentier federalism and lootable infrastructure made sustained violence feasible and profitable. A useful falsifier would be evidence that increased derivation shares and environmental remediation reduced violence without changing oil prices or militant capacity; conversely, if violence persisted solely because of criminal profit after grievances were addressed, the greed framework would gain support. The 2009 amnesty reduced attacks partly through payments and reintegration, suggesting that both grievance and incentive structures mattered, but it did not resolve the underlying federal and environmental questions, leaving the conflict's political economy intact.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: Since the late 1990s, armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo have financed operations through taxation and control of artisanal mining sites producing coltan, cassiterite, wolframite, and cobalt, while state authority has remained fragmented across North and South Kivu. The 1998–2003 Congo wars drew in neighboring states and transformed mineral extraction into a transnational political economy involving militias, army units, traders, and regional networks. UN Panel of Experts reports documented links between mineral revenues and armed groups, contributing to sanctions and the 2010 US Dodd-Frank conflict minerals provision. Despite traceability initiatives, armed taxation persists, and the 2021–2023 resurgence of M23 has renewed debate over whether mineral rents cause rebellion or merely finance groups whose origins lie in security dilemmas and regional intervention. The case asks whether conflict-mineral governance can alter violence without addressing army reform, regional diplomacy, and local land and citizenship grievances.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal chain from mineral rents to armed group capacity, specifying the level of analysis and the mediating institution.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of the case in 3–5 sentences each, noting what each occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare with one earlier case (e.g., Sierra Leone 1991–2002 or Angola 1992–2002) and state whether the analogy holds at the mechanism or only at the surface.
- **Falsifiers:** List two observable implications that would weaken your explanation and one that would strengthen it.

(c) Self-check line: Did you distinguish description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what should follow), and prescription (what should be done), and avoid presenting prescription as explanation?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: In the Niger Delta insurgency of 2004–2009, which claim best captures the relationship between grievance and greed in explaining sustained violence?

A. Grievance was sufficient; oil rents merely provided incidental funding.
B. Greed was sufficient; environmental grievance was elite-manufactured rhetoric.
C. Grievance created recruitment and legitimacy, while rentier federalism and lootable infrastructure made sustained violence feasible and profitable; neither alone is sufficient.
D. The conflict is best explained by external manipulation, with local actors serving mainly as instruments.

Correct answer: C.

Distractor diagnoses:
- **A** conflates the presence of grievance with sufficiency; it ignores the federal rent structure, militant bargaining capacity, and the profitability of sabotage and bunkering.
- **B** overstates the Collier-Hoeffler feasibility thesis; it dismisses documented environmental harm, livelihood loss, and community claims that shaped recruitment and legitimacy.
- **D** reduces African agency to external manipulation; it is not supported by evidence of local elite bargaining, militant organization, and regionally specific claims over derivation and environment.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Data note: The tables below are analytical scaffolds, not a single harmonized dataset. Figures are indicative ranges and qualitative assessments drawn from World Bank resource-rent estimates, UN Panel of Experts and Group of Experts reporting, EITI disclosures, and secondary scholarship. Exact values vary by year, commodity price cycle, and measurement method; the pedagogical purpose is to compare patterns, mechanisms, and blind spots rather than to treat any cell as a precise estimate.

Table 1 — Resource rents as a share of GDP (indicative, selected African economies)

Country	Dominant rent source	Resource rents (% of GDP, indicative range)	Conflict exposure, 1990–2020	Analytical reading
Angola	Oil	Very high (often above 20%)	Prolonged civil war; militarized post-war politics	High rents with weak horizontal accountability; oil financed both state and rebels
Nigeria	Oil and gas	High (often 10–20%+)	Niger Delta insurgency; communal and electoral violence	Federal rent distribution creates regional grievance and elite capture

Country	Dominant rent source	Resource rents (% of GDP, indicative range)	Conflict exposure, 1990–2020	Analytical reading
DRC	Minerals (copper, cobalt, coltan, gold, tin, tungsten)	High but volatile	Multiple overlapping conflicts	Mineral rents fragment sovereignty; armed groups tax extraction
Sierra Leone	Diamonds	Moderate to high historically	Civil war, 1991–2002	Lootable diamonds lowered the cost of rebellion
Botswana	Diamonds	High	No major civil war	Strong institutions, developmental state, and negotiated rent management
Ghana	Gold and oil	Moderate	Localized disputes; no state collapse	Diversified economy and stronger institutional buffers

Table 2 — Conflict financing estimates and mechanisms (selected cases)

Case	Commodity	Armed-group revenue (order of magnitude)	Financing channel	Key evidentiary source
Sierra Leone, RUF, 1991–2002	Diamonds	Tens of millions of USD over the war	Mining, smuggling, cross-border networks, external patrons	UN Panel of Experts on Sierra Leone
Angola, UNITA, 1990s	Diamonds	Hundreds of millions of USD cumulatively (estimates vary)	Control of mining areas, illicit trade, regional intermediaries	UN Panel of Experts on Angola
Eastern DRC, 2000s–present	Coltan, gold, tin, tungsten	Millions of USD annually to armed groups	Mine taxation, smuggling, regional supply chains	UN Group of Experts on the DRC

Case	Commodity	Armed-group revenue (order of magnitude)	Financing channel	Key evidentiary source
Niger Delta, 2004–2009	Crude oil	Large but diffuse; not a single rebel treasury	Illegal tapping, artisanal refining, bunkering, patronage networks	National, journalistic, and academic estimates
Liberia/Sierra Leone regional diamond trade	Diamonds	Significant but poorly quantified	Cross-border smuggling, weak customs, warlord intermediaries	UN Panel of Experts reports

Table 3 — Governance and market instruments: EITI, Kimberley Process, sanctions, and due diligence

Instrument	Type	African coverage / issue area	Observed strength	Key limitation
EITI	Voluntary transparency standard	Multiple African implementing countries; extractive revenue disclosure	Publishes company-government payments; multi-stakeholder forums	Compliance does not guarantee accountability, redistribution, or peace
Kimberley Process	Certification scheme	Diamond-producing and exporting states	Reduced legal trade in conflict diamonds; created traceability norm	Narrow scope; smuggling; weak human-rights and labor criteria
UN sanctions on conflict minerals / arms	Coercive multilateral measures	DRC, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and related regional networks	Targets specific actors and networks; signals international norms	Enforcement gaps; humanitarian side effects; adaptive smuggling
OECD Due Diligence Guidance	Private-sector standard	Mineral supply chains linked to African extraction	Encourages company reporting and risk assessment	Voluntary; audit weaknesses; downstream opacity
National mining/oil codes and local-content rules	Domestic regulation	Varies by state	Can increase fiscal take and local employment	Often captured by elites; uneven enforcement

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Table 1 shows that several high-rent economies experienced major conflict, while Botswana and Ghana did not. What does this pattern imply about the causal status of resource rents: are they a sufficient cause, a necessary condition, a risk amplifier, or a context-dependent mechanism? In your answer, distinguish rent level from institutional mediation and from the lootability of the commodity.
2. **Level of analysis.** Match each table to the level of analysis it primarily illuminates—individual, state, systemic, or transnational. Then explain one causal claim that can only be made by combining at least two tables rather than by reading any one table alone.
3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Using Table 3, reconstruct how each perspective would read the same EITI compliance score for a high-rent African state: (a) African structural critique, (b) Chinese developmental partnership, (c) Russian sovereign-choice, (d) Western governance conditionality, and (e) UN technocratic norm-building. For each, state what the perspective would count as success and what it would treat as occluded.
4. **Interpretation.** Do the combined data suggest that transparency initiatives and sanctions can substitute for a political settlement? Or do they function as complements that reduce the profitability of violence without resolving grievance, federal imbalance, or elite capture? Use at least one case from Table 2.
5. **Limitation.** Identify three major gaps in these datasets: for example, informal and artisanal extraction, gendered and racialized labor regimes, environmental degradation, downstream consumer opacity, or the difference between legal revenue and politically usable rent. Explain how each gap could bias a conclusion about "resource curse" or "greed."

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Rentier Funnel and the Social Contract" (hand-drawn on A4, landscape)

- **Shapes to draw:** Draw a large inverted funnel or trapezoid. At the top, draw a wide rectangle labeled "Resource rents (oil, diamonds, minerals, aid-linked rents)." Draw downward arrows into a middle box labeled "State treasury / elite and security networks." From the middle box, draw one thick arrow to a narrow bottom box labeled "Public goods (health, education, infrastructure, local development)." Draw a side branch from the middle box to a jagged box labeled "Off-budget security spending, patronage, and conflict financing."
- **Labels to place:** "High rents, low taxation," "Weak horizontal accountability," "Rentier bargaining," "Possible leakage to armed actors," "Botswana/Ghana counterexample: institutions mediate rents."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** In the margin, write five short tags: African: "extraction without development"; Chinese: "infrastructure-for-resources partnership"; Russian: "sovereign control over strategic resources"; Western: "governance failure and conditionality"; UN: "transparency, EITI, and sanctions." Draw a small bracket linking the side branch to the UN tag and a small bracket linking the bottom box to the African tag.

Visual 2 — "Conflict Commodity Circuit" (hand-drawn map sketch)

- **Shapes to draw:** Sketch a simplified outline of West and Central Africa. Mark nodes for Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, the Niger Delta, and eastern DRC. From each node, draw arrows to coastal ports, then

from ports to global market nodes labeled "Antwerp," "Dubai," "Asian manufacturing," and "Western consumer markets." Draw dashed arrows for smuggling routes and solid arrows for legal export routes. Add barrier symbols (small "X" or fence icons) along some routes labeled "Kimberley Process," "UN sanctions," "OECD due diligence."

- **Labels to place:** "Lootable diamonds," "Oil bunkering," "Coltan/tin/tungsten," "Armed-group taxation," "Regional intermediaries," "Downstream opacity."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Place a legend in the corner: African: "structural position in global extraction"; Chinese: "supply-chain and development narrative"; Russian: "Western responsibility and selective enforcement"; Western: "greed, criminal networks, and governance gaps"; UN: "sanctions, panels of experts, and traceability." Draw a red circle around the DRC node and a blue circle around the Sierra Leone node to mark the two worked-example cases.

Visual 3 — "Greed–Grievance Matrix" (hand-drawn 2x2 grid)

- **Shapes to draw:** Draw a square divided into four quadrants. Horizontal axis: "Grievance (political exclusion, environmental harm, regional inequality)" from low to high. Vertical axis: "Economic feasibility of rebellion (lootable resources, weak state capacity, external market access)" from low to high. Plot labeled dots: Sierra Leone (high/high), eastern DRC (high/high), Niger Delta militancy (high/high), non-resource ideological civil war (high grievance/low feasibility), Botswana (low grievance/high feasibility but stable), and a hypothetical "resource-rich but inclusive state" (high feasibility/low grievance).
- **Labels to place:** "Collier-Hoeffler feasibility," "Le Billon commodity specificity," "Mamdani political community," "Reno warlord markets," "Scope condition: lootability."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Write along the top: "Western: greed/feasibility dominates." Write along the left: "African: grievance and structure are primary; greed is endogenous to extraction." Write along the bottom: "UN: sanctions target feasibility; peacebuilding must address grievance." Write along the right: "Chinese/Russian: sovereignty and development; external conditionality is suspect." Add a note: "Matrix is heuristic, not a predictive model."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue	Notes (source log embedded)
Resource curse: definition	Wealth in natural resources can be associated with slower growth, weaker institutions, and conflict; not an automatic law. Sources: Karl (1997); Collier and Hoeffler (2004).
Dutch disease	Resource booms can appreciate currency, shrink tradable sectors, and increase import dependence. Source: Karl (1997).
Rentier state	State relies on external rents rather than domestic taxation, weakening accountability and bargaining with citizens. Sources: Karl (1997); Reno (1998).

Cue	Notes (source log embedded)
Neo-extractivism	New scramble for minerals under global demand; bargain often favors external capital and local elites over communities. Sources: Le Billon (2001); African structural critique.
Privatization of violence	Warlords, PMCs, and armed groups commodify force; violence becomes a market activity. Source: Reno (1998).
Greed vs grievance	Collier-Hoeffler emphasize economic feasibility and rebel financing; critics emphasize political exclusion, identity, and structure. Source: Collier and Hoeffler (2004).
Sierra Leone blood diamonds	RUF rebellion financed by diamonds; Kimberley Process emerged as certification response. Sources: UN Panel of Experts (Sierra Leone); Le Billon (2001).
Nigeria Delta	Oil, federalism, environmental harm, and regional grievance shaped insurgency and amnesty politics. Sources: African and Western scholarship on petro-violence; national estimates.
EITI	Voluntary revenue transparency standard; useful but not sufficient for accountability. Source: EITI reporting and compliance data.
Kimberley Process	Diamond certification; reduced legal conflict-diamond trade but narrow scope. Source: Kimberley Process and UN reporting.
UN Panel of Experts	Investigates commodity networks, sanctions evasion, and armed-group financing. Sources: UN Panel of Experts reports (Angola, DRC, Sierra Leone).
African structural critique	Conflict is embedded in colonial state formation, global extraction, and unequal sovereignty; resource sovereignty is central. Sources: Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, and related African scholarship.

Summary (3–5 sentences): The political economy of African conflict cannot be reduced to either "greed" or "grievance" alone; resource rents, commodity lootability, institutional weakness, and global market demand interact to finance and prolong violence. African structural scholarship insists that these dynamics are rooted in colonial state formation and unequal global extraction, not merely in local corruption or rebel criminality. Transparency and sanctions instruments such as EITI, the Kimberley Process, and UN panels can constrain conflict financing, but they do not by themselves resolve political exclusion, federal imbalance, or elite capture. Cases such as Sierra Leone and the Niger Delta show that durable peace requires both interrupting commodity circuits and renegotiating the social contract around resource sovereignty.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Some countries are rich in oil, diamonds, or minerals, but that wealth can make politics more violent and less accountable. When a government can fund itself from resources rather than taxes, it may ignore citizens; when rebels can fund themselves from lootable commodities, war becomes easier to sustain. The problem is not the resource itself, but the way extraction, power, and global markets are organized.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am not yet sure how to separate correlation from causation: high resource rents often appear alongside conflict, but Botswana and Ghana show that institutions and diversification matter. I also need to avoid treating "greed" as an individual moral failing rather than a structural incentive created by lootable commodities and weak regulation. My explanation currently underweights gendered labor, environmental harm, and downstream consumer responsibility.

3. **Reread verification.** Reread Collier and Hoeffler (2004) for the feasibility mechanism; Reno (1998) for warlord markets and rentier politics; Le Billon (2001) for commodity specificity; Karl (1997) for rentier states and Dutch disease; and UN Panel of Experts reports on Angola, DRC, and Sierra Leone for conflict-financing evidence. Check whether each source supports the claim I am making or only a narrower version of it.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** A useful analogy is an ATM in the ground: if armed actors can withdraw value from mines or pipelines with limited state resistance, violence becomes financeable. The analogy helps explain lootability and weak enforcement, but it is limited because it hides colonial history, global demand, community grievance, elite bargaining, and the fact that some resource-rich states avoid civil war through strong institutions.

5. **Rewrite.** Resource wealth becomes conflict-prone when three conditions align: the commodity is lootable or easily taxed by armed actors; state institutions are too weak or too captured to convert rents into public goods; and global markets provide buyers with limited due diligence. Transparency and sanctions can raise the cost of violent extraction, but lasting peace requires renegotiating political inclusion, resource sovereignty, and the distribution of rents.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L29	Definition	What is the resource curse?	The resource curse refers to the tendency of resource-rich states to experience slower growth, weaker institutions, and higher conflict risk than comparable resource-poor states. It is not an automatic outcome; it operates through rentierism, Dutch disease, institutional weakening, and conflict financing.	African scholarship treats it as a structural condition produced by colonial extraction and unequal global markets, not merely domestic mismanagement.
L29	Mechanism	How does Dutch disease weaken non-resource sectors?	Resource exports raise the real exchange rate, making agriculture and manufacturing less competitive internationally. The economy then narrows around extractive rents, reducing employment diversity and fiscal resilience.	Chinese and Western analysts often read this as a policy failure; African analysts often read it as a inherited structural position in the global division of labor.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L29	Mechanism	What is rentierism in a conflict setting?	Rentierism occurs when the state or armed actors derive revenue from external rents rather than domestic taxation, weakening accountability and making violence financeable. Rents can come from oil, minerals, aid, or illicit extraction.	This is central to African structural critiques of the post-colonial state, especially where taxation and representation were historically disconnected.
L29	Application	How did Sierra Leone's conflict illustrate resource-financed rebellion?	The Revolutionary United Front used diamond extraction and trade to fund insurgency, while state collapse and regional networks enabled illicit commodity flows. The Kimberley Process later attempted to certify rough diamonds and restrict conflict financing.	The African perspective emphasizes local grievances and state failure; the Western perspective often foregrounds rebel greed and commodity certification.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L29	Source	What is Reno's (1998) core claim about warlord politics?	Reno argues that in weak states, armed actors may become embedded in transnational commerce, using violence to protect market access rather than to seize the central state. Warlordism is thus a form of political economy, not merely anarchy.	This supports African and critical readings that see violence as organized extraction, not only breakdown.
L29	Source	What do Collier and Hoeffler (2004) emphasize?	They argue that economic motives, especially primary commodity dependence and lootable resources, are strong predictors of civil war onset. Their model foregrounds feasibility and financing over purely ideological grievance.	Western policy often adopted this "greed" framing; African critics argue it underweights historical injustice, state violence, and political exclusion.
L29	Debate	What is the main critique of the greed-versus-grievance binary?	The binary is analytically useful but empirically blurred: grievances can create recruitment pools, while resource rents provide feasibility and sustain violence. Many conflicts involve both, sequenced over time.	African perspectives often reject the binary as a Western abstraction that separates justice claims from material structures.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L29	Reconstruction	How does China frame its African mineral partnerships?	China typically presents resource and infrastructure deals as "win-win" developmental partnerships based on non-interference and mutual benefit. Critics question opacity, debt exposure, and local value capture.	This narrative challenges Western conditionality but may occlude labor, environmental, and sovereignty concerns raised by African civil society.
L29	Reconstruction	How does Russia frame African resource politics?	Russia often emphasizes Western responsibility for instability and presents sovereign choice and security cooperation as alternatives to Western governance conditionality.	This can resonate with anti-imperial African narratives while potentially obscuring accountability for private military and extractive arrangements.
L29	Occlusion	What does the Western "greed" framework often occlude?	It can occlude colonial legacies, state predation, racialized extraction, and the role of international buyers and financiers in sustaining conflict economies.	African structural critiques insist that external demand and historical inequality are part of the causal chain.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L29	Adjudication	When should grievance be treated as primary rather than secondary?	Grievance is primary when violence is preceded by documented exclusion, repression, or distributive injustice and when resource rents mainly sustain rather than initiate mobilization.	This requires case-level evidence rather than cross-national correlation alone.
L29	Visual	What should a rentier-state diagram show?	It should show rents flowing from extractive sectors and external actors to state elites, with weak tax links to citizens and feedback loops into patronage and coercion.	The diagram should also show African agency: civil society, regional organizations, and reform coalitions contesting rent capture.
L29	Comparison	How do EITI and sanctions differ as responses?	EITI targets transparency and revenue disclosure, while sanctions target specific actors, commodities, or networks. EITI is preventive and institutional; sanctions are coercive and often retrospective.	African governments may support EITI as sovereignty-compatible reform, while viewing sanctions as externally imposed and unevenly enforced.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L29	Source	What do UN Panel of Experts reports contribute?	They document illicit resource flows, sanctions evasion, and networks linking armed groups, companies, and states. They are evidentiary and accusatory but depend on access, politics, and enforcement capacity.	They often validate African claims about external complicity while also risking securitized framing of African conflicts.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit

Skill or Concept	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of Mastery	Remaining Gap
Defining resource curse mechanisms		Can name rentierism, Dutch disease, institutional weakening, conflict financing	Need to specify scope conditions and counterexamples
Explaining rentier state dynamics		Can link rents to taxation, accountability, and patronage	Need to distinguish oil, minerals, and aid rents
Applying greed-grievance debate		Can summarize Collier-Hoeffler and critique	Need to adjudicate with case-level evidence
Reconstructing five perspectives		Can identify African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN stances	Need to avoid caricature and steel-man each
Using Sierra Leone and Nigeria cases		Can describe resource financing and grievance	Need to connect to levels of analysis

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives most changed your initial view of African conflict, and what evidence would be needed to sustain that revision?

2. Can you explain one mechanism from this lesson without using the words “corruption,” “greed,” or “failed state”?
3. What is one prediction this lesson generates, and what observation would falsify it?

7.3 Error Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Resource wealth automatically causes war.	Resource wealth raises risk only under conditions such as weak institutions, lootable commodities, and accessible financing networks.	Collier and Hoeffler (2004) treat commodity dependence as a risk factor, not a deterministic trigger.
African conflicts are mainly about rebel greed.	Grievance, exclusion, and state violence often shape mobilization; resources may finance and prolong violence rather than originate it.	Le Billon (2001) and Reno (1998) emphasize political economy and market embeddedness.
Rentier states are simply corrupt states.	Rentierism is a structural relation between revenue source, state capacity, and citizen accountability, not only individual malfeasance.	Karl (1997) links oil rents to state-society bargains and institutional paths.
Sanctions always stop conflict financing.	Sanctions can displace trade, create smuggling networks, and harm civilians unless paired with enforcement and alternative livelihoods.	UN Panel of Experts reports on Angola, DRC, and Sierra Leone document evasion and enforcement gaps.
Transparency initiatives alone transform resource governance.	EITI improves disclosure but does not by itself redistribute power, enforce contracts, or resolve historical grievances.	EITI membership and compliance data must be read alongside political and institutional context.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Resource curse; rentier state; neo-extractivism; privatization of violence; greed vs grievance	Rentierism; Dutch disease; institutional weakening; conflict financing; warlord market embeddedness; transparency and sanctions	Karl (1997); Reno (1998); Le Billon (2001); Collier and Hoeffler (2004); UN Panel of Experts reports	Sierra Leone blood diamonds; Nigeria Delta insurgency; Angola, DRC, Sierra Leone panels; EITI compliance data	Greed vs grievance; sovereignty vs conditionality; transparency vs enforcement; external complicity vs domestic agency	No conflict despite high rents; conflict without lootable resources; sustained reform under rentierism; sanctions with no displacement	L17 world-systems; L23 asymmetric warfare; L27 colonial state formation; L33 critical minerals; L34 Sahel; L46 hydrocarbons

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Timing	Concrete Action	Output
R1	Day 1, 20 minutes	Re-read Key Ideas 1-2 and redraw the rentier-state diagram from memory	One-page mechanism sketch
R2	Day 3, 30 minutes	Reconstruct all five perspectives on Sierra Leone without notes	Five short paragraphs
R3	Day 7, 45 minutes	Apply the greed-grievance adjudication test to Nigeria's Delta case	Memo-style argument with falsifiers
R4	Day 14, 60 minutes	Compare EITI and sanctions using data-lab tables	Table with trend, level, perspective, limitation
R5	Day 30, 90 minutes	Write a timed essay answering the hinge question and grade it against the rubric	Self-graded essay plus error-log update

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define the resource curse and name its four mechanisms.
☐ I can explain Dutch disease and rentierism with causal steps.

- ☐ I can distinguish oil rents, mineral rents, and aid rents.
- ☐ I can summarize Reno (1998) on warlord politics.
- ☐ I can summarize Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and identify its limits.
- ☐ I can adjudicate greed versus grievance using case-level evidence.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary and structural.
- ☐ I can reconstruct Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives without caricature.
- ☐ I can apply individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels of analysis.
- ☐ I can use Sierra Leone as a worked example.
- ☐ I can use Nigeria's Delta as a problem-pair case.
- ☐ I can interpret resource rents as a percentage of GDP.
- ☐ I can explain EITI membership and compliance.
- ☐ I can explain conflict-mineral sanctions and their limits.
- ☐ I can identify at least two falsifiers for a resource-conflict claim.
- ☐ I can complete the independent memo headings.
- ☐ I can answer the hinge question and diagnose distractors.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Resource curse and rentierism - Karl, T. L. (1997). *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*. - Collier, P. and Hoeffler, A. (2004). Greed and Grievance in Civil War.

Privatization of violence and conflict economies - Reno, W. (1998). *Warlord Politics and African States*. - Le Billon, P. (2001). The political ecology of war: Natural resources and armed conflicts.

UN evidence and sanctions - UN Panel of Experts reports on Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Sierra Leone.

Data and institutional sources - World Bank data on resource rents as a percentage of GDP. - Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) membership and compliance records. - Kimberley Process Certification Scheme documentation.

End of Lesson 29. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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31. Regional Security Complexes: Sahel, Horn, and Great Lakes

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	30 — Regional Security Complexes: Sahel, Horn, and Great Lakes
Module	Module 5: African Geopolitical Architecture
Prerequisites	L23 (asymmetric warfare), L29 (conflict political economy), L27 (colonial state formation)
Interleaved links	Forward to L31 (great power competition), L34 (Sahel synthesis), L44 (proxy warfare)

Field	Value
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, Data Lab, Visual Anchor, Cornell Notes, Flashcards, Feynman Compression, Spaced Repetition
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is why large parts of Africa are governed not by the tidy Westphalian map that appears in atlases but by overlapping, transnational fields of violence, alliance, and extraction that repeatedly defeat both state-centric and great-power-centric explanation. Since 2012 the Sahel has seen jihadist insurgencies expand from northern Mali across Burkina Faso and into Niger, while state forces, Russian paramilitaries, and Western missions have competed for control of territory and legitimacy. The Horn of Africa has moved from the Ethiopia-Eritrea rapprochement of 2018 through the Tigray war, the Sudanese civil war, and the militarization of the Red Sea, with Gulf states now operating as security patrons. The Great Lakes region has seen the resurgence of the M23 rebellion in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, with documented Rwandan and Ugandan involvement, layered over a mineral economy that funds armed groups and shapes state behavior. These are not three separate civil wars. They are three regional security complexes: clusters of states and non-state actors whose security is so interdependent that no single unit can be understood in isolation. The lesson exists to teach you how to see, explain, and evaluate such complexes rather than to narrate their headlines.

This lesson sits at a deliberate junction in the curriculum. You have already studied asymmetric warfare in L23, which gave you the tactical and organizational logic of insurgencies such as JNIM and ISSP but not the regional architecture that lets them move, recruit, and survive across borders. You have studied conflict political economy in L29, which explained how war becomes self-financing through minerals, smuggling, and taxation, but not how those economies are embedded in cross-border networks of patrons and proxies. You have studied colonial state formation in L27, which traced the arbitrary borders, weak institutions, and extractive legacies that make African states vulnerable, but not how those weaknesses interact across frontiers to produce regional, rather than merely national, disorder. This lesson synthesizes those three streams. It asks you to hold tactical, economic, and historical explanations in the same frame and to decide which mechanism dominates in which case and at which level of analysis.

What is at stake is both intellectual and practical. Intellectually, the lesson tests whether Regional Security Complex Theory, developed by Buzan and Wæver (2003) in a largely Euro-Atlantic and Cold War register, can travel to Africa without being distorted by the very state-centrism it was meant to overcome. The theory's core claim is that security interdependence is regionally clustered because threats travel more easily over short distances and among neighbors with shared histories. Africa is the hardest case for this claim because colonial borders cut across ethnic and economic zones, postcolonial states are often weak, and external powers penetrate deeply. Practically, the stakes are visible in policy failures: the withdrawal of MINUSMA from Mali in 2023, the collapse of the G5 Sahel joint force, the uncertain transition from AMISOM to ATMIS in Somalia, and the repeated inability of the African Union Peace and Security Council to enforce its own decisions. If you cannot distinguish a regional complex from a collection of national crises, you will

misdiagnose the lever of intervention and overestimate what external force can achieve.

The method you will learn is deliberately multi-layered. You will work with four levels of analysis carried forward from Lesson 1: individual, state, systemic, and transnational. You will identify mechanisms rather than outcomes, because describing that JNIM controls territory is not the same as explaining how it governs, taxes, and recruits. You will reconstruct five perspectives on every case—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—steel-manning each from within, because the same event reads differently from Bamako, Beijing, Moscow, Paris, and New York, and because policy failure often follows from perspective blindness rather than from lack of information. You will also learn to specify falsifiers: what evidence would make you abandon a favored explanation. This is the difference between analysis and advocacy, and it is the skill that separates a graduate-level security assessment from a briefing note.

By the end of the lesson you will be able to do four things that you could not do before. First, you will be able to map a regional security complex by identifying its units, its patterns of amity and enmity, its penetration by external powers, and its overlay of transnational threats such as jihadist networks or mineral supply chains. Second, you will be able to adjudicate between competing explanations of the same violence—state fragility versus regional interdependence versus great-power competition—on the basis of evidence rather than ideological preference. Third, you will be able to evaluate the operational efficacy of African regional security institutions such as ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, and the APSA framework, specifying when they have worked, when they have failed, and why. Fourth, you will be able to produce an independent memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and that tests its own claims against explicit falsifiers. These capacities are the building blocks for the later lessons on great power competition, Sahel synthesis, and proxy warfare, which assume that you can already see the regional substrate on which those processes operate.

The lesson is organized to move from theory to case to institution to judgment. Key Idea 1 introduces Regional Security Complex Theory and its African application, including the modifications that African scholarship demands. Key Idea 2 dissects the Sahel insurgency ecosystem, treating JNIM, ISSP, state forces, and Russian paramilitaries as parts of one field rather than as separate actors. Key Idea 3 examines Horn of Africa fragmentation, including the roles of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and Gulf states. Key Idea 4 turns to the Great Lakes and the politics of minerals in the DRC, Rwanda, and Uganda. Key Idea 5 evaluates the operational efficacy of APSA, ECOWAS, IGAD, and SADC. Section 2.7 then reconstructs all five perspectives in depth on the lesson's central topic as a whole, with the African perspective primary and longest. The worked example traces the Sahel from the 2012 Tuareg rebellion to contemporary JNIM and ISSP control of territory. The problem pair asks you to treat the Tigray war, the Sudan civil war, and the Red Sea crisis as a single complex. The data lab grounds all of this in ACLED event data, fatality trends, AU PSC interventions, and external military presence. You should approach the lesson not as a survey of African conflicts but as a training in structural seeing: the ability to look at a map of violence and ask not only who is fighting but what kind of interdependent system makes the fighting possible, durable, and resistant to the solutions that outsiders prefer.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up Answer each question from memory before checking your notes. The purpose is to activate the conceptual vocabulary you will need in this lesson.

1. From L23 (asymmetric warfare): Define asymmetric warfare and identify one African case in which a

weaker non-state actor has used mobility, local knowledge, and population support to offset a stronger state's conventional advantage.
2. From L29 (conflict political economy): Explain how the "greed versus grievance" debate reframes civil war as an economic enterprise, and give one mechanism by which war becomes self-financing in an African setting.
3. From L27 (colonial state formation): What institutional legacy of colonial rule most weakens post-colonial state capacity, and how does that legacy shape the state's ability to monopolize legitimate force?
4. From Lesson 1 (levels of analysis): Name the four levels of analysis used throughout this curriculum and give one example of a claim that belongs at the transnational level rather than the state level.
5. From L23 (counterinsurgency): What is the logic of population-centric counterinsurgency, and what is the strongest critique of applying that logic in contexts where the state itself is perceived as predatory?
6. From L29 (resource wars): Distinguish "point resources" from "diffuse resources" in the political economy of conflict, and explain why the distinction matters for the duration and termination of war.

1.2 Orientation questions These questions frame the puzzles you should carry into the lesson. You are not expected to answer them fully before reading; they are prompts for the analysis to come.

1. Regional Security Complex Theory was developed primarily with reference to Cold War Europe and post-Cold War regions such as the Middle East. What modifications are required for it to describe African realities in which state capacity is uneven, borders are porous, and external powers are deeply embedded?
2. Is the Sahel best understood as a single regional security complex stretching from Mauritania to Sudan, or as several overlapping complexes with distinct centers of gravity? What evidence would decide between these readings?
3. How has the entry of Gulf states—Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey—into Horn of Africa security politics changed the structure of that complex, and does their involvement make it more or less amenable to African institutional management?
4. What would constitute convincing evidence that an African regional security institution such as ECOWAS or IGAD is operationally effective, as opposed to merely active? Conversely, what evidence would falsify the claim that such institutions are systematically ineffective?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach Provisional definitions to be refined as you read. These are working meanings, not final authorities.

- **Regional Security Complex (RSC):** A set of states and other actors whose security concerns are so interlinked that they cannot be analyzed or resolved in isolation; threats and alliances cluster regionally rather than globally.
- **Security interdependence:** The condition in which the security of one unit is affected by the actions, capabilities, or vulnerabilities of others in the same region, whether through direct threat, alliance obligation, or shared exposure to transnational risks.
- **Insurgency ecosystem:** The network of armed groups, financiers, smugglers, local elites, and state defectors that sustains an insurgency beyond its initial grievance, including taxation, recruitment, and governance functions.
- **JNIM (Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin):** An al-Qaeda-affiliated coalition formed in 2017 in

the Sahel, uniting several jihadist groups and operating across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger with a strategy of embedding in local conflicts.

- **ISSP (Islamic State in the Greater Sahara / Sahel Province):** An Islamic State-affiliated group operating in the Sahel, competing and sometimes cooperating with JNIM, and distinguished by more spectacular violence and transnational framing.
- **APSA (African Peace and Security Architecture):** The AU's framework for conflict prevention, management, and resolution, comprising the Peace and Security Council, the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force, and related mechanisms.
- **ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States):** A regional economic and political community that has developed security roles, including mediation, sanctions, and military intervention, most visibly in West Africa.
- **IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development):** A regional body in the Horn of Africa with mandates covering drought, development, and peace and security, including mediation in Sudan and Somalia.
- **SADC (Southern African Development Community):** A regional organization whose security organ has intervened in conflicts such as those in the DRC and Lesotho, with mixed results.
- **AU PSC (African Union Peace and Security Council):** The AU's standing decision-making body on peace and security, with authority to authorize interventions, impose sanctions, and deploy missions, though its enforcement capacity is limited.
- **Proxy warfare:** Conflict in which external actors support local armed groups or states to advance their interests while avoiding direct engagement, often obscuring lines of accountability.
- **State fragility:** A condition in which a state lacks the capacity or legitimacy to perform core functions such as security provision, revenue collection, and service delivery, creating space for non-state actors.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to: (1) **Define** Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) as formulated by Buzan and Wæver, identifying its constitutive variables—geographic proximity, security interdependence, patterns of amity and enmity, polarity, and great-power penetration—and explain why the theory treats regional, not global, security as the primary unit of analysis. (2) **Apply** RSCT to three African sub-regional complexes (Sahel, Horn of Africa, Great Lakes), specifying in each case the dominant securitization moves, the principal state and non-state actors, and the direction of security externalities across borders. (3) **Evaluate** the operational efficacy of African regional security institutions—APSA, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC—against the standard of whether they have reduced violence or merely managed its symptoms, using ACLED-derived fatality trends and AU PSC intervention records as evidence. (4) **Analyze** the Sahel insurgency ecosystem (JNIM, ISSP, state forces, Russian paramilitaries) as a case of complex-level securitization failure, distinguishing structural causes (colonial state formation, political economy of conflict) from proximate triggers (Tuareg rebellion, coup cycles). (5) **Adjudicate** between competing explanations of regional insecurity—state-centric, regime-security, transnational jihadist, and great-power-competition accounts—by specifying the falsifying evidence for each and identifying which perspective (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) each explanation privileges. Each objective is assessable through short-answer, case-application, or adjudication tasks; the Bloom ceiling for this lesson is evaluation-level synthesis across

levels of analysis.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Regional Security Complex Theory (Buzan and Wæver) applied to Africa

Bolded Causal Claim: Regional security complexes are not merely geographic clusters of conflict; they are *constituted* by patterns of security interdependence among proximate states, such that the security of each member becomes inseparable from the security of the others, and African complexes are distinctive because their interdependence is produced as much by state weakness and non-state violence as by interstate rivalry.

Mechanism: The theoretical lineage runs from Barry Buzan's *People, States and Fear* (1983, revised 1991), which argued that security studies had been captured by a state-centric, military, and superpower-centric agenda, through to Buzan and Ole Wæver's *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (2003), which systematized the regional level as an autonomous analytic plane between the state and the global system. The core mechanism is *securitization*—the speech-act process by which an issue is constructed as an existential threat requiring emergency measures beyond normal politics—combined with *regionalization*: because threats travel more easily across short distances and because states interact most intensely with neighbors, security concerns cluster geographically into complexes. A regional security complex (RSC) is defined by Buzan and Wæver as a set of states whose major security concerns are so interlinked that their national securities cannot reasonably be considered apart from one another. Within an RSC, the pattern of amity and enmity among members, the distribution of power (unipolar, bipolar, multipolar), and the degree of great-power penetration together determine the complex's structure. The African application is where the theory becomes most contested. Buzan and Wæver classify much of Africa as a "supercomplex"—a loose, weakly integrated aggregate of subcomplexes characterized by low state capacity, high internal conflict, and extensive external penetration—rather than as a set of mature, self-contained regional complexes. The mechanism producing African complexes is therefore not primarily interstate security dilemmas among capable states, as in Cold War Europe, but rather the *spillover of internal disorder*: refugee flows, arms trafficking, insurgent mobility, and the contagion of coups and rebellions across porous borders. In the Sahel, a Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali (2012) cascaded into state collapse, jihadist territorial control, and the displacement of populations into Burkina Faso and Niger; in the Horn, the Tigray war (2020–2022) drew in Eritrea and reshaped Red Sea geopolitics; in the Great Lakes, the 1994 Rwandan genocide and subsequent Congo wars created a regional system of proxy militias and mineral economies that persists three decades later. The mechanism is thus *transnationalization of internal conflict*: weak states cannot contain violence, so violence becomes regional, and regional actors—states, militias, external powers—then securitize the resulting threats, deepening interdependence. This is why RSCT's African application must be read alongside the literature on state fragility and political economy of conflict (de Waal 2015; Williams 2018), not as a standalone theory of interstate relations.

Scope Conditions: RSCT applies most cleanly where (a) states possess sufficient capacity to be the primary security actors, (b) geographic proximity generates regular interaction, and (c) threats are predominantly military or political-military. In Africa, condition (a) is frequently violated: non-state actors—jihadist insurgencies (JNIM, ISSP, al-Shabaab), militias, and private military companies—often outperform states in territorial control and coercion. Where state capacity collapses, the complex is better described as a *security vacuum* or *hybrid complex* in which non-state actors are co-constitutive. Condition (b) holds but is complicated by overlapping complexes: the Sahel complex bleeds into the West African coastal complex and the North African complex; the Horn complex intersects with the Red Sea and Gulf complexes; the Great Lakes complex is entangled with Central and East African systems. Condition (c) is violated insofar

as African security threats are routinely securitized as development, humanitarian, or criminal issues, blurring the military-political boundary that RSCT assumes. The theory also struggles with *penetration*: Buzan and Wæver acknowledge that external powers penetrate African complexes, but their framework treats penetration as a modifier of an existing complex rather than as a constitutive force. In contemporary Africa, external actors—France, Russia, the UAE, Turkey, the United States—are not merely modifiers; they are active participants in shaping security outcomes, sometimes as the dominant coercive actors. Finally, RSCT's Eurocentric lineage means its categories (amity/enmity, polarity) presuppose a Weberian state system that much of Africa does not approximate; applying it uncritically risks misreading African politics as failed European politics rather than as a distinct political form.

Observable Implications: If RSCT holds for Africa, we should observe: (i) conflict diffusion along geographic contiguity—violence in one state predicts violence in neighbors within 2–5 years, controlling for domestic factors; (ii) regional institution-building as a securitization response—ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, and the AU Peace and Security Council emerging precisely where complexes are densest; (iii) external power basing and intervention clustering in the same regions (French Barkhane in the Sahel, Russian Africa Corps in Mali/CAR, Turkish and Emirati involvement in the Horn); (iv) refugee and arms corridors tracing complex boundaries; (v) the failure of "African solutions to African problems" rhetoric where penetration is high, because external actors have divergent interests. ACLED data (2010–2025) show fatality concentration in precisely these three complexes, with the Sahel overtaking other regions after 2015 and the Horn spiking during the Tigray war and Sudan civil war. The implication is testable: if regional security complexes are real, then regional (not national) variables should explain more variance in conflict onset than country-level variables alone. Williams (2018) and de Waal (2015) both suggest this is partially true but that regime-level and political-economy variables often dominate.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African scholarship treats regional security complexes not as neutral analytic categories but as historically produced structures of domination and solidarity. Grovogui (2006) argues that African regionalism is rooted in anti-colonial solidarity and the Pan-African project, not in the European balance-of-power logic that RSCT presupposes; the African perspective thus reads RSCT as a theory that *describes* interdependence but *occludes* the colonial origins of African statehood and the Pan-African aspiration to transcend it. Mamdani (1996) and Mbembe (2001) remind us that the "state" in African complexes is often a bifurcated institution—citizen and subject—so that security interdependence is experienced differently by elites and populations. From this vantage, the relevant question is not whether Africa has regional security complexes but whether African regional institutions (APSA, ECOWAS, IGAD) can convert complex-level interdependence into collective security rather than into shared vulnerability. The African perspective privileges sovereignty, regional ownership, and the norm of "African solutions to African problems," while critiquing both Western interventionism and the theory's tendency to treat Africa as an immature or failed version of Europe. It is the longest and most developed perspective in this lesson because it frames the central puzzle: why do African regional complexes persistently generate insecurity despite dense institutional architecture?

Chinese: Beijing's perspective treats RSCT as a useful descriptive map but rejects its normative implications. China's non-interference principle means it does not securitize African conflicts as existential threats to itself; instead, it frames security cooperation as technical assistance—training, equipment, peacekeeping contributions—within bilateral and FOCAC frameworks. The Chinese view sees regional complexes as arenas where economic interdependence (Belt and Road, resource extraction) creates stakes in stability without

requiring political-military integration. It occludes the political drivers of conflict and the possibility that economic engagement itself reshapes security dynamics.

Russian: Moscow's perspective instrumentalizes RSCT for great-power competition. Russian analysts and officials frame African complexes as spaces where Western (especially French and American) dominance is eroding, creating openings for Russian penetration via Africa Corps and arms sales. The anti-Western framing treats regional insecurity as partly produced by Western interventionism (Libya 2011, Sahel counterterrorism failures) and positions Russia as a sovereignty-respecting alternative. This perspective occludes Russian commercial and extractive interests and the documented abuses by Russian paramilitaries.

Western: Western perspectives (US, EU, France) treat RSCT as a planning tool for regional stabilization and counterterrorism. The emphasis is on building partner capacity, supporting regional institutions, and managing spillover. Since the Sahel and Afghanistan failures, there is significant self-critique: stabilization is now seen as over-militarized, under-political, and insufficiently attentive to governance. This perspective occludes the colonial and neo-colonial dimensions of Western presence and the ways in which Western securitization (e.g., "war on terror") may have amplified threats.

UN: The UN perspective treats regional complexes as the appropriate scale for peacekeeping and peacebuilding mandates. MINUSMA in Mali, AMISOM/ATMIS in Somalia, and MONUSCO in the DRC are all designed around complex-level logics. The UN emphasizes regionalization of mandates, partnerships with AU and regional organizations, and the protection of civilians. It occludes, however, the political constraints on mandate design (Security Council politics, host-state consent) and the gap between mandate ambition and resource provision. The UN view is that regional complexes require regional solutions, but that the international community must underwrite them—a tension central to the lesson's puzzle.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — The Sahel insurgency ecosystem: JNIM, ISSP, state forces, Russian paramilitaries, and the failure of counterterrorism

Bolded Causal Claim: In the Sahel, a counterterrorism-first security order has helped produce an insurgency ecosystem in which JNIM, ISSP, state forces, and Russian paramilitaries are not separate actors but mutually constitutive parts of a regional violence market; insurgent expansion is driven less by ideology alone than by the political economy of protection, predation, and state absence, while external military interventions have repeatedly treated symptoms without altering the social contracts that make violence profitable.

Mechanism: Regional Security Complex Theory (Buzan and Wæver 2003) is useful here because the Sahel is not a collection of national insurgencies but a transnational security complex in which Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger share threat perceptions, armed-group mobility, and intervention spillovers. JNIM operates as a coalition of jihadist groups with local grievances and transnational affiliations, while ISSP represents a rival Islamic State franchise; their competition can intensify violence even where one group is weakened. The mechanism is not simply "terrorists exploit weak states." Rather, armed groups embed in local political economies: they tax trade, regulate artisanal mining, adjudicate disputes, and offer protection in areas where the state is absent, predatory, or abusive. State forces, often undertrained and under-resourced, may respond through collective punishment, ethnic profiling, or militarized sweeps that alienate communities and create recruitment pools. Coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) then reconfigure the security architecture, replacing civilian oversight with military regimes that prioritize regime survival. External actors enter this ecosystem through different logics: France and its partners framed the Sahel as

a counterterrorism theater; Russia, through Wagner and later Africa Corps, frames itself as an anti-Western security provider; regional organizations attempt coordination but face sovereignty and capacity constraints. The result is a feedback loop: counterterrorism operations displace fighters across borders; displacement creates new grievances; new grievances legitimate further militarization; and militarization deepens the political marketplace in which violence is exchanged for resources and authority. De Waal's (2015) analysis of the political marketplace is relevant because Sahelian violence can be understood as a system in which armed actors, state elites, and external patrons bargain over protection and predation rather than over public goods. Williams (2018) on African peace and security institutions also helps explain why regional mechanisms struggle when member states are themselves parties to the conflict or when mandates are under-resourced. ACLED reporting on the Sahel (2023–2025) documents the scale of this ecosystem through rising fatalities, expanding territorial contestation, and the diffusion of violence from northern Mali into central Mali, Burkina Faso, and western Niger.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism is strongest where four conditions coincide: (1) state capacity is thin in rural and borderland areas; (2) communal grievances—especially between pastoralist and farming communities, or between ethnic groups—are politicized by armed actors; (3) external intervention is organized around counterterrorism rather than political settlement; and (4) post-coup regimes depend on military and paramilitary partners for survival. It is weaker where states maintain inclusive local governance, where regional organizations have enforcement capacity, or where armed groups lack access to cross-border sanctuaries and revenue streams. The mechanism also has temporal scope: it explains the post-2012 escalation and the post-2020 coup period better than the earlier Tuareg rebellions, which were more narrowly ethno-regional. It does not imply that all Sahelian violence is jihadist; banditry, communal militias, and state abuses are distinct but interacting components of the same ecosystem.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism holds, one should observe (a) territorial control or at least freedom of movement by JNIM and ISSP in rural zones despite national capitals remaining under state control; (b) rising civilian fatalities associated with both insurgent attacks and state/paramilitary operations; (c) displacement and food insecurity concentrated in borderlands; (d) coups justified by security failure; (e) French and European withdrawal alongside expanded Russian paramilitary presence; (f) ECOWAS and AU difficulty in enforcing norms against coup regimes; and (g) a shift in external rhetoric from "stabilization" to "regime security." ACLED data and Crisis Group reporting on the Sahel are consistent with these implications, particularly the geographic spread of violence and the increasing role of non-state armed actors. One should also observe that counterterrorism successes—such as the killing of senior jihadist leaders—do not necessarily reduce violence, because leadership decapitation can fragment groups into more predatory local factions.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective begins from the premise that Sahelian insecurity is not an external terrorist threat imported into an otherwise stable region but a crisis of state-society relations, regional order, and post-colonial sovereignty. African scholars such as Mamdani (on the bifurcated state and citizen/subject distinction), Bayart (on the politics of the belly and extraversion), Mbembe (on necropolitics and the commandement), and Grovogui (on sovereignty and international order) provide tools for seeing how colonial administrative legacies, authoritarian centralization, and externally driven security agendas have hollowed out legitimate authority. From this vantage, JNIM and ISSP are not merely terrorist organizations; they are symptoms of a broader collapse in the social contract, especially in peripheral regions where the state has historically extracted rather than protected. African perspectives also emphasize regional ownership:

ECOWAS, the AU, and Sahelian states themselves should define threats and responses, rather than having priorities set by Paris, Washington, or Moscow. Nkrumah's and Nyerere's visions of pan-African solidarity and non-alignment are invoked to argue that external military bases and paramilitary deployments reproduce dependency. Cabral's and Fanon's analyses of liberation and violence are used more cautiously: they warn that anti-colonial or anti-Western rhetoric can mask new forms of domination, including by African military elites. Aning and Danso's work on African security governance highlights the gap between institutional design and political will, while Tamale and Oyěwùmí remind us that security is gendered and that women's bodies and labor are often the terrain on which "stability" is negotiated. The African perspective's strength is that it centers legitimacy, sovereignty, and local political economy; its risk is that "African solutions" can be invoked by authoritarian regimes to deflect accountability.

Chinese: China's perspective is shaped by non-interference, economic interests, and a preference for state-to-state security cooperation. Beijing generally supports Sahelian governments, including post-coup regimes, through diplomatic recognition, infrastructure, and limited security assistance, while avoiding large-scale military intervention. It frames terrorism as a threat to development and Belt and Road projects, but its rhetoric emphasizes sovereignty and non-interference more than counterterrorism. This perspective contributes a critique of Western interventionism and an alternative model of security-development linkage; it occludes, however, the ways in which Chinese economic engagement can reinforce extractive state practices and the limited transparency of security cooperation.

Russian: Russia's perspective, articulated through Wagner and Africa Corps, frames the Sahel as a theater of anti-Western realignment. It offers regime protection, counterinsurgency support, and disinformation capacity in exchange for political alignment and resource access. The Russian narrative presents itself as respecting sovereignty and opposing neo-colonialism, while Western actors are depicted as failed interveners. This perspective contributes a challenge to Western monopoly over security assistance; it occludes the documented abuses by paramilitaries, the lack of accountability, and the possibility that Russian support deepens authoritarianism without reducing insurgent capacity.

Western: The Western perspective, especially French and U.S., has been dominated by counterterrorism, stabilization, and partner-capacity building. It emphasizes the transnational threat of jihadist groups, the need to protect civilians, and the importance of governance and development. Its self-critique—especially after the failures of Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA—acknowledges that military solutions without political reform were insufficient and that local legitimacy matters. This perspective contributes operational capacity and intelligence; it occludes, however, the ways in which securitization can militarize politics and how Western threat framings may have amplified the very insurgencies they sought to contain.

UN: The UN perspective treats the Sahel as a complex requiring integrated peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and humanitarian action. MINUSMA's mandate combined security, political, and human-rights tasks, reflecting the UN view that counterterrorism alone cannot resolve insurgency. The UN emphasizes civilian protection, regional partnerships, and the limits of military force. It occludes, however, Security Council politics, host-state consent constraints, and the gap between mandate ambition and resources. The UN view is that regional complexes require regional solutions underwritten by international support—a tension central to the Sahel case.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Horn of Africa fragmentation: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and Gulf state involvement

Bolded Causal Claim: The Horn of Africa is a regional security complex in which state fragmentation, interstate rivalry, and Gulf-state proxy competition are mutually reinforcing; the Tigray war, Sudan's civil war, and Red Sea insecurity are not separate crises but linked manifestations of a regional order in which sovereignty is contested, maritime chokepoints are securitized, and external patrons convert local conflicts into geopolitical assets.

Mechanism: Buzan and Wæver's (2003) framework helps explain why the Horn functions as a tightly coupled security complex: threats, alliances, and interventions travel quickly across Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, Djibouti, and the Red Sea littoral. The mechanism begins with contested sovereignty. Ethiopia's ethnic federal system, Eritrea's militarized state, Somalia's incomplete state-building, and Sudan's post-Bashir transition all create arenas in which armed actors can mobilize around identity, territory, and resources. The Tigray war (2020–2022) demonstrated how federal-regional tensions, historical grievances, and external alliances can escalate into mass violence; Eritrea's involvement showed that interstate rivalries can override formal sovereignty. Sudan's civil war (from 2023) illustrates a different but related mechanism: a power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces became a regionalized conflict involving Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Chad, and others, with gold, logistics, and Red Sea access as stakes. Somalia remains a third node: Al-Shabaab's insurgency, federal-regional tensions, and the transition from AMISOM to ATMIS reveal the difficulty of building state capacity under external security dependence. Gulf states add a maritime-geopolitical layer. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey have invested in ports, military bases, and political alliances around the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, treating the Horn as a strategic corridor linking Africa, the Middle East, and global trade. This creates a proxy-competition mechanism: local actors gain resources and legitimacy by aligning with external patrons, while patrons gain influence without direct occupation. The Red Sea crisis—whether through Houthi attacks, piracy, or militarization—then feeds back into Horn politics by increasing the value of ports, bases, and naval access. The result is a regional complex with no single hegemon, multiple overlapping rivalries, and weak institutional mediation. IGAD, the AU, and the UN can convene, but they lack the coercive capacity or political unity to impose settlements when member states and external patrons have divergent interests.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism is strongest where (1) states have unresolved center-periphery or federal-regional conflicts; (2) maritime chokepoints raise the strategic value of territory; (3) Gulf and Middle Eastern states compete for influence; and (4) regional institutions are fragmented or captured by member-state rivalries. It is weaker where a dominant regional hegemon can enforce order, where maritime routes are less salient, or where local conflicts remain insulated from external patronage. The mechanism also depends on the post-2011 regional environment: the Arab Spring, Gulf rivalries, and Red Sea militarization intensified external involvement in ways that earlier decades did not. It does not imply that all Horn conflicts are externally manufactured; local grievances, state-building failures, and historical animosities remain primary, but external actors amplify and prolong them.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism holds, one should observe (a) cross-border military involvement in civil wars, as in Eritrea's role in Tigray and the regionalization of Sudan's conflict; (b) port and base competition among Gulf and other external actors in Djibouti, Berbera, Assab, and Sudanese Red Sea ports; (c) shifting alliances that cut across formal regional organizations; (d) humanitarian crises and displacement that spill across borders; (e) maritime insecurity affecting global shipping; (f) AU/IGAD mediation efforts that are repeatedly undermined by member-state interests; and (g) a gap between peace agreements and im-

plementation, as seen in the Pretoria agreement's uneven follow-through and Sudan's stalled political process. ACLED data and Crisis Group reporting on the Horn are consistent with these implications, particularly the geographic spread of violence and the increasing role of external actors.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on the Horn begins from the recognition that the region's crises are rooted in the unfinished business of state formation, decolonization, and regional order-making. African scholars such as Mamdani (on the colonial state and political identity), Bayart (on extraversion and the politics of the belly), Mbembe (on necropolitics and the postcolony), and Grovogui (on sovereignty and international hierarchy) help explain how externally imposed borders, authoritarian centralization, and Cold War interventions produced states that are simultaneously overcentralized and fragile. From this vantage, Ethiopia's federal experiment, Eritrea's militarized sovereignty, Somalia's collapse, and Sudan's repeated transitions are not anomalies but variations on a post-colonial condition in which the state has often been an instrument of domination rather than citizenship. The African perspective also emphasizes regional ownership: IGAD, the AU, and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development should be the primary mediators, and external actors should support rather than supplant African-led processes. Nkrumah's pan-Africanism and Nyerere's ujamaa are invoked not as nostalgic programs but as reminders that regional solidarity and non-alignment are normative resources against proxy competition. Cabral's and Fanon's analyses of liberation warn that external patrons can capture local struggles, while Aning and Danso highlight the institutional weaknesses that make African mediation difficult. Tamale and Oyěwùmí add that the Horn's conflicts are gendered: women's bodies, labor, and political participation are central to both war-making and peacebuilding. The African perspective's strength is that it centers sovereignty, legitimacy, and regional self-determination; its risk is that "African solutions" can be invoked by states to resist accountability or by regional hegemons to justify dominance.

Chinese: China's perspective emphasizes non-interference, development, and state-to-state relations. Beijing has significant economic interests in the Horn—ports, railways, and energy corridors—and generally supports recognized governments while avoiding military intervention. It frames stability as a precondition for development and prefers quiet diplomacy over public mediation. This perspective contributes an alternative to Western conditionality and a focus on infrastructure; it occludes, however, the ways in which Chinese projects can reinforce state power without addressing local grievances, and the limited transparency of security cooperation.

Russian: Russia's perspective in the Horn is less institutionally entrenched than in the Sahel but follows similar anti-Western and sovereignty-respecting themes. Moscow has sought naval access, arms sales, and diplomatic alignment, particularly with Sudan and Eritrea, while framing Western and Gulf interventions as destabilizing. This perspective contributes a challenge to Western and Gulf dominance; it occludes the risks of militarized partnerships and the lack of accountability in Russian security cooperation.

Western: The Western perspective emphasizes counterterrorism (especially against Al-Shabaab), maritime security, and state-building. The U.S. and European actors have supported AMISOM/ATMIS, Somali federal institutions, and Red Sea security initiatives, while also engaging in diplomacy around Ethiopia and Sudan. This perspective contributes operational capacity and humanitarian resources; it occludes, however, the ways in which Western security priorities can distort local politics and how great-power competition can undermine multilateral mediation.

UN: The UN perspective treats the Horn as a complex requiring peacekeeping, humanitarian protection, and

political mediation. AMISOM/ATMIS in Somalia, UNISFA in Abyei, and various mediation efforts reflect the UN view that regional complexes require integrated mandates. The UN emphasizes civilian protection, human rights, and regional partnerships; it occludes, however, Security Council divisions, host-state consent constraints, and the gap between mandate ambition and resources. The UN view is that regional complexes require regional solutions underwritten by international support—a tension central to the Horn case.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Great Lakes rivalries: DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, and the politics of minerals

Bolded Causal Claim: The Great Lakes regional security complex is structured by a self-reinforcing security dilemma in which the Democratic Republic of Congo's territorial fragmentation and mineral wealth, combined with the unresolved security fears of Rwanda and Uganda, generate recurring cycles of proxy warfare that neither bilateral diplomacy nor African regional institutions have been able to break.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through five linked stages that repeat across decades. First, the collapse of the Mobutu Sese Seko regime in 1997 and the subsequent Congo wars of 1998–2003 destroyed the DRC's monopoly on legitimate force, creating a durable security vacuum across the eastern provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri. The state's absence was not merely administrative; it was coercive: the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) became one armed actor among many, often predatory rather than protective. Second, Rwanda and Uganda, having intervened initially to topple Mobutu and then to remove Laurent-Désiré Kabila, developed enduring security interests in eastern Congo. Rwanda's core fear was the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), the armed successor to the ex-FAR and Interahamwe militias that had participated in the 1994 genocide; Uganda sought to contain the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and secure its western frontier. These fears were not fabricated: cross-border attacks occurred, and rebel sanctuaries persisted. Third, the vacuum created opportunities for mineral extraction—coltan, cassiterite, wolframite, and gold—that financed armed groups and, according to successive UN Group of Experts reports, benefited networks linked to regional military and political elites. The coltan boom of 2000–2001 illustrated how global demand could rapidly monetize local violence. Fourth, the security dilemma intensified through interaction: each state's defensive measures—supporting proxy forces, conducting cross-border operations, backing local militias—were interpreted by neighbors as offensive threats, producing reciprocal arming and repeated interventions. The 1998–2003 war, involving up to nine African states, was the extreme expression of this dilemma. Fifth, peace agreements—the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement (1999), the Sun City accords (2002), the Nairobi and Goma processes—formalized withdrawals and created transitional institutions but failed to disarm militias or reform the FARDC, allowing the cycle to resume. The M23 rebellions of 2012–2013 and again from 2021 demonstrated this recurrence: the Congrès national pour la défense du peuple (CNDP) rebranded as M23, and allegations of Rwandan support resurfaced, denied by Kigali but documented by UN experts. The mechanism is thus not merely resource predation but a security dilemma amplified by state weakness, cross-border ethnic ties, and regional power asymmetry.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism applies where a large, resource-rich but institutionally weak state borders smaller states with acute security fears and cross-border ethnic communities; where rebel groups enjoy sanctuary across borders; where regional organizations lack coercive enforcement capacity; and where global commodity demand provides financing for non-state armed actors. It does not apply where the weak state has consolidated territorial control, where a hegemon imposes order, or where resource rents are effectively captured by a capable state. The Great Lakes case is distinctive because the DRC's size and mineral endowment

make it simultaneously a prize and a threat, while Rwanda and Uganda's post-conflict consolidation gave them both the capacity and the incentive to project force. The mechanism also requires a permissive international environment: the relative tolerance of proxy warfare in the 1990s and 2000s, and the prioritization of counterterrorism over governance in later years, lowered the costs of intervention.

Observable Implications: The mechanism implies recurring spikes in violence in eastern DRC following periods of apparent stabilization; the persistence of armed groups despite peace agreements and disarmament programs; mineral smuggling routes through Rwanda and Uganda documented by UN panels of experts; the rebranding of rebel movements rather than their dissolution; and the limited impact of MONUSCO despite its status as the largest UN peacekeeping mission. It also implies that external military pressure alone—such as the Force Intervention Brigade's 2013 defeat of M23—produces temporary lulls rather than structural change, because the underlying security dilemma and resource incentives remain. Further implications include the militarization of local politics, the proliferation of Mai-Mai militias as community defense forces, and the humanitarian consequences: millions of internally displaced persons and recurrent epidemics.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective frames the Great Lakes crisis as a failure of regional ownership and a legacy of colonial borders that divided communities and created artificial states. Scholars such as Mamdani (2001) and Prunier (2009) emphasize that the 1994 genocide and its aftermath were not merely ethnic but political, rooted in colonial racial categories and post-colonial state failure. The African Union and regional bodies—the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), the Southern African Development Community (SADC)—have attempted mediation, but the African perspective stresses that durable peace requires addressing root causes: land tenure, citizenship, and state legitimacy. It highlights African agency in peace processes while acknowledging that regional states have been both mediators and perpetrators. It occludes, however, the extent to which African elites have benefited from the conflict economy and the difficulty of holding member states accountable within consensus-based institutions.

Chinese: China's perspective emphasizes non-interference and economic engagement. Chinese firms have invested in DRC mining, and Beijing has generally supported the DRC government while avoiding entanglement in eastern Congo's conflicts. China contributes to MONUSCO and supports AU mediation, framing stability as a precondition for investment. It occludes, however, the ways in which resource extraction by Chinese and other firms can fuel local grievances, the absence of Chinese security leverage over regional actors, and the tension between commercial interests and conflict-sensitive development.

Russian: Russia's perspective is less directly engaged in the Great Lakes than in the Sahel, but Moscow has increasingly framed African conflicts as products of Western intervention and neo-colonialism. Russia supports the DRC government rhetorically and has explored security cooperation, while criticizing Western peacekeeping as ineffective. It occludes, however, Russia's limited operational footprint in the region, its tendency to instrumentalize anti-Western framing without offering concrete security solutions, and the absence of Russian leverage over Rwanda or Uganda.

Western: The Western perspective has shifted from humanitarian intervention in the immediate post-1994 period to stabilization and state-building, with significant investment in MONUSCO and the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the DRC and the region. Western actors emphasize human rights, sexual violence, and mineral supply chains, exemplified by conflict minerals legislation such as the Dodd-Frank Act's Section 1502. It occludes, however, the ways in which Western demand for minerals and support for authoritarian allies have contributed to the conflict, the limits of conditionality, and the gap between

normative commitments and strategic interests.

UN: The UN perspective treats the Great Lakes as a peacekeeping and protection challenge. MONUSCO, the largest UN mission, has evolved from stabilization to protection of civilians and support for state authority. The UN emphasizes the PSC Framework and regional cooperation through the ICGLR. It occludes, however, the mission's inability to address root causes, host-state resistance to reform, the gap between mandate and resources, and the political constraints of Security Council consensus. The UN view is that regional complexes require sustained multilateral engagement—a lesson drawn from repeated failures in eastern Congo.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — APSA, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC — the operational efficacy of African regional security institutions

Bolded Causal Claim: African regional security institutions possess significant normative authority and operational experience but remain structurally constrained by member-state sovereignty, funding dependence, and the gap between mandate ambition and enforcement capacity, producing a pattern of rapid deployment without durable resolution.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through a cycle of institutional creation, normative commitment, operational deployment, and structural constraint. First, the African Union's Constitutive Act (2000) established the principle of non-indifference—permitting intervention in grave circumstances—and the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) was designed with five pillars: the Peace and Security Council (PSC), the African Standby Force (ASF), the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System, and the Peace Fund. The Regional Economic Communities (RECs)—ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, ECCAS, EAC—were designated as building blocks, reflecting the view that security is regional. Second, normative innovation followed: the AU's 2002 Protocol on the PSC, the 2004 Solemn Declaration on a Common African Defence and Security Policy, and the Ezulwini Consensus (2005) on UN reform asserted African ownership of security governance. Third, operational deployment demonstrated capacity: ECOWAS intervened in Liberia (1990), Sierra Leone (1997), Côte d'Ivoire (2011), Mali (2013), and The Gambia (2017); IGAD mediated the Sudan and Somalia peace processes; SADC deployed in the DRC and Lesotho. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM, later ATMIS) and the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA) showed willingness to deploy into high-risk environments. Fourth, structural constraints repeatedly limited efficacy. The ASF, conceived as a standing force, never became fully operational; deployments relied on ad hoc coalitions and member-state contributions. Funding dependence on external donors—the European Union, United Nations, and bilateral partners—created accountability gaps and conditionality. Consensus decision-making within the PSC and RECs allowed member states to block action against peers. Sovereignty concerns meant that interventions required host-state consent or regional consensus, limiting enforcement. Fifth, the result is a pattern of rapid deployment without durable resolution: ECOWAS could remove Yahya Jammeh in 2017 but struggles to sustain pressure on juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger; the AU PSC can authorize missions but cannot guarantee funding or troop contributions; and the gap between mandate ambition and resources produces mission creep and fatigue. The mechanism is thus one of institutional aspiration constrained by political economy.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism applies to African regional security governance broadly but varies significantly by REC. ECOWAS has the strongest record of enforcement, partly due to Nigerian hegemony and a tradition of intervention. IGAD has mediation capacity but limited enforcement, reflecting the interests of its member states. SADC has military capacity but political divisions. The mechanism is strongest where a hegemon is willing to bear costs and weakest where consensus is required among rivals. It also depends

on external funding: without donor support, most missions are unsustainable. The mechanism does not apply to contexts where a single state dominates regionally or where external powers provide direct security guarantees.

Observable Implications: The mechanism implies that African regional institutions can deploy quickly in crises of regime change or acute violence but struggle with sustained counterinsurgency and state-building. It implies that AU PSC decisions are frequently not implemented due to resource gaps. It implies that the ASF remains a paper force despite decades of planning. It implies that external military presence—French in the Sahel, Russian via Africa Corps, Turkish in Somalia—often fills gaps left by African institutions. It implies that regional bodies compete for authority, as seen in tensions between the AU and RECs over mandates. And it implies that African security governance is characterized by a normative-practical gap: strong principles of non-indifference and responsibility to protect, but weak enforcement.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective treats APSA and the RECs as expressions of sovereignty and ownership, reflecting the principle that African problems require African solutions. Scholars such as Williams (2018) and de Waal (2015) emphasize that African institutions have developed genuine capacity and normative innovation, including the non-indifference principle, but remain constrained by the political economy of member states and external dependence. The African perspective stresses the legitimacy of regional ownership while acknowledging the gap between aspiration and capacity. It highlights the role of hegemons—Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya—in driving or blocking action. It occludes, however, the extent to which African elites have used regional institutions to legitimize national interests and the difficulty of accountability within consensus-based bodies.

Chinese: China's perspective supports African regional institutions rhetorically and through funding, including contributions to the AU Peace Fund and support for APSA. Beijing emphasizes non-interference and capacity-building, framing security cooperation as part of its broader development partnership. It occludes, however, the limited Chinese operational role in African security and the tension between supporting state sovereignty and engaging with non-state actors. China's support for regional institutions is consistent with its preference for multilateral frameworks that do not challenge state authority.

Russian: Russia's perspective has become more assertive, framing African security institutions as weakened by Western influence and promoting bilateral security partnerships as alternatives. Moscow criticizes Western peacekeeping and supports African states' right to choose partners, including Russian paramilitaries. It occludes, however, Russia's limited contribution to multilateral African security architecture and its tendency to undermine regional consensus by backing specific regimes. Russia's approach favors bilateralism over institutional multilateralism.

Western: The Western perspective has supported APSA financially and technically while expressing frustration with its limitations. Western actors emphasize capacity-building, training, and funding, but also condition support on governance and human rights. It occludes, however, the ways in which Western funding creates dependence and how Western security priorities—counterterrorism, migration control—can distort African institutional agendas. The Western view has shifted from direct intervention to "African solutions to African problems" while retaining significant influence.

UN: The UN perspective treats African regional institutions as essential partners under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter. The UN emphasizes burden-sharing, with African missions (AMISOM/ATMIS, AFISMA) often transitioning to or supported by UN frameworks. It occludes, however, the tension between UN standards

and African operational realities, the difficulty of funding African-led missions, and the Security Council's control over mandates. The UN view is that regional complexes require regional solutions underwritten by international support—a principle tested repeatedly in Africa.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on regional security complexes begins from a fundamentally different ontological premise than the one embedded in Buzan and Wæver's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT). Where RSCT treats the state as the primary referent object of security and defines regions by patterns of security interdependence among states, African scholarship has long insisted that the state in Africa is itself a contested, layered, and historically specific formation whose sovereignty is neither given nor evenly distributed across territory. This is not a peripheral qualification; it is the central analytical move that reorganizes the entire study of regional security in Africa. From this starting point, the African perspective does not merely add African cases to a Western theoretical framework—it reconstructs the framework's foundational categories.

The theoretical lineage runs through several distinct but converging traditions. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state (Mamdani 1996) distinguishes between the "civil" sphere of urban, modern, rights-bearing citizenship and the "customary" sphere of rural, ethnic, subject populations governed through decentralized despotism. This bifurcation means that the African state is not a unitary actor with a monopoly on legitimate violence; it is a dual structure in which authority is fragmented between modern institutions and customary authorities, and in which the state's reach into peripheral territories is historically thin. Applied to regional security complexes, this implies that the "state" that enters into security interdependence with its neighbors is not a coherent entity but a composite of competing centers of power, some of which may have stronger ties to armed groups, commercial networks, or foreign patrons than to the capital. The Sahel, the Horn, and the Great Lakes are not regions of state-to-state security interdependence in the RSCT sense; they are regions of fragmented sovereignty in which the boundaries between state and non-state violence are permeable.

Mbembe's concept of necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) extends this analysis by examining how sovereignty in postcolonial Africa operates through the power to dictate who may live and who must die. In the context of regional security complexes, necropolitics illuminates how state and non-state actors alike exercise sovereignty not through the provision of security but through the management of death—through militias, paramilitaries, and the instrumentalization of ethnic and communal violence. The African perspective thus reframes regional security complexes not as systems of mutual deterrence or alliance but as fields of necropolitical competition in which the distinction between "security provider" and "security threat" is often blurred. This is particularly evident in the Great Lakes, where state armies and rebel movements have historically been intertwined, and in the Horn, where the Ethiopian state's military campaigns in Tigray demonstrated the lethal consequences of a sovereignty that defines itself through the exclusion of populations deemed threats.

Bayart's analysis of the "politics of the belly" (Bayart 1993) and the "criminalization of the state" (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999) adds a political-economy dimension. Regional security complexes in Africa are not driven solely by security dilemmas or ideological competition; they are shaped by the instrumentalization of violence for economic accumulation. The mineral economies of the Great Lakes, the smuggling networks of the Sahel, and the rentier economies of the Horn all create incentives for the perpetuation of conflict that are not reducible to state security interests. The African perspective thus insists that any analysis of regional security complexes must account for the political economy of violence—the ways in which war economies

sustain armed actors and undermine peace. This connects directly to the conflict political economy analyzed in Lesson 29 and to the colonial state formation processes examined in Lesson 27.

Rodney's underdevelopment thesis (Rodney 1972) and Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism (Nkrumah 1965) provide the historical-structural frame. African regional security complexes are not natural formations; they are products of colonial partition that created states with arbitrary borders, weak institutions, and economies oriented toward external extraction. The colonial state was designed for control, not development, and its postcolonial successor inherited this orientation. Regional security complexes in Africa are therefore shaped by the legacy of colonial state formation: borders that divide communities, economies that depend on external markets, and security forces that are oriented toward internal repression rather than external defense. Nkrumah's warning that political independence without economic independence is meaningless applies with particular force to security: African states that depend on external powers for military equipment, training, and intelligence are not fully sovereign in the security domain, and their regional security complexes are penetrated by external interests.

Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and its psychological aftermath (Fanon 1961) contributes a dimension that RSCT cannot accommodate: the role of violence in the constitution of political subjectivity. In the African perspective, regional security complexes are not merely systems of state interaction; they are arenas in which identities are forged through violence, in which the experience of war shapes political consciousness, and in which the memory of colonial and postcolonial violence informs contemporary security practices. This is particularly relevant to the Sahel, where the Tuareg rebellions and the subsequent jihadist insurgency have been shaped by decades of marginalization, and to the Horn, where the Eritrean independence war and the Ethiopian civil war have left deep scars that continue to structure regional relations.

Nyerere's vision of regionalism, articulated through the East African Community and his broader philosophy of ujamaa, represents an alternative African approach to regional security: one based on solidarity, shared development, and the transcendence of colonial borders through integration rather than through the security dilemma. Nyerere's insistence that African unity is a precondition for genuine sovereignty (Nyerere 1966) frames regional security complexes not as problems to be managed but as opportunities for collective self-determination. This vision, though largely unrealized, continues to inform African institutional design and provides a normative benchmark against which contemporary regional security arrangements are measured.

Cabral's analysis of national liberation and the role of culture (Cabral 1973) adds the dimension of cultural resistance and the importance of understanding security from the perspective of the oppressed. In the African perspective, regional security complexes must be analyzed from the standpoint of those who bear the costs of insecurity—the displaced, the marginalized, the communities caught between state forces and armed groups. This standpoint epistemology, which insists that knowledge about security is situated and partial, challenges the view from above that dominates much Western security analysis.

The institutional expression of the African perspective is the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), established under the AU's Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council (2002). APSA represents an ambitious attempt to create an African-owned framework for conflict prevention, management, and resolution, encompassing the Peace and Security Council, the Continental Early Warning System, the African Standby Force, the Panel of the Wise, and regional mechanisms. The African perspective treats APSA not as a technical instrument but as an expression of sovereignty and agency—a claim that Africans can and must manage their own security. This is the principle of "African solutions to African problems," which, while often criticized as rhetoric, reflects a genuine commitment to self-determination in the security domain.

However, the African perspective must also confront its own limitations. The gap between APSA's institutional design and its operational capacity is substantial. The African Standby Force, conceived as a rapid-deployment capability, has never been fully operationalized. The Peace and Security Council's decisions depend on the political will of member states, which is often constrained by competing interests and sovereignty concerns. The financing of African-led missions remains dependent on external donors, creating a dependency that undermines the very sovereignty APSA is meant to express. Williams (2018) has documented these challenges extensively, noting that the AU's peace and security efforts are often hampered by inadequate resources, weak coordination with regional economic communities, and the reluctance of member states to cede authority to supranational bodies.

The African perspective also occludes certain dynamics. By emphasizing external interference and colonial legacy, it can underplay the agency of African elites in perpetuating conflict and the role of internal power struggles in driving regional insecurity. The "African solutions" framing can sometimes serve to shield governments from accountability, particularly when those governments are themselves sources of insecurity. Moreover, the African perspective's emphasis on sovereignty can conflict with the protection of human rights, as seen in the AU's reluctance to intervene in cases of mass atrocities when the offending state invokes sovereignty. Tamale's feminist critique (Tamale 2020) reminds us that the African security discourse, like its Western counterpart, has historically been gendered, treating security as a masculine domain of statecraft and military affairs while marginalizing the security concerns of women and the gendered dimensions of conflict.

Oyěwùmí's analysis of gender and colonial categories (Oyěwùmí 1997) challenges the very categories through which security is analyzed, arguing that Western concepts of gender and hierarchy were imposed on African societies through colonialism. This has implications for regional security complex theory: if the categories of "state," "nation," and "region" are themselves colonial impositions, then RSCT's application to Africa may be fundamentally mis-specified. The African perspective thus raises the question of whether regional security complexes as theorized by Buzan and Wæver are adequate to capture the realities of African security, or whether they need to be supplemented or replaced by frameworks that take seriously the specificity of African political formations.

Grovogui's work on sovereignty and international law (Grovogui 1996, 2006) provides a critical bridge between the African perspective and international relations theory. Grovogui argues that the international order is structured by a racialized hierarchy in which African sovereignty is systematically devalued. This means that African regional security complexes are not merely regional phenomena; they are embedded in a global order that constrains African agency and legitimizes external intervention. The African perspective thus insists on situating regional security complexes within the broader context of global power asymmetries, a move that RSCT's regional focus tends to obscure.

De Waal's analysis of the political marketplace (de Waal 2015) adds a further dimension that is particularly relevant to the Horn of Africa but applicable more broadly. De Waal argues that political systems in the Horn are organized around the monetization of violence and the commercialization of loyalty, creating a "political marketplace" in which armed actors compete for resources and influence. This framework challenges both the state-centric assumptions of RSCT and the normative assumptions of Western peacebuilding, suggesting that regional security complexes in Africa are better understood as political economies of violence than as systems of state interaction. The African perspective, drawing on de Waal, insists that any analysis of regional security must account for the material incentives that sustain conflict and the ways in which violence is integrated into political and economic life.

What the African vantage point contributes that the other four cannot is a fundamental reorientation of the security referent: from the state to the human, from the territory to the community, from the present to the historical. It insists that regional security complexes in Africa cannot be understood without reference to colonialism, neo-colonialism, and the ongoing struggle for genuine sovereignty. It reveals that the apparent "failure" of African regional institutions is often a failure of the international system to support African agency, not a failure of Africans themselves. And it demonstrates that security in Africa is not merely a technical problem of conflict management but a political problem of justice, development, and self-determination. Crisis Group Africa reports consistently document how local grievances, governance deficits, and economic marginalization drive insecurity in the Sahel, Horn, and Great Lakes—findings that align with the African perspective's insistence on root-cause analysis rather than symptom management.

What it occludes is the extent to which African elites themselves are implicated in the production of insecurity, the internal dynamics of power that drive conflict, and the practical challenges of building effective regional institutions in a context of resource scarcity and political fragmentation. The African perspective's emphasis on external causation can sometimes obscure internal agency, and its normative commitment to sovereignty can conflict with the protection of vulnerable populations. These tensions are not resolvable within the perspective itself; they require engagement with the other four perspectives.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

China's approach to African regional security complexes is shaped by a distinctive combination of principles: non-interference in internal affairs, respect for sovereignty, economic engagement as the foundation of security, and selective security cooperation. This approach reflects China's own historical experience of foreign intervention and its strategic interest in stable access to African resources and markets. In the context of the Sahel, the Horn, and the Great Lakes, China's perspective emphasizes that security is ultimately a function of development, and that external military intervention is both illegitimate and counterproductive.

The principle of non-interference, articulated in China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and reiterated in the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) declarations, is the cornerstone of China's approach. China does not condition its engagement on governance standards, human rights performance, or democratic credentials. This means that China engages with all governments in a region regardless of their legitimacy or behavior, and it does not support sanctions, interventions, or regime change. In the Sahel, where Western-backed governments have been overthrown by military coups, China has maintained relations with the new authorities, emphasizing continuity and stability. In the Horn, China has maintained close ties with Ethiopia throughout the Tigray war, providing diplomatic support and economic engagement. In the Great Lakes, China's economic interests in Congolese minerals have led it to engage with all parties, including those accused of human rights abuses.

China's security cooperation with African states has expanded significantly in recent years. This includes arms sales, military training, joint exercises, and the establishment of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti (2017). China participates in UN peacekeeping missions in Africa, contributing troops to missions in Mali, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Chinese peacekeepers have been involved in combat operations, and China has suffered casualties, demonstrating a level of commitment that goes beyond purely economic engagement. China also provides security assistance to African states through bilateral channels, including police training, intelligence sharing, and counterterrorism cooperation.

The Chinese perspective on regional security complexes emphasizes the role of economic development in addressing the root causes of insecurity. China's infrastructure investments—ports, roads, railways, and

energy projects—are framed as contributions to stability, on the theory that economic opportunity reduces the appeal of armed mobilization. In the Horn, China's investments in Ethiopian infrastructure and its role in the Djibouti port are seen as stabilizing factors. In the Great Lakes, Chinese mining investments are framed as development opportunities, though they have also been criticized for contributing to conflict dynamics. ACLED data on conflict fatalities in the Sahel show a dramatic increase in violence since 2012, a trend that China attributes in part to the failure of Western counterterrorism and the absence of development-focused approaches.

What the Chinese perspective contributes is a model of engagement that respects African sovereignty and prioritizes economic development over military intervention. It challenges the Western assumption that security requires political conditionality and demonstrates that non-Western powers can play a significant role in African security. China's willingness to engage with all governments, regardless of their human rights record, provides an alternative to Western selectivity and can be seen as more consistent with the principle of sovereign equality. For African states seeking to diversify their partnerships and reduce dependence on Western powers, China offers a valuable counterweight.

What it occludes is the extent to which China's economic interests drive its security engagement, the lack of transparency in Chinese arms deals and security assistance, and the potential for Chinese engagement to reinforce authoritarian governance. China's non-interference principle, while rhetorically appealing, can amount to indifference to human rights abuses and can provide cover for governments that are themselves sources of insecurity. The Chinese perspective also tends to treat regional security complexes as collections of bilateral relationships rather than as integrated systems, underestimating the transnational dynamics that connect conflicts across borders. Moreover, China's growing military presence in Africa, including the Djibouti base, raises questions about whether China's approach is as non-interventionist as its rhetoric suggests. The Chinese perspective's emphasis on development as a security strategy, while valuable, can overlook the political and institutional dimensions of conflict that are not addressable through infrastructure alone.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

Russia's approach to African regional security complexes is shaped by a combination of historical legacy, strategic competition with the West, and a distinctive model of security provision through private military companies. Russia presents itself as an anti-colonial power and an alternative to Western intervention, drawing on Soviet-era relationships and a narrative of solidarity with African states against Western imperialism. In the Sahel, the Horn, and the Great Lakes, Russia's perspective emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and the provision of security assistance without political conditionality.

The historical foundation of Russia's African engagement lies in Soviet support for African liberation movements during the Cold War. The Soviet Union provided military training, weapons, and ideological support to anti-colonial movements across the continent, and many African leaders were educated in the Soviet Union. This legacy provides Russia with a reservoir of goodwill and a narrative of anti-imperialist solidarity that it has actively cultivated in recent years. Russia's framing of its African engagement as a continuation of this anti-colonial tradition resonates with African audiences who are critical of Western interventionism, particularly in the Sahel, where anti-French sentiment has been a powerful political force.

The contemporary expression of Russia's security engagement in Africa is the Africa Corps, formerly known as the Wagner Group. The Africa Corps operates in several African countries, providing security services, training, and combat support to governments in exchange for resource concessions and political influence. In the Sahel, the Africa Corps has been particularly active in Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Central African

Republic, where it has replaced French forces and provided security support to military governments. In the Horn, Russia has sought to expand its influence through arms sales and security cooperation, particularly with Sudan and Eritrea. In the Great Lakes, Russia's engagement has been more limited but includes arms sales and diplomatic support.

Russia's perspective on regional security complexes emphasizes the failure of Western intervention and the need for alternative security partnerships. Russian officials and media frame Western counterterrorism efforts as neocolonialism and argue that Western military presence has destabilized rather than stabilized the region. The coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger are presented as expressions of popular sovereignty against Western-backed governments, and Russia positions itself as a partner that respects African agency. This narrative has been effective in countries where anti-French sentiment is strong and where governments are seeking alternatives to Western security partnerships. Crisis Group Africa reports have documented the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel following the withdrawal of French forces and the arrival of Russian paramilitaries, noting that violence has continued to escalate despite the change in security partners.

What the Russian perspective contributes is a challenge to Western hegemony in African security and a demonstration that alternative security partnerships are available. Russia's willingness to engage with military governments and its lack of political conditionality provide options for African states that are dissatisfied with Western approaches. The Africa Corps model, while controversial, has provided security support to governments that Western powers have abandoned or sanctioned, and it has allowed some African states to assert greater independence from Western security frameworks.

What it occludes is the extractive nature of Russia's engagement, the human rights abuses associated with the Africa Corps, and the destabilizing effects of Russian security provision. The Africa Corps has been implicated in massacres, torture, and the targeting of civilians in Mali and the Central African Republic. Its operations are opaque, and its accountability mechanisms are nonexistent. Russia's engagement is driven by strategic competition with the West and by economic interests in African resources, not by a genuine commitment to African security or development. The anti-colonial rhetoric masks a relationship that is in many respects more extractive and less accountable than the Western partnerships it criticizes. Moreover, Russia's support for military governments undermines democratic governance and can deepen the very insecurity it claims to address. The Russian perspective's framing of regional security complexes as arenas of great-power competition obscures the local dynamics and African agency that are central to understanding these conflicts.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on African regional security complexes is shaped by a combination of strategic interests, normative commitments, and a growing recognition of the limits of external intervention. Western engagement with African security has evolved significantly over the past two decades, from a focus on counterterrorism and stabilization to a more nuanced approach that emphasizes African ownership, governance, and development. This evolution reflects both the failures of earlier interventions and a changing geopolitical environment in which Western powers face competition from China and Russia.

The Western perspective treats regional security complexes in Africa as threats to international security, particularly through the lenses of terrorism, migration, and state failure. The Sahel has been framed as a "terrorist haven" and a source of migration to Europe, driving significant Western military and development engagement. The Horn is seen as a critical node in global shipping routes and a source of regional instability with global implications. The Great Lakes are viewed through the lens of resource conflict and humanitarian

crisis. These framings reflect Western strategic interests and threat perceptions, which are not always aligned with African priorities. ACLED data showing a steady increase in conflict fatalities across the Sahel since 2012 have been cited in Western policy documents as evidence of the need for sustained engagement, though the effectiveness of that engagement remains contested.

Western security engagement in Africa has taken multiple forms. The United States has maintained a military presence through AFRICOM, with bases and training programs across the continent. France has been the most active Western military power in the Sahel, conducting Operation Barkhane (2014-2022) and its predecessor Operation Serval. The European Union has deployed military and civilian missions, and individual European states have contributed to peacekeeping and training. Western powers have also provided significant development and humanitarian assistance, framed as addressing the root causes of insecurity.

The Western perspective has undergone significant self-critique in recent years. The failure of Operation Barkhane to stabilize the Sahel, the coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, and the withdrawal of French forces have prompted a reassessment of Western military engagement. There is growing recognition that counterterrorism-focused approaches have been insufficient and that military solutions cannot address the political and economic drivers of conflict. The Western perspective increasingly emphasizes governance, development, and African ownership, though the gap between rhetoric and practice remains significant. This self-critique is a genuine feature of the Western perspective, distinguishing it from more triumphalist accounts of Western intervention.

What the Western perspective contributes is a wealth of resources, institutional capacity, and experience in conflict management. Western powers have funded peacekeeping missions, supported African regional institutions, and provided humanitarian assistance on a scale that no other external actor matches. The Western emphasis on human rights, democratic governance, and accountability, while often inconsistently applied, provides a normative framework that challenges authoritarianism and impunity. Western self-critique, particularly the recognition of the limits of military intervention, represents a genuine learning process that can inform more effective engagement. The UN's MINUSMA mission in Mali, though ultimately withdrawn, represented an unprecedented multilateral effort to stabilize a complex conflict environment.

What it occludes is the extent to which Western engagement is driven by strategic and economic interests rather than African needs, the securitization of migration and its distortion of African institutional agendas, and the historical legacy of colonialism that shapes contemporary Western-African relations. The Western perspective tends to treat African states as objects of intervention rather than as agents of their own security, and its emphasis on "capacity building" can mask a relationship of dependency. The conditionality attached to Western assistance—governance standards, human rights requirements—can be seen as a form of neocolonialism that undermines African sovereignty. Moreover, the Western perspective's focus on terrorism and migration reflects Western threat perceptions that may not correspond to African priorities, which are more likely to center on development, governance, and human security. The Western perspective's self-critique, while genuine, has not always translated into fundamental changes in policy, and the underlying power asymmetries between Western and African actors remain largely intact.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The United Nations perspective on African regional security complexes is shaped by the UN Charter's framework for collective security, particularly Chapter VIII, which recognizes the role of regional arrangements in maintaining international peace and security. The UN treats African regional institutions as essential partners and emphasizes burden-sharing, with African-led missions often transitioning to or being supported by

UN frameworks. This perspective reflects both the UN's institutional mandate and its practical dependence on regional actors for the implementation of peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts.

The UN's engagement with African regional security complexes has been extensive. In the Sahel, the UN deployed MINUSMA (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) from 2013 to 2023, one of the most complex and dangerous peacekeeping missions in UN history. MINUSMA was mandated to support the political process, protect civilians, and stabilize key population centers, but it faced significant challenges including asymmetric attacks, limited freedom of movement, and the withdrawal of the host government's consent. In the Horn, the UN has supported AMISOM/ATMIS in Somalia, a hybrid mission that has been critical in pushing back Al-Shabaab but has struggled with funding, troop contributions, and the challenge of transitioning to Somali security forces. In the Great Lakes, the UN has deployed MONUSCO in the DRC, one of the largest and longest-running peacekeeping missions, which has faced criticism for its inability to protect civilians and its entanglement in local conflict dynamics.

The UN perspective emphasizes the principle of "African solutions to African problems" while insisting on international support and standards. The UN recognizes that regional organizations have comparative advantages in understanding local dynamics and deploying rapidly, but it also insists on adherence to international humanitarian law, human rights standards, and the principles of impartiality and consent. This creates a tension between UN standards and African operational realities, particularly when African-led missions are deployed in contexts where the host government's consent is contested or where the mission's mandate conflicts with the interests of powerful member states. Williams (2018) has noted that the relationship between the UN and African regional organizations is characterized by both cooperation and competition, with overlapping mandates and competing claims to authority.

The UN perspective also highlights the challenge of funding African-led missions. The AU's Peace Fund, established to provide predictable funding for African peace operations, has been underfunded, and African missions have historically depended on external donors, particularly the EU and individual member states. The UN has sought to address this through mechanisms such as the UN Support Office for AMISOM (UNSOA) and through the broader debate on UN-assessed contributions for African-led missions. This debate reflects a fundamental tension: African states want ownership and control of their security, but they lack the resources to fully fund their operations, while external funders want accountability and alignment with their priorities. The UN's role in this debate is to mediate between African aspirations and international constraints, a role that is often frustrating for all parties.

What the UN perspective contributes is a framework for multilateral cooperation that legitimizes regional action and provides institutional support. The UN's emphasis on human rights, civilian protection, and the rule of law provides a normative benchmark that challenges both state and non-state violence. UN peacekeeping missions, despite their limitations, have provided critical stabilization in contexts where no other actor was willing or able to intervene. The UN's role in convening international support and coordinating humanitarian assistance is indispensable. In the Sahel, MINUSMA's presence, despite its ultimate withdrawal, provided a degree of stabilization and protection that would not have existed otherwise. In Somalia, AMISOM/ATMIS has been essential in preventing the complete collapse of the Somali state.

What it occludes is the tension between UN standards and African operational realities, the difficulty of funding African-led missions, and the Security Council's control over mandates. The UN perspective can be overly focused on institutional processes and legal frameworks, underestimating the political dynamics that drive conflict. The Security Council's composition and decision-making processes reflect power asymmetries that can marginalize African voices. Moreover, the UN's emphasis on consent and impartiality can

constrain its ability to act decisively in situations where the host government is itself a party to the conflict. The UN perspective also tends to treat regional security complexes as collections of national crises rather than as integrated systems, underestimating the transnational dynamics that connect conflicts across borders. The withdrawal of MINUSMA from Mali in 2023, following the Malian government's request, illustrates the limits of UN engagement when host-state consent is withdrawn, and raises questions about the future of UN peacekeeping in contexts where governments prefer alternative security partners.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers regional ownership and the sovereignty of African states in defining security threats; reveals how external interventions displace African agency and how predatory postcolonial governance creates the vacuums that armed groups exploit	Underestimates the material and intelligence dependence of African forces on external partners; can romanticize regional solidarity that fractures under national interest and elite calculations	Security must be African-led, with external actors in supporting roles; sovereignty is non-negotiable; political solutions must precede military ones	AU PSC communiqués on Mali and the Sahel; ECOWAS interventions in Gambia (2017) and Mali (2012); APSA framework documents; African Union (2020) Silencing the Guns initiative	Western: African regional institutions lack enforcement capacity, funding, and intelligence, making "ownership" aspirational rather than operational in the short term

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Provides infrastructure investment and a non-interference framework that builds state capacity without political conditionality; insists on development as the foundation of security	Treats security as derivative of development, underestimating the autonomous logic of armed conflict and the political drivers of insurgency; security cooperation remains bilateral and opaque	Non-interference in internal affairs; development as the foundation of security; mutual benefit and sovereignty respect	FOCAC security cooperation pledges; Chinese peacekeeping contributions to UNAMID and UNMISS; bilateral military training and equipment programs in the Sahel	Western: Chinese non-interference enables authoritarian consolidation, ignores human rights abuses by partner governments, and provides no conflict mediation capacity
Russian	Exploits gaps left by Western withdrawal; provides rapid military support without governance conditionality; frames engagement as anti-imperialist solidarity that resonates with governments frustrated by Western conditionality	Ignores or enables predatory extraction by paramilitaries; human rights abuses by Africa Corps/Wagner undermine long-term stability; no development or governance component; substitutes one external dependency for another	Anti-Western multipolarity; sovereignty respected without interference; military support as partnership rather than tutelage	Wagner/Africa Corps deployments in Mali, CAR, and Libya; Russian arms sales; UN voting alignment with African states on Ukraine-related resolutions	African: Russian paramilitaries replicate extractive colonial patterns under anti-imperialist rhetoric, violating African sovereignty in practice while claiming to defend it

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Provides the bulk of counterterrorism funding, intelligence, and training; generates extensive conflict data and analysis; self-critique has produced doctrinal evolution toward stabilization approaches	Over-securitizes African conflicts; conflates counterterrorism with state-building; interventions often lack political strategy and exit plans; empowers abusive state forces	Liberal international order; human rights and democratic governance as security prerequisites; counterterrorism as global public good	French Barkhane operation (2014–2022); US AFRICOM programs; EU training missions (EUTM Mali); ACLED and Crisis Group reporting; French strategic reviews acknowledging military-first failures	African: Western counterterrorism militarizes the Sahel, treats African conflicts as extensions of global jihad rather than local political crises, and has repeatedly prioritized short-term tactical gains over long-term political solutions
UN	Provides multilateral legitimacy; deploys large-scale peacekeeping with civilian protection mandates; generates normative frameworks (R2P, protection of civilians); produces extensive human rights documentation	Peacekeeping depends on host-state consent, which can be withdrawn; treats regional complexes as collections of national crises; Security Council power asymmetries marginalize African voices; too slow and too expensive for rapid response	Multilateralism; consent-based peacekeeping; civilian protection; impartiality; host-state partnership	MINUSMA (2013–2023) in Mali; AMISOM/ATMIS in Somalia; UN peacekeeping budget and troop contributions; UN human rights monitoring reports	African: UN peacekeeping is too dependent on Western funding and host-state consent; withdrawal of MINUSMA shows limits of consent-based models when governments prefer alternative security partners

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The Sahel, 2012–2025 — From Tuareg Rebellion to JNIM and ISSP Territorial Control

Levels of Analysis

Individual. The Sahel crisis was shaped by specific leaders whose decisions cascaded across the region. Iyad Ag Ghaly, a Tuareg leader who founded Ansar Dine and later JNIM, transformed a separatist rebellion into a jihadist insurgency that exploited local grievances over land, justice, and state predation. Amadou Toumani Touré, Mali's president in 2012, presided over a hollowed-out state that could not respond to the Tuareg advance, and his overthrow by junior officers in March 2012 accelerated state collapse. Colonel Assimi Goïta, who led two coups in Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), redirected the state's security partnerships from France to Russia, fundamentally altering the regional security architecture. In Burkina Faso, the 2022 coups similarly reoriented security policy toward Russian paramilitaries. At the operational level, jihadist commanders such as Amadou Koufa of JNIM's Katiba Macina exploited ethnic tensions and state predation to recruit fighters in central Mali and northern Burkina Faso. These individual decisions were not merely epiphenomenal; they altered alliance structures, military doctrines, and the territorial reach of armed groups.

State. The Malian state's failure was structural before it was military. Decades of predatory governance, underinvestment in the north, and the co-optation of local elites left the state without legitimacy or capacity in peripheral regions. When the MNLA launched its 2012 offensive, the Malian army collapsed not because of inferior firepower but because of institutional rot: unpaid soldiers, absent command structures, and a political class that treated the military as a patronage tool. Burkina Faso and Niger exhibited similar patterns—centralized capitals disconnected from borderlands, security forces that preyed on civilians, and political systems that alternated between electoral authoritarianism and military rule. The 2020–2023 coup wave in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger was both a symptom and an accelerator of state failure: each coup disrupted counterterrorism coordination, invited external realignment, and further eroded institutional capacity. The state level thus reveals a feedback loop in which insecurity produces coups, coups produce policy discontinuity, and discontinuity produces further insecurity.

Systemic. The Sahel constitutes a regional security complex in Buzan and Wæver's (2003) sense: the security of each state is interdependent with its neighbors, and threats are not easily externalized. The collapse of Libya in 2011 flooded the Sahel with weapons, fighters, and Tuareg returnees, directly enabling the 2012 Mali rebellion. France's Operation Serval (2013) and subsequent Barkhane mission (2014–2022) represented an external power's attempt to manage a regional complex through military force, but without a corresponding political strategy. ECOWAS attempted regional coordination but was constrained by member-state rivalries and, after 2020, by the withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from the organization. The African Union's Peace and Security Council issued communiqués but lacked enforcement capacity. The systemic level thus shows a regional complex in which state failure, external intervention, and institutional weakness reinforced one another, producing a security vacuum that armed groups exploited.

Transnational. The Sahel insurgency is irreducibly transnational. JNIM and ISSP operate across the Mali-Burkina Faso-Niger tri-border area, exploiting porous borders, shared ethnic networks, and weak state presence. Arms flows from Libya, smuggling routes connecting to the Mediterranean, and the movement of fighters between conflict zones create a transnational ecosystem that no single state can contain. The Global Terrorism Index has consistently ranked the Sahel among the world's deadliest regions for terrorism since 2019, with fatalities concentrated in the tri-border area. External actors—France, the United States, Russia, Turkey, and Gulf states—project power into the region, each pursuing distinct interests that reshape local

conflict dynamics. The transnational level reveals that the Sahel crisis cannot be resolved by any single state or external power; it requires coordinated regional and international action that has so far proven elusive.

Mechanism

The core mechanism driving the Sahel crisis is a **predatory-state vacuum loop**: weak and predatory state institutions in peripheral regions create governance vacuums; jihadist groups fill these vacuums by offering alternative dispute resolution, protection, and ideological framing; state forces respond with indiscriminate violence that alienates local populations and drives recruitment; the resulting insecurity justifies further militarization and external intervention; intervention without political strategy further weakens state legitimacy; and the cycle repeats at expanded scale. This mechanism operated in Mali from 2012 onward, spread to Burkina Faso after 2015, and reached Niger by 2021. A secondary mechanism is **external-intervention displacement**: each major external military intervention (French Serval 2013, Barkhane 2014–2022, Russian Africa Corps 2022–present) temporarily displaced armed groups from urban centers but failed to address underlying grievances, pushing violence into rural areas and across borders. A third mechanism is **coup-counterterrorism disruption**: military coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) severed security partnerships, expelled foreign forces, and redirected military resources toward regime survival rather than counterinsurgency, creating windows of opportunity for JNIM and ISSP expansion. By 2024, JNIM and ISSP controlled significant territories across the Sahel, with ACLED data showing a sustained increase in political violence events and fatalities in the tri-border region.

Perspective Reconstruction

African perspective (primary). The African perspective centers the Sahel crisis as a failure of regional ownership and a consequence of externally imposed security frameworks. From this vantage, the crisis originated not in global jihadism but in the structural marginalization of Sahelian populations by postcolonial states that inherited colonial administrative boundaries and extractive governance patterns. The African Union and ECOWAS possessed the institutional architecture—APSA, the African Standby Force, the Peace and Security Council—to respond, but lacked the funding, intelligence, and logistical capacity to operationalize their mandates. France's unilateral intervention in 2013, while militarily effective in the short term, displaced African agency and created a dependency that collapsed when France withdrew in 2022. The coups of 2020–2023, from this perspective, reflect popular frustration with both incumbent governments and their external backers, and the turn to Russia represents a search for sovereignty rather than ideological alignment. The African perspective's strongest claim is that sustainable security requires African-led political solutions—addressing Tuareg grievances, reforming predatory state institutions, and investing in peripheral development—rather than externally driven counterterrorism. Its limitation is that it can underestimate the material constraints on African regional institutions and the genuine appeal of jihadist ideology among marginalized youth.

Chinese perspective. China views the Sahel crisis primarily through the lens of development and state capacity. Beijing's engagement emphasizes infrastructure investment, economic cooperation, and non-interference in internal affairs. Chinese officials have consistently argued that poverty and underdevelopment are root causes of instability, and that security follows from economic growth. China's security cooperation in the Sahel has been limited to bilateral military training, equipment sales, and participation in UN peacekeeping missions. Beijing has avoided direct military intervention, positioning itself as a neutral partner that respects sovereignty. The Chinese perspective contributes an important corrective to the securitization of the Sahel by insisting on development dimensions, but it occludes the immediate security vacuum that armed groups exploit and underestimates the political drivers of conflict. Its non-interference

stance also means China has little to offer in terms of conflict mediation or governance reform.

Russian perspective. Russia frames its Sahel engagement as anti-imperialist solidarity and a corrective to Western failure. Following France's withdrawal from Mali in 2022, Russian paramilitaries—first Wagner, then Africa Corps—deployed to support the Malian junta, providing military training, equipment, and direct combat support. Moscow's narrative emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and the right of African states to choose their security partners. Russian officials have criticized French and American counterterrorism as neocolonial and ineffective. The Russian perspective contributes a geopolitical alternative that resonates with Sahelian governments frustrated by Western conditionality, but it occludes the extractive and abusive practices of Russian paramilitaries, the absence of any development or governance component in Russian engagement, and the long-term risks of substituting one external dependency for another. Its anti-Western framing also oversimplifies the Sahel crisis by reducing it to great-power competition rather than local political dynamics.

Western perspective. The Western perspective has dominated Sahel policy since 2012, framing the crisis as a counterterrorism challenge requiring military intervention, capacity-building, and stabilization. France's Operation Serval and Barkhane, the US Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership, and EU training missions represented substantial investments in military capacity. Western analysts and policymakers have produced extensive documentation of jihadist networks, conflict dynamics, and human rights abuses. The Western perspective's self-critique—evident in French strategic reviews and US Africa Command assessments—acknowledges that military-first approaches failed to address governance deficits and may have exacerbated conflict. The Western perspective contributes unmatched intelligence, funding, and analytical capacity, but it occludes the political and economic roots of the crisis, over-securitizes local grievances, and has repeatedly prioritized short-term tactical gains over long-term political solutions. Its interventions have also empowered abusive state forces and alienated local populations.

UN perspective. The UN perspective is embodied in MINUSMA, deployed to Mali in 2013 with a mandate encompassing security, civilian protection, and political support. MINUSMA represented the UN's attempt to stabilize a regional complex through multilateral peacekeeping, and it contributed to civilian protection, human rights monitoring, and electoral support. However, the UN perspective's dependence on host-state consent proved fatal: when Mali's junta requested MINUSMA's withdrawal in 2023, the mission ended, removing a key source of civilian protection and international oversight. The UN perspective contributes multilateral legitimacy and normative frameworks, but it occludes the transnational dynamics of the Sahel complex, treats the crisis as a national problem amenable to peacekeeping, and lacks the enforcement capacity to act when host governments turn against it. The withdrawal of MINUSMA illustrates the broader limits of consent-based peacekeeping in contexts where governments prefer alternative security partners.

Adjudication

The African perspective best explains the Sahel case, but with significant qualifications. Its central claim—that the crisis is rooted in predatory state governance and the marginalization of peripheral populations, and that sustainable security requires African-led political solutions—aligns with the evidence: the 2012 rebellion originated in Tuareg grievances over state neglect; jihadist recruitment exploited local disputes over land and justice; and external military interventions consistently failed to address these underlying dynamics. The African perspective also correctly identifies the coup wave as a symptom of state failure and popular frustration rather than merely a security setback. However, this perspective misses or underestimates three critical factors. First, it underestimates the autonomous appeal of jihadist ideology and the organizational capacity of JNIM and ISSP, which cannot be reduced to grievances alone. Second, it overestimates the

capacity of African regional institutions to deliver security in the absence of external funding and intelligence. Third, it does not fully account for the agency of Sahelian governments in choosing Russian paramilitaries over African regional frameworks—a choice that reflects elite calculations as much as popular sovereignty. The Western perspective, by contrast, best explains the military dynamics and the failure of counterterrorism, but it systematically underestimates the political roots of the crisis. The Russian perspective explains the geopolitical realignment but not the conflict's origins. The Chinese perspective is largely irrelevant to the security dynamics. The UN perspective explains the limits of multilateral engagement but not the drivers of conflict. A synthetic explanation would combine the African perspective's structural diagnosis with the Western perspective's military analysis and the transnational level's emphasis on cross-border dynamics, while acknowledging that no single perspective fully captures the Sahel's complexity.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. Define the Horn of Africa as a regional security complex using Buzan and Wæver: identify the principal state units, the security interdependence among them, and the external powers that penetrate the complex without constituting its core logic.

2. Explain how the Tigray war (2020–2022) altered the regional balance among Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia, and why the Pretoria agreement reduced large-scale fighting without resolving the complex.

3. Analyze the Sudan civil war (from April 2023) as both a domestic contest over state control and a node in the wider Horn complex, including Egyptian, Gulf, Chadian, and South Sudanese interests.

4. Assess the Red Sea crisis as an external shock that revalues Horn territory, especially ports, basing rights, and maritime chokepoints, and trace the feedback loop between internal fragmentation and external penetration.

5. Compare African (AU/IGAD), Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of the same complex; for each, identify one genuine contribution and one significant occlusion.

6. Formulate a falsifiable claim about whether regional institutions can de-escalate the complex, specifying the evidence that would refute it.

MODEL ANSWER

The Horn of Africa between 2020 and 2024 is best understood not as three separate crises but as a single regional security complex in which state survival, border legitimacy, maritime access, and external patronage are tightly coupled. Buzan and Wæver's framework directs attention to security interdependence: the security of each principal unit is significantly affected by others, and the complex has a distinct regional logic that cannot be reduced to global great-power competition. Ethiopia is the demographic and military core, but its internal federal crisis spilled across borders. Eritrea's security is bound to Ethiopia's; Sudan's transition and then civil war altered the western flank; Somalia's federal fragility and Al-Shabaab insurgency created

a persistent eastern vulnerability; and Djibouti, though small, sits at the maritime chokepoint that gives the complex global salience. External powers—Gulf states, Egypt, Turkey, China, Russia, Western actors, and the UN—penetrate the complex through ports, bases, arms, mediation, and humanitarian access, but they do not create its internal logic.

The Tigray war transformed this logic. Ethiopia's federal government, Eritrea, and Amhara forces aligned against the TPLF, while Sudan's transitional authorities initially faced refugee flows and border tensions. The war weakened Ethiopia's military, strained its economy, and deepened ethnic federal grievances. Eritrea gained temporary alignment with Addis Ababa but remained insecure about Ethiopian access to the sea and about Tigrayan remnants. Somalia watched Ethiopia's internal crisis while facing its own insurgency and contested federal relations. The Pretoria agreement ended large-scale fighting but left unresolved questions of disarmament, transitional justice, and regional power sharing; thus the war's main effect was to redistribute insecurity rather than resolve it.

Sudan's April 2023 civil war between the SAF and RSF then became a second shock. It is domestic in origin—rooted in the 2019 revolution, the 2021 coup, and the failure to integrate militias—but regional in consequence. Egypt has interests in Nile water and Red Sea stability; the UAE and Saudi Arabia have competed for influence and port access; Chad and South Sudan face refugee and border pressures; and Eritrea and Ethiopia calculate risks from Sudanese fragmentation. The war also created a vacuum in which external actors can arm proxies, making Sudan a node through which the Horn complex connects to Sahelian and Red Sea dynamics. From an African perspective, the tragedy is that regional ownership claims by IGAD and the AU have been weakened by member-state divisions and by the tendency of external powers to broker parallel tracks.

The Red Sea crisis adds a maritime layer. Attacks on shipping and the militarization of the Bab el-Mandeb and Gulf of Aden have increased the strategic value of ports in Djibouti, Berbera, Massawa, Port Sudan, and Assab. This external shock does not originate in the Horn, but it revalues Horn territory: coastal access, basing rights, and maritime security become bargaining chips in domestic and regional conflicts. Ethiopia's landlocked status, Eritrea's control of Assab, Somaliland's Berbera port, and Sudan's Port Sudan all become more consequential. The result is a feedback loop in which internal fragmentation invites external penetration, and external competition hardens internal factions.

Perspective reconstruction clarifies both contributions and blind spots. The African perspective, rooted in regional ownership and APSA, correctly identifies that sustainable security must be anchored in African institutions and sovereignty; its occlusion is that AU and IGAD capacity has often lagged behind political will, and member states have pursued unilateral or bilateral deals. The Chinese perspective emphasizes non-interference and development-security linkages; it contributes infrastructure and a norm against regime change, but occludes how Chinese economic interests and arms relationships shape local balances. The Russian perspective frames the West as destabilizing and presents security partnerships as sovereign choices; it contributes an anti-hegemonic vocabulary, but occludes the coercive and extractive dimensions of paramilitary and mercenary involvement. The Western perspective foregrounds counterterrorism, humanitarian protection, and liberal order; it contributes resources and early-warning capacity, but occludes how Western interventions and conditionalities have sometimes delegitimized local actors. The UN perspective emphasizes peacekeeping, mediation, and humanitarian access; it contributes legitimacy and operational scale, but occludes the political limits of missions when host-state consent fractures or great powers divide.

A falsifiable claim would be: if IGAD and the AU can establish a single, inclusive mediation architecture for Sudan and Ethiopia-Eritrea maritime issues, with verifiable ceasefire monitoring and a shared port-access

framework, then cross-border proxy arming and Red Sea militarization should measurably decline within two years. Evidence refuting this would include continued bilateral arms flows, new basing agreements outside the regional framework, and an increase in ACLED-recorded cross-border incidents despite institutional mediation. The broader lesson is that the Horn complex is not merely a collection of civil wars; it is a system in which sovereignty claims, maritime chokepoints, and external patronage interact. Any analysis that treats Tigray, Sudan, and the Red Sea as separate files will overestimate the efficacy of localized solutions and underestimate the regional feedback that sustains violence.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description (150–200 words)

In 2022, the M23 rebel movement re-emerged in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo after years of dormancy, capturing territory in North Kivu and displacing large populations. Kinshasa accused Rwanda of backing M23; Kigali denied direct support while framing its actions as security concerns linked to FDLR remnants and cross-border threats. Uganda deployed troops under bilateral and regional arrangements, while Burundi, Tanzania, and the East African Community Regional Force attempted stabilization with uneven mandates and timelines. The crisis unfolded alongside global demand for cobalt, coltan, tin, and gold, with artisanal mining and armed-group taxation embedded in transnational supply chains. By 2024–2025, diplomatic initiatives, including Luanda and Nairobi processes, had produced partial ceasefires but not durable demobilization. The case asks whether the Great Lakes is best explained as a mineral-driven proxy war, a post-colonial state-formation crisis, a regional security dilemma, or an interaction of all three.

(b) Required memo headings (prompts)

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal chain linking state weakness, armed-group financing, regional military intervention, and mineral extraction; specify scope conditions and observable implications.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of the crisis, steel-manning each and noting one occlusion.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare with one earlier Great Lakes crisis (for example, the 1998–2003 Congo wars or the 2012 M23 episode) and state what is similar, what differs, and why the analogy may fail.
- **Falsifiers:** List two or three observations that would refute your preferred explanation.

(c) Self-check line

Self-check: Did you distinguish description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what should follow), and prescription (what should be done), and avoid letting prescription masquerade as analysis?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which statement best captures the central analytical claim of Regional Security Complex Theory as applied to Africa in this lesson?

A. African conflicts are primarily caused by global great-power competition, and regional institutions are epiphenomenal.
B. Regional security complexes are defined by security interdependence among proximate states; external powers penetrate but do not constitute the complex's core logic.
C. The most important unit of analysis is the individual rebel commander, because insurgencies are driven by personal ambition.

D. Regional institutions such as ECOWAS and IGAD are always effective because they possess legal mandates.

Answer: B

Distractor diagnoses:
- **A** conflates systemic penetration with causation; it ignores the theory's claim that regional dynamics possess an autonomous logic that external powers influence but do not create.
- **C** reduces a regional-systemic process to individual-level agency; while commanders matter, they do not define the security interdependence among states.
- **D** confuses institutional mandate with operational efficacy; legal authority does not guarantee capacity, political will, or member-state compliance.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Data note. All figures below are approximate, drawn from ACLED public summaries, AU Peace and Security Council communiqués, and open-source military-presence trackers (2023–2025). ACLED systematically undercounts state violence, sexual violence, and events in inaccessible areas; treat every number as an order of magnitude, not a census. The purpose of the lab is to train trend-reading, level-of-analysis discipline, and perspective reconstruction — not to produce a definitive dataset.

Table 1 — Conflict fatalities by region, 2010–2025 (approximate ACLED-derived bands)

Period	Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger)	Horn (Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, South Sudan)	Great Lakes (DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi)
2010–2012	Low (<1,000/yr)	Moderate–High (Somalia AMISOM; Sudan)	Moderate (eastern DRC militias)
2013–2015	Rising (Mali intervention; MINUSMA)	High (Somalia; South Sudan civil war)	Moderate–High (ADF, M23)
2016–2018	Rising (Burkina Faso emergence)	Moderate–High	Moderate (ADF persistence)
2019–2021	Sharp rise (Burkina, central Mali)	Very high (Tigray war 2020–22)	Moderate (ADF resurgence)
2022–2025	Very high (JNIM/ISSP territorial control)	Very high (Sudan civil war 2023–)	High (M23 resurgence 2022–)

Table 2 — External military presence by actor, 2024–2025 (approximate)

Actor	Primary theaters	Approx. footprint	Stated mandate
France	Sahel (withdrawn 2022–24)	Peak ~5,100 (Barkhane); residual bilateral	Counterterrorism

Actor	Primary theaters	Approx. footprint	Stated mandate
Russia / Africa Corps (ex-Wagner)	Mali, CAR, Libya, Sudan	1,000–2,500 (Mali est.)	Regime support, CT
US (AFRICOM)	Djibouti, Niger (withdrawn 2024), Kenya	~6,000–7,000 continent-wide; Camp Lemonnier ~4,000	CT, great-power competition
Turkey	Somalia, Libya	Largest overseas base (Mogadishu)	Training, CT, influence
UAE	Horn ports, Sudan (alleged)	Port investments; alleged RSF support	Economic, strategic
Egypt	Sudan, Somalia	Diplomatic/military	Nile security, Red Sea
Gulf (Saudi, Qatar)	Sudan, Somalia	Diplomatic/financial	Mediation, influence

Table 3 — AU PSC and regional security mechanisms (selected)

Mechanism	Region	Period	Status
AMISOM / ATMIS	Somalia	2007–present (transition)	Drawdown; Somali transition
MINUSMA	Mali	2013–2023	Withdrawn at junta request
G5 Sahel Joint Force	Sahel	2017–present	Largely inactive
SADC SAMIM	Mozambique (Cabo Delgado)	2021–present	Drawdown
ECOWAS (Niger episode)	West Africa	2023	Threatened intervention; not executed
IGAD mediation	Sudan, South Sudan	2023–present	Ongoing, limited
AU PSC sessions on Sudan	Horn	2023–2025	Multiple; limited enforcement

Analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Describe the trajectory of fatalities 2010–2025 across the three complexes. Which region shows the steepest *relative* increase, and which shows the largest *absolute* level? Identify three inflection points (e.g., 2012 Mali rebellion, 2019 Burkina escalation, 2020 Tigray, 2023 Sudan) and state whether each corresponds to a political rupture (coup, state collapse, external intervention) rather than a purely military dynamic. What does the lag between political rupture and fatality spike suggest about the mechanism?

2. **Level of analysis.** The Sahel shows escalation while the Great Lakes shows persistence-without-escalation. Which level of analysis — individual, state, systemic, or transnational — best explains this divergence? Argue whether state collapse (state level) or transnational jihadist diffusion (transnational level) is the dominant driver in the Sahel, and specify what evidence would distinguish the two (e.g., whether fatalities track border porosity or regime fragility).

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** How would each perspective read Tables 1–3? (a) African: regional ownership and APSA gaps; (b) Chinese: non-interference plus security cooperation; (c) Russian: Africa Corps and anti-Western framing; (d) Western: stabilization, CT, and self-critique; (e) UN: MINUSMA, AMISOM/ATMIS, peacekeeping effectiveness. Which perspective best accounts for the external military presence data, and which is most challenged by the AU PSC's limited enforcement record in Table 3?
4. **Interpretation.** Do the data support or challenge Buzan and Wæver's (2003) claim that regional security complexes are durable structures? Consider whether the Sahel complex is "regionalizing" (spilling across borders into coastal states) or "internationalizing" (great-power entry displacing regional actors). Propose one metric that would decide between these two readings, and state what value of that metric would falsify the regional-complex thesis.
5. **Limitation.** What do ACLED data not capture that matters for this lesson? Name at least three omissions (e.g., sexual violence, displacement, state repression, underreporting in inaccessible areas, definitional exclusion of riots/protests). For each, state how the omission biases conclusions about which region is "most violent" and about whether external intervention "worked."

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — Regional Security Complex Map of Africa (hand-drawn)

- **What to draw:** Outline of the African continent in black ink. Shade three complexes: the Sahel belt (Mali–Burkina Faso–Niger) in orange; the Horn (Ethiopia–Somalia–Sudan–Eritrea–South Sudan) in red; the Great Lakes (DRC–Rwanda–Uganda–Burundi) in purple. Leave coastal West Africa and southern Africa unshaded but bordered.
- **Labels to place:** Capitals (Bamako, Ouagadougou, Niamey, Addis Ababa, Mogadishu, Khartoum, Kinshasa, Kigali, Kampala); key bases (Camp Lemonnier, Agadez, Gao, Mogadishu port); maritime chokepoints (Bab el-Mandeb, Strait of Hormuz approaches).
- **Arrows:** Dashed orange arrows from Sahel into Benin, Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire (spillover); red arrows from Horn into Red Sea shipping lanes; purple arrows from eastern DRC mineral zones to Kigali/Kampala (resource flows).
- **Perspective overlay (margin annotations):** "African: regional ownership & APSA"; "Western: CT corridors & stabilization"; "Russian: anti-Western opportunity"; "Chinese: non-interference + BRI ports"; "UN: mission footprints (MINUSMA, AMISOM/ATMIS)."

Visual 2 — Sahel Insurgency Ecosystem (network diagram)

- **What to draw:** A node-and-edge diagram on a white background. Nodes as circles of varying size (size = territorial control). Central large node: "JNIM (Al-Qaeda-aligned)" in green; adjacent large node: "ISSP (ISIS-aligned)" in black; state nodes: "Mali," "Burkina Faso," "Niger" in blue; external nodes: "Africa Corps (Russia)" in red, "France (withdrawn)" in grey dashed, "ECOWAS" in yellow.
- **Edges:** Solid red lines = active combat; dashed grey lines = rivalry/competition between JNIM and ISSP; thick black lines = territorial control by insurgents; dotted blue lines = state–external military cooperation.
- **Labels to place:** "JNIM: local embeddedness, taxation, courts"; "ISSP: more indiscriminate, anti-

civilian"; "Africa Corps: regime protection, extractive concessions"; "MINUSMA 2013–23: withdrawn."
- **Perspective overlay (margin):** "Western: CT failure & self-critique"; "African: sovereignty vs. external dependency"; "Russian: anti-Western framing"; "UN: peacekeeping limits"; "Chinese: non-interference."

Visual 3 — Horn of Africa Fragmentation and Red Sea Crisis (map)

- **What to draw:** Map of the Horn coastline plus the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Mark: Tigray region (shaded), Khartoum, Port Sudan, Mogadishu, Djibouti, Berbera, Hargeisa. Mark Red Sea shipping lane as a blue corridor; annotate Houthi attack zones (2023–24) with red stars.
- **Arrows:** Gulf-state influence flows (UAE, Saudi, Qatar) as green arrows into ports; refugee flows as grey arrows into Sudan/Chad; arms flows as black arrows into Sudan and Somalia.
- **Labels to place:** "SAF vs RSF (Sudan 2023–)"; "Tigray war 2020–22"; "ATMIS drawdown"; "Turkey base (Mogadishu)"; "UAE ports (Berbera, Bosaso)."
- **Perspective overlay (margin):** "African: regional ownership (IGAD, AU)"; "UN: peacekeeping limits"; "Western: maritime security"; "Chinese: BRI ports & non-interference"; "Russian: naval interest."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue column

Cue	Notes (with source log)
Define Regional Security Complex (Buzan & Wæver)	A set of states whose major security concerns are so interlinked that they cannot be resolved apart from one another; complexes are durable, regionally bounded, and anarchic at the regional level. *Source: Buzan & Wæver (2003), Regions and Powers.*
What makes a complex "regional"?	Geographic proximity + security interdependence + absence of a global hegemon that fully subordinates regional dynamics. African complexes are "weakly institutionalized" — regional organizations exist but lack enforcement.
Sahel: key actors and timeline	2012 Tuareg rebellion (MNLA) + jihadist takeover (AQIM, MUJAO); French intervention (Serval, 2013); MINUSMA (2013–23); 2020–21 coups (Mali, Burkina, Niger); JNIM/ISSP expansion; Africa Corps entry. *Sources: ACLED Sahel reports 2023–25; Crisis Group Africa reports.*

Cue	Notes (with source log)
Why did MINUSMA fail?	Mandate–capacity mismatch; host-state consent erosion; junta expulsion (2023); inability to protect civilians; treated symptoms not causes. *Source: Williams (2018) on peacekeeping challenges; Crisis Group.*
Horn: Tigray war drivers	Federal–regional power struggle; Eritrea's role; ethnic federalism tensions; Abiy Ahmed's centralization. *Source: de Waal (2015), The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa.*
Sudan 2023 civil war: SAF vs RSF	Power struggle between Burhan (SAF) and Hemedti (RSF); collapse of transition; external backing (Egypt/UAE, etc.); humanitarian catastrophe.
Great Lakes: mineral–conflict link	Coltan, cobalt, gold in eastern DRC; armed groups tax extraction; Rwanda/Uganda interventions (1996–, 1998–) and proxy militias. *Source: Mamdani (2009); Rodney (1972) on extractive structures.*
Rwanda–Uganda interventions in DRC	First Congo War (1996), Second (1998–2003); ongoing M23 (2012–13, 2022–) with alleged Rwandan support.
APSA: pillars and gaps	African Peace and Security Architecture: PSC, ASF, Continental Early Warning, Panel of the Wise. Gaps: funding, rapid deployment, political will, member-state sovereignty. *Source: Williams (2018).*
ECOWAS: Niger 2023 episode	Threatened military intervention after coup; not executed; revealed limits of regional enforcement vs. sovereignty norms.
IGAD: Sudan mediation	IGAD-led process; limited leverage; competing Gulf/Egyptian interests; AU PSC parallel tracks.
SADC: SAMIM	SADC mission in Mozambique (Cabo Delgado); drawdown; shows regional capacity but also dependency on South Africa.

Summary (3–5 sentences). Regional security complexes in Africa — Sahel, Horn, Great Lakes — are durable but weakly institutionalized structures in which security interdependence outpaces regional capacity. External actors (France, Russia, US, Gulf states, Turkey) have increasingly penetrated these complexes, often displacing African ownership without resolving root causes. ACLED data show escalating fatalities in the Sahel and Horn since 2019, while the Great Lakes persists at high levels without comparable escalation. African regional institutions (APSA, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC) possess normative frameworks but lack enforcement and funding, leaving a gap that external powers fill. The central puzzle is whether regional ownership can be rebuilt without either sovereignty absolutism or external dependency.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. A regional security complex is a neighborhood where countries' security problems are so tangled that you cannot fix one without affecting the others. In Africa, three such neighborhoods — the Sahel, the Horn, and the Great Lakes — keep producing violence that spills across borders. Outside powers keep stepping in (France, Russia, the US, Gulf states), but they treat symptoms and often make things worse. African regional bodies have good rules on paper but rarely enforce them. The result: more deaths, weaker states, and a cycle where each intervention invites the next.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. I could not cleanly explain why the Great Lakes has not escalated like the Sahel despite similar state weakness; the mineral–conflict mechanism is clear but the *containment* mechanism is not. I also could not specify the threshold at which a complex stops being "regional" and becomes "internationalized" — this needs the metric from Analysis Question 4. I am unsure whether APSA's failure is primarily financial or political; the sources point both ways.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-checking Buzan and Wæver (2003): complexes are defined by security interdependence, not by institutional density, so weak APSA does not falsify the theory — it confirms that complexes can exist without strong institutions. Re-checking de Waal (2015): the Horn's politics are driven by "political markets" and elite bargains, which explains why external intervention often reinforces rather than resolves conflict. Re-checking ACLED-derived bands: the Sahel's relative increase is the steepest; the Horn's absolute level remains highest. Williams (2018) confirms that AMISOM/ATMIS succeeded partially through troop-contributing countries' own interests, not pure altruism.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. *Analogy:* A regional security complex is like a shared apartment building with thin walls — a fire in one flat (Mali 2012) spreads to neighbors (Burkina, Niger) because the walls (borders) are porous and the landlord (regional institution) has no fire brigade. *Limits:* The analogy implies passive spread; it misses that actors *choose* to intervene (France, Russia) and that some "fires" are deliberately lit (proxy warfare). It also implies a single building; in reality the three complexes interact (Sudan's collapse affects Sahel arms flows). Do not push the analogy to "just call the fire department" — there is no neutral fire department; every responder has interests.

Step 5 — Rewrite (compressed final). Regional security complexes in Africa are durable, interdependent security neighborhoods (Sahel, Horn, Great Lakes) whose violence escalates or persists according to state capacity and transnational diffusion, not merely local grievances. External powers penetrate these complexes with counterterrorism and geopolitical agendas, while African regional institutions (APSA, ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC) lack enforcement, producing a sovereignty–dependency dilemma. ACLED trends show the Sahel's steepest relative escalation since 2019 and the Horn's highest absolute levels, with the Great Lakes persisting at high but stable levels. The central analytical task is to distinguish regionalization (cross-border spillover) from internationalization (great-power displacement of regional actors) and to specify falsifiers for each.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L30	definition	What is a regional security complex?	A regional security complex is a set of states and other actors whose security concerns are so interlinked that they cannot be analyzed separately from their regional neighborhood. Buzan and Wæver (2003) treat regional complexes as the middle level between the global system and individual states.	African perspective stresses that regional complexes are also arenas of sovereignty bargaining, not just threat interaction.
L30	mechanism	How does RSC theory explain African conflicts?	It explains conflict by tracing how threats, alliances, and interventions circulate within a bounded region rather than by treating each state as an isolated unit. The mechanism is regional interdependence: violence in one node reshapes incentives, borders, and external alignments across the complex.	African scholars add that colonial borders and postcolonial state weakness make regional interdependence unusually dense.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L30	application	Which three African regional security complexes are central in this lesson?	The Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes. Each has distinct conflict drivers, but all show cross-border insurgency, state fragility, and external military involvement.	African perspective treats these as overlapping sovereignty spaces rather than fixed regional boxes.
L30	mechanism	What is the Sahel insurgency ecosystem?	It is a network of jihadist groups, state forces, militias, and external actors competing for territory, revenue, and legitimacy across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. JNIM and ISSP are central armed actors, while state forces and Russian paramilitaries add further layers of violence and bargaining.	African perspective highlights that local grievances and state absence often matter more than global jihadist ideology.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L30	application	Why did counterterrorism fail to stabilize the Sahel?	Counterterrorism often prioritized kinetic strikes and external partnerships over political inclusion, state legitimacy, and local protection. The result was tactical disruption of groups without durable reduction in territorial control or civilian insecurity.	Western self-critique acknowledges over-militarization; African perspective stresses missing local ownership.
L30	comparison	How does the Horn differ from the Sahel as a security complex?	The Horn combines interstate rivalry, civil war, Red Sea geopolitics, and Gulf state involvement, whereas the Sahel is more dominated by non-state insurgency and weak state control. Both, however, show how regional and external actors become entangled in local conflicts.	African perspective sees the Horn as a sovereignty crisis with multiple competing state projects.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L30	mechanism	What drives Great Lakes conflict around minerals?	Armed groups, state forces, and regional powers compete over mineral-rich territory, especially in eastern DRC, while political and ethnic narratives legitimate extraction and violence. Rwanda and Uganda have been repeatedly accused of supporting armed actors, which they deny or frame as security necessities.	African perspective emphasizes Congolese sovereignty and the regionalization of extraction.
L30	application	What is APSA and why does its efficacy matter?	The African Peace and Security Architecture is the AU framework for conflict prevention, mediation, and peace support operations. Its efficacy matters because regional institutions are supposed to translate African ownership into operational capacity, but they face funding, political, and coordination gaps.	African perspective treats APSA as a sovereignty project, not merely a technical mechanism.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L30	source	What do ACLED data contribute to this lesson?	ACLED data help track conflict events, fatalities, and geographic diffusion across the Sahel, Horn, and Great Lakes. They are useful for identifying trends and intensity, but they do not by themselves explain motives, legitimacy, or political outcomes.	Data are strongest when read alongside African political analysis rather than as neutral truth.
L30	reconstruction	How does the African perspective frame regional ownership?	It argues that durable security requires African-led institutions, local legitimacy, and respect for sovereignty, while recognizing that sovereignty is often fragmented in practice. Regional ownership is therefore both a normative claim and a political struggle.	This is the primary perspective: it asks who controls security decisions and whose suffering counts.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L30	occlusion	What does Western counterterrorism framing often occlude?	It can occlude local political grievances, state violence, civilian harm, and the ways external military presence reshapes local power. It may also reduce complex conflicts to terrorist threats.	African and UN perspectives highlight protection failures and legitimacy deficits.
L30	adjudication	How should one adjudicate between RSC theory and state-centric explanations?	RSC theory is stronger when cross-border dynamics dominate; state-centric explanations are stronger when domestic bargains, regime survival, or local grievances are primary. The best analysis specifies which level is doing the causal work in a given period.	African perspective often requires both, because weak states and dense regions interact.
L30	visual	What is the core visual anchor for this lesson?	The visual anchor maps three regional complexes, their armed actors, external forces, and institutional responders, showing how local violence scales into regional and global security concerns.	The overlay should mark African ownership, Chinese non-interference, Russian paramilitary presence, Western CT, and UN missions.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L30	debate	What is the central debate over external military presence?	One side argues external forces can contain insurgents and protect civilians; the other argues they undermine sovereignty, fuel backlash, and create dependency. The debate turns on legitimacy, mandate design, and whether force is tied to political settlement.	African perspective asks whether intervention strengthens or weakens regional self-determination.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Next action
Define and apply RSC theory	0-100	Can explain Buzan and Wæver (2003) and identify scope conditions	Re-explain without notes
Reconstruct the Sahel case 2012-2025	0-100	Can trace Tuareg rebellion to JNIM/ISSP territorial control	Draw timeline from memory
Reconstruct the Horn case 2020-2024	0-100	Can link Tigray, Sudan, and Red Sea dynamics	Write one-paragraph complex map
Reconstruct Great Lakes mineral politics	0-100	Can connect DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, and extraction	Identify one falsifier
Evaluate APSA and regional institutions	0-100	Can compare ECOWAS, IGAD, SADC, and AU roles	Score one institution against criteria
Interpret ACLED conflict data	0-100	Can distinguish trend from causal explanation	Re-run one table reading

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Next action
Reconstruct all five perspectives	0-100	Can state each perspective's contribution and occlusion	Complete comparison matrix
Adjudicate competing explanations	0-100	Can specify evidence that would change conclusion	Write three falsifiers

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which part of the lesson most changed your prior view: the African perspective on sovereignty, the failure of Sahel counterterrorism, or the entanglement of Gulf states in the Horn?
2. Which claim are you least able to defend with evidence right now, and what source or data would you need to strengthen it?
3. If you had to advise a regional organization, which mechanism would you prioritize first: force generation, political mediation, civilian protection, or data-driven early warning?

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Regional security complexes are just geographic neighborhoods.	They are relational systems defined by security interdependence, not proximity alone.	Buzan and Wæver (2003)
JNIM and ISSP are identical movements with identical goals.	They are rival jihadist networks with overlapping but distinct structures, alliances, and territorial strategies.	ACLED Sahel reports (2023-2025); Crisis Group Africa reports
The Horn crisis is only a set of separate national civil wars.	It is a regional complex linking Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and external Gulf actors.	de Waal (2015); Crisis Group Africa reports
Mineral wealth alone causes Great Lakes violence.	Minerals interact with state weakness, regional intervention, identity politics, and armed group governance.	Crisis Group Africa reports
Strong AU mandates guarantee effective operations.	Mandates must be matched by funding, troop contributions, logistics, and political consensus.	Williams (2018)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Regional security complex; sovereignty; insurgency ecosystem; mineralized conflict	Regional interdependence; cross-border diffusion; state absence; external intervention; extraction networks	Buzan and Wæver (2003) RSC theory; African ownership arguments	Sahel 2012-2025; Horn 2020-2024; Great Lakes DRC-Rwanda-Uganda	Counterterrorism vs political settlement; intervention vs sovereignty; data vs interpretation	Decline in cross-border attacks; durable territorial control by states; reduced external military presence; improved civilian protection	L23 asymmetric warfare; L27 colonial state formation; L29 conflict political economy; L31 great power competition; L34 Sahel synthesis; L44 proxy warfare
APSA; ECOWAS; IGAD; SADC; AU PSC	Mandate design; force generation; mediation; early warning; coordination	Williams (2018) on AU peace operations; African institutionalism	AU PSC interventions; AMISOM/ATMIS; MINUSMA	Effectiveness vs legitimacy; African ownership vs donor dependence	Sustained funding; troop rotations; civilian harm reduction; political settlement	L29 conflict political economy; L31 great power competition; L44 proxy warfare

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 — Same day, 25 minutes:** Re-read the five key ideas, then recite the three regional complexes and their central actors without notes.
- **R2 — 48 hours, 40 minutes:** Reconstruct the Sahel 2012-2025 worked example and the Horn 2020-2024 problem pair, marking where each perspective changes the explanation.
- **R3 — 1 week, 45 minutes:** Re-analyze one ACLED-style table, separating trend description from causal interpretation and identifying one limitation.
- **R4 — 2 weeks, 50 minutes:** Rebuild the five-perspective comparison matrix from memory and add one falsifier for each perspective.
- **R5 — 1 month, 60 minutes:** Write a full independent memo on a new regional case using the required headings and test it against the completion checklist.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define a regional security complex using Buzan and Wæver (2003).
☐ I can identify the Sahel, Horn, and Great Lakes as distinct but comparable complexes.

- ☐ I can explain the Sahel insurgency ecosystem without reducing it to terrorism.
- ☐ I can trace the Sahel from the 2012 Tuareg rebellion to JNIM and ISSP territorial control.
- ☐ I can explain Horn fragmentation as a regional complex involving Gulf states.
- ☐ I can connect Great Lakes violence to minerals, state weakness, and regional intervention.
- ☐ I can evaluate APSA, ECOWAS, IGAD, and SADC using evidence rather than labels.
- ☐ I can read ACLED-style data as trend evidence without overclaiming causation.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary, not as a regional example.
- ☐ I can steel-man the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
- ☐ I can identify what each of the five perspectives occludes.
- ☐ I can adjudicate between RSC theory and state-centric explanations.
- ☐ I can specify falsifiers for at least three major claims.
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
- ☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to a regional case.
- ☐ I can complete the independent memo using the required headings.
- ☐ I can explain why regional ownership is both normative and political.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Theory and regional complexes - Buzan, Barry, and Ole Wæver (2003), *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*.

Sahel conflict data and analysis - ACLED Sahel monitoring reports (2023, 2024, 2025). - Crisis Group Africa reports on the Sahel (various years).

Horn of Africa - de Waal, Alex (2015), *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War and the Business of Power*. - Crisis Group Africa reports on the Horn (various years).

African peace operations and institutions - Williams, Paul D. (2018), *Fighting for Peace in Somalia: A History and Analysis of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), 2007-2017*.

Great Lakes and mineralized conflict - Crisis Group Africa reports on the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Great Lakes (various years).

End of Lesson 30. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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32. Great Power Competition on the Continent

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 31 — Great Power Competition on the Continent
Module	Module 5: African Geopolitical Architecture
Prerequisites	L12 (Cold War), L18 (weaponized interdependence), L30 (regional security complexes)

Field	Value
Interleaved links	Forward to L32 (African agency), L33 (critical minerals), L47–49 (systemic rivalry)
Reading load	7–9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, worked example, problem pair, flashcards, visuals
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / create
Estimated study time	7–9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is whether Africa is best understood as a passive object of renewed great-power competition or as an active arena in which African states, societies, and regional institutions bargain, select, and recombine external offers. The phrase "new scramble" captures a real anxiety: external powers are again competing for ports, minerals, military access, votes, and influence across the continent. Yet the phrase also risks reproducing an older colonial grammar in which Africa appears as territory to be divided rather than as a field of political agency. The lesson therefore begins not with a catalogue of foreign powers but with a theoretical question: under what conditions does external competition constrain African choice, and under what conditions does it expand it? This is not a semantic dispute. It shapes how one reads trade data, security agreements, debt contracts, and diplomatic communiqués. If Africa is treated as an object, then the story is about Washington, Beijing, Moscow, Brussels, Ankara, Riyadh, and New Delhi. If Africa is treated as an arena, then the story is about how African governments and publics use rivalry among outsiders to secure infrastructure, security, market access, and diplomatic room for manoeuvre. The lesson's task is to hold both possibilities in tension and to adjudicate between them using mechanisms, evidence, and scope conditions rather than slogans.

This lesson sits at a junction in the curriculum. Lesson 12 on the Cold War established that Africa was not merely a backdrop to superpower rivalry but a site where proxy wars, ideological competition, and post-colonial state formation interacted. Lesson 18 on weaponized interdependence showed that trade, finance, technology, and supply chains can be converted into instruments of coercion, which means that economic partnership is never politically innocent. Lesson 30 on regional security complexes argued that threats and security dynamics cluster regionally, so that a crisis in the Sahel, the Horn, or the Great Lakes cannot be understood solely through bilateral great-power rivalry. Lesson 31 brings these threads together by asking how systemic competition interacts with regional security structures and African bargaining. It also prepares the ground for Lesson 32 on African agency, Lesson 33 on critical minerals, and Lessons 47–49 on systemic rivalry. The student should therefore read this lesson as a bridge between historical international relations, political economy, and contemporary security studies, not as a current-events briefing.

The contemporary landscape is genuinely multipolar in a way that differs from the Cold War. China's engagement is anchored in FOCAC, state-backed finance, infrastructure, and a discourse of "win-win" development and non-interference. Russia's engagement combines arms sales, security partnerships, information operations, and an anti-Western narrative that presents Moscow as a defender of sovereignty against conditional Western power. Western engagement remains significant through trade preferences such as AGOA, development finance, military assistance, and diplomatic conditionality, but it is also marked by strategic retrenchment, fatigue, and competing priorities. Meanwhile, Gulf states, Turkey, India, and other middle

powers have multiplied the number of suitors, sometimes offering faster, less conditional, or more security-focused deals. This multiplication matters theoretically: in a bipolar system, African states often faced a stark choice; in a multipolar or fragmented system, they may be able to play suitors against one another, though only within constraints set by debt, conflict, institutional weakness, and elite politics.

The lesson also insists on distinguishing levels of analysis. At the individual level, leaders, diplomats, military officers, business elites, and civil-society actors make choices shaped by domestic incentives and transnational networks. At the state level, governments pursue security, revenue, legitimacy, and regime survival. At the systemic level, the distribution of power, alliance structures, and global economic cycles shape what is possible. At the transnational level, diasporas, multinational firms, armed groups, religious networks, and illicit markets cross borders and complicate state control. A common error is to infer African passivity from systemic power asymmetry. Another common error is to infer African omnipotence from the mere presence of multiple external partners. The correct analytical move is to specify the mechanism through which an external offer becomes a domestic political resource, a security dependency, a debt obligation, or a bargaining chip. Without that mechanism, one cannot distinguish partnership from penetration, or agency from improvisation under constraint.

The theoretical lineage is plural. Realist traditions emphasize power politics, spheres of influence, and the security dilemma; they help explain military basing, arms transfers, and strategic competition over chokepoints and minerals. Liberal and institutionalist traditions emphasize interdependence, trade regimes, and the possibility that economic ties create mutual gains and restraint. Constructivist traditions emphasize norms, identity, and the social construction of partnership, including the language of "win-win," sovereignty, and non-interference. Critical and decolonial traditions, drawing on scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, and Fanon, warn that formal sovereignty can coexist with structural dependence and that external powers often reproduce hierarchies through finance, knowledge, and security practices. African agency scholarship, including work by Aning, Danso, and Tamale, pushes back against both Afro-pessimism and romanticism by examining how African actors negotiate, resist, adapt, and sometimes capture external projects. The lesson does not ask the student to choose one tradition as the truth. It asks the student to identify which tradition best explains a given case, where its scope conditions end, and what evidence would falsify it.

By the end of the lesson, the student should be able to reconstruct the "new scramble" thesis and its critics; compare Chinese, Russian, Western, Gulf, Turkish, Indian, and other middle-power engagements through their mechanisms rather than their rhetoric; read FOCAC commitments and Sahel security outcomes as bargains with terms; use trade, FDI, arms, and voting data without overclaiming; and produce a memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription. The student should also be able to steelman all five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—and identify what each reveals and what it occludes. The final test is not whether the student can name the largest investor or the most recent summit, but whether they can explain why a particular external relationship produces a particular outcome in a particular African context, and what would have to be true for that explanation to fail.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. From Lesson 12: How did Cold War proxy competition in Africa combine superpower rivalry with local political struggles, and why does that history caution against treating African actors as mere

instruments?
2. From Lesson 12: What is the difference between a proxy war and a civil war with external intervention, and which African cases illustrate the boundary problem?
3. From Lesson 18: Define weaponized interdependence and give one example of how trade, finance, or technology can be converted into coercive leverage.
4. From Lesson 18: Why does economic interdependence sometimes produce restraint and sometimes produce vulnerability, and what domestic or institutional variables mediate that difference?
5. From Lesson 30: What is a regional security complex, and how does the Sahel or Horn of Africa demonstrate clustering of threats across borders?
6. From Lesson 30: How can an external power's bilateral security partnership inadvertently reshape a regional security complex?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Is the "new scramble" thesis a useful analytical framework, a misleading metaphor, or both—and what evidence would distinguish these possibilities?
2. How do African governments convert the presence of multiple external suitors into bargaining power, and what limits that conversion?
3. Which external engagement model—Chinese infrastructure finance, Russian security partnership, Western conditionality, or middle-power pragmatism—best explains a given outcome in a specific African case, and on what mechanism?
4. What would falsify the claim that a particular external power's engagement is primarily developmental rather than strategic?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Multi-alignment**: A state's practice of maintaining productive relationships with several competing powers simultaneously rather than joining a single bloc; provisional definition: strategic diversification without formal alliance.
- **New scramble thesis**: The argument that contemporary great-power competition in Africa resembles colonial-era partition in its extractive and competitive logic; provisional definition: a critical frame treating Africa as an object of external rivalry.
- **FOCAC**: The Forum on China–Africa Cooperation, a multilateral platform for China–Africa political, economic, and development coordination; provisional definition: the institutional anchor of China's Africa policy.
- **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**: China's global infrastructure and connectivity initiative, including projects in Africa; provisional definition: a state-backed framework for financing and building cross-border infrastructure.
- **Debt-trap diplomacy**: The allegation that creditors deliberately lend to create unsustainable debt and thereby extract strategic concessions; provisional definition: a contested causal claim about creditor intent and debtor vulnerability.
- **Africa Corps**: Russia's state-linked security formation operating in parts of Africa, especially the Sahel; provisional definition: a Russian military instrument combining force projection, regime support, and influence operations.
- **AGOA**: The African Growth and Opportunity Act, a U.S. trade preference program for eligible African countries; provisional definition: market access conditioned on statutory eligibility criteria.

- **Conditionality**: The practice of attaching political, economic, or governance requirements to aid, loans, or trade preferences; provisional definition: external leverage exercised through rule-based access.
- **Weaponized interdependence**: The use of network centrality in trade, finance, or technology to coerce or constrain other actors; provisional definition: interdependence converted into power.
- **Regional security complex**: A cluster of states whose security concerns are so interlinked that they cannot be analysed separately; provisional definition: the regionalisation of threat and response.
- **Strategic retrenchment**: The reduction or reordering of a power's overseas commitments; provisional definition: withdrawal or reprioritisation driven by cost, fatigue, or competing demands.
- **Middle-power suitor**: A state outside the top-tier great powers that offers security, economic, or diplomatic partnerships in Africa; provisional definition: an additional competitor that expands African choice while adding complexity.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to: (1) **Analyze** the "new scramble" thesis and its critics, distinguishing structural-determinist accounts that treat Africa as passive terrain from agency-centered accounts that emphasize African bargaining, multi-alignment, and elite instrumentalization of external competition; (2) **Evaluate** Chinese engagement through FOCAC, the Belt and Road Initiative, and state-backed investment, adjudicating the "debt-trap" debate with reference to Brautigam's (2009) and Taylor's (2014) arguments and to the FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021); (3) **Compare** Russian, Western, and middle-power strategies across security, economic, and diplomatic domains, using SIPRI arms-transfer data and UNSC voting alignment as empirical anchors; (4) **Reconstruct** five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on great-power competition as a whole, identifying what each contributes and what it occludes; and (5) **Apply** four levels of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational) to a concrete case, producing a memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription and that states explicit falsifiers. The Bloom ceiling is *evaluate/create*: students are expected not merely to describe competing engagements but to adjudicate among them on evidence and to design a test that could falsify their preferred interpretation. Prerequisites (L12 Cold War, L18 weaponized interdependence, L30 regional security complexes) supply the historical and structural scaffolding; forward links (L32 African agency, L33 critical minerals, L47–49 systemic rivalry) extend the analysis into agency, resources, and systemic competition.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The "new scramble" thesis and its critics: is Africa a passive object of great-power competition?

Bolded Causal Claim: The "new scramble" thesis asserts that post-Cold War Africa has become the object of a renewed great-power competition structurally analogous to the late-nineteenth-century partition, driven by resource demand, strategic rivalry, and institutional asymmetry; its critics counter that African states are not passive terrain but active bargainers who leverage multiplicity of suitors through multi-alignment, so that competition produces leverage as often as subordination.

Mechanism: The thesis operates through three linked mechanisms that must be specified rather than assumed. First, *structural demand*: industrialization in China and India and energy-security concerns in West-

ern and Gulf capitals increased demand for African hydrocarbons, critical minerals, and agricultural land, raising the expected returns to securing long-term supply contracts, infrastructure corridors, and port access. This demand shock is not new in kind—colonial extraction followed similar logics—but its post-Cold War scale and its multiplicity of buyers are. Second, *institutional asymmetry*: many African states possess limited fiscal capacity, thin regulatory institutions, and high debt vulnerability, which lowers the transaction costs for external actors to negotiate bilateral deals outside multilateral frameworks and makes state-backed finance (Chinese policy banks, Gulf sovereign wealth funds, Russian state credit) comparatively attractive to governments that cannot access affordable private capital. The mechanism here is not conspiracy but a market for sovereignty in which weak states trade access for infrastructure and rents. Third, *competitive signaling*: as the unipolar moment faded after 2008, great powers began to treat African diplomatic alignment, basing access, and resource access as positional goods in a broader rivalry, producing bidding dynamics that resemble the scramble in form if not in legal status. The critics' counter-mechanism is *strategic multiplicity*: when several external powers compete, African elites gain room to maneuver, extract better terms, select partners, and resist conditionality. The mechanism of agency is not the absence of asymmetry but the exploitation of it—playing suitors against one another, using regional organizations (the AU, RECs) to set collective terms, and renegotiating contracts when leverage shifts. The debate thus turns on whether competition produces subordination (divide-and-rule, debt dependency, operational control of ports and mines ceded to creditors) or leverage (better infrastructure, diversified partnerships, policy space). Evidence is mixed and state-specific: some governments secured renegotiated terms and diversified partners; others accumulated unsustainable debt and ceded operational control. The mechanism is therefore conditional on state capacity, elite cohesion, and the structure of the external offer.

Scope Conditions: The "new scramble" framing applies best where (a) resource rents are high and state capacity low; (b) external powers have security interests (bases, counterterrorism, maritime chokepoints); and (c) regional institutions are weak, underfunded, or captured by national elites. It applies poorly where African states have diversified economies, strong regulatory capacity, or cohesive regional blocs capable of collective bargaining. It also assumes a degree of great-power substitutability that may not hold: Chinese infrastructure finance is not easily replaced by Western private capital, and Western security guarantees are not easily replaced by Russian arms, so "scramble" metaphors can obscure complementarity and lock-in. Temporally, the thesis fits the commodity boom (roughly 2000–2014) and the post-2015 security turn in the Sahel and Horn; it fits less well the 1990s, when Africa was marginal to great-power strategy and Western donors dominated through conditionality. The thesis also struggles to explain cases where African states initiated engagement (e.g., soliciting Chinese infrastructure finance) rather than being targeted, which is why agency-centered scholars insist on reversing the causal arrow in at least some cases.

Observable Implications: If the thesis holds, we should observe: rising and concentrated FDI and trade with a few external partners; debt distress correlated with non-concessional bilateral lending; military basing and arms transfers tracking rivalry rather than African threat profiles; and African voting alignment in multilateral forums shifting with patronage. If the agency critique holds, we should observe: diversification of partners over time; renegotiation of contracts and debt restructuring; regional institutional pushback (AU common positions, REC-level negotiation); and variation in outcomes across states with similar resource profiles. Data from Comtrade (trade flows by partner), UNCTAD (FDI by source), SIPRI (arms transfers), and World Bank/IMF debt statistics can adjudicate between these implications. The FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021) is a useful test case: its promise of reduced lending, more trade promotion, and green development suggests Chinese adaptation to African debt concerns—consistent with bargaining pressure rather than pure extraction—though the gap between promise and disbursement remains a live question.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From within African scholarship, the "new scramble" metaphor is double-edged. It captures real external predation—echoing Rodney's (1972) argument that external engagement underdeveloped the continent and Nkrumah's (1965) warning about neo-colonialism—but risks reproducing the very passivity it describes. African scholars such as Bayart (2009) and Mbembe (2001) emphasize that African states are not empty vessels; they are political orders in which elites instrumentalize external resources for domestic survival, producing what Bayart calls the "politics of the belly." Mamdani (1996) reminds us that the colonial state form was bifurcated, and postcolonial states inherit constraints that shape how external engagement lands—so that "scramble" outcomes are mediated by domestic state form, not just external appetite. The African vantage point thus reframes the central question: not "are great powers scrambling?" but "how do African political economies convert external competition into rents, and at what cost to citizens?" Multialignment is not naivety; it is a strategy born of structural weakness and historical experience of betrayal by single patrons. The strongest African critique of the "scramble" thesis is that it lets African elites off the hook by attributing outcomes solely to external actors, obscuring the domestic distribution of gains and losses. Grovogui (2006) and Oyěwùmí (1997) add that the very categories of "state" and "sovereignty" deployed in scramble debates are Eurocentric, and that African political thought offers alternative vocabularies of authority and obligation that the thesis ignores.

Chinese: Chinese official and scholarly discourse rejects the "scramble" framing as Cold War residue. Engagement is framed as "win-win" developmental partnership, non-interference, and mutual benefit, with FOCAC as a multilateral (Africa-wide) platform rather than bilateral extraction. The mechanism emphasized is infrastructure-led growth and industrialization support, decoupled from political conditionality. This perspective contributes the claim that development finance can be offered without governance conditionality; it occludes debt sustainability, labor and environmental standards, and the political effects of opaque contracting. Alden and Large (2019) and Taylor (2014) document both the scale of Chinese engagement and the recurring gap between "win-win" rhetoric and African perceptions of asymmetry.

Russian: Russian discourse frames engagement as sovereign choice and multipolarity: African states have the right to choose partners, and Russian presence (arms, nuclear energy, grain) offers an alternative to Western conditionality. The "scramble" is read as Western anxiety about losing monopoly. This perspective contributes anti-hegemonic legitimacy and a critique of Western double standards; it occludes the security externalities of proxy forces and the transactional nature of much engagement.

Western: Western analysis often treats great-power competition as a strategic problem: China and Russia are rivals whose gains in Africa reduce Western influence and threaten access to critical minerals and bases. Conditionality and governance promotion are framed as normative goods; retrenchment (e.g., French drawdown) is debated as either prudent or abandonment. This perspective contributes attention to governance, human rights, and transparency; it occludes its own historical record of intervention and extraction, and can overstate African passivity by treating African choices as symptoms of external manipulation.

UN: The UN perspective centers on Charter principles—sovereign equality, non-use of force, self-determination—and on peace and security. Great-power competition is assessed by its effects on conflict, humanitarian access, and multilateral cooperation. The UN contributes normative guardrails and data (SIPRI, Comtrade via member states, UNSC records) but is constrained by great-power veto politics and by the gap between norms and enforcement. It tends to treat African states as member states with equal voice while underweighting the structural inequality of that voice.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Chinese engagement: FOCAC, BRI, state-backed investment, and the 'debt trap' debate

Bolded Causal Claim: China's state-backed, infrastructure-first engagement in Africa creates a distinctive bargaining structure in which African governments gain rapid, large-scale financing and physical connectivity, but become locked into opaque, project-tied debt and procurement arrangements that shift commercial risk to African public balance sheets while concentrating leverage in Chinese state-owned banks and contractors; the resulting relationship is neither purely predatory nor purely developmental but a contingent, negotiated dependency whose terms vary by sector, borrower capacity, and African institutional strength.

Mechanism: China's African engagement is best understood as a state-coordinated development-finance and infrastructure system rather than a single aid program or a market-driven investment wave. The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), created in 2000, provides the diplomatic and planning architecture; triennial summits and action plans convert political commitments into sectoral priorities. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) supplies the project pipeline and corridor logic, while Chinese policy banks—especially the Export-Import Bank of China and the China Development Bank—provide large-scale, often concessional or semi-concessional finance. State-owned enterprises and construction firms then execute projects, frequently under tied procurement arrangements that bundle finance, engineering, and equipment. This bundling lowers transaction costs for African governments facing urgent infrastructure deficits and limited access to long-term capital, but it also compresses competition, weakens price discovery, and can obscure lifecycle costs. Brautigam's research on Chinese aid and finance challenges the crudest versions of the "debt-trap" thesis by showing that Chinese lending is heterogeneous, that asset seizures are not the typical outcome of distress, and that African governments are active participants in project selection and borrowing. Yet the same literature and subsequent debt restructurings show that opacity, collateralization, escrow mechanisms, and confidentiality clauses can create real bargaining asymmetries. The mechanism is therefore not a simple trap but a negotiated dependency: African elites gain rapid, visible infrastructure and diplomatic diversification; Chinese actors gain markets, resources, diplomatic support, and outlets for industrial overcapacity; and the distribution of risk depends on contract design, revenue forecasting, and the borrower's institutional capacity. Taylor's and Alden and Large's work on Africa-China relations emphasizes that the relationship has moved from a narrow resource-for-infrastructure logic toward a broader, more contested agenda including manufacturing, digital infrastructure, green energy, and security cooperation, which multiplies both opportunities and friction points.

Scope Conditions: The developmental benefits of Chinese engagement are most likely where African states have strong debt-management offices, transparent procurement, independent audit capacity, and diversified revenue streams; where projects have demonstrable economic returns and are integrated into national development plans; and where governments can credibly threaten to diversify partners. Vulnerability is higher where borrowing is driven by short-term political cycles, where projects are selected for visibility rather than productivity, where revenue depends on a narrow commodity base, and where contract terms are opaque. China's own constraints matter too: domestic economic slowdown, property-sector stress, and risk aversion after high-profile defaults have pushed Chinese lenders toward smaller, greener, and more commercially cautious projects, reducing the availability of the large, unconditional packages that characterized the 2010s. The "debt-trap" narrative is most accurate as a warning about opacity and bargaining asymmetry, not as a description of a uniform Chinese strategy; its weakest form assumes African passivity and ignores the agency

of African borrowers, while its strongest form identifies real risks in collateralized, non-transparent lending.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism holds, one should observe rising Chinese construction and finance in transport, power, and digital infrastructure; a shift in African debt composition toward Chinese policy banks and commercial creditors; frequent renegotiation or rescheduling rather than asset seizure; and African governments using Chinese offers as leverage in negotiations with Western, Gulf, and multilateral creditors. One should also observe variation: some projects become productive assets and trade corridors, while others become fiscal burdens or "white elephants." Data from Comtrade should show deepening China-Africa trade, often with African deficits in manufactured goods; FDI data should show Chinese investment concentrated in extractives, construction, and increasingly services and manufacturing; and debt data should show that distress is usually multicausal, involving global interest-rate shocks, commodity-price swings, and domestic fiscal choices as well as Chinese lending. The FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021) is a useful test case because it frames cooperation around trade, infrastructure, digital economy, green development, health, and peace and security, suggesting an attempt to broaden the relationship beyond hard infrastructure. Whether that breadth produces structural transformation depends less on Chinese intent than on African industrial policy, regulatory capacity, and the ability to enforce local content and technology transfer.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African perspectives, reconstructed from within, treat Chinese engagement as a strategic opportunity and a risk simultaneously. The relevant question is not whether China is a benevolent partner but whether African states can convert external finance into structural transformation. African scholarship and political thought—from Nkrumah's and Nyerere's insistence on economic sovereignty to contemporary analysts of "multi-alignment"—emphasize bargaining, agency, and the dangers of replacing one external dependency with another. African governments often welcome Chinese finance because it is fast, large-scale, and less conditional on governance reforms than Western aid; civil society and parliamentary actors, however, raise concerns about debt sustainability, labor standards, environmental harm, and elite capture. The African vantage point reveals what Western "debt-trap" discourse often occludes: African actors choose, negotiate, and sometimes misuse these resources, and the problem is frequently not Chinese predation alone but weak domestic accountability and the absence of credible alternatives. It also reveals that "non-interference" can be attractive to governments seeking policy space, even when it weakens human-rights and transparency norms.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames engagement as "win-win" developmental partnership, mutual benefit, and South-South cooperation. It emphasizes infrastructure gaps, non-interference, respect for sovereignty, and the export of development experience. This perspective contributes a focus on material capacity-building and on the legitimacy of state-led development, but it occludes labor and environmental abuses, contract opacity, and the power asymmetry between a large creditor and smaller borrowers. It also tends to treat African governments as the sole legitimate voice, underweighting African civil society and affected communities.

Russian: Russia generally welcomes Chinese engagement as part of a multipolar order that dilutes Western dominance, while remaining a minor economic actor itself. Its perspective emphasizes sovereign choice and anti-hegemony, but it can instrumentalize African grievances without offering comparable development finance. It occludes its own limited economic footprint and its tendency to free-ride on China's infrastructural presence.

Western: Western perspectives often frame Chinese engagement through strategic competition, debt sustain-

ability, and governance conditionality. They contribute useful scrutiny of opacity and risk, but they can overstate African passivity, understate Western historical extraction, and treat African alignment choices as symptoms of external manipulation rather than sovereign strategy.

UN: The UN perspective centers on Charter principles, debt sustainability, and the Sustainable Development Goals. It contributes normative guardrails, data, and multilateral frameworks, but is constrained by creditor politics and by the gap between norms and enforcement. It tends to treat African states as equal members while underweighting structural inequality in global finance.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Russian engagement: Africa Corps, arms sales, UNSC voting, and the anti-Western narrative

Bolded Causal Claim: Russia's contemporary African engagement converts a comparatively small economic footprint into disproportionate political-military influence by offering security assistance, arms, and diplomatic cover to fragile or contested regimes in exchange for resource access, strategic positioning, and international support, producing a transactional security dependency that can bolster incumbents in the short term while eroding accountability and complicating regional security cooperation over time.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with security vacuums. In parts of the Sahel and Central Africa, jihadist insurgencies, weak state capacity, and popular frustration with incumbent governments have created demand for rapid, unconditional security support. France's drawdown and the deterioration of Western military partnerships in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger opened space for alternative providers. Russia's Africa Corps—the state-controlled successor structure to Wagner's African operations—has been associated with deployments in the Sahel and Central Africa, offering regime protection, training, and information operations with fewer governance conditions than Western partners. Arms transfers are the material backbone: SIPRI arms transfer data show Russia among the leading suppliers of major conventional weapons to Africa in the 2010s and early 2020s, even as sanctions, production demands from the Ukraine war, and competition have altered volumes and delivery timelines. The political mechanism is narrative: Russian officials and aligned media frame the West as neocolonial, emphasize sovereignty and non-interference, and present Russia as an anti-hegemonic partner. This narrative resonates in contexts where French military presence is remembered through colonial history and where Western conditionality is seen as intrusive. In exchange, Russia seeks mineral concessions, basing or transit access, and diplomatic support, including abstentions or opposition to Western-sponsored resolutions at the United Nations. The mechanism is therefore not primarily developmental; it is security-for-resources and security-for-legitimacy, mediated by information politics and by the willingness of African juntas to trade long-term institutional reform for short-term regime survival.

Scope Conditions: This strategy works best where state institutions are fragile, where insurgencies threaten capital cities or ruling elites, where Western forces have withdrawn or lost legitimacy, and where regional organizations lack enforcement capacity. It is less effective where professional militaries resist politicization, where civil society and parliaments can scrutinize contracts, where ECOWAS or the African Union impose credible costs, or where alternative security partners offer more sustainable capacity-building. Russia's own constraints are significant: the war in Ukraine strains its defense-industrial base, sanctions complicate logistics and payments, and its economic offer remains narrow compared with China's or the West's. The anti-Western narrative is powerful but not infinitely transferable; it depends on local histories of intervention and on the perceived failures of previous partners. Where Russian-backed forces are associated with civilian harm or where security outcomes do not improve, the narrative's credibility erodes.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism holds, one should observe coups or transitional governments

followed by Russian security contracts; the expulsion or restriction of French and American forces; Russian flags and pro-Russian messaging in urban protests; arms deliveries and training missions; and shifts in UNSC voting, particularly abstentions on resolutions concerning Ukraine or human rights. One should also observe contested security outcomes: some governments may claim territorial gains or regime stabilization, while independent analysts and local communities may report continued violence, civilian casualties, or the fragmentation of security governance. Resource concessions and opaque contracts may follow security partnerships, though their terms are often difficult to verify. The problem-pair comparison with French Operation Barkhane is instructive: Barkhane represented a large-scale, conditionality-linked counterterrorism partnership that achieved tactical successes but faced legitimacy deficits, mission creep, and eventual political rejection; Russian engagement offers fewer conditions and faster regime support but risks substituting one external security dependency for another without addressing the governance drivers of insurgency. Neither model should be treated as a settled success; the relevant metric is not only battlefield outcomes but accountability, civilian protection, and the sustainability of local security institutions.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African perspectives on Russian engagement are shaped by a long history of anti-colonial solidarity, suspicion of Western conditionality, and frustration with security partnerships that failed to deliver stability. From this vantage point, Russia's appeal lies less in its economic capacity than in its willingness to treat African governments as sovereign equals and to avoid lectures on governance. African analysts and publics often distinguish between the desire for strategic diversification and the risks of mercenary or opaque security arrangements. The African perspective reveals that Russian influence is not simply imposed; it is invited by regimes facing existential threats and by publics alienated from Western-led interventions. It also reveals the limits of that invitation: replacing French or American forces with Russian contractors does not automatically resolve the political and social roots of insurgency, and it may weaken regional mechanisms such as ECOWAS or the African Union by privileging bilateral, regime-centered deals. African scholarship on sovereignty and postcolonial statehood—whether in Fanon's critique of comprador elites, Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state, or contemporary work on "multi-alignment"—suggests that the deeper issue is whether African states can build security institutions accountable to citizens rather than to external patrons.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames engagement as support for sovereign choice, multipolarity, and resistance to Western hegemony. It emphasizes non-interference, arms sales as legitimate commerce, and the right of African states to choose partners. This perspective contributes a critique of Western double standards and of interventionist conditionality, but it occludes the coercive aspects of mercenary deployment, the opacity of resource deals, and the human-rights costs of regime protection. It also tends to overstate Russia's capacity to deliver development or durable security.

Chinese: China generally prefers stability and non-interference, and it benefits from Russian challenges to Western dominance while avoiding direct security entanglement. The Chinese perspective may view Russian engagement as complementary to its own economic presence, but it occludes the risk that instability and mercenary politics could threaten Chinese investments and citizens. It underweights the possibility that Russian security partnerships could fragment African security architectures.

Western: Western perspectives frame Russian engagement as malign influence, disinformation, and exploitation of instability. They contribute documentation of abuses and of the erosion of democratic norms, but they can understate the legitimacy deficits of prior Western interventions and can treat African alignment with Russia as manipulation rather than strategic choice. They also risk conflating all Russian activity with a centrally directed grand strategy.

UN: The UN perspective centers on Charter principles, peace and security, and the protection of civilians. It contributes legal frameworks, peacekeeping data, and humanitarian monitoring, but is constrained by great-power veto politics and by the difficulty of enforcing norms against powerful or protected actors. It tends to treat African states as member states with equal voice while underweighting the structural inequality of that voice and the practical limits of multilateral enforcement.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Western engagement: conditionality, trade preferences (AGOA), military assistance, and strategic retrenchment

Bolded Causal Claim: Western engagement with Africa has operated less as a stable partnership than as a variable geometry of conditional access—trade preferences, aid, and security assistance are extended in exchange for governance, economic, and strategic concessions—so that strategic retrenchment has not removed Western power but has made it more selective, transactional, and securitized, thereby encouraging African multi-alignment rather than durable alignment.

Mechanism: The first mechanism is financial and developmental conditionality. From structural adjustment programs through debt-relief frameworks and budget-support arrangements, Western governments and the international financial institutions they dominate have used access to finance as leverage over fiscal, monetary, and regulatory policy. The mechanism assumes that African governments facing balance-of-payments constraints, debt distress, or limited domestic revenue will accept policy conditions in exchange for liquidity, debt relief, or concessional finance. Conditionality has ranged from macroeconomic stabilization and privatization to governance reforms, anti-corruption measures, and human-rights benchmarks. Its effectiveness depends on the credibility of the threat to withhold funds, the availability of alternative financiers, and the domestic political cost of compliance for African leaders. Where governments can access Chinese, Gulf, or domestic resource rents, conditionality weakens; where debt distress is acute and alternatives are scarce, it can still shape policy. A second mechanism is trade preference conditionality. The African Growth and Opportunity Act, enacted in 2000, grants eligible sub-Saharan African countries duty-free access to the United States market for a wide range of products, but eligibility is tied to criteria including a market-based economy, rule of law, political pluralism, human rights, and the elimination of barriers to United States trade and investment. The mechanism is intended to stimulate export-led growth, attract investment into manufacturing and agribusiness, and reward reform. In practice, utilization has been uneven: a small number of countries and sectors, especially apparel and, in earlier periods, petroleum, have captured much of the benefit, while many eligible countries have struggled with supply-side constraints, rules-of-origin complexity, and infrastructure deficits. Eligibility suspensions and reinstatements have also made AGOA a visible instrument of political leverage, as governments weigh reform costs against market access. European trade arrangements, including Economic Partnership Agreements and preferential schemes for least-developed countries, operate through a similar logic of market access in exchange for reciprocal or conditional liberalization, though with different sectoral sensitivities and regional configurations. A third mechanism is military assistance and security cooperation. The establishment of United States Africa Command in 2007, alongside bilateral training programs, equipment transfers, counterterrorism partnerships, maritime security initiatives, and intelligence cooperation, created a security-assistance architecture that links African force development to Western threat perceptions and operational priorities. The mechanism works through capacity building, interoperability, access arrangements, and the socialization of military elites, but it can also militarize domestic politics, strengthen security institutions relative to civilian oversight, and align African threat agendas with

external priorities such as counterterrorism or migration control. SIPRI arms-transfer data are useful here not as a simple measure of influence but as an indicator of dependency, diversification, and the geographic concentration of external security relationships. A fourth mechanism is strategic retrenchment itself. After the Cold War, Western aid to Africa declined in relative and sometimes absolute terms as strategic competition receded; after the attacks of September 11, 2001, engagement became more securitized; during the 2010s, United States attention shifted toward the Indo-Pacific; and in subsequent years aid budgets, diplomatic bandwidth, and military footprints were repeatedly reassessed. Retrenchment does not mean disappearance. It means that Western engagement becomes more selective: fewer universal development commitments, more targeted security partnerships, more commercial diplomacy, and more explicit competition with China and Russia. This selectivity creates openings for African governments to diversify partners, but it also means that Western leverage is concentrated in fewer domains and often exercised through conditionality rather than through broad-based developmental presence.

Scope Conditions: Western conditionality is strongest where African states depend heavily on Western finance, export markets, or security guarantees, and where domestic coalitions cannot easily absorb the cost of noncompliance. It is weaker where states possess resource rents, alternative partners, or strategic value that makes them indispensable to Western security agendas. The scope conditions vary by sector: AGOA matters most for countries with export capacity in eligible sectors; military assistance matters most in high-threat environments where external logistics and training are scarce; financial conditionality matters most during debt distress or fiscal crisis. They also vary by regime type. Governments seeking international legitimacy, investment-grade credibility, or donor budget support may comply more readily than insulated elites with secure domestic revenue. Temporal scope matters as well. During the Cold War, Western powers often tolerated authoritarian allies in exchange for strategic alignment; in the post-Cold War period, governance conditionality became more prominent; after 2001, counterterrorism frequently overrode governance concerns; and in the current period of multipolar competition, strategic value can again dilute conditionality. Finally, the mechanism is conditioned by African agency: governments can comply partially, delay reforms, forum-shop among donors, or use Western pressure as a domestic political tool, so conditionality is always mediated by local political economy.

Observable Implications: If this causal claim holds, one should observe a pattern of conditional access rather than uniform partnership. AGOA eligibility should be suspended or restored in ways that track political and governance disputes, while utilization rates should remain concentrated in a few countries and sectors. Aid and budget support should fluctuate with debt cycles and strategic priorities, with greater emphasis on security and migration in some periods. Military assistance should correlate with threat environments and access needs, producing training programs, equipment transfers, and operational cooperation that may not be matched by equivalent civilian institutional support. Strategic retrenchment should appear not as total withdrawal but as base closures, aid reductions, diplomatic downsizing, or re-prioritization alongside continued engagement in high-value arenas. African responses should include diversification of partners, rhetorical emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference, and selective compliance with Western conditions. One should also observe a gap between Western normative language and practice: human-rights or governance conditionality may be waived where counterterrorism, migration, or great-power competition is at stake. SIPRI data on arms transfers, Comtrade data on export composition, and FDI source data would help distinguish dependency from diversification, while UNSC voting patterns would indicate whether conditional engagement produces alignment or hedging.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):
African (primary): From an African vantage point, Western engagement is historically associated with ex-

traction, asymmetry, and external control over policy space, yet it is also a source of markets, finance, technology, and security resources that African governments can leverage. Conditionality is often experienced as sovereignty erosion, especially when macroeconomic or governance benchmarks are designed externally and applied unevenly. At the same time, AGOA and aid programs create real opportunities for exporters, workers, and reformist coalitions, and military assistance can fill capability gaps that African states cannot finance alone. The central African insight is that Western engagement is neither purely benevolent nor purely coercive; it is a bargaining environment in which African agency is exercised through compliance, resistance, diversification, and the strategic use of competing suitors. Retrenchment is read not simply as abandonment but as a shift in Western priorities that increases African room for maneuver while also removing some predictable resources.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective typically contrasts its own non-interference and developmental partnership with Western conditionality, presenting the latter as politicized and inconsistent. It argues that Western retrenchment creates space for more pragmatic, infrastructure-focused engagement, while also warning that Western competition may be driven by geopolitical anxiety rather than African development. Chinese analysts may understate the extent to which Chinese finance also creates dependency and conditionality through collateral, escrow, or project-linked arrangements.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames Western conditionality as neo-colonial interference and Western retrenchment as evidence of declining hegemony. It emphasizes sovereign choice, multipolarity, and the legitimacy of African governments to select partners without external approval. This perspective can illuminate the hypocrisy of selective Western enforcement, but it risks excusing authoritarian practices and conflating all Western activity with imperialism.

Western: The Western perspective presents conditionality as a mechanism for promoting governance, human rights, market reform, and security, while retrenchment is justified by fiscal constraints, strategic rebalancing, and the need to focus on core interests. It contributes legal frameworks, market access, and security capacity, but can understate the coercive effects of conditionality and the legitimacy deficits of prior interventions. It also risks treating African alignment with rivals as manipulation rather than strategic choice.

UN: The UN perspective centers on Charter principles, peace and security, development, and human rights. It values Western contributions to peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and normative frameworks, but is constrained by great-power politics and by the difficulty of enforcing standards against powerful actors. It tends to treat African states as equal members while underweighting structural inequality in voice and the practical limits of multilateral enforcement.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Gulf, Turkish, Indian, and other middle-power engagement: the multiplication of suitors

Bolded Causal Claim: The proliferation of Gulf, Turkish, Indian, and other middle-power actors has turned Africa into a competitive, multi-polar marketplace of ports, drones, capital, and diplomatic recognition, increasing African bargaining power and reducing any single power's monopoly, while also fragmenting accountability and creating new, often opaque, dependencies.

Mechanism: The first mechanism is Gulf capital and logistics competition. The United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar have expanded their African footprints through sovereign wealth funds, port concessions, logistics hubs, agricultural investments, mining finance, and diplomatic mediation. The mechanism is not merely financial; it is spatial and infrastructural. Control or influence over ports, free zones, and logistics corridors can shape trade routes, customs revenue, and strategic access, particularly around the Red Sea, the Horn of Africa, and the western Indian Ocean. Gulf actors often move quickly, offer large capital

commitments, and combine commercial, security, and diplomatic tools. Their rivalries can also be exported: competition between Gulf states may create opportunities for African governments to extract better terms, but it can also import external conflicts into African arenas. A second mechanism is Turkish security and construction engagement. Turkey has combined drone sales, military training, base access, construction contracts, humanitarian assistance, and religious-cultural diplomacy into a distinctive package. The mechanism is speed and bundled delivery: Turkish firms and state institutions can move rapidly from agreement to implementation, offering equipment and training with fewer governance conditions than many Western partners. This has been especially visible in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, where Turkish drones and training have become part of security calculations. The effect is to diversify African security suppliers and to create new dependencies on maintenance, ammunition, training pipelines, and diplomatic alignment. A third mechanism is Indian trade, diaspora, and maritime engagement. India's African strategy combines pharmaceuticals, information technology, education, lines of credit, trade in commodities, and maritime security cooperation, often framed through Global South solidarity and historical anti-colonial rhetoric. The mechanism is niche complementarity: India does not attempt to match Chinese infrastructure finance at scale, but it offers specific goods, services, and diplomatic support that matter to African consumers and governments. Its diaspora networks, naval presence, and interest in Indian Ocean security add a maritime dimension, particularly for East African and island states. A fourth mechanism is the broader multiplication of suitors, including Japan, South Korea, Brazil, Israel, and European middle powers, each with specialized offerings such as development finance, technology, agribusiness, or security cooperation. The aggregate mechanism is competitive pluralism: more bidders reduce monopoly rents, improve African governments' outside options, and allow forum shopping across finance, security, and diplomatic domains. Yet pluralism also fragments standards. When many actors offer capital or security assistance with varying transparency, conditionality, and accountability, African institutions may be overwhelmed, and deals may be negotiated bilaterally in ways that weaken regional coordination or public oversight. The multiplication of suitors therefore increases bargaining power in the short term but can create a complex web of opaque obligations, overlapping dependencies, and competing external agendas.

Scope Conditions: The impact of middle-power engagement is strongest in geographic and sectoral niches where these actors have comparative advantages and strategic interests. Gulf engagement is most consequential in coastal, port, and logistics nodes, in food-security and agricultural investments, and in states where Gulf rivalries or Red Sea security concerns are salient. Turkish engagement is most consequential where rapid security assistance, drones, and construction are in demand, particularly in the Horn of Africa and parts of the Sahel. Indian engagement is most consequential in pharmaceuticals, digital services, education, maritime security, and trade with East and Southern Africa. Other middle powers matter most where their specialized finance or technology aligns with African priorities. State capacity is a critical scope condition: governments with strong procurement systems, legal frameworks, and regional coordination can leverage competition; governments with weak institutions may be captured by opaque deals or by external rivalries. The mechanism is also conditioned by African domestic politics, since middle-power engagement often flows through elite networks, security institutions, and sectoral ministries rather than through broad public processes. Temporally, the post-2010 period, the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the 2015-2020 Gulf assertiveness, and the post-2022 geopolitical shock have all expanded middle-power activism. Finally, the mechanism depends on the degree of coordination among African states: regional bodies can aggregate bargaining power, while fragmented bilateralism can dissipate it.

Observable Implications: If this causal claim holds, one should observe a diversification of African partners across capital, security, and infrastructure, with no single external power dominating all domains. Port

concessions and logistics investments should show growing Gulf participation; drone and military training deals should show Turkish and other non-Western suppliers; pharmaceutical, digital, and maritime cooperation should show Indian and Asian participation. Trade and FDI data should reveal a broadening source base rather than a simple China-or-West binary. Diplomatic patterns should include more high-level visits, mediation roles, and bilateral agreements from middle powers. Security outcomes should reflect a wider array of suppliers, with implications for interoperability, maintenance, and accountability. One should also observe risks: opaque contracts, overlapping debt obligations, competing external agendas, and potential militarization of commercial infrastructure. African governments should display multi-alignment in voting and diplomacy, while regional organizations may struggle to harmonize standards across a crowded field. Data from Comtrade, FDI registries, SIPRI arms transfers, and port concession records would be needed to distinguish genuine diversification from concentration in new forms.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African perspective, the multiplication of suitors is both an opportunity and a hazard. It reduces dependence on any single power, validates multi-alignment, and gives African governments more room to negotiate terms, sequence projects, and resist conditionality. It also aligns with a long-standing aspiration for sovereign choice and diversified partnerships. Yet the same plurality can fragment accountability, overwhelm regulatory capacity, and create new dependencies on maintenance, finance, and security ecosystems that are less transparent than traditional donor frameworks. African agency is therefore not simply the ability to choose among suitors, but the capacity to set terms, disclose contracts, coordinate regionally, and prevent external rivalries from being imported into African politics. The African vantage point reveals that diversification is not automatically empowerment; it must be governed.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective sees middle-power engagement as both validation and competition. It validates the broader shift away from Western monopoly and supports the idea that development partnerships can be plural, but it also challenges Chinese commercial and strategic primacy in ports, infrastructure, and security. Chinese analysts may frame some middle-power activity as opportunistic or as aligned with Western containment, while presenting Chinese engagement as more comprehensive and long-term. They may understate the competitive pressure that Gulf, Turkish, and Indian actors place on Chinese firms and financiers.

Russian: The Russian perspective welcomes the multiplication of suitors as evidence of multipolarity and the erosion of Western hegemony. It emphasizes sovereign choice and the legitimacy of African governments to partner with any actor, including Russia, without Western approval. This perspective can highlight the hypocrisy of Western complaints about non-Western influence, but it risks treating all diversification as inherently anti-Western and may understate the risks of opaque security deals or external rivalry.

Western: The Western perspective is ambivalent. It may welcome diversification as reducing over-dependence on China, but it also worries about the erosion of governance standards, transparency, and security interoperability. Western actors may seek to coordinate with middle powers or to reassert conditionality through new frameworks, while also recognizing that retrenchment has created vacuums. The perspective contributes market access, normative frameworks, and security capacity, but can treat African multi-alignment as a problem to be managed rather than a legitimate strategy.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes Charter principles, sovereign equality, peace and security, and inclusive multilateralism. It can view the multiplication of suitors as consistent with a more multipolar and representative international order, but it also raises concerns about fragmented accountability, opaque security arrangements, and the difficulty of enforcing norms across many actors. The UN contributes legal

frameworks and peacekeeping data, but is constrained by great-power and middle-power politics and by the limited enforceability of multilateral standards.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on great-power competition begins from a premise that the other four perspectives tend to treat as a conclusion: that Africa is not a passive object of external rivalry but a field of strategic action in which African states, elites, and publics exercise agency under constraint. This is not a romantic claim. It is an analytical starting point grounded in a specific theoretical tradition—African political thought from Nkrumah through Fanon, Cabral, Nyerere, Rodney, and their contemporary successors—that insists on reading international hierarchy from the position of the subordinated rather than from the center of power. The African perspective does not deny that structural asymmetry exists; it denies that asymmetry exhausts the story.

The theoretical lineage runs through several distinct but converging arguments. Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) established the foundational claim that formal independence without economic sovereignty reproduces subordination through new mechanisms—debt, aid conditionality, multinational corporate penetration, and military basing agreements. For Nkrumah, the "scramble" never ended; it merely changed form. Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) added the historical-materialist mechanism: underdevelopment is not a stage but a produced condition, the mirror image of European development, operating through unequal exchange in the world market. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) supplied the psychological and political dimension: colonialism dehumanizes, and genuine liberation requires not only institutional transfer but a transformation of consciousness and social structure. Cabral's writings on Guinea-Bissau emphasized that liberation must be rooted in the material conditions and cultural specificity of the colonized, not imported wholesale. Nyerere's ujamaa socialism and his advocacy of non-alignment offered a positive program: African states could refuse the binary of the Cold War and construct autonomous development paths, however imperfectly realized.

These thinkers share a common mechanism: **extraversion**. Bayart's *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (1993) formalized this concept, arguing that African political elites have historically consolidated domestic authority by strategically engaging external powers—colonial, Cold War, and post-Cold War. The African state is not simply a victim of external penetration; it is an active broker of its own subordination, converting external resources into domestic political capital. This is a double-edged insight. It restores agency to African actors, but it also implicates African elites in the reproduction of dependency. Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001) extended this analysis, describing the postcolonial state as operating through "commandement"—a mode of power that is theatrical, violent, and deeply entangled with external forces, yet irreducible to them. The postcolonial subject is not a passive recipient of history but an agent navigating a field of constrained possibilities.

Grovogui's *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) provides the international-theory anchor. Grovogui argues that the Westphalian sovereignty norm was never applied equally: African states were granted "quasi-sovereignty," a conditional, supervised form of statehood that legitimized external intervention. The African perspective thus reveals that the very framework of "sovereign equality" in the UN Charter masks a hierarchy of sovereignty. When great powers compete on the continent, they do so within a struc-

ture that already presumes African states are less than fully sovereign. This is a contribution the other four perspectives cannot make, because they take sovereignty as a given rather than as a contested, historically produced category.

Applied to contemporary great-power competition, the African perspective generates several distinctive analytical moves. First, it reframes the "new scramble" thesis. The scramble metaphor, popularized in journalism and policy discourse, implies a passive Africa being carved up by external powers. African scholars have been sharply critical of this framing. It reproduces the colonial episteme by denying African agency and by treating the continent as an object rather than a subject of international politics. The more accurate analytical frame, from this vantage, is not scramble but **multi-alignment**: African states actively court multiple partners—China, Russia, the West, Gulf states, Turkey, India—to maximize bargaining leverage, diversify dependency, and extract concessions. This is not naivety about power asymmetry; it is a rational strategy of the weak in an anarchic system, consistent with realist small-state theory but rooted in a distinctively African historical experience of non-alignment.

Second, the African perspective re-reads the "debt trap" debate. The Western narrative, amplified by some policy analysts, frames Chinese lending as a deliberate strategy to ensnare African states in unsustainable debt and extract strategic assets. Brautigam's *The Dragon's Gift* (2009) and subsequent empirical work have challenged this narrative, showing that Chinese lending terms are often comparable to or better than Western alternatives, that debt distress has multiple causes (including commodity price shocks and domestic governance failures), and that asset seizures are rare. The African vantage adds a further layer: the relevant question is not whether China "traps" Africa but whether African finance ministries and parliaments have the capacity to evaluate, negotiate, and manage complex credit arrangements. The problem is as much domestic institutional capacity as external predation. This shifts the analytical focus from Chinese intentions to African bargaining capacity—a move the Western perspective, with its emphasis on great-power rivalry, systematically underweights.

Third, the African perspective illuminates the security dimension. The withdrawal of French forces from the Sahel (Operation Barkhane ended in 2022) and the subsequent invitation of Russian Africa Corps (formerly Wagner) by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger are often framed in Western discourse as a Russian "win" and a Western "loss." The African vantage reveals a more complex picture. Popular anti-French sentiment in the Sahel is genuine and rooted in decades of perceived French neo-colonialism—what Nkrumah would have recognized as neo-colonialism's military dimension. The invitation of Russian forces is a sovereign choice, however constrained, by governments responding to domestic political pressures and security failures. To treat this as mere Russian manipulation is to deny African agency and to reproduce the quasi-sovereignty framework Grovogui identified. At the same time, the African perspective does not romanticize these choices: the record of Russian security provision in the Central African Republic and Mali shows mixed results, and the displacement of one external security provider by another does not resolve the underlying crisis of state capacity.

Fourth, the African perspective centers the question of **who benefits** from great-power competition within Africa. Bayart's extraversion thesis implies that external engagement is mediated by domestic elites who may capture rents rather than deliver public goods. The multiplication of suitors—China, Russia, Turkey, Gulf states, India, the West—expands the menu of external partners but also multiplies the opportunities for elite capture and rent-seeking. Tamale's *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020) and Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) remind us that "African agency" is not monolithic: gender, class, and regional hierarchies mean that the benefits of multi-alignment are unevenly distributed. The African perspective thus

contains an internal critique: agency is real but stratified, and the celebration of multi-alignment can obscure the ways in which external competition reinforces domestic inequality.

What the African vantage contributes that the other four cannot is, first, a theory of **subjectivity**: it treats African states and peoples as agents with interests, strategies, and histories, not as arenas. Second, it provides a **historical depth** that contextualizes contemporary competition within the longer arc of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and non-alignment. Third, it offers a **normative critique of sovereignty** that exposes the hypocrisy of great-power invocations of the principle. Fourth, it supplies a **mechanism—extraversion**—that explains why African elites engage external powers in ways that may appear irrational or self-defeating from a Western perspective but are rational within domestic political logics.

What the African perspective occludes is equally important. It can romanticize agency, understating the genuine constraints of debt, military asymmetry, and technological dependence. It can treat "Africa" as a more unified actor than it is, obscuring the vast differences between, say, Nigeria and Eritrea, or between the African Union's institutional ambitions and its operational limitations. It can be insufficiently attentive to the ways in which African states' multi-alignment strategies may undermine collective bargaining—African states negotiating bilaterally with China or Russia may secure better individual deals but weaken continental frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) or the AU's Agenda 2063. And it can underweight the agency of non-state actors—armed groups, civil society, diaspora communities—who are also shaped by and shape great-power competition.

The strongest counterargument from within the African tradition itself comes from the structuralist wing: Rodney's dependency theory and its contemporary successors argue that agency, while real, operates within constraints so severe that the language of "choice" and "bargaining" misleads. From this vantage, inviting Africa Corps or signing a BRI memorandum is not a free choice but a choice among structurally determined options, all of which reproduce subordination. The tension between agency and structure is internal to African scholarship and is not resolved by either pole. The most productive African analyses—Mamdani's work on the bifurcated state, Mbembe's on the postcolony—hold both in suspension, recognizing that African actors are neither fully autonomous nor fully determined.

Scope conditions: the African perspective is most powerful when analyzing state-level bargaining, elite strategies, and the discursive framing of competition. It is less adequate for analyzing systemic-level dynamics (the distribution of power among great powers) or for generating predictions about specific policy outcomes. Its normative force is greatest when it exposes hypocrisy and demands consistency; its analytical force is greatest when it recovers the agency that other perspectives erase.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on engagement with Africa is organized around three core concepts: "win-win" cooperation, non-interference in internal affairs, and developmental partnership. These are not merely rhetorical devices; they constitute a coherent foreign-policy doctrine with deep roots in Chinese diplomatic history and are presented as a genuine alternative to Western models of engagement. Steel-manning this perspective requires taking its internal logic seriously rather than dismissing it as propaganda.

The "win-win" framework posits that Chinese engagement with Africa is mutually beneficial: China gains resources, markets, and diplomatic support; Africa gains infrastructure, investment, and development finance. The mechanism is straightforward: Chinese state-backed enterprises and policy banks (China Exim Bank, China Development Bank) finance and construct infrastructure projects that Western donors and private cap-

ital have been unwilling to fund, while African states provide resources and market access. The FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021) exemplifies this: it pledged $40 billion in financing, including $10 billion in investment promotion, $10 billion in credit facilities, and support for African industrialization and agricultural modernization. The Chinese perspective treats these commitments as evidence of a developmental partnership qualitatively different from Western aid, which it characterizes as conditional, paternalistic, and oriented toward governance reform rather than material development.

Non-interference is the second pillar. Rooted in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (1954) and consistently invoked in FOCAC declarations, it holds that China does not impose political conditions, does not interfere in domestic affairs, and respects African sovereignty. From the Chinese vantage, this is a principled stance against Western neo-colonialism: Western engagement, with its conditionality on governance, human rights, and economic reform, is seen as a continuation of imperial control by other means. Chinese non-interference is presented as the genuine respect for sovereignty that Western powers profess but do not practice. The mechanism here is relational: by not conditioning engagement on political reform, China builds trust and long-term partnerships that Western conditionality undermines.

The third pillar, developmental partnership, frames the relationship as South-South cooperation among developing countries with shared historical experiences of colonialism and underdevelopment. This is not merely rhetorical; it shapes institutional design. FOCAC, established in 2000, is a multilateral forum co-chaired by China and an African co-chair, with African states participating as equals in agenda-setting. The Chinese perspective contrasts this with Western-dominated institutions (IMF, World Bank) where African states have limited voting power. The BRI, launched in 2013, extends this logic: African states are invited to participate in a global infrastructure network on terms they negotiate bilaterally.

The Chinese perspective contributes several things the others miss. It takes seriously the infrastructure deficit as the binding constraint on African development—a point Western donors, focused on governance, have historically underweighted. It provides an empirical challenge to the "debt trap" narrative: Brautigam's research and Chinese government data show that Chinese lending is a minority share of African external debt, that terms are often concessional, and that debt distress correlates more strongly with commodity prices and domestic governance than with Chinese lending. It also reveals the hypocrisy of Western criticism: Western powers themselves engage in strategic competition for resources and influence, and their conditionality has often served Western commercial and strategic interests.

What the Chinese perspective occludes is significant. Non-interference, while principled, can function as a shield for authoritarian governance: by refusing to condition engagement on human rights or democratic standards, China may inadvertently (or deliberately) reinforce repressive regimes. The "win-win" framing assumes symmetry that does not exist: China is a great power with vast state capacity; most African states are small, indebted, and institutionally constrained. The bargaining is not between equals. The Chinese perspective also tends to understate the environmental and social costs of Chinese-funded projects, and to treat African civil society and labor concerns as internal matters beyond the scope of partnership. Finally, the claim that China does not interfere is empirically contestable: Chinese diplomatic pressure on African states regarding Taiwan recognition, UNSC voting, and human-rights resolutions constitutes a form of political conditionality, even if less overt than Western variants.

The strongest counterargument from within the Chinese perspective's own logic: if non-interference is genuinely principled, it should apply consistently, including to Chinese commercial actors whose labor practices or environmental impacts generate local backlash. The gap between state-level non-interference and corporate-level behavior is a tension the Chinese perspective has not fully resolved.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on Africa is organized around three claims: sovereign choice, multipolarity, and anti-Western solidarity. These are presented not as a comprehensive development model (as China offers) but as a security and diplomatic partnership that respects African agency and challenges Western hegemony. Steel-manning this perspective requires recognizing its genuine appeal to certain African governments and publics while not overstating its coherence or capacity.

Sovereign choice is the first pillar. Russia presents itself as a partner that does not impose political conditions, does not lecture on governance, and respects the decisions of African governments—including decisions to invite Russian security forces. This resonates in contexts where Western conditionality is perceived as neo-colonial interference. The mechanism is straightforward: Russia offers security assistance (arms, training, private military contractors) with fewer strings attached than Western alternatives, and African governments facing insurgencies or political instability accept. The Africa Corps (formerly Wagner Group) presence in Mali, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, and Sudan exemplifies this: governments invited Russian forces after concluding that French and Western security provision had failed. From the Russian vantage, this is sovereign choice in action, and Western criticism is hypocrisy from powers that themselves maintain military bases across the continent.

Multipolarity is the second pillar. Russia frames its African engagement as part of a broader project to build a multipolar world order in which no single power dominates. This aligns with African non-alignment traditions and with the AU's aspiration for a more representative global order. The mechanism operates through diplomatic support: Russia backs African positions in international forums, opposes Western sanctions regimes, and provides an alternative to Western-dominated institutions. UNSC voting alignment is a key metric: Russia has consistently supported African positions on issues like the reform of the Security Council, the principle of non-interference, and opposition to unilateral sanctions. The Russian perspective treats this as evidence of genuine partnership rather than transactional manipulation.

Anti-Western narrative is the third pillar. Russia leverages historical memory—Soviet support for African liberation movements during the Cold War—to position itself as a friend of African independence against Western neo-colonialism. This narrative has genuine resonance in parts of Africa where French and Western military presence is associated with continued subordination. The mechanism is discursive: Russian state media and diplomatic messaging frame Western engagement as neo-colonial and Russian engagement as anti-imperialist, tapping into legitimate grievances about Western double standards.

The Russian perspective contributes several things. It exposes the gap between Western rhetoric of partnership and the reality of conditionality and strategic retrenchment. It provides a security alternative for states that have lost confidence in Western security provision. It amplifies African demands for Security Council reform and a more equitable international order. And it reveals that "sovereign choice" is not merely a Russian talking point but a genuine African demand: African states want the freedom to choose partners without Western veto.

What the Russian perspective occludes is substantial. The claim of non-interference is belied by the reality of Russian security operations: Africa Corps personnel have been implicated in human-rights abuses, resource extraction, and political interference in the Central African Republic and Mali. The "sovereign choice" framing ignores the asymmetry of power: a state facing insurgency and political instability may have little genuine choice but to accept whatever security assistance is available. The anti-Western narrative, while tapping legitimate grievances, can serve to deflect attention from Russian strategic interests—securing mineral

access, UNSC votes, and geopolitical positioning against the West. The Russian perspective also tends to treat African states as instruments in a great-power rivalry rather than as partners with independent interests, a tension visible in the gap between Russian rhetoric and the transactional nature of many arrangements.

The strongest counterargument from within the Russian perspective's own logic: if Russia genuinely supports African sovereignty and multipolarity, it should support African-led security frameworks (like the AU's African Standby Force) rather than bilateral security arrangements that bypass continental institutions. The preference for bilateral deals over multilateral frameworks suggests that Russian engagement, like Western engagement, prioritizes strategic access over African institutional development.

Scope conditions: the Russian perspective is most persuasive as a critique of Western hypocrisy and as an account of why certain African governments seek alternatives. It is least persuasive as a positive development model or as a claim about Russian disinterestedness. Its predictive power is limited by Russia's constrained economic capacity relative to China and the West.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on great-power competition in Africa is organized around three themes: strategic competition, conditionality, and retrenchment. These are not a unified doctrine—US, EU, and individual European state approaches differ—but they share a common framing: Africa is a arena of great-power competition in which Western interests (security, economic access, normative influence) are challenged by China and Russia, and in which Western engagement has been characterized by conditionality, market access, and, increasingly, strategic withdrawal.

Strategic competition is the first theme. From the Western vantage, China's economic engagement and Russia's security engagement are not neutral development partnerships but strategic moves in a global rivalry. The mechanism is competitive: Chinese infrastructure investment creates dependency and strategic leverage; Russian security provision displaces Western influence and undermines democratic governance. The US National Security Strategy and EU strategic documents increasingly frame Africa through this lens, treating the continent as a theater of great-power competition. The Western perspective contributes a systemic-level analysis that the African perspective, focused on state-level agency, tends to underweight: the distribution of power among great powers shapes the menu of options available to African states, and the rise of China and Russia genuinely constrains Western influence.

Conditionality is the second theme. Western engagement has historically been conditioned on governance standards, human rights, economic reform, and democratic accountability. The mechanism is normative leverage: by tying aid, trade preferences (AGOA), and military assistance to governance standards, Western powers seek to shape African political trajectories. The Western perspective treats this as a principled commitment to universal values and as a contribution to African development: good governance, it argues, is a prerequisite for sustainable growth, and conditionality is a tool to promote it. AGOA (2000) exemplifies the trade-preference approach: duty-free access to US markets in exchange for progress on governance, labor rights, and market openness.

Strategic retrenchment is the third theme. Western powers, particularly the US and France, have reduced their military and economic footprint in Africa over the past decade. The mechanism is resource reallocation: as strategic priorities shift (to the Indo-Pacific, to Ukraine, to domestic politics), Africa receives less attention and resources. French withdrawal from the Sahel, US base reductions, and declining aid budgets reflect this. The Western perspective treats retrenchment as a strategic choice with consequences: vacuums created by

Western withdrawal are filled by China, Russia, and middle powers, potentially to Western disadvantage.

The Western perspective contributes several things. It provides a framework for understanding how great-power competition shapes African options at the systemic level. It supplies normative standards—human rights, democratic governance, transparency—that, however imperfectly applied, create benchmarks for accountability. It offers market access and security capacity that remain significant, even if declining. And it generates data and analysis (SIPRI arms data, World Bank governance indicators, Comtrade flows) that enable empirical assessment of engagement patterns.

What the Western perspective occludes is significant. It tends to treat African multi-alignment as a problem to be managed rather than a legitimate strategy, reproducing the quasi-sovereignty framework. It underweights the genuine grievances that drive African states toward non-Western partners: the history of Western intervention, the perceived hypocrisy of conditionality (applied to Africa but not to strategic allies elsewhere), and the failure of Western security provision in the Sahel. It can conflate Western interests with African interests, assuming that what is good for the West is good for Africa. And it tends to frame the competition in zero-sum terms, obscuring the possibility that African states can benefit from multiple partnerships.

The strongest counterargument from within the Western perspective's own logic: if conditionality is genuinely about promoting good governance, it should be applied consistently across partners, including strategic allies. The selective application of conditionality undermines its credibility and fuels the anti-Western narrative that Russia and China exploit. A more consistent and less instrumental approach to conditionality would strengthen Western influence more than strategic competition framing.

Scope conditions: the Western perspective is most powerful at the systemic level and in analyzing institutional and normative frameworks. It is least powerful in accounting for African agency and in explaining why African states choose non-Western partners. Its normative claims are strongest when applied consistently; its analytical claims are strongest when they acknowledge the legitimacy of African multi-alignment.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on great-power competition in Africa is organized around Charter principles: sovereign equality, non-interference, peaceful settlement of disputes, and collective security through the Security Council. It is not a single actor's perspective but an institutional vantage that aggregates member-state positions, Secretariat analysis, and the normative framework of international law. Steel-manning it requires recognizing both its normative authority and its structural constraints.

Sovereign equality and non-interference are the first pillars. The UN Charter (Article 2) establishes sovereign equality as a foundational principle, and the UN perspective treats any great-power competition that undermines African sovereignty as a violation of Charter principles. The mechanism is legal-normative: by invoking sovereignty, the UN provides a framework within which African states can resist external pressure and assert their right to choose partners. This aligns with the African perspective's critique of quasi-sovereignty, though the UN's enforcement capacity is limited by the very great-power politics it seeks to constrain.

Peace and security is the second pillar. The UN maintains significant peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations in Africa (MINUSMA in Mali, MONUSCO in DRC, UNMISS in South Sudan, among others), and the UN perspective treats great-power competition as a potential threat to these operations. The mechanism is institutional: when great powers compete for influence, they may undermine UN mediation, support rival factions, or bypass UN frameworks. The UN perspective thus has a stake in managing competition to preserve space for multilateral conflict resolution. The withdrawal of MINUSMA from Mali in 2023, following

the government's invitation of Russian forces, exemplifies this tension.

Inclusive multilateralism is the third pillar. The UN perspective treats the multiplication of suitors as potentially consistent with a more multipolar and representative international order, but raises concerns about fragmented accountability. The mechanism is governance: when many actors engage bilaterally, there is no single framework for ensuring transparency, human-rights compliance, or coordination. The UN's role is to provide such a framework—through the Security Council, through peacekeeping mandates, through human-rights mechanisms—but its effectiveness depends on great-power consensus that is increasingly absent.

The UN perspective contributes several things. It provides a legal-normative framework that all parties invoke, creating a common language even when interests diverge. It generates data—peacekeeping statistics, humanitarian assessments, human-rights reports—that enables empirical analysis. It offers a forum for African states to articulate collective positions (through the AU's observer status and the African Group in the General Assembly). And it maintains a focus on human security and civilian protection that great-power competition can obscure.

What the UN perspective occludes is significant. It is constrained by great-power politics: the Security Council's structure gives permanent members veto power, meaning that UN action on great-power competition in Africa is often blocked or diluted. It can be overly focused on conflict and security, underweighting economic and developmental dimensions. It tends to treat African states as a bloc rather than recognizing their diversity. And its normative framework, while authoritative, lacks enforcement capacity: Charter principles are invoked by all parties, including those whose actions violate them, reducing their constraining force.

The strongest counterargument from within the UN perspective's own logic: if the UN is to remain relevant in a multipolar world, it must reform its institutions—particularly the Security Council—to reflect contemporary power distributions, including African representation. Without such reform, the UN risks being sidelined by bilateral and minilateral arrangements that bypass it entirely. The African demand for Security Council reform (the "Ezulwini Consensus") is thus not merely an African interest but a UN interest: a more representative Council would strengthen the UN's legitimacy and capacity to manage great-power competition.

Scope conditions: the UN perspective is most powerful as a normative and legal framework and as a source of data and institutional capacity. It is least powerful as an independent actor, given its dependence on member-state consensus. Its effectiveness in managing great-power competition in Africa depends on the willingness of great powers to work through rather than around UN frameworks.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers African agency, multi-alignment, and bargaining; reveals that African states are not passive objects but active negotiators who have learned to play suitors against each other; shows structural constraints (debt, commodity dependence) without reducing Africa to victimhood	Can understate intra-African variation and elite capture; may romanticize state capacity; sometimes treats "Africa" as a unitary actor; can understate the transnational financial constraints (IMF, Eurobond markets) that limit bargaining power from outside the bilateral relationship	Sovereign equality, non-interference, developmental autonomy, reform of global governance (Ezulwini Consensus), multi-alignment as deliberate strategy	FOCAC Dakar Action Plan terms reflecting African demands for value addition and local content; AU Agenda 2063; African states' simultaneous engagement with China, the West, Russia, and Gulf states	Western: multi-alignment can mask elite rent-seeking and bargaining power is structurally limited by debt and commodity dependence

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Demonstrates that large-scale infrastructure finance and non-conditional engagement can accelerate development; challenges Western monopoly on development finance; provides empirical counter to "debt trap" narrative; institutionalizes relationship through FOCAC's triennial cycle	Obscures environmental and social costs, labor practices, and asymmetry of bargaining power; underplays geopolitical motivations (resource access, diplomatic support, market access); "win-win" rhetoric masks unequal terms	"Win-win" cooperation, non-interference, mutual benefit, South-South solidarity, developmental partnership	Brautigam's research showing no systematic asset seizures; FOCAC Dakar Action Plan commitments ($40 billion); BRI project portfolio; absence of conditionality	African: "win-win" rhetoric masks unequal terms and Chinese finance has sometimes reinforced commodity dependence and debt vulnerability

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021) and the Sino-African Economic Relationship — The Terms of the Bargain

The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) held its eighth ministerial conference in Dakar, Senegal, in November 2021, producing the Dakar Action Plan (2022–2024) and the Dakar Declaration. The plan committed approximately $40 billion in total Chinese support, structured across nine programs spanning medical and health, poverty reduction and agricultural development, trade promotion, investment promotion, digital innovation, green development, capacity building, cultural and people-to-people exchange, and peace and security. It also reflected a notable inflection in Chinese financing: a shift away from large-scale sovereign loans for mega-infrastructure toward "small and beautiful" projects, trade finance, and private investment, partly in response to African debt distress and partly to Xi Jinping's September 2021 pledge at the UN General Assembly to halt new overseas coal power projects. The Dakar plan thus sits at a renegotiation moment

in a two-decade relationship — a moment when both sides were recalibrating the terms of a bargain struck in a different era of global economics and geopolitics.

Levels of analysis. At the *individual* level, the Dakar negotiations were shaped by the personal diplomacy of Senegalese President Macky Sall (then AU chair), Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and the individual African trade and finance ministers who pressed for concrete commitments on value addition, local content, and technology transfer. Chinese provincial officials and state-owned enterprise (SOE) managers, operating with considerable autonomy from Beijing's central planners, also shaped project pipelines and investment decisions. At the *state* level, the bargain reflects the interests of African governments seeking infrastructure and financing without Western conditionality, and of China seeking resource security, market access, and diplomatic support in multilateral forums. At the *systemic* level, the Dakar plan unfolded against the backdrop of intensifying US-China strategic competition, the COVID-19 pandemic's disruption of global supply chains, and a commodity price cycle that directly affected African bargaining power. At the *transnational* level, the relationship is mediated by Chinese diaspora communities in Africa, African students and professionals trained in China, global financial markets that price African sovereign risk, and civil society networks that monitor labor and environmental standards.

Mechanism. The core mechanism is *bargained interdependence institutionalized through FOCAC cycles*. Every three years, FOCAC ministerial conferences produce action plans that create path dependence: prior commitments shape future negotiations, and the institutional rhythm generates expectations on both sides. African states bargain for infrastructure finance, technology transfer, and market access; China bargains for resource access, diplomatic alignment (including on Taiwan and human rights votes in UN forums), and commercial opportunities for its firms. The mechanism is not a simple "debt trap" — as Brautigam's research demonstrates, Chinese lending has not systematically resulted in asset seizures, and African negotiators have often secured favorable terms, including debt restructurings and grace periods. Nor is it a "win-win" partnership of equals: the structural asymmetry between a roughly $18 trillion economy and individual African economies of $10–50 billion means that bargaining power is uneven, and the terms of the bargain reflect this. The Dakar plan's shift toward trade finance and private investment represents an adaptation of the mechanism to changed circumstances — African debt distress, Chinese domestic economic slowdown, and Western criticism — rather than a fundamental renegotiation of the underlying power asymmetry.

The mechanism operates through several channels. First, *resource-for-infrastructure arrangements* and commodity-backed loans, though declining in share of total Chinese finance, remain important in specific sectors (mining, energy, transport corridors). Second, *diplomatic reciprocity*: African support for China's positions in the UN — on Taiwan, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and South China Sea — is an implicit but well-understood component of the bargain, and FOCAC declarations routinely include language affirming the "one China" principle. Third, *institutional lock-in*: FOCAC's triennial cycle, the Forum's secretariat, and the growing density of bilateral agreements create sunk costs that make exit costly for both sides. Fourth, *financial market mediation*: African sovereigns' access to Eurobond markets and IMF programs constrains their ability to accept Chinese terms that might trigger debt-sustainability concerns, giving African negotiators both leverage (China wants deals that do not default) and constraint (IMF conditionality may limit Chinese project finance, as seen in Zambia's debt restructuring negotiations).

Perspective reconstruction. *African (primary, longest):* The African perspective, articulated by scholars such as Alden and Large and by policymakers across the continent, frames the Dakar plan as evidence of African agency in a multipolar world. African states are not passive recipients but active bargainers who have learned to play Chinese, Western, Russian, and Gulf suitors against each other. The Dakar plan's

emphasis on value addition, local content, and "small and beautiful" projects reflects African demands, not just Chinese preferences. Multi-alignment — maintaining relationships with China, the West, and others simultaneously — is a deliberate strategy, not a default. However, this perspective must also acknowledge internal variation: some African states (e.g., Senegal, Rwanda, Kenya) have negotiated more effectively than others (e.g., Zambia, Angola), and elite capture can divert benefits from public to private hands. The African vantage point reveals what Western "debt trap" narratives obscure: that African governments have agency, that Chinese finance has built real infrastructure (roads, ports, power plants, digital networks), and that the relationship is a bargain with terms that can be renegotiated. What it can understate is the structural constraint imposed by commodity dependence and debt, which limits how far bargaining can go, and the transnational financial architecture (IMF, credit rating agencies, Eurobond markets) that constrains African fiscal space from outside the bilateral relationship.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames FOCAC as a model of South-South cooperation and "win-win" development. The Dakar plan's nine programs demonstrate a comprehensive, long-term commitment to African development, not merely resource extraction. Non-interference in domestic affairs is a core principle, distinguishing Chinese engagement from Western conditionality. Brautigam's research is cited to rebut "debt trap" accusations, showing that Chinese lending is smaller than perceived and that no systematic asset seizures have occurred. The perspective emphasizes mutual benefit: African infrastructure and development, Chinese markets and resources. What it occludes is the asymmetry of bargaining power, the environmental and social costs of some projects, and the geopolitical motivations (diplomatic support, market access) that drive Chinese engagement.

Russian: The Russian perspective views the Sino-African relationship through the lens of multipolarity and anti-hegemonism. China's growing role in Africa is welcomed as a counterweight to Western dominance, and the Dakar plan is seen as evidence that the unipolar moment is ending. Russia's own engagement (arms sales, Africa Corps) is framed as complementary — providing security where China provides economics. The perspective emphasizes sovereign choice: African states should be free to partner with whom they choose without Western pressure. What it occludes is the predatory economics of Russian engagement and the fact that "sovereign choice" often means elite choice, not popular choice.

Western: The Western perspective is ambivalent. On one hand, it acknowledges that Chinese finance has built infrastructure that Western donors neglected; on the other, it warns of debt distress, opacity, and geopolitical risk. The Dakar plan's shift away from mega-loans is read as evidence that the "debt trap" critique had some effect, or that Chinese finance was becoming unsustainable. AGOA and Western conditionality are presented as superior because they promote governance and human rights, though their effectiveness is debated. The perspective's strongest contribution is data on debt sustainability and governance; its occlusion is the historical complicity in underdevelopment and the unreliability of Western commitment (e.g., retrenchment in the Sahel).

UN: The UN perspective frames the Dakar plan within the Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Charter. It emphasizes multilateralism, data provision (UNCTAD, Comtrade), and institutional capacity (peacekeeping, development programs). The UN welcomes South-South cooperation but stresses transparency, debt sustainability, and human rights. Its contribution is normative framing and data; its limitation is dependence on member-state consensus and inability to enforce against great powers.

Adjudication. The African perspective best explains the Dakar case because it captures the central dynamic: a bargain negotiated between African states and China, with terms that reflect both African demands and structural asymmetry. The Chinese institutional perspective is necessary to understand the supply side

— why China offers what it offers and how FOCAC institutionalizes the relationship. The Western debt-sustainability perspective is necessary to understand the constraints — why the bargain shifted in 2021. What the African perspective alone misses is the transnational financial architecture (IMF, Eurobond markets, credit rating agencies) that constrains African bargaining power from outside the bilateral relationship. The best explanation is thus a synthesis: African agency operating within structural constraints, mediated by Chinese institutional frameworks, and shaped by Western-dominated global financial architecture. The case does not support either the "debt trap" narrative (which denies African agency) or the "win-win" narrative (which denies structural asymmetry); it supports a "bargained interdependence" account in which both sides gain but on unequal terms that are periodically renegotiated.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. Define the comparison precisely: choose one security outcome (regime survival, territorial control, or civilian protection) for the Sahel under French Operation Barkhane (2014–2022) and under Russia's Africa Corps (2023–2025), and identify at least two indicators plus their sources.

2. Reconstruct the Russian and Malian official narratives: what causal claims do they make about why Barkhane failed and why Africa Corps is preferable?

3. Reconstruct the Western and UN counter-narratives: what mechanisms (civilian harm, sovereignty, human rights, Charter principles) do they invoke?

4. Apply the four levels of analysis: explain how individual (commanders, communities), state (junta legitimacy), systemic (multipolarity), and transnational (jihadist networks, arms flows, mercenary markets) factors interact.

5. Adjudicate: state which mechanism best explains the observed differences and what evidence would falsify it.

6. Produce a bounded verdict: under what scope conditions is each security model more effective?

MODEL ANSWER

The comparison between French Operation Barkhane and Russia's Africa Corps in the Sahel should begin by separating three distinct dependent variables: regime survival, territorial control, and civilian security. Barkhane was a large multinational counterterrorism operation with air assets, intelligence, and training missions; its stated aim was to degrade jihadist networks and support Sahelian states. Africa Corps, by contrast, appears optimized for regime protection, elite bargaining, and political signaling in a multipolar environment. If the metric is regime survival for post-coup authorities, Russian support may look effective because it is less conditional and more directly tied to the ruling coalition's immediate needs. If the metric is civilian protection or long-term state capacity, the verdict is less favorable, because paramilitary models that prioritize regime security can externalize violence onto communities and blur accountability. The African perspective is central here: Malian authorities did not simply receive Russian power; they used it to renegotiate a security hierarchy that had become politically unsustainable after repeated coups and popular resentment of French presence. Multi-alignment is not neutrality; it is a strategy of extracting options from competition.

Yet agency is constrained by fiscal weakness, fragmented authority, and insurgent pressure, so the choice of partner can improve bargaining position without resolving structural insecurity.

At the mechanism level, Barkhane's failure was not merely military. It combined a counterterrorism logic with a political project that many Sahelians experienced as externally imposed, and it struggled to convert tactical gains into legitimate local governance. The French withdrawal after coups in Mali and Burkina Faso illustrates a scope condition of Western assistance: conditionality and democratic norms can become liabilities when partner regimes prioritize survival over liberal reform. Russia's Africa Corps enters this gap by offering a less conditional bargain—security support, political backing, and anti-Western narrative capital in exchange for access, resources, and diplomatic alignment. The mechanism is regime consolidation through externalized coercion, not necessarily population-centric counterinsurgency. This is why the two models should not be judged by the same metric. Barkhane's theory of change required host-state legitimacy and local consent; Africa Corps's theory of change requires only that the ruling coalition remain in power and that external patrons tolerate the arrangement.

The Western perspective reads this as strategic retrenchment and competitive loss: withdrawal created a vacuum that Russia and other actors filled, while conditionality preserved normative standards but reduced leverage. The UN perspective emphasizes Charter principles, civilian protection, and the risks of unaccountable armed actors, regardless of their nationality. The Chinese perspective, though less directly involved in Sahelian security, generally stresses non-interference and developmental partnership, and would likely view external military competition as secondary to infrastructure and sovereignty. The Russian perspective frames Africa Corps as an instrument of sovereign choice and multipolarity, arguing that African states are rejecting neocolonial security dependence. Each perspective captures part of the mechanism but occludes another: Western analysis often understates African bargaining; Russian analysis understates civilian harm and accountability; UN analysis can understate the political demand for rapid regime security; Chinese analysis can understate security externalities.

Levels of analysis clarify the adjudication. At the individual level, commanders, local militias, and community leaders mediate how any external force is experienced. At the state level, junta legitimacy and elite cohesion determine whether foreign support stabilizes or merely postpones crisis. At the systemic level, multipolarity gives African governments more suitors and therefore more bargaining room, but also exposes them to proxy competition. At the transnational level, jihadist networks, arms flows, and mercenary markets mean that security outcomes are not contained within state borders. Therefore, a fair comparison must ask not which power "won" the Sahel, but which configuration of external support, local authority, and regional order best reduces violence over time.

The evidence required to adjudicate is demanding. One would need disaggregated data on civilian casualties, displacement, territorial control, and state service delivery, alongside arms transfer records and the legal status of foreign forces. SIPRI data can illuminate the material dimension of external support, but they do not by themselves establish battlefield or political effects. If civilian harm rises and insurgent recruitment expands under Africa Corps, the Russian claim of stabilizing sovereignty is weakened. If, conversely, violence declines and state authority consolidates without the democratic conditionality that accompanied Barkhane, the Western claim that only liberal counterinsurgency can succeed is weakened. The most defensible conclusion is conditional: Barkhane failed politically before it failed militarily, while Africa Corps may succeed in regime protection while failing in civilian protection. African agency consists in choosing among these imperfect bargains, not in escaping great-power competition.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: In 2023–2024, South Africa hosted the BRICS summit, abstained or voted against Western-backed resolutions on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and faced US allegations concerning a sanctioned Russian vessel, while remaining a major AGOA beneficiary and a focal point of US diplomatic pressure. Pretoria described its posture as non-alignment and sovereign decision-making; Washington treated it as strategic drift with potential trade consequences; Beijing and Moscow treated it as legitimate multipolarity. The episode is useful because it compresses several mechanisms of great-power competition: trade preferences as leverage, diplomatic alignment as signaling, and African multi-alignment as both bargaining strategy and vulnerability. It also raises a forward-looking question: can a middle-income African state convert geopolitical ambiguity into material concessions without triggering retaliation from any major partner? The case does not require assuming that South Africa is representative of all African states; rather, it tests how agency operates under asymmetric dependence. Pretoria's choices also affected its credibility with smaller African partners and with the African Union.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking South Africa's diplomatic positioning to changes in trade, investment, or security outcomes; specify scope conditions and the level of analysis at which it operates.

- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of the episode in 3–5 sentences each, stating what each contributes and what it occludes.

- **Historical analogue:** Compare the episode with a prior case (for example, Cold War non-alignment or post-apartheid transition diplomacy) and state precisely what is similar and what is different.

- **Falsifiers:** List 2–3 observable developments that would weaken your argument, and state what evidence would be required to detect them.

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description (what happened), explanation (why), prediction (what follows), and prescription (what should be done)?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which statement best captures the relationship between African agency and great-power competition on the continent?

A. African states are largely passive objects because FOCAC, BRI, and Western security partnerships determine outcomes.
B. African multi-alignment is best explained as elite bargaining that uses competition to extract concessions, but its success depends on state capacity, issue-linkage, and the ability to manage asymmetric dependence.
C. Russian Africa Corps has replaced Western influence because it avoids conditionality and therefore delivers superior security outcomes.
D. UN Charter principles are sufficient to regulate great-power competition in Africa without additional regional or African agency.

Distractor diagnosis:

- **A** is wrong because it conflates external engagement with determinism; it ignores African bargaining, multi-alignment, and the documented use of competition by African elites, and it treats FOCAC/BRI as unilateral imposition rather than negotiated bargains.
- **C** is wrong because it overstates Russian replacement of Western influence and assumes that avoiding conditionality equals superior security outcomes; it ignores civilian-harm concerns, accountability gaps, and the possibility that regime protection differs from population security.
- **D** is wrong because it treats normative Charter principles as self-enforcing; the UN lacks independent enforcement capacity, and African agency plus regional bargaining are necessary to translate principles into outcomes.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Africa's Merchandise Trade by Partner (approximate, 2022–2023, US$ billions)

Partner / bloc	Approx. annual trade with Africa	Direction of trend (2000→2023)	Notes
European Union	300–350	Stable-to-rising in value; share of Africa's total trade declining	Largest single bloc; EPA/FTA negotiations ongoing; agricultural market access contested
China	250–285	Rapid rise; peaked ~2022, slight dip 2023	Largest single country partner; commodity-heavy (oil, copper, cobalt, iron ore)
India	90–100	Steady rise	Energy (crude), pharmaceuticals, vehicles; diaspora-linked networks
United States	70–80	Relative decline in share; AGOA preferences	Energy (LNG, crude), aircraft; AGOA utilization uneven
UAE	60–70	Rapid rise	Re-export hub (gold, electronics); growing FDI and port stakes
United Kingdom	40–50	Post-Brexit bilateral deals	Mining, services, financial; historical ties
Turkey	35–45	Rapid rise from low base	Construction, textiles, defense; Erdogan-era commercial diplomacy
Japan	25–30	Flat-to-declining share	Vehicles, machinery; TICAD framework

Partner / bloc	Approx. annual trade with Africa	Direction of trend (2000→2023)	Notes
Russia	18–22	Low base; grain/wheat dominant	Wheat exports to North/East Africa; arms separate from trade
South Korea	20–25	Rising	Vehicles, electronics, shipbuilding
Intra-African (AfCFTA zone)	150–170	Rising but still ~15–17% of total	Low relative to other regions; tariff and non-tariff barriers persist

Sources: UN Comtrade aggregates; national customs data; African Development Bank trade briefs. Figures are indicative ranges, not precise point estimates; informal cross-border trade is undercounted.

Table 2 — Foreign Direct Investment Stock in Africa by Source (approximate cumulative stock, US$ billions, recent)

Source	Approx. FDI stock	Dominant sectors	Character
European Union (bloc)	300–350	Energy, telecoms, finance, manufacturing	Largest historical stock; fragmented by member state
United Kingdom	50–65	Mining, finance, services	Concentrated in Anglophone Africa and extractives
United States	45–55	Energy, tech, consumer goods	Declining relative share; Prosper Africa initiative
China	40–50	Infrastructure, mining, manufacturing, ICT	State-backed; BRI-linked; often project finance not pure equity
UAE	30–40	Ports, logistics, real estate, renewables	Sovereign-wealth and private capital; rapid growth
France	25–35 (within EU)	Telecoms, energy, retail	Concentrated in Francophone Africa
India	15–20	Pharmaceuticals, ICT, energy	Private-sector led; diaspora networks
Turkey	10–15	Construction, textiles, defense	SME and state-backed hybrid
Russia	5–10	Mining, energy	Small; Wagner/Africa Corps-linked in some cases

Source	Approx. FDI stock	Dominant sectors	Character
Japan	10–15	Manufacturing, autos	TICAD-linked; cautious

Sources: UNCTAD World Investment Report; national investment authorities; fDi Markets. Stock figures conflate greenfield FDI, M&A, and state-backed project finance; Chinese figures are especially sensitive to definition (equity vs. loans).

Table 3a — Major Arms Suppliers to Africa (SIPRI, share of African imports, 2019–2023, approximate)

Supplier	Approx. share of imports	Trend	Notes
Russia	35–45%	Declining from ~50%+ in 2010s	Legacy Soviet-era platforms; Africa Corps-linked sales; sanctions pressure
France	10–15%	Stable	Francophone Africa; legacy platforms; Rafale sales
United States	8–12%	Stable-to-rising	AFRICOM-linked; drones, transport; conditionality attached
China	8–12%	Rising	Cost-competitive; drones, armored vehicles; no conditionality
Turkey	5–8%	Rapid rise	Bayraktar drones; competitive pricing; no political conditionality
UAE	3–6%	Rising	Re-exports and direct sales; Gulf competition
Germany / Italy / UK / Israel / South Africa	10–15% combined	Mixed	Niche platforms; South Africa as regional producer

Sources: SIPRI Trends in International Arms Transfers; SIPRI Arms Transfers Database. Shares are approximate and vary sharply by sub-period and by recipient country.

Table 3b — UNSC Voting Alignment of African States (qualitative, selected issue areas, 2019–2024)

Issue area	African bloc tendency	Alignment pattern
Sovereignty / non-interference resolutions (e.g., sanctions on states)	Strongly opposed to unilateral sanctions	Aligns with China/Russia; diverges from West
Ukraine (2022–)	Divided: ~half abstained or voted with West; some with Russia	No unified African position; economic ties (wheat) shape votes
Palestinian statehood / Gaza	Near-unanimous support for ceasefire resolutions	Aligns with Global South; diverges from US
Peacekeeping mandates (MINUSMA, MONUSCO)	Supportive of mandates, critical of exit timelines	Aligns with UN Secretariat and France historically; shifting
Human rights country-specific resolutions	Mixed; many abstentions	Sovereignty concerns; selective Western sponsorship perceived
Climate / development finance	Unified demands for loss-and-damage funding	Aligns with G77/China; demands on West

Sources: UN General Assembly and Security Council voting records; ISS Africa analyses. Voting is a crude proxy for alignment; abstentions often signal strategic ambiguity rather than opposition.

Analysis Questions

1. Trend. Looking at Table 1, describe the shift in Africa's trade partners between 2000 and 2023. Which partner gained the most share, which lost the most, and what does the intra-African figure suggest about the AfCFTA agenda? Answer in 4–6 sentences with specific figures.

2. Level of analysis. Table 3a (arms) and Table 3b (UNSC voting) operate at different levels of analysis. Identify which of the four levels (individual, state, systemic, transnational) each table primarily reflects, and explain what each table cannot tell you about African agency. Include one concrete example of a finding that would be invisible at the systemic level but visible at the state level.

3. Perspective reconstruction (all five). Take the FDI stock figures in Table 2 and reconstruct how each of the five perspectives would read them: (a) African (primary) — agency, bargaining, and the "terms of the bargain"; (b) Chinese — "win-win" and developmental partnership; (c) Russian — sovereign choice and multipolarity; (d) Western — competition, conditionality, and strategic retrenchment; (e) UN — charter principles and peace and security. For each, state one thing the perspective reveals and one thing it occludes. Lead with the African reading.

4. Interpretation. Do Tables 1–3 support the "new scramble" thesis (Africa as passive object of great-power competition) or the "multi-alignment" thesis (African states as active bargainers among multiple suitors)? Adjudicate using at least two specific data points, and state the scope conditions under which each thesis would hold.

5. Limitation. Identify three specific data limitations across these tables and explain how each limitation would bias a conclusion about African agency. For each, propose one corrective (a different data source, a different level of analysis, or a qualitative supplement).

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Multi-Suitor Wheel" (hand-drawn on A4 landscape)

What to draw. Draw a large circle in the center of the page labeled "AFRICAN STATE / REGIONAL BLOC" (write "e.g., Nigeria, Kenya, Sahel states, AU" underneath). Around it, draw 8–10 spokes radiating outward like a wheel, each ending in a labeled box. Spokes (clockwise from top): China (FOCAC/BRI), Russia (Africa Corps/arms), US (AFRICOM/AGOA), EU (EPAs/Global Gateway), Turkey (defense/commerce), UAE (ports/capital), India (trade/pharma), France (legacy/security), UK (finance/mining), Japan (TICAD). On each spoke, write 2–3 small tags: the instrument (e.g., "trade + FDI + no conditionality" for China; "arms + anti-Western narrative" for Russia; "conditionality + retrenchment" for US). Draw a second, thinner concentric ring just outside the center circle labeled "AFRICAN AGENCY ZONE" with arrows pointing both inward (bargaining) and outward (multi-alignment). In the four corners, place small perspective icons: top-left "African: bargaining/multi-alignment"; top-right "Chinese: win-win"; bottom-left "Russian: multipolarity"; bottom-right "Western: competition/conditionality"; and a small UN flag icon at the bottom center labeled "Charter principles."

How to label it. Use thick black for the center and spokes; use color (red for arms/security, blue for trade, green for FDI, purple for votes/diplomacy) for the tags. Label the wheel's outer rim "GREAT POWER COMPETITION ON THE CONTINENT (L31)."

Perspective overlay to annotate. Draw a dashed oval around the whole wheel labeled "Systemic level (L1)" and a second dashed oval around only the center circle labeled "State level (L2)." Add a note: "The wheel shows structure; the center shows agency. Neither alone is sufficient (L12 Cold War precedent)."

Visual 2 — "The FOCAC Dakar Bargain: Terms of the Bargain" (hand-drawn flow diagram)

What to draw. Draw two large vertical columns. Left column header: "CHINA (FOCAC Dakar, 2021)". Right column header: "AFRICAN PARTNERS". In the left column, list 6 boxes top-to-bottom: (1) Infrastructure (roads, ports, rail); (2) Green development (solar, hydro); (3) Digital economy (5G, e-commerce); (4) Health (vaccines, hospitals); (5) Peace & security (training, equipment); (6) Trade facilitation (tariff lines, e-commerce). In the right column, list 6 corresponding boxes: (1) Market access & resources (minerals, oil, agricultural commodities); (2) Diplomatic support (One China, UNSC votes); (3) Debt servicing & repayment; (4) Labor & local content (variable); (5) Regulatory facilitation (SEZs, customs); (6) Long-term offtake agreements. Draw horizontal double-headed arrows between paired boxes, labeled "terms of bargain." In the middle, draw a central box labeled "THE BARGAIN" with four sub-labels: "Volume (scale of commitments)", "Conditionality (none stated, implicit via debt)", "Transparency (partial)", "Reciprocity (asymmetric but negotiated)." Below the columns, draw a timeline arrow: "FOCAC 2000 → 2006 → 2015 → 2018 → 2021 (Dakar) → 2024 (Beijing)."

How to label it. Use blue for Chinese commitments, green for African commitments, black for the central bargain box. Add small flags: China flag on left column header, AU flag on right.

Perspective overlay to annotate. Top banner: "African reading: bargaining within asymmetry (Grovogui, Mbembe)." Left margin note: "Chinese reading: win-win, non-interference (Brautigam 2009)." Right margin note: "Western reading: debt-trap / conditionality gap (Taylor 2014)." Bottom note: "UN reading:

charter principles, development as right."

Visual 3 — "Sahel Security Comparator: Barkhane vs. Africa Corps" (hand-drawn comparison matrix)

What to draw. Draw a large table with 3 columns: "Dimension" (left), "French Operation Barkhane (2014–2022)" (middle), "Africa Corps / Wagner (2023–2025)" (right). Rows (8–9): (1) Force size & footprint; (2) Mandate & legal basis; (3) Host-state relationship; (4) Civilian protection record; (5) Territorial control outcomes; (6) Exit / transition; (7) Cost to host state; (8) International legitimacy; (9) Coups during deployment. Fill each cell with 2–4 word descriptors (e.g., Barkhane: "5,000+ troops; UN-authorized"; Africa Corps: "smaller footprint; bilateral deals"). Below the table, draw two arrows: left arrow "Barkhane → withdrawal 2022" and right arrow "Africa Corps → expanding 2023–25." Add a small map sketch of the Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger) with dots marking capitals and a legend: blue dots = Barkhane bases (closed), red dots = Africa Corps presence.

How to label it. Use blue header for Barkhane column, red header for Africa Corps column. Bold the "Coups during deployment" row. Add a footnote line: "Outcomes are contested; data on civilian casualties is incomplete (SIPRI, ACLED)."

Perspective overlay to annotate. Left margin: "Western reading: counterterrorism, state capacity, exit." Right margin: "Russian reading: sovereign choice, anti-Western, multipolarity." Top: "African reading: security as bargaining chip; coup regimes as new clients (Mamdani, Aning)." Bottom: "UN reading: charter Art. 2(4), human rights, peacekeeping transition."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the "new scramble" thesis?	Claim that Africa is again a passive object of great-power competition, echoing 1884–85 Berlin Conference. Critics (Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart) argue African states bargain, multi-align, and extract rents; agency is constrained but real. Source: Grovogui (1996); Mbembe (2001); Bayart (2000).
What is multi-alignment?	African states maintaining simultaneous ties with China, Russia, West, Gulf, Turkey, India; using competition among suitors to maximize bargaining leverage. Not non-alignment (Cold War) but active portfolio management. Source: Aning & Danso (2019); Nkrumah (1965) on neo-colonialism as warning.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
FOCAC: what is it?	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, founded 2000; triennial summits; Dakar Action Plan 2021 set commitments on infrastructure, green, digital, health, peace & security, trade. Source: FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021).
"Debt trap" debate	Brautigam (2009): Chinese lending is not uniquely predatory; debt distress is real but driven by multiple creditors and domestic factors. Taylor (2014): structural asymmetry in Sino-African trade (raw materials out, manufactures in). Alden & Large (2019): relationship is negotiated, not imposed.
Russia's instruments	Africa Corps (rebranded Wagner, 2023–), arms sales (SIPRI: ~35–45% of African imports), UNSC votes, grain diplomacy, anti-Western narrative. Targets coup regimes in Sahel. Source: SIPRI; Marten (2019) on Wagner.
Western instruments	Conditionality (governance, human rights), AGOA trade preferences (2000, renewed), military assistance (AFRICOM), sanctions. Strategic retrenchment post-2010s; France's Barkhane withdrawal (2022). Source: Taylor (2014); AFRICOM posture statements.
Middle powers	Turkey (drones, construction), UAE (ports, capital), India (pharma, trade), Gulf states, Japan (TICAD), South Korea. Multiplication of suitors increases African bargaining space. Source: Alden & Large (2019).
Levels of analysis (L1)	Individual (leaders), state (regimes), systemic (polarity, great-power competition), transnational (corporations, diaspora, armed groups). Each level reveals and occludes.
African agency mechanisms	Bargaining (extracting rents), multi-alignment (portfolio), forum shopping (AU, FOCAC, TICAD), norm entrepreneurship (Agenda 2063, Silencing the Guns). Source: Grovogui; Tamale (2020); Oyěwùmí (1997) on epistemic agency.
What data shows	Trade: China ~250–285B, EU ~300–350B (2022–23); FDI stock EU largest; arms Russia largest share; UNSC votes divided. Supports multi-alignment over pure scramble. Source: Comtrade; UNCTAD; SIPRI.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
Key critique of data	Comtrade undercounts informal trade; FDI stock conflates equity and loans; SIPRI values at production cost not market; UNSC votes are crude alignment proxy.
Historical analogue	Cold War (L12): Africa as proxy battleground; non-alignment movement; superpower conditionality. Today's multipolarity offers more suitors but similar risks of instrumentalization. Source: Nkrumah (1965); Nyerere (1960s speeches).

Summary (3–5 sentences). Great power competition on the continent is best understood not as a "new scramble" in which Africa is a passive object, but as a multi-alignment environment in which African states bargain among an expanded set of suitors—China, Russia, the West, and middle powers—using trade, FDI, arms, and diplomatic votes as leverage. The FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021) exemplifies the terms of the Sino-African bargain: large-scale commitments without stated political conditionality, exchanged for market access, resources, and diplomatic support. Russia's Africa Corps in the Sahel illustrates a security-for-legitimacy bargain with coup regimes, contrasting with France's withdrawn Operation Barkhane. Data on trade, FDI, arms, and UNSC voting support the multi-alignment reading but remain limited by under-counting, definitional ambiguity, and the coarseness of voting proxies. The African perspective—agency within asymmetry—reveals what both the "scramble" and "win-win" narratives occlude: that African states are constrained but not merely acted upon.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Imagine a country in Africa that needs roads, weapons, and trade partners. Twenty years ago it mainly dealt with Europe and the US. Today it can also go to China for infrastructure money, Russia for weapons, Turkey for drones, the UAE for port investment, and India for medicine. That country is not just being fought over; it is playing these suitors against each other to get better deals. The "new scramble" idea says Africa is just the prize in a game others play. The better idea is that African governments are players too—constrained by debt and power imbalances, but actively bargaining. China's FOCAC meetings promise big projects without demanding political reforms; Russia's Africa Corps offers security help to new military governments in exchange for access and anti-Western alignment; the West still offers trade deals like AGOA but has pulled back militarily in places like the Sahel. The data—trade volumes, investment stocks, arms sales, UN votes—shows many partners, not one master, which fits the bargaining story better than the scramble story.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. (a) I have not explained *how* bargaining power is actually exercised—whether through AU coordination, bilateral deals, or elite capture—and the data cannot distinguish these. (b) I treated "African agency" as unitary; I have not addressed internal divisions (civil society vs. state, regional blocs vs. capitals) or the Mamdani critique that the post-colonial state itself is a bifurcated structure. (c) I have not specified the mechanism by which arms sales translate into political alignment—whether through dependency, train-

ing, or elite co-optation. (d) I asserted that multi-alignment is "better" than scramble without fully testing the scramble thesis against cases where African states had little room to maneuver (e.g., debt-distressed states). (e) I have not addressed the UN perspective's concern that multi-alignment may erode charter norms (sovereignty, human rights) when security is outsourced to non-state actors like Africa Corps.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading the key claims: Brautigam (2009) supports the claim that Chinese lending is not uniquely predatory but does not deny debt distress; Taylor (2014) supports structural asymmetry in trade but is about trade patterns, not agency; Alden and Large (2019) support negotiated relationship; SIPRI data supports Russia's leading arms share; FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021) supports the six commitment areas listed. The claim that "multi-alignment is better supported by data" is an interpretation, not a datum—acceptable if labeled as adjudication. The claim about France's Barkhane withdrawal in 2022 is accurate. The claim that Turkey's drone sales rose rapidly is supported by SIPRI trend data. No invented quotations used; all attributions are to general arguments.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. *Analogy:* Great power competition in Africa today is like a bazaar where multiple merchants (China, Russia, Turkey, UAE, India, the West) compete for the same customer (an African state), and the customer can walk between stalls, compare prices, and play merchants off each other—unlike a monopoly market where one merchant sets terms. *Limits of the analogy:* (1) The "customer" is not a single rational actor but a fragmented state with elites, militaries, and civil societies pulling in different directions; (2) some "merchants" (especially in arms and security) create lock-in through training, spare parts, and intelligence sharing that a bazaar customer can avoid; (3) debt creates asymmetric dependency that a cash customer does not face; (4) the analogy ignores the systemic level—global polarity, commodity prices, and climate shocks—that constrains all parties; (5) the bazaar metaphor risks overstating African agency by implying equal footing, which the data on FDI stock and debt do not support.

Step 5 — Rewrite. Great power competition on the African continent is not a replay of the nineteenth-century scramble in which Africa was merely territory to be divided; it is a multi-alignment environment in which African states, regional blocs, and elites bargain among an expanded set of external suitors—China, Russia, the Western powers, and middle powers such as Turkey, the UAE, and India—using trade access, mineral and energy resources, diplomatic votes, and security partnerships as leverage. The evidence supports this reading: China-Africa trade of roughly $250–285 billion and EU-Africa trade of $300–350 billion in 2022–2023 show no single dominant partner; Russia's ~35–45% share of African arms imports and Turkey's rapid rise show a diversifying security market; and divided UNSC voting on Ukraine shows strategic ambiguity rather than bloc discipline. Yet agency is bounded: FDI stock remains concentrated in Western and Chinese hands, debt distress constrains choice, and security outsourcing to actors like Africa Corps raises charter and human-rights concerns that the UN perspective foregrounds. The FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021) captures the terms of the Sino-African bargain—scale without stated conditionality, exchanged for resources and diplomatic support—while the Sahel comparison of France's withdrawn Operation Barkhane with Russia's expanding Africa Corps shows how security partnerships have become a currency of regime survival. The African vantage point, reconstructed from within through scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, and Bayart, reveals what both the "scramble" and "win-win" narratives occlude: African states are neither passive objects nor equal partners, but constrained bargainers operating in a multipolar marketplace whose rules they did not write.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Definition	What is the “new scramble” thesis?	It argues that Africa is being re-divided by external powers competing for resources, markets, and strategic position. Critics counter that African states bargain, select partners, and shape terms, so the continent is not a passive object. The thesis is strongest when it describes competitive pressure and weakest when it erases agency.	African view: warns against objectification; Western view: frames rivalry.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Mechanism	What mechanism links FOCAC to Sino-African bargaining?	FOCAC institutionalizes periodic negotiation over trade, infrastructure, finance, and political commitments, creating a forum where African governments can aggregate demands. The Dakar Action Plan (2021) set priority areas and financing pledges, but implementation depends on project pipelines and state capacity. Bargaining power varies by state size, resource endowment, and debt position.	Chinese view: partnership; African view: forum for agency.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Debate	How does the "debt trap" debate frame Chinese lending?	Critics argue that opaque, collateralized, or commercially priced loans can create dependency and asset risk. Defenders, including Brautigam, emphasize that debt distress has multiple creditors and that Chinese finance is often project-linked rather than predatory by design. The evidence requires case-level debt composition, not aggregate suspicion.	Western view: risk; Chinese view: development finance.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Definition	What is multi-alignment in African foreign policy?	Multi-alignment means maintaining simultaneous relationships with competing powers to maximize options, avoid exclusive dependence, and extract concessions. It is not neutrality; states may vote differently across issues and institutions. Its success depends on credible exit options and domestic capacity to manage multiple bargains.	African view: sovereignty strategy; UN view: charter equality.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Source	What does SIPRI arms-transfer data show about great-power competition?	SIPRI data track supplier concentration, volume trends, and recipient patterns, revealing which powers gain military influence and where. Rising Russian or Turkish deliveries in the Sahel can indicate shifting security partnerships, but transfers alone do not prove operational effectiveness. They must be read with training, maintenance, and doctrine.	Russian view: sovereign choice; Western view: competition.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Comparison	How did French Operation Barkhane and Russia's Africa Corps differ in the Sahel?	Barkhane was a large, multinational counterterrorism operation with formal host-state agreements and a significant logistical footprint. Africa Corps represents a more transactional, state-backed security model with fewer transparency obligations. Comparing them requires separating security outcomes from sovereignty costs and political legitimacy.	African view: sovereignty trade-offs; Russian view: anti-Western alternative.
L31	Mechanism	What is the Western conditionality mechanism?	Western aid, trade preferences such as AGOA, and military assistance often attach governance, human-rights, or economic-policy conditions. This can incentivize reform but may also be perceived as sovereignty infringement or strategic inconsistency. Retrenchment reduces leverage while creating openings for rivals.	Western view: norms; African view: external constraint.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Application	What does UNSC voting alignment measure?	It measures how often states vote with a given power on resolutions, indicating diplomatic alignment or tactical convergence. It is a proxy for influence, not proof of control, because votes may reflect issue-specific interests, bloc politics, or abstention strategies. African voting often varies by resolution and regional position.	UN view: multilateralism; Russian view: multipolarity.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Reconstruction	What is the Russian anti-Western narrative in Africa?	It frames Western intervention as neo-colonial and presents Russia as a partner that respects sovereignty and offers security without political conditionality. This narrative can resonate where Western missions are seen as ineffective or intrusive. Its credibility depends on whether Russian support produces durable security and accountable governance.	Russian view: multipolarity; Western view: disinformation risk.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Mechanism	What is the Gulf/Turkish/Indian engagement mechanism?	Middle powers multiply suitors by offering niche advantages: Turkish drones and construction, Gulf finance and ports, Indian pharmaceuticals and training. This diversifies African options and can reduce dependence on any single great power. It also fragments accountability and may create competing patronage networks.	African view: bargaining leverage; UN view: complex peacebuilding.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Source	How does Brautigam (2009) challenge the “debt trap” narrative?	Brautigam argues that Chinese engagement is more varied and project-specific than predatory stereotypes suggest, and that debt problems require examining all creditors and domestic borrowing decisions. The claim is not that risks are absent, but that evidence must be case-based. This shifts analysis from moral panic to institutional capacity.	Chinese view: development partnership; Western view: strategic caution.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Source	What does Taylor (2014) add to great-power competition analysis?	Taylor situates Africa within BRICS and divergent development paths, emphasizing that external partnerships interact with domestic political economies. The lesson is that outcomes depend on how African elites negotiate, allocate, and legitimize resources. External power alone does not determine development trajectories.	African view: elite bargaining; Western view: order competition.
L31	Source	What do Alden and Large (2019) contribute?	They highlight new directions in Africa-China studies, moving beyond binary "colonialism versus partnership" debates toward granular, field-based research. Their work stresses institutional, social, and local dimensions of Chinese presence. This supports more precise causal claims about impact and agency.	Chinese view: partnership nuance; African view: local agency.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L31	Application	What is the FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021) as a bargain?	It is a negotiated framework setting cooperation priorities and commitments between China and African states. Its value lies in agenda-setting and signaling, but its effects depend on financing follow-through, project selection, and African coordination. It exemplifies institutionalized rather than ad hoc engagement.	Chinese view: win-win; African view: collective bargaining.
L31	Adjudication	What is the strongest objection to the "new scramble" thesis?	The strongest objection is that it treats African states as terrain rather than actors, ignoring multi-alignment, institutional bargaining, and differentiated national strategies. It also risks conflating competition with control. A better framework measures both external pressure and African agency.	African view: primary; Western view: rivalry lens.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100)

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence from this lesson	Next action
Distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription		Can state what happened, why, what may follow, and what should be done without conflating them	Rewrite one memo paragraph labeling each sentence type
Reconstruct all five perspectives on great-power competition		Can identify each perspective's core normative stance and occlusion	Produce a one-sentence steel-man for the weakest perspective
Apply the four levels of analysis to a case		Can separate individual, state, systemic, and transnational mechanisms	Map one Sahel event across all four levels
Interpret SIPRI and Comtrade data without overclaiming		Can describe trends while noting proxy limits	Add one caveat to a data-based claim
Adjudicate the "debt trap" debate using evidence		Can compare Brautigam's critique with risk-based arguments	List three case-level falsifiers
Compare Barkhane and Africa Corps by outcomes and sovereignty costs		Can separate security effects from legitimacy effects	Build a two-column comparison table
Specify scope conditions for a causal claim		Can state when a mechanism should and should not operate	Add scope conditions to one flashcard back
Recognize what each perspective occludes		Can name one blind spot per perspective	Add occlusion notes to Cornell notes

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which perspective did I treat as the default, and what did that perspective make invisible?
2. Which causal claim did I state without specifying its mechanism, scope conditions, or observable implications?
3. Which piece of evidence would most seriously weaken my conclusion, and did I record it as a falsifier rather than an afterthought?

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Africa is a passive object of a "new scramble."	African states exercise agency through multi-alignment, forum bargaining, and differentiated partnerships.	FOCAC negotiations, AU positions, and varied national strategies
Chinese loans are inherently predatory.	Debt distress is multi-creditor and case-specific; Chinese finance is often project-linked.	Brautigam (2009); debt-composition analysis
Russian security support automatically improves stability.	Outcomes depend on legitimacy, capacity, accountability, and local acceptance.	Sahel comparisons between Barkhane and Africa Corps
Western retrenchment means Western influence has ended.	Conditionality, markets, military assistance, and norms still shape choices.	AGOA uptake; security cooperation patterns
UNSC voting alignment proves external control.	Voting is a proxy for diplomatic convergence, not proof of control.	Variation by resolution and regional position
More external suitors always increase African leverage.	Multiplication can fragment accountability and create competing patronage networks.	Middle-power port, drone, and finance competition

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
New scramble thesis; African agency; multi-alignment	External competition for resources, markets, and strategic position; African bargaining and forum diplomacy	Realist rivalry; dependency critique; African agency scholarship	Trade, FDI, and arms data; FOCAC negotiations	Object versus agent	Evidence of African bargaining, differenti-ated national strategies	L12, L30, L32

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Chinese engagement; FOCAC; debt trap debate	Institutionalized negotiation; project finance; debt composition	Brautigam (2009); Alden and Large (2019)	FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021); Comtrade flows	Debt trap versus development partnership	Debt composition by creditor; project completion and utilization	L33, L47-49
Russian engagement; Africa Corps; anti-Western narrative	Security provision; arms transfers; sovereignty-respecting rhetoric	Multipolarity; sovereign choice	SIPRI arms data; Sahel security transitions	Security versus legitimacy	Casualty, territory, and governance trends	L18, L47-49
Western engagement; conditionality; retrenchment	Aid, trade preferences, military assistance, and governance conditions	Liberal institutionalism; strategic competition	AGOA; Operation Barkhane	Norms versus sovereignty	Preference uptake; reform indicators; mission outcomes	L12, L18
Middle-power engagement; multiplication of suitors	Niche advantages in drones, ports, finance, pharmaceuticals, and training	Multi-alignment; bargaining theory	Turkish, Gulf, and Indian projects in Africa	Leverage versus fragmentation	Supplier concentration; debt and patronage indicators	L32, L33
Five perspectives on great-power competition	Competing normative frames and occlusions	African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN traditions	UNSC voting; FOCAC; SIPRI; Comtrade	Agency versus structure	Perspective-specific evidence that contradicts each frame	L1-L5, L30

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (same day, 20 minutes):** Reconstruct the five perspectives from memory, then check each against its occlusion. Mark any perspective you defaulted to.
- **R2 (24 hours, 30 minutes):** Redraw the visual anchor from memory, label the trade, FDI, arms, and UNSC-voting trends, and annotate one perspective overlay per visual.

- **R3 (72 hours, 45 minutes):** Write a 300-word memo on the FOCAC Dakar Action Plan using the four levels of analysis and all five perspectives.
- **R4 (1 week, 45 minutes):** Compare Barkhane and Africa Corps using security outcomes, sovereignty costs, and falsifiers; state which evidence would change your verdict.
- **R5 (2 weeks, 60 minutes):** Teach the lesson to a peer or record a five-minute explanation, then answer the hinge question without notes.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define the "new scramble" thesis and state its strongest criticism.
☐ I can explain FOCAC as an institutionalized bargaining forum.
☐ I can distinguish the "debt trap" claim from Brautigam's critique.
☐ I can define multi-alignment and identify its scope conditions.
☐ I can interpret SIPRI arms data without treating transfers as proof of control.
☐ I can compare Barkhane and Africa Corps across security and sovereignty dimensions.
☐ I can explain Western conditionality and strategic retrenchment.
☐ I can explain how middle powers multiply African options and risks.
☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives in their own terms.
☐ I can identify at least one occlusion for each perspective.
☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to the worked example.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I can state falsifiers for my preferred conclusion.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit honestly.
☐ I have recorded at least one error in the error log.
☐ I can answer the hinge question and diagnose each distractor.
☐ I can use the cheatsheet to reconstruct the lesson's core mechanisms.
☐ I can explain why the African perspective is primary in this lesson.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Chinese engagement and debt debates - Brautigam, D. (2009). *The Dragon's Gift: The Real Story of China in Africa*. Oxford University Press. - Alden, C., and Large, D. (2019). *New Directions in Africa-China Studies*. Routledge. - FOCAC Dakar Action Plan (2021).

Systemic competition and African agency - Taylor, I. (2014). *Africa Rising? BRICS, Divergent Development and the New World Order*. Polity.

Security, arms, and trade data - SIPRI Arms Transfers Database (annual). - UN Comtrade Database (annual).

African institutional and legal frameworks - African Union Constitutive Act (2000). - African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) (2000, as amended).

Multilateral and security context - United Nations Security Council resolutions and reports on the Sahel and West Africa (annual).

End of Lesson 31. Say **Next** when you are ready.

33. African Agency and Strategic Autonomy

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 32: African Agency and Strategic Autonomy
Module	Module 5: African Geopolitical Architecture
Prerequisites	L28 (Pan-Africanism); L31 (Great Power Competition)
Interleaved links	Forward: L33 (Critical Minerals), L34 (Sahel Synthesis), L49 (Global South)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, worked example, problem pair, independent memo, flashcards, Cornell notes
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple to state and extraordinarily difficult to resolve: in a world where the United States, China, Russia, the European Union, and the Gulf states are all simultaneously courting African governments with trade deals, security partnerships, infrastructure finance, and diplomatic attention, do African states possess more agency than they did during the unipolar 1990s, or have they merely inherited a more crowded and more competitive form of dependency? The question matters because the answer determines whether the current multipolar moment represents a genuine expansion of African bargaining space or a sophisticated reconfiguration of the same structural constraints that have limited African sovereignty since independence. This lesson does not assume either answer. It builds the analytical machinery needed to adjudicate between them case by case, metric by metric, and perspective by perspective.

The puzzle is not new, but its contemporary form is. Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) argued that political independence without economic control was a hollow achievement, and Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) traced the mechanisms through which colonial and post-colonial extraction produced structural dependence. The Organisation of African Unity's 1963 charter enshrined sovereignty and non-interference as foundational principles, yet the same principles often shielded authoritarian regimes and limited collective action. The end of the Cold War removed superpower competition as a source of leverage for African states, and the 1990s structural adjustment era compressed policy space dramatically. The 2000s commodity boom and China's entry into African markets reopened some space, but on terms that often reinforced raw-material export dependence. The 2020s, with their overlapping crises—COVID-19, the Russia-Ukraine war, great power competition, climate stress, and debt distress—have produced a new vocabulary of "strategic autonomy" and "multi-alignment" that this lesson subjects to critical scrutiny rather than accepting at face value.

The theoretical stakes are high and they cut across the discipline. International Relations theory has historically treated African states as objects of great power politics rather than as agents within it. Realism predicts that weak states in a competitive system will bandwagon with the strongest power or balance against threats, but it struggles to explain why so many African governments simultaneously court Washington, Beijing, Moscow, and Riyadh without fully committing to any. Liberal institutionalism predicts that trade integration and institutional membership generate autonomy through interdependence, yet the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) remains under-implemented and its sovereignty dividends are prospective rather than realized. Constructivism highlights the role of norms, identity, and diplomatic framing, but risks overstating the material consequences of normative assertion. African IR scholarship—Jean-François Bayart's analysis of "extraversion," Mahmood Mamdani's work on the bifurcated state, Siba Grovogui's theorization of sovereignty as practice rather than status, and Achille Mbembe's reflections on the postcolony—insists that African political actors are strategic, creative, and historically situated, not merely reactive. This lesson takes that insistence seriously while refusing to romanticize it.

The lesson is positioned within Module 5, African Geopolitical Architecture, and builds directly on Lesson 28 (Pan-Africanism) and Lesson 31 (Great Power Competition). From L28 it inherits the question of whether continental institutions can convert shared identity into collective bargaining power. From L31 it inherits the empirical reality of intensified external competition and the analytical tools for mapping great power strategies. It also looks forward: to Lesson 33 on critical minerals, where resource sovereignty becomes concrete; to Lesson 34 on the Sahel, where security dependence and sovereignty collide; and to Lesson 49 on the Global South, where African agency is situated in a broader coalition politics. The student who masters this lesson will be able to move between these scales—individual state, regional hegemon, continental institution, global system—without losing analytical coherence.

What the student will be able to do after mastering this lesson is specific and assessable. First, evaluate competing claims about African agency using evidence rather than assertion, distinguishing rhetorical sovereignty from material capacity. Second, analyze multi-alignment as a strategic logic with identifiable mechanisms, scope conditions, and failure modes, rather than treating it as either wisdom or opportunism. Third, assess the AfCFTA not as a slogan but as a project with a theory of change, implementation gaps, and distributional consequences. Fourth, examine resource sovereignty initiatives—such as the DRC-Zambia battery value chain memorandum and Indonesia-style export bans—on their own terms, including their industrial policy requirements and their risks of elite capture. Fifth, identify the structural limits on agency—debt, aid dependence, weak state capacity, commodity dependence, security outsourcing—and specify how they interact rather than treating them as a single undifferentiated constraint. Sixth, reconstruct and adjudicate among five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on the same empirical phenomena, recognizing what each reveals and what each occludes.

A methodological commitment runs through the entire lesson and deserves explicit statement. Agency is treated as a variable, not a binary. States possess more or less agency in different domains (diplomatic, economic, security, normative) at different times, and the same state may be highly agentic in one arena and deeply constrained in another. The lesson therefore resists both the Afro-pessimist narrative that treats African states as perpetual victims of structure and the Afro-optimist narrative that celebrates every diplomatic gesture as evidence of empowerment. It demands evidence of bargaining outcomes—concessions extracted, terms improved, alternatives created—not merely of diplomatic activity. It also insists on distinguishing four analytical operations that students frequently conflate: description (what states do), explanation (why they do it), prediction (what will follow), and prescription (what they should do). Conflating these produces the common error of inferring strategic wisdom from observed behavior, or of prescribing autonomy

without specifying the material preconditions for achieving it. The worked example and problem pair are designed to train precisely this discrimination.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer each question in two to four sentences, drawing on earlier lessons. Do not consult notes until after attempting all six.

1. **From L28 (Pan-Africanism):** What did Kwame Nkrumah mean by "neo-colonialism," and how does his concept differ from formal colonialism in its implications for African sovereignty?
2. **From L28 (Pan-Africanism):** How did the OAU's 1963 principle of non-interference simultaneously protect newly independent states and constrain collective African action?
3. **From L31 (Great Power Competition):** Which external powers are most active in Africa in the 2020s, and what distinguishes their modes of engagement (trade, security, infrastructure, diplomacy)?
4. **From L31 (Great Power Competition):** How did China's Belt and Road Initiative and the US Prosper Africa initiative differ in their underlying theories of how economic engagement produces influence?
5. **From L1 (Levels of Analysis):** At which level of analysis would you situate a state's decision to abstain on a UN General Assembly resolution, and what would change if you analyzed the same decision at the individual-leader level?
6. **From L28 (Pan-Africanism):** What is the difference between Pan-Africanism as an ideological movement and Pan-Africanism as an institutional practice (AU, RECs), and why does the gap between them matter for agency?

1.2 Orientation Questions These questions frame the lesson's central puzzle. You will return to them after completing the lesson and should be able to answer each with evidence and mechanism.

1. Is African "strategic autonomy" in the 2020s best understood as a genuinely new capacity created by multipolarity, or as a rebranding of older patterns of dependency under more favorable diplomatic conditions?
2. Does multi-alignment strengthen African bargaining power by playing suitors against each other, or does it dilute leverage by preventing any single partner from investing deeply in a committed relationship?
3. Can the AfCFTA deliver economic sovereignty without complementary industrial policy, or does trade integration without production capacity risk locking in existing comparative advantage in raw materials?
4. Where does agency end and structure begin for a state like Nigeria or South Africa—what would have to change in the evidence for you to revise your assessment of either state's autonomy?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach Provisional definitions for terms that recur throughout the lesson. Refine these as you encounter each term in context.

- **Strategic autonomy:** The capacity of a state to make and implement decisions in its perceived national interest without being compelled by external actors; in the African context, typically understood as bounded and domain-specific rather than absolute.

- **Multi-alignment:** A diplomatic strategy in which a state maintains active, simultaneous relationships with multiple great powers without exclusive commitment to any, seeking to extract concessions and preserve optionality.
- **Extraversion (Bayart):** The thesis that African political systems have historically oriented themselves outward toward external patrons and resources as a strategy of domestic power accumulation, complicating simple narratives of either sovereignty or subordination.
- **Regional hegemon:** A state with disproportionate economic, military, and diplomatic weight within its region, whose preferences shape regional order; in Africa, Nigeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia occupy this role with markedly different resource bases.
- **AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area):** The AU's flagship trade integration project, operational since 2021, aiming to create a single continental market; its sovereignty potential depends on implementation depth, rules of origin, and industrial policy.
- **Resource sovereignty:** State efforts to increase control over extractive sectors through ownership, taxation, local content requirements, export restrictions, or value-chain upgrading; includes initiatives like the DRC-Zambia battery MOU.
- **Conditionality:** The practice of attaching policy requirements to financial assistance, trade preferences, or debt relief; a primary instrument of Western and multilateral leverage over African policy space.
- **Non-alignment:** The Cold War-era doctrine of refusing military alliances with either superpower bloc; distinct from multi-alignment, which is transactional and non-ideological rather than principled.
- **Structural dependence:** Persistent constraints on policy autonomy arising from debt burdens, aid dependence, commodity export concentration, weak industrial bases, and security outsourcing.
- **State capacity:** The ability of a state to implement its decisions effectively across its territory; a binding constraint on agency that operates independently of diplomatic skill or normative assertion.
- **Bargaining space:** The range of outcomes a state can realistically achieve in negotiation with external actors, determined by its alternatives, its assets, and the competitive environment among suitors.
- **Neo-colonialism:** Nkrumah's term for a system in which former colonies remain economically subordinated to former metropoles through control of finance, trade, and resources despite formal political independence.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

After mastering this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the distinct resource bases, institutional embeddedness, and normative authority that allow Nigeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia to exercise regional hegemony in qualitatively different ways, and explain why these differences resist ranking on a single hierarchy of power. (Analyze)
2. **Evaluate** the African Continental Free Trade Area as a project of economic sovereignty, weighing its tariff-reduction and rules-of-origin mechanisms against the structural limits of state capacity, infrastructure deficits, and the political economy of protection. (Evaluate)
3. **Explain** multi-alignment as a rational strategy rather than incoherence, identifying the mechanisms through which African states play external suitors against one another to extract concessions and preserve autonomy. (Explain)

4. **Assess** resource-sovereignty initiatives — including the DRC-Zambia battery value-chain memorandum and Indonesia-style export bans — in terms of their capacity to alter the terms of extraction and their vulnerability to retaliation, smuggling, and capital flight. (Assess)
5. **Critique** the limits of African agency by tracing how structural constraints, weak state capacity, and dependence on external finance bound the feasible set of autonomous action even for the continent's most powerful states. (Critique)

Each objective is assessable through the worked example (Nigeria's multi-alignment), the problem pair (South Africa's Russia-Ukraine balancing), and the independent memo; the student should be able to move between description, explanation, prediction, and prescription without conflating them. The objectives are sequenced so that the first establishes the material and institutional foundations of power, the second and third examine the economic and diplomatic instruments of autonomy, the fourth tests whether resource endowments can be converted into bargaining leverage, and the fifth imposes the structural constraints that bound all four.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Regional hegemons: Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia — distinct strategies, different resources

Bolded Causal Claim: Regional hegemony in Africa is not a scalar property of aggregate national power but a relational achievement produced by the conversion of specific, non-fungible resource endowments — oil rent and demographic mass in Nigeria, industrial depth and post-apartheid moral authority in South Africa, military capacity and developmental-state infrastructure in Ethiopia — into regional public goods and institutional leadership; consequently, the three hegemons pursue qualitatively different strategies of order-building that cannot be ranked on a single hierarchy and that rise and fall with the convertibility of their distinctive assets.

Mechanism: Regional hegemony operates through three channels. First, material provision: the hegemon supplies security (peacekeeping, mediation, counter-terrorism), economic opportunity (market access, investment, aid), and diplomatic representation (speaking for the region in global forums). Second, institutional embeddedness: hegemony is exercised through and legitimated by regional economic communities — ECOWAS for Nigeria, SADC for South Africa, IGAD and the AU for Ethiopia — which convert bilateral power into multilateral authority. Third, normative authority: the hegemon's claim to leadership must be recognized by smaller states, which depends on perceived impartiality, shared identity, and a record of delivering public goods. The mechanism is therefore not simply "power over" but "power to" — the capacity to set agendas, define threats, and allocate resources within a regional institutional framework. Nigeria's oil rents fund ECOWAS interventions (Ecomog in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the 2017 Gambia intervention) but also make Abuja vulnerable to price shocks and to Western conditionality attached to oil-sector finance. South Africa's industrial base and financial sector give it leverage in SADC and the AU, while its post-apartheid moral authority — the "rainbow nation" legitimacy — provides normative capital that has eroded with domestic inequality, xenophobic violence, and the Zimbabwe policy controversies. Ethiopia's military capacity, built during the EPRDF period, made it the anchor of IGAD and the AU's security architecture (AMISOM/ATMIS in Somalia), while its developmental-state infrastructure (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, industrial parks) promised economic leadership; the 2020-2022 Tigray war demonstrated how quickly military capacity converts into liability when turned inward. The mechanism implies that hegemony is path-dependent and reversible: each hegemon's strategy is shaped by which assets are most convertible in its regional context, and by the domestic political coalitions that control those assets.

Scope Conditions: Regional hegemony functions where (a) the hegemon possesses at least one asset convertible into regional public goods; (b) regional institutions exist to mediate and legitimate leadership; (c) smaller states perceive net benefit from hegemonic order relative to alternatives (including external great-power patronage); and (d) the hegemon's domestic politics permit sustained external commitment. It weakens when asset convertibility declines (Nigeria's oil-price collapses of 2014-2016 and 2020), when domestic instability consumes capacity (Ethiopia 2020-2022), or when normative authority is contested (South Africa's 2008 and 2019 xenophobic violence, its equivocation on Zimbabwe). It also fails where a rival hegemon or external power offers smaller states a better deal — France in the Sahel, China's infrastructure finance, or Gulf states' port investments. The scope condition is therefore not "power" but "convertible power under institutionalized consent."

Observable Implications: If the causal claim holds, we should observe: (i) Nigeria leading ECOWAS military and diplomatic interventions when oil rents are high and retreating when they fall; (ii) South Africa dominating SADC economic and security agendas while its moral authority fluctuates with domestic politics; (iii) Ethiopia anchoring Horn security and AU diplomacy during stable periods and ceding space during internal conflict; (iv) smaller states forum-shopping between hegemons and external powers; (v) regional institutions (ECOWAS, SADC, IGAD) rising and falling with hegemonic capacity. Evidence: Nigeria's Ecomog operations (1990-1999) and the 2017 Gambia intervention; South Africa's mediation in DRC (2002 Sun City) and Zimbabwe (2008-2009); Ethiopia's role in AMISOM and the 2018 Eritrea peace; the 2021-2023 erosion of Ethiopian diplomatic capital during the Tigray war.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective, reconstructed from within, treats regional hegemons not as natural leaders but as contested political projects whose legitimacy must be continually earned. Adebajo's characterization of Nigeria as a "reluctant hegemon" captures the central tension: Abuja possesses the material capacity for regional leadership but lacks the domestic political consensus and institutional follow-through to sustain it, oscillating between interventionism and withdrawal. This is not a failure of will but a structural feature of oil-dependent states whose fiscal capacity tracks commodity prices and whose foreign policy is captured by rent-seeking elites — a dynamic Bayart's "politics of the belly" illuminates. South Africa's hegemony is read differently: as "hegemony by consent" built on the moral capital of the anti-apartheid struggle, but increasingly strained by the contradiction between its liberation narrative and its domestic inequality, labor-market exclusion of migrants, and its equivocation on Zimbabwe's 2008 crisis. Mamdani's analysis of the post-colonial state — "decentralized despotism" — suggests that South African regional leadership reproduces at the continental level the same bifurcated authority that characterizes the domestic state: formal democratic institutions layered over coercive and patrimonial practices. Ethiopia presents a third variant: the developmental state as hegemon, where the EPRDF's vanguard-party model generated rapid growth and military capacity but also ethnic federalism's fragilities, culminating in the Tigray war that destroyed both its domestic legitimacy and its regional standing. The African vantage reveals what external perspectives miss: that regional hegemony in Africa is inseparable from the post-colonial state's internal contradictions — the gap between sovereignty as legal status and sovereignty as effective capacity. Nkrumah's warning about "neo-colonialism" and Nyerere's insistence on collective self-reliance (the Arusha Declaration, the Lagos Plan of Action) frame the hegemon's dilemma: it must be strong enough to resist external domination yet not so strong as to dominate its neighbors. The African perspective thus sees hegemons as necessary but dangerous — necessary for collective agency in a multipolar world, dangerous because their power can reproduce sub-imperial hierarchies. Grovogui's critique of the "standard of civilization" and the racialized hierarchies of international order adds that African hegemons operate within a global system that recognizes

their sovereignty formally while constraining their autonomy materially, so that even "successful" hegemony is hegemony within limits. The longest and most developed reading is therefore not of power but of constraint: African regional hegemons are simultaneously the continent's best instruments of strategic autonomy and the sites where that autonomy is most visibly incomplete.

Chinese: China's perspective treats regional hegemons as "anchor states" and "gateways" for its Africa engagement, mapping distinct roles onto each: Nigeria as oil and consumer market, South Africa as industrial and financial hub and BRICS partner, Ethiopia as infrastructure corridor and AU host. Beijing's relational framing — "partnership" rather than "leadership" — avoids adjudicating African hierarchies, consistent with non-interference. The Chinese vantage contributes recognition that hegemons provide institutional platforms (AU, ECOWAS) that China can engage multilaterally, reducing transaction costs. It occludes, however, the internal fragility of each hegemon and the possibility that Chinese finance deepens rather than resolves their structural vulnerabilities — for example, debt distress in Ethiopia or Nigeria's oil-sector dependence.

Russian: Russia's perspective frames regional hegemons as sovereign poles in a multipolar order, emphasizing their resistance to Western conditionality. Moscow cultivates Nigeria (arms, nuclear cooperation, oil), South Africa (BRICS, historical anti-apartheid solidarity, the 2014 nuclear framework), and Ethiopia (arms, historical ties) as partners in "sovereign choice." The Russian vantage contributes a vocabulary of anti-hegemonic solidarity and supports African claims to non-alignment. It occludes Russia's limited economic footprint relative to China or the West, and its tendency to treat African hegemons as instruments of great-power competition rather than autonomous actors — a framing that can undermine the very sovereignty it rhetorically champions.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly US and EU, treats regional hegemons as "anchor states" for stability, counter-terrorism, and market access. Nigeria is valued for ECOWAS leadership and counter-Boko Haram cooperation; South Africa for SADC stability and peacekeeping; Ethiopia for Horn security and AU diplomacy. The Western vantage contributes resources — aid, security assistance, market access (AGOA) — and institutional support. It occludes African agency by framing hegemony through Western security priorities, and its conditionality (human rights, governance) is read in Africa as sovereignty infringement. Frustration with non-alignment — Nigeria's and South Africa's abstentions on Ukraine — reveals the Western assumption that partnership entails alignment.

UN: The UN perspective treats regional hegemons as "sub-regional leaders" operating under the principle of subsidiarity, with the AU as the continental anchor. Nigeria's ECOWAS interventions, South Africa's SADC mediation, and Ethiopia's AU hosting are valued as African solutions to African problems, reducing UN deployment burdens (AMISOM/ATMIS, UNMIL). The UN vantage contributes legitimacy, funding, and a multilateral framework. It occludes power asymmetries within Africa — the risk that hegemony becomes sub-imperialism — and its emphasis on state-centric peacekeeping can sideline non-state and civil-society actors. The UN also struggles to hold hegemons accountable when they are simultaneously indispensable partners.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — AfCFTA as a Project of Economic Sovereignty: Potential and Limits

Bolded Causal Claim: The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is best understood not as a conventional tariff-cutting agreement but as a sovereignty-building project: by pooling market access, rules of origin, standards, and dispute settlement across the continent, African states seek to convert fragmented

national economies into a collective bargaining unit capable of shaping the terms of global trade, investment, and industrialization; yet its sovereignty gains are contingent on implementation capacity and are constrained by the very asymmetries among member states that the agreement is meant to overcome.

Mechanism: The causal chain begins with tariff liberalization—ninety percent of tariff lines are to be liberalized over agreed transition periods—but tariffs are only the visible layer. The deeper mechanism is institutional: the AfCFTA protocols on trade in goods, services, investment, intellectual property, competition, digital trade, and dispute settlement create a continental rule-making space that did not previously exist. Rules of origin determine which products count as "African," thereby creating incentives for regional value chains rather than simple re-export of externally manufactured goods. The Guided Trade Initiative and similar pilot mechanisms test whether customs administrations, standards bodies, and private firms can actually move goods under the new rules. If these mechanisms function, the continental market—roughly 1.4 billion people—becomes a source of bargaining power: external partners must negotiate with a larger bloc rather than with individual states whose markets are too small to command concessions. The sovereignty effect is therefore not autarky but "capacity to set terms": African states gain leverage to demand technology transfer, local content, and industrial upgrading rather than accepting extractive terms. At the same time, the mechanism contains internal frictions. Non-tariff barriers—customs delays, divergent standards, sanitary and phytosanitary rules, roadblocks, and informal payments—often impose higher costs than tariffs. Infrastructure deficits, especially in transport corridors and energy, mean that tariff preferences may be unusable. Industrial concentration in a few economies (notably South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt, and Kenya) risks turning AfCFTA into a hub-and-spoke system in which smaller states become markets for a few regional manufacturers rather than co-producers. Revenue loss is also material: states that depend heavily on customs duties face fiscal shocks before alternative tax bases mature. Finally, external trade agreements—European Partnership Agreements, bilateral deals with China, the United States, and others—can erode AfCFTA preferences if rules of origin and cumulation are not carefully aligned. Sovereignty, in this sense, is pooled rather than absolute: member states accept constraints on unilateral tariff policy in exchange for collective market power, but the exchange only pays off if implementation is credible.

Scope Conditions: AfCFTA's sovereignty-building logic works under a specific set of conditions. First, legal domestication must occur: ratification alone is insufficient unless tariff schedules, rules of origin, and customs procedures are incorporated into national law and administered by trained officials. Second, customs and standards institutions must be capable of certifying origin, testing products, and resolving disputes without prohibitive delay. Third, physical and digital infrastructure—ports, corridors, one-stop border posts, payment systems, and data frameworks—must reduce the cost of moving goods across borders. Fourth, industrial policy must be complementary: AfCFTA creates market access, but it does not by itself create firms, skills, or technological capacity. Fifth, political commitment must extend beyond summit declarations to the removal of non-tariff barriers that protect politically connected importers or domestic monopolies. Sixth, adjustment mechanisms must compensate or support states and sectors that lose tariff revenue or face new competition, especially least-developed and landlocked countries. The logic fails or weakens where these conditions are absent: in conflict-affected regions, where borders are militarized or closed; in states with very narrow export bases; in economies where informal cross-border trade dominates and formal rules are bypassed; and where elite incentives favor rent extraction from import licensing rather than production. It also weakens if external powers use bilateral agreements to divide African negotiating positions, or if African states treat AfCFTA as a diplomatic symbol rather than an economic discipline.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism is working, one should observe a rising share of intra-African trade in total African trade, and—more importantly—a shift in composition toward manufactured and in-

termediate goods rather than raw commodities. One should see expansion of the Guided Trade Initiative, increased use of AfCFTA certificates of origin, growth in regional value chains (for example in automotive components, pharmaceuticals, agro-processing, and light manufacturing), and a measurable reduction in reported non-tariff barriers. One should also see the AfCFTA Secretariat and dispute-settlement bodies becoming active, with cases or consultations that clarify rules rather than merely ceremonial meetings. Fiscal data should show states experimenting with alternative revenue instruments as tariff dependence declines. If the limits dominate, the observable pattern will be different: intra-African trade will remain stagnant, informal trade will continue to dwarf formal flows, tariff schedules will exist on paper but not at the border, and external partners will continue to capture most value-added. One would also observe "forum shopping," where states sign AfCFTA commitments while simultaneously deepening bilateral deals that undermine continental rules of origin. The key diagnostic is not the number of ratifications but the cost, time, and predictability of moving a container or a digital service across an African border.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, AfCFTA is the economic counterpart to political Pan-Africanism: it attempts to reverse the fragmentation imposed by colonial borders and to build the continental market that earlier generations envisioned in the Lagos Plan of Action and the Abuja Treaty. African scholarship frames the problem not as a lack of trade but as a structure of extraversion—Bayart's term for economies oriented outward toward external patrons rather than inward toward regional production. Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment and Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism remain relevant because AfCFTA's promise is not simply more trade but trade on terms that permit industrialization. Mamdani's work on the bifurcated state reminds us that colonial administrative legacies can weaken the very institutions required to implement continental rules. The African perspective therefore treats sovereignty as capacity: a state or region is sovereign not merely when it has legal independence but when it can feed, employ, and industrialize its population without perpetual external permission. AfCFTA is thus a project of "decolonizing trade," but African feminist and social scholarship also insists that its success must be measured by whether informal traders—disproportionately women—gain recognition, credit, and protection rather than being displaced by formalization. The African vantage contributes a historical and structural diagnosis that Western trade theory often misses: low intra-African trade is not a natural market failure but a colonial inheritance. It also contributes a normative insistence that integration must not reproduce internal hierarchies, where a few regional hegemons dominate continental markets. Its occlusion, however, can be a tendency to treat continental unity as an unqualified good, underestimating the real distributional conflicts among member states and the possibility that pooled sovereignty may weaken democratic accountability if decisions are made in technocratic spaces far from citizens.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames AfCFTA as compatible with, and potentially amplifying, China-Africa partnership. It emphasizes infrastructure connectivity, industrial parks, and "win-win" cooperation, often presenting the Belt and Road Initiative and AfCFTA as mutually reinforcing. The relational framing stresses long-term partnership rather than conditionality, and Chinese actors may see a continental market as an opportunity for Chinese firms to scale production and for African states to accelerate industrialization. What this perspective contributes is a willingness to finance large-scale infrastructure that many Western actors have avoided. What it occludes is the risk that Chinese firms capture value-added segments while African economies remain suppliers of raw materials or low-margin assembly; it also tends to understate concerns about debt sustainability, procurement transparency, and competition with African manufacturers.

Russian: The Russian perspective generally welcomes African economic integration as part of a multipolar

order and frames AfCFTA as a step away from Western-dominated trade structures. Russian rhetoric emphasizes sovereign choice and non-interference, but Russia's actual trade and investment footprint in Africa is comparatively small, and its comparative advantages lie more in arms, energy, and diplomatic support than in consumer markets or manufacturing supply chains. The perspective contributes a geopolitical counterweight to Western pressure, but it occludes the limited complementarity between Russian and African economies and the constraints imposed by sanctions and logistical distance.

Western: The Western perspective tends to support AfCFTA rhetorically as a market-opening, rules-based initiative aligned with global trade norms. It emphasizes standards, intellectual property, competition policy, procurement transparency, and the compatibility of AfCFTA with existing European Partnership Agreements. Western actors often see AfCFTA as an opportunity for their firms to access a larger African market. What this perspective contributes is technical expertise, financing for trade facilitation, and pressure for regulatory predictability. What it occludes is the historical role of colonial trade structures and asymmetric agreements in producing Africa's external orientation; it can also treat African industrial policy—such as local content requirements or export bans—as distortions rather than sovereignty tools.

UN: The UN perspective treats AfCFTA as a development instrument aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and with AU Agenda 2063. UN agencies, especially the Economic Commission for Africa and UNCTAD, provide technical support, modeling, and advocacy for trade as a driver of inclusive growth. The perspective emphasizes multilateralism, gender inclusion, and the special needs of least-developed countries. What it contributes is legitimacy, data, and a normative framework for inclusive integration. What it occludes is the hard politics of power asymmetry within Africa and the possibility that technocratic integration may proceed without sufficient democratic accountability or redistribution.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Multi-Alignment as Rational Strategy: The Logic of Playing Suitors Against Each Other

Bolded Causal Claim: Multi-alignment is a rational, interest-maximizing strategy for African states with sufficient market size, strategic location, or diplomatic weight: by maintaining simultaneous and non-exclusive partnerships with competing external powers, they convert great-power rivalry into bargaining leverage, diversify risk, and preserve decision-making autonomy; but the strategy is not costless, because credibility, state capacity, and domestic coherence determine whether courting multiple suitors yields concessions or merely multiplies dependencies.

Mechanism: Multi-alignment should be distinguished from both non-alignment and bandwagoning. Non-alignment, in its classic Cold War form, often implied neutrality or equidistance; bandwagoning implies choosing a patron. Multi-alignment, by contrast, is active and transactional: a state deliberately cultivates overlapping relationships with the United States, China, Russia, the European Union, Gulf states, and others across security, finance, trade, and diplomacy, while refusing to grant any single partner exclusive access. The mechanism is "competitive courting." When external powers perceive that a state has credible alternatives, they bid against one another with infrastructure finance, arms, market access, debt relief, diplomatic support, and technology. The African state can then extract better terms, avoid overdependence on one creditor, and preserve room for maneuver. A second mechanism is "omni-enmeshment": by embedding different partners in different sectors—ports, telecoms, energy, defense, agriculture—the state prevents any one actor from dominating the whole economy. A third mechanism is diplomatic: simultaneous membership in competing forums (the African Union, BRICS, the G20, the Commonwealth, the Francophonie, or sub-regional blocs) allows the state to shift venues when one forum becomes constraining. The strategy also

has a domestic dimension. Multi-alignment can serve elite coalition management by distributing rents and contracts across factions aligned with different external patrons, thereby reducing the risk that any single faction captures the state. But this same mechanism can become pathological: if elite competition is managed through external rents rather than domestic accountability, multi-alignment reinforces "gatekeeper" politics rather than development. The strategy can also fail when signals become incoherent. If a state accepts incompatible obligations—exclusive basing rights, conflicting data regimes, or contradictory sanctions exposure—partners may impose costs, withdraw support, or treat the state as unreliable. Thus the core mechanism is leverage through credible alternatives, and its success depends on the state's ability to manage complexity without losing coherence.

Scope Conditions: Multi-alignment works best for states with structural assets that make them worth courting: large populations and markets (Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, Egypt, Kenya), strategic geography (the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea, the Red Sea), critical minerals, or diplomatic centrality (AU host, regional hegemon, aspirant global-governance voice). It also requires institutional capacity: a professional foreign service, coherent national-security and economic planning, and the ability to negotiate complex contracts. Domestic political conditions matter as well. A degree of elite consensus on core interests is necessary; otherwise, multi-alignment becomes a battlefield among factions, each selling access to a different patron. The strategy is more viable during periods of intense great-power competition, when suitors are motivated and alternatives are abundant; it is less effective when major powers retrench or when global liquidity tightens. It fails or degrades where states are small, highly aid-dependent, conflict-affected, or lacking credible exit options. In such cases, "multi-alignment" may be merely "multi-dependence": the state accumulates obligations to several patrons without gaining leverage over any. It also fails when external powers coordinate to punish non-alignment, or when a state's strategic assets are so vital that one patron is willing to coerce rather than compete.

Observable Implications: If multi-alignment is functioning as a rational strategy, one should observe simultaneous high-level engagement with competing powers without exclusive commitments; diversified arms procurement and training relationships; parallel infrastructure, energy, and telecom deals with different financiers; and voting patterns that avoid automatic alignment with any bloc, including abstentions or split positions in the United Nations General Assembly. One should also observe improved terms—better financing conditions, technology transfer, or diplomatic support—following competitive bidding. If the strategy is failing, the observable signs include rising debt to multiple creditors with incompatible conditions; conflicting contractual obligations; sanctions exposure; reputational incoherence; and domestic polarization over foreign policy. Another diagnostic is whether the state can say "no" to a major partner without catastrophic retaliation. A state that cannot refuse is not multi-aligned; it is dependent. The most important observable implication is therefore not the number of partnerships but the terms on which they are conducted and the state's retained freedom to choose among them.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective frames multi-alignment as an expression of strategic autonomy and agency, not as opportunism. It draws on the non-alignment tradition of Nkrumah, Nyerere, and the Bandung spirit, but adapts it to a multipolar world in which African states are no longer merely choosing between two blocs. African scholars such as Adebajo and Alden emphasize that African states have historically been treated as objects of great-power competition; multi-alignment is an attempt to become subjects. The logic of "playing suitors" is therefore a reversal of extraversion: instead of accepting the terms offered by a single patron, the state uses competition to improve its position. Yet the African perspective

also contains a sharp internal critique. Bayart's analysis of the "gatekeeper state" warns that external rents can strengthen elites who mediate between foreign patrons and domestic populations, producing sovereignty without development. Mamdani's work on political identity and state form suggests that multi-alignment may be used to manage internal coalitions rather than to serve citizens. The African vantage thus insists that strategic autonomy must be measured not only by diplomatic freedom but by whether it expands domestic capacity, accountability, and material welfare. It contributes a historically grounded suspicion of external conditionality and a normative commitment to African agency; it occludes, at times, the possibility that some external partnerships may be genuinely developmental and that refusing all conditionality can protect predatory elites.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective generally accepts multi-alignment as legitimate and even natural, consistent with its emphasis on non-interference and "win-win" cooperation. China benefits from being one suitor among many, but it also prefers bilateral, relational engagement that builds long-term trust. The relational framing presents partnership as mutual benefit rather than transactional leverage. What this perspective contributes is a refusal to demand exclusive alignment and a willingness to compete on infrastructure and finance. What it occludes is the possibility that African multi-alignment is partly a hedge against overdependence on China itself; Chinese actors may underestimate how diversification reduces their leverage and may frame African agency as ingratitude or instability.

Russian: The Russian perspective supports African multi-alignment rhetorically as part of an anti-hegemonic, multipolar vision. It presents Russia as an alternative to Western conditionality and emphasizes sovereign choice. In practice, however, Russia's economic offer is limited, and its appeal often rests on security cooperation, arms, and diplomatic backing rather than broad-based development. The perspective contributes a geopolitical counterweight and a vocabulary of sovereignty, but it occludes the asymmetry between its rhetoric and its material capacity, as well as the risks that security partnerships can deepen authoritarianism or conflict.

Western: The Western perspective often interprets multi-alignment as hedging or non-alignment, and it can generate frustration when African states abstain from Western-led initiatives or refuse to condemn adversaries. Conditionality—on governance, human rights, or sanctions compliance—reflects an assumption that partnership should entail political alignment. What this perspective contributes is a rules-based framework, institutional funding, and pressure for accountability. What it occludes is the historical experience of coercion and the rationality of African states' desire to avoid overdependence; it can mistake strategic autonomy for unreliability or moral failure.

UN: The UN perspective values multilateral engagement and dialogue among competing powers, and it supports African voice in global governance. It tends to frame multi-alignment as compatible with the UN Charter and with multilateralism, while emphasizing rules, norms, and collective security. What it contributes is a forum for de-escalation and a normative commitment to sovereign equality. What it occludes is the reality that great-power competition often bypasses multilateral institutions, and that the UN's state-centric framework may not capture the domestic and transnational dimensions of multi-alignment, including elite capture and non-state actors.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Resource sovereignty: DRC-Zambia battery initiative, Indonesia-style export bans, and the terms of extraction

Bolded Causal Claim: African states' capacity to convert critical mineral endowments into structural transformation depends not on geological abundance but on sovereign control over the terms of extraction, processing, and value-chain positioning; where states assert such control through export restrictions, joint ventures, and regional coordination, they can shift from price-taker to price-maker in strategic commodity markets, but only where state capacity and regional market depth make enforcement credible.

Mechanism: The mechanism runs through three linked channels, each with a distinct theoretical lineage. First, the "terms of extraction" channel: mining contracts, royalty regimes, local-content requirements, and environmental standards determine how much value is captured domestically versus repatriated. Rodney's (1972) analysis of underdevelopment as a relational process—where Africa's integration into global capitalism as a raw-material periphery systematically transferred surplus to metropolitan centers—remains the foundational African scholarly framing. Nkrumah's (1965) neo-colonialism thesis extends this: formal political independence without economic control reproduces subordination through unequal exchange. Bayart's (2009) concept of "extraversion" adds that African states are oriented toward external patrons, making resource governance a site of elite capture and rent-seeking rather than developmental accumulation. Second, the "value-addition" channel: exporting unprocessed ores captures minimal value; processing—smelting, refining, battery precursor production—captures more. Indonesia's 2020 nickel export ban and subsequent 2023 bauxite ban demonstrated that a state with concentrated supply and some processing capacity could force foreign firms to invest in domestic processing, attracting billions in FDI and moving Indonesia up the value chain. The DRC-Zambia battery initiative, formalized through a memorandum of understanding in April 2022, aims to create a joint special economic zone for battery precursor production, leveraging the DRC's cobalt and Zambia's copper. Third, the "regional coordination" channel: individual African states lack market power; collective action through the AfCFTA or regional economic communities can aggregate bargaining power. The mechanism is not automatic: export bans without processing capacity simply divert trade; bans without enforcement capacity invite smuggling and capital flight; bans without regional coordination invite competitive undercutting by neighbors. Mamdani's (1996) analysis of "decentralized despotism" is relevant here—states whose institutional reach is fragmented cannot enforce resource sovereignty even where the legal framework exists.

Scope Conditions: The causal claim holds under specific conditions. (a) Supply concentration: the state or region must control a significant share of global supply of a commodity with inelastic demand—cobalt, where the DRC supplies roughly seventy percent; copper; lithium. (b) Processing capacity or credible commitment to build it: Indonesia had existing nickel processing; DRC-Zambia are building from a lower base. (c) State capacity to enforce: customs, monitoring, contract negotiation expertise. (d) Regional market depth: AfCFTA implementation must reduce intra-African trade barriers. (e) Geopolitical demand: the energy transition must sustain demand for battery minerals. Where these fail—in states with fragmented sovereignty, weak customs, or commodities with elastic supply—the export-ban strategy fails or backfires, producing revenue loss and investor flight. The claim also does not imply that resource sovereignty alone produces development; it is a necessary but not sufficient condition, and without complementary industrial policy, education, and infrastructure, value-addition can become an enclave. Ake's (1996) warning that African states are often "disarticulated" from their societies applies: resource sovereignty without social embeddedness risks becoming elite enrichment.

Observable Implications: We should observe: (i) adoption of export restrictions on unprocessed minerals—

DRC cobalt export quotas, Zimbabwe's 2022 lithium ban, Namibia's 2023 critical minerals export restrictions; (ii) renegotiation of mining contracts and royalty increases, as in the DRC's 2018 mining code revision; (iii) joint ventures and special economic zones for processing—the DRC-Zambia battery zone, Tanzania's graphite processing ambitions; (iv) local-content and technology-transfer requirements; (v) increased state equity in mining; (vi) regional coordination mechanisms; (vii) pushback from consuming states and firms—WTO disputes, supply-chain diversification, "friend-shoring." The observable pattern should show variation: states with higher capacity achieve more; fragile states achieve less. Botswana's diamond beneficiation, though in a different commodity, illustrates the high-capacity pathway; the DRC's persistent struggle to enforce its 2018 code illustrates the low-capacity pathway.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective frames resource sovereignty as the unfinished business of decolonization. Rodney (1972) and Nkrumah (1965) established that Africa's underdevelopment is not a natural condition but a produced one, through centuries of extraction. Mbembe (2001) extends this to the postcolony, where sovereignty is exercised as a "commandement" over bodies and resources, often through violent extraction. Bayart (2009) notes that African states are "extraverted"—oriented toward external patrons—making resource governance a site of elite capture and rent-seeking. Yet African scholarship also insists on agency: Aning and Danso (2013) emphasize that African states are not merely victims but strategic actors; Grovogui (2006) argues sovereignty is a practice, not a possession, and African states exercise it through diplomatic and legal maneuvering. Tamale (2020) and Oyěwùmí (1997) add that extraction is gendered: mining economies disrupt women's land rights and social reproduction, and resource sovereignty must include feminist political economy. The DRC-Zambia initiative is read as pan-African industrialization, a concrete attempt to break the "pit-to-port" model. The strongest African claim: without control over resources, political sovereignty is hollow; the strongest internal critique: elite capture and weak capacity may convert sovereignty rhetoric into new forms of extraction benefiting narrow coalitions.

Chinese: China's perspective emphasizes partnership and relational framing: resource cooperation is embedded in broader infrastructure and development packages, with rhetoric of "win-win" and non-interference. Chinese firms dominate cobalt processing and have invested heavily in DRC mining. The perspective contributes capital and infrastructure that Western firms often withhold, and it does not impose governance conditionality. What it occludes: concerns about labor standards, environmental degradation, debt sustainability, and the concentration of processing capacity in China, which can reproduce dependence even as it shifts the patron. Chinese policy discourse tends to frame resource cooperation as mutual benefit, but African critics note asymmetric bargaining power.

Russian: Russia's perspective emphasizes sovereign choice and anti-Western rhetoric: African states have the right to choose partners, and Western criticism of resource deals is hypocritical given Western extraction histories. Russia's actual economic footprint in African mining is smaller but includes security-for-resources arrangements and nuclear/energy deals. What it contributes is a geopolitical counterweight and rhetorical support for sovereignty; what it occludes is that Russian engagement often prioritizes regime security and elite deals over broad-based development, and its capacity to deliver large-scale processing investment is limited.

Western: The Western perspective emphasizes conditionality, ESG standards, supply-chain security, and market efficiency. It supports value addition in principle but worries that export bans distort markets, invite retaliation, and may not build capacity. It contributes technology, capital, and governance frameworks—EITI, OECD guidelines—and "friend-shoring" initiatives. What it occludes: historical extraction patterns,

asymmetric power in contract negotiation, and the possibility that Western firms' reluctance to process in Africa reflects risk aversion rather than African incapacity. Western frustration with non-alignment sometimes conflates commercial interest with normative concern.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes sustainable development, the SDGs, multilateral frameworks such as EITI and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, and African voice in global governance. It supports resource sovereignty as compatible with development but stresses environmental and social safeguards. What it contributes is normative frameworks and technical assistance; what it occludes is enforcement weakness and the reality that great-power competition often bypasses multilateral resource governance.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The limits of agency: structural constraints, weak state capacity, and dependence on external finance

Bolded Causal Claim: African strategic autonomy is structurally bounded by weak state capacity, dependence on external finance, and asymmetric integration into global capitalism; agency is real but exercised within narrow margins, and its expansion requires not just diplomatic maneuvering but domestic institutional strengthening and regional collective action.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through four channels, each grounded in a distinct scholarly tradition. First, the "finance dependence" channel: many African states rely on external borrowing—Eurobonds, IMF and World Bank programs, Chinese loans—that carries conditionality and constrains fiscal space. Mkandawire's (2001) concept of "choiceless democracies"—states that hold elections but lack policy autonomy due to structural adjustment and donor dependence—captures this dynamic. Debt distress, as in Zambia's 2020 default and Ghana's 2022 restructuring, illustrates how finance dependence narrows options. Adebajo (2016) notes that African states' foreign policies are frequently shaped by the need to maintain access to external finance and security guarantees. Second, the "state capacity" channel: weak tax administration, limited industrial policy expertise, fragile infrastructure, and security deficits constrain what states can implement. Ake (1996) argued that African states are often "disarticulated" from their societies, lacking the bureaucratic and infrastructural power to execute developmental projects. Mamdani's (1996) "decentralized despotism" thesis shows how colonial institutional legacies constrain democratic and developmental capacity. Third, the "extraversion" channel: Bayart (2009) shows African states are oriented toward external patrons, with elites capturing rents from external flows rather than taxing domestic production, weakening accountability and developmental orientation. Fourth, the "security dependence" channel: reliance on external security providers—French operations in the Sahel, Russian PMCs, US AFRICOM—constrains strategic choices. The mechanism is not deterministic: agency exists—Clapham (1996) and Brown (2012) document how African states maneuver within constraints—but the margin of maneuver varies sharply with capacity, resource endowment, and geopolitical position. Tshabalala and Ndzendze (2022) argue that African agency is best understood as "agency within constraints," a formulation that avoids both fatalism and voluntarism.

Scope Conditions: The claim holds most strongly for states with low fiscal autonomy, high debt, weak institutions, and high aid dependence. It holds less for states with diversified economies, stronger institutions, and regional leadership—Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia historically, Rwanda, Botswana. The claim also does not imply zero agency; even weak states exercise agency through diplomatic positioning, alliance choices, and normative entrepreneurship. The limits are contingent and can be expanded through regional integration (AfCFTA), domestic reform, and diversification of partnerships. The claim is falsified if states with weak capacity consistently achieve autonomous industrial policy outcomes comparable to strong-capacity states.

Alden (2019) emphasizes that African agency is not a fixed quantity but a variable shaped by the density of external engagement and the quality of domestic institutions.

Observable Implications: We should observe: (i) continued IMF programs and conditionality in many states; (ii) debt distress and restructuring; (iii) limited industrial policy implementation despite rhetorical commitments; (iv) reliance on external security; (v) variation in capacity across states; (vi) elite capture of external rents; (vii) AfCFTA implementation gaps; (viii) "policy space" debates in AU and UN forums. The observable pattern should show that agency is uneven: Nigeria can multi-align; fragile Sahelian states cannot. The AU Agenda 2063's emphasis on "domestic resource mobilization" and "capable institutions" implicitly acknowledges these limits.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on limits of agency is internally contested, and this contestation is itself a scholarly strength. One strand—Rodney (1972), Nkrumah (1965), Fanon (1961)—emphasizes structural constraint: colonialism and neo-colonialism created dependencies that cannot be overcome by will alone. Mamdani (1996) shows how colonial institutional legacies constrain democratic and developmental capacity. Another strand—Nyerere (1968), Cabral (1979), and contemporary scholars like Mkandawire (2001)—insists on agency within constraints: African states and movements have historically exercised remarkable agency (liberation struggles, non-alignment, pan-Africanism) and can do so again. Grovogui (2006) argues sovereignty is practiced, not given. The tension between these strands is productive: it prevents both fatalism and voluntarism. Mbembe (2001) adds that postcolonial sovereignty is often exercised through violence and extraction, complicating celebratory narratives. Tamale (2020) and Oyěwùmí (1997) insist that limits are gendered: women's exclusion from state institutions limits the range of agency. The strongest African claim: agency is real but must be understood as practice within structure, not as autonomy from it; the strongest internal critique: some African scholarship risks overemphasizing structure (fatalism) or overemphasizing agency (voluntarism), and the balance is empirical.

Chinese: China's perspective tends to emphasize partnership and capacity-building, offering infrastructure and finance with less conditionality than Western donors. It contributes an alternative to Western conditionality and supports African agency rhetorically. What it occludes: new dependencies (debt, infrastructure lock-in, technology dependence) and the possibility that Chinese engagement reproduces extraversion in new forms. Chinese discourse frames limits as temporary and solvable through cooperation.

Russian: Russia's perspective emphasizes sovereign choice and anti-Western solidarity, framing limits as imposed by Western hegemony. It contributes rhetorical and diplomatic support. What it occludes: limited capacity to address structural constraints (finance, infrastructure, capacity-building) and the risk that security partnerships deepen dependence.

Western: The Western perspective emphasizes governance, institutions, and conditionality as paths to expanded agency. It contributes aid, technical assistance, and normative frameworks. What it occludes: historical responsibility for creating constraints, the possibility that conditionality undermines rather than builds capacity, and the tendency to blame African states for structural problems. Western frustration with non-alignment sometimes reflects impatience with the slow pace of change.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes multilateral support, capacity-building, and the SDGs. It contributes normative frameworks and technical assistance. What it occludes: the state-centric framework may miss transnational constraints (illicit flows, climate), and UN programs are often donor-driven, reproducing dependence. The UN's emphasis on "good governance" can individualize structural problems.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective on strategic autonomy begins from a historical sociology of power rather than from a static map of alliances. It treats agency as a practice exercised under constraint, not as the absence of constraint. This is the first contribution that the other four perspectives systematically understate: African states and societies are not merely arenas in which external powers compete; they are actors with their own strategic grammars, shaped by colonial partition, the Cold War's proxy wars, structural adjustment, and the contemporary scramble for minerals, markets, and military access. Rodney's analysis of how Africa's underdevelopment was historically produced, Nkrumah's warning against neo-colonialism, and Cabral's insistence that liberation requires both political and economic transformation all frame autonomy as a long-duration struggle rather than a diplomatic posture. From this vantage, multi-alignment is not opportunism or incoherence; it is a rational response to an international order in which no single partner can be trusted to deliver security, capital, and market access simultaneously. The African perspective therefore reconstructs non-alignment and hedging as forms of statecraft that preserve optionality.

This perspective also insists that sovereignty is relational and unevenly distributed within states. Bayart's notion of extraversion captures how African elites have historically used external connections to consolidate domestic power, while Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject reminds us that the postcolonial state inherited authoritarian forms that complicate any simple equation of state agency with popular sovereignty. Mbembe's work on the postcolony and necropolitics adds that power operates through the management of life and death, especially in zones of extraction and conflict. Grovogui's critique of international law's civilizing mission shows how legal and normative frameworks that present themselves as universal often encode hierarchical assumptions about who is capable of self-rule. Taken together, these scholars suggest that strategic autonomy must be evaluated not only by whether a state can choose among Washington, Beijing, Moscow, Brussels, or Gulf capitals, but by whether its choices expand or contract the political and economic space available to its own citizens.

The regional hegemons illustrate this complexity. Nigeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia each possess different resources and face different vulnerabilities, and the African perspective resists treating them as interchangeable "regional powers." Nigeria's demographic weight, hydrocarbon revenues, and ECOWAS leadership give it diplomatic centrality, but its internal insecurity, fiscal dependence on oil, and uneven state capacity constrain its ability to convert size into sustained influence. South Africa's industrial base, financial sector, and constitutional democracy make it a normative and economic anchor, yet its growth stagnation, inequality, and energy crises limit the credibility of its leadership. Ethiopia's demographic scale and strategic location have made it a pivotal Horn of Africa actor, but recent conflict and humanitarian catastrophe demonstrate how quickly internal fragility can erode external autonomy. The African perspective sees hegemony not as a status to be celebrated but as a burden: regional leadership can amplify collective bargaining in the AU or AfCFTA negotiations, yet it can also reproduce hierarchy, justify intervention, and mask domestic legitimacy deficits. Aning and Danso's work on African security governance is useful here because it highlights how regional organizations are simultaneously instruments of self-determination and arenas in which stronger states project power.

AfCFTA is central to this perspective because it reframes economic sovereignty as a collective project rather than a purely national one. The logic is straightforward: a larger internal market reduces dependence on ex-

ternal demand, increases bargaining power in trade negotiations, and creates incentives for industrialization and value addition. AU Agenda 2063's emphasis on continental integration provides the normative backdrop. Yet the African perspective is not triumphalist. It recognizes that tariff schedules, rules of origin, and non-tariff barriers are technical instruments whose effectiveness depends on state capacity, infrastructure, and political will. It also recognizes that integration can reproduce inequalities: larger economies may capture disproportionate gains, while smaller or landlocked states may face adjustment costs. The perspective therefore treats AfCFTA as a necessary but insufficient condition for autonomy. Without complementary investments in energy, transport, digital infrastructure, and industrial policy, the agreement risks becoming a legal framework that ratifies existing patterns of extraversion rather than transforming them.

Multi-alignment, in this view, is not a moral failure to choose sides but a strategic grammar of survival and advancement. African governments have learned from the Cold War that exclusive alignment can convert domestic politics into proxy battlegrounds, and from structural adjustment that dependence on a single creditor or market can foreclose policy space. Playing suitors against one another can yield infrastructure finance, diplomatic support, technology transfer, and market access. It can also create room for maneuver in multilateral forums, as seen when African states coordinate positions in the UN General Assembly or AU. The African perspective does not deny that this strategy has costs: overlapping commitments can produce incoherence, external partners may retaliate, and domestic institutions may be overwhelmed by competing demands. But it insists that the alternative—automatic alignment with any single power—has historically delivered less autonomy, not more. The key question is not whether African states should align, but on what terms, with what safeguards, and with what domestic accountability.

Resource sovereignty sharpens the argument. The DRC-Zambia battery initiative and debates over Indonesia-style export bans are not merely industrial policy experiments; they are attempts to renegotiate the terms of extraction in a global economy that has long rewarded raw-material export and penalized value addition. The African perspective sees mineral wealth as both opportunity and trap. Without processing capacity, skills, energy, and infrastructure, export bans can reduce revenues without generating industrialization. With them, they can begin to shift rents from extraction to manufacturing and create fiscal space for public investment. The terms of extraction—taxation, local content, environmental standards, community consent, and transparency—are therefore central to autonomy. This perspective also warns against a new form of resource nationalism that benefits elites while displacing communities, a concern that connects to Tamale's and Oyěwùmí's insistence that gendered and local dimensions of power must be included in any serious account of sovereignty. Women's informal cross-border trade, land rights, and participation in extractive economies are not peripheral to strategic autonomy; they are constitutive of it.

The limits of agency are not denied; they are theorized. Structural constraints—debt burdens, commodity price volatility, climate vulnerability, illicit financial flows, and security dependencies—narrow the space for autonomous choice. Weak state capacity means that even well-designed policies may fail in implementation. Dependence on external finance, whether through aid, loans, or private capital, can reintroduce conditionality through the back door. The African perspective's distinctive contribution is to locate these limits historically and relationally rather than morally. It asks how colonial infrastructures, Cold War interventions, and contemporary financial architectures produced the very constraints that are now invoked to justify continued external guidance. It also asks who benefits from narratives of African incapacity. At the same time, this perspective must avoid romanticizing resistance. Not every act of non-alignment is emancipatory; some elite bargains use anti-Western or anti-colonial rhetoric to deflect accountability. The strongest version of the African perspective therefore combines a defense of agency with a critical examination of how that agency is exercised, by whom, and for whose benefit.

What this perspective contributes that the other four cannot is a historically grounded, internally differentiated account of power that treats autonomy as a contested political project rather than a diplomatic label. It reveals that strategic autonomy is not simply the freedom to choose among external partners, but the capacity to transform the structures that make some choices costly and others impossible. Adebajo (2016) and Alden (2019) illustrate, from different angles, how African states navigate great-power competition without reducing that navigation to either submission or heroic resistance. The perspective's occlusions are also real: it can overstate the coherence of "Africa" as a political subject, underplay the diversity of interests among states, classes, genders, and generations, and under-theorize the role of non-state actors such as firms, civil society, diaspora networks, and armed groups. It may also insufficiently address the ways in which African states themselves generate constraints through corruption, repression, or policy incoherence. Yet its central insight remains indispensable: strategic autonomy is not a gift from external partners but a contested political project, and its evaluation requires attention to history, structure, and the distribution of power within as well as between states.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

China's perspective on African agency is shaped by its own historical experience of semi-colonialism, its development trajectory, and its contemporary ambition to reshape global governance. It frames the relationship through partnership, mutual benefit, and non-interference, often invoking South-South solidarity. From Beijing's vantage, African strategic autonomy is not a threat but a precondition for a more multipolar and legitimate international order. A stronger Africa reduces unipolar dependence and creates markets, resources, and diplomatic partners for China. This perspective therefore supports, at least rhetorically, African multialignment and regional integration, including AfCFTA, because a larger and more integrated African market aligns with Chinese commercial interests and with the narrative of collective development.

The Chinese contribution is substantial in material terms: infrastructure finance, trade expansion, technology transfer, and diplomatic backing in multilateral forums. The FOCAC process and Belt and Road Initiative have made China a central development partner, often filling gaps left by Western donors and private investors. China's model emphasizes state-led development, infrastructure, and non-conditionality, which many African governments find attractive because it preserves formal policy space. Alden's analysis of China-Africa relations highlights how Beijing's engagement has shifted from resource extraction toward a broader portfolio of trade, finance, and security cooperation, though asymmetries remain. China also presents itself as a champion of sovereignty: it generally avoids public criticism of domestic governance and frames its engagement as respect for African choices.

Yet the Chinese perspective occludes several tensions. Its emphasis on non-interference can shield authoritarian practices and weaken accountability, especially where Chinese finance supports projects with limited transparency. Debt sustainability concerns, labor standards, and environmental impacts are often treated as bilateral technical matters rather than structural issues. The "win-win" framing can obscure bargaining asymmetries: African states may lack the technical capacity to negotiate complex contracts, and Chinese firms may benefit from state-backed financing and long-term supply arrangements. In resource sectors, China's demand for minerals can reinforce extractive patterns even when accompanied by infrastructure investment. The perspective also tends to personalize diplomacy around state elites, sometimes underestimating the importance of civil society, parliaments, and local communities in determining whether partnerships are legitimate.

On resource sovereignty, China's position is pragmatic. It generally accepts state ownership and regulatory authority but seeks secure, long-term supply and competitive access. Export bans and local-processing re-

quirements are viewed as negotiable constraints rather than existential threats, provided Chinese firms can participate in downstream industries. This creates potential convergence with African value-addition goals, but also risks a new division of labor in which China controls technology and markets while Africa supplies processed inputs. The Chinese perspective is therefore best understood as supportive of African agency in form while seeking to shape its content through commercial and diplomatic leverage. It contributes capital and an alternative to Western conditionality, but its occlusions around transparency, debt, and elite capture require critical scrutiny.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

Russia's perspective on African agency is filtered through its confrontation with the West and its pursuit of multipolarity. Moscow frames African states as sovereign actors entitled to choose their partners without Western interference, and it presents its own engagement as anti-colonial solidarity rather than great-power competition. This rhetorical stance resonates in contexts where Western conditionality is perceived as intrusive or hypocritical. Russia contributes security cooperation, arms sales, nuclear energy partnerships, grain and fertilizer diplomacy, and diplomatic support in multilateral forums. Its veto power in the UN Security Council and its willingness to challenge Western resolutions give African states additional leverage, particularly on issues such as sanctions or conflict classification.

The Russian perspective treats multi-alignment as legitimate and even necessary. It argues that African states should not be forced to choose between Russia and the West, and it criticizes Western pressure on states that maintain ties with Moscow. In this sense, Russia positions itself as a defender of sovereign choice. Its security partnerships in the Sahel and elsewhere are framed as responses to African requests and as alternatives to Western or UN missions that are seen as ineffective or neo-colonial. The perspective also draws on historical memory: Soviet support for anti-colonial movements and opposition to apartheid provide a reservoir of legitimacy, even though contemporary Russia is not the Soviet Union.

The occlusions are significant. Russia's economic footprint in Africa is comparatively limited, and its engagement is often concentrated in security, energy, and extractive sectors. The use of private military companies and opaque security arrangements raises questions about accountability, human rights, and state sovereignty. Sanctions and the war in Ukraine constrain Russia's capacity to deliver sustained economic benefits, making its partnerships more rhetorical than material in many cases. The anti-Western framing can also obscure Russia's own authoritarianism and its interest in accessing minerals, markets, and diplomatic support. On resource sovereignty, Russia may support state control when it serves its firms' access, but it is not a consistent advocate of African industrialization or value addition. Its perspective contributes a counterweight to Western dominance and validates sovereign choice, but it risks substituting one form of dependence for another, particularly in security domains where African states may lack oversight capacity.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on African agency is rooted in a liberal internationalist framework that emphasizes governance, markets, human rights, and institutional capacity. It views strategic autonomy as desirable but often conditional on reforms that align with Western norms and economic models. Western governments and institutions contribute development finance, security assistance, technical expertise, and normative frameworks such as the SDGs, EITI, and various governance indicators. They also provide market access through trade preferences and investment. From this vantage, African multi-alignment is understandable but potentially problematic: hedging can dilute collective responses to aggression, undermine sanctions regimes, and create security risks when partners such as Russia or China gain influence in sensitive sectors.

The Western perspective's central mechanism is conditionality. Aid, loans, and market access are linked to governance standards, fiscal transparency, and human rights. The argument is that external support should build capacity and accountability, not merely sustain incumbent elites. This perspective also emphasizes the rules-based international order and sees African agency as most effective when exercised through multilateral institutions and legal frameworks. On AfCFTA, Western actors generally support integration but stress implementation, regulatory harmonization, and private-sector participation. On resource sovereignty, they may support value addition and local processing in principle while worrying about export bans, contract sanctity, and supply-chain security.

The occlusions are equally important. The Western perspective often underestimates the historical and structural constraints that limit African policy space, including debt, commodity dependence, and the legacy of colonial economic structures. It can individualize systemic problems by attributing underdevelopment primarily to domestic governance failures. Its frustration with non-alignment sometimes reflects impatience with the slow pace of change or with African refusal to adopt Western geopolitical priorities. Conditionality, while intended to build capacity, can undermine sovereignty and create resentment, particularly when standards are applied inconsistently. The perspective also tends to treat "the West" as a coherent actor, obscuring differences among the US, EU, UK, and other partners. Its strongest contribution is the insistence that agency without accountability can become elite self-enrichment; its weakest is the assumption that Western models are universally transferable.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective frames African agency within multilateralism, sustainable development, and international law. It emphasizes African voice in global governance, capacity-building, peace operations, and the SDGs. The UN contributes normative frameworks, technical assistance, humanitarian support, and forums for collective deliberation. It sees AfCFTA as aligned with SDG 8 and SDG 9, and it treats regional integration as a pathway to resilience and inclusive growth. On multi-alignment, the UN perspective is generally permissive as long as state conduct remains within the Charter framework; it values sovereignty but also stresses human rights, peace, and development as interdependent goals.

The UN's distinctive contribution is its claim to universality and its institutional capacity to convene diverse actors. It can amplify African positions on climate finance, debt relief, and Security Council reform, and it provides legitimacy to peace processes and development initiatives. The UN also supports resource governance through frameworks such as EITI and the SDGs, encouraging transparency and domestic resource mobilization. In this view, strategic autonomy is not opposed to multilateralism; rather, effective multilateralism requires stronger African capacity to shape agendas and implement commitments.

The occlusions stem from the UN's own structure and funding. Programs are often donor-driven, which can reproduce dependence and prioritize donor preferences over African-defined priorities. The state-centric framework may miss transnational constraints such as illicit financial flows, climate change, and cross-border insecurity. The emphasis on "good governance" can individualize structural problems, while peacekeeping mandates may stabilize situations without addressing root causes. The UN's reform agenda, including Security Council expansion, has been slow, limiting its credibility as a champion of African voice. Nevertheless, the UN perspective remains important because it provides a forum in which African agency can be articulated in universal terms and because it insists that autonomy and interdependence are not mutually exclusive.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reframes strategic autonomy as relational agency: African states can choose, sequence, and bargain among partners rather than accept a single patron. It foregrounds sovereignty, African-defined priorities, and the possibility of converting great-power competition into development gains.	It can understate internal constraints—weak state capacity, elite fragmentation, corruption, and uneven regional power—that make "agency" unevenly distributed within and across African states.	Strategic autonomy, equitable partnership, and African voice in global governance.	AU Agenda 2063; AfCFTA documentation; Nigeria's and South Africa's diplomatic balancing across US, China, Russia, and Gulf partners.	Western/UN: autonomy without capacity can become fragmented dependence; non-alignment can shield governments from accountability.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Provides infrastructure finance, market access, and a non-interference framing that many African governments find attractive; treats development through connectivity as a legitimate path to sovereignty.	Obscures debt exposure, asymmetry in bargaining power, local labor and environmental costs, and the possibility that state-to-state deals bypass African publics.	Partnership, mutual benefit, sovereignty, and development through connectivity.	Belt and Road-linked rail, port, and energy projects; expanding China-Africa trade.	African: partnership can become extractive if terms are opaque; Western: lacks transparency and conditionality.
Russian	Offers anti-Western solidarity, security cooperation, and rhetorical support for sovereign choice; exploits grievances about double standards and unipolar dominance.	Its economic footprint is comparatively small; its engagement often prioritizes geopolitical disruption, diplomatic support, or security rents over broad-based African development.	Multipolarity, sovereign choice, and anti-hegemony.	UN voting alignments; arms, security, and energy engagements with selected African states.	Western/UN: undermines norms and can empower authoritarian or coercive actors; African: rhetoric is not matched by development finance.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Promotes conditionality, governance norms, aid, trade preferences, and security frameworks; insists that autonomy must be compatible with accountability and rules-based order.	Can treat non-alignment as defection, underestimate historical asymmetry, and individualize structural problems through "good governance" discourse.	Liberal internationalism, accountability, human rights, and rules-based order.	Aid programs, sanctions regimes, trade preferences, and security assistance.	African/Russian: conditionality infringes sovereignty; Chinese: hypocrisy given Western historical extraction.
UN	Provides a multilateral forum, universal norms, peacekeeping, development frameworks, and a language in which African agency can be articulated globally.	State-centric and often donor-driven; may stabilize situations without addressing root causes; reform of global governance, including Security Council expansion, has been slow.	Multilateralism, interdependence, human security, and African voice in global governance.	UNGA resolutions; AU-UN cooperation; peacekeeping and development programs.	African: reform is too slow to match multipolarity; Western: too accommodating to sovereignty claims.

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: Nigeria's multi-alignment strategy across the United States, China, Russia, and Gulf partners. Nigeria is Africa's most populous state and one of its largest economies, with a federal structure, an oil-dependent revenue base, severe internal security pressures, and a long-standing claim to regional leadership in West Africa. Its foreign policy has not been a choice between Washington and Beijing, or between the West and an anti-Western bloc, but a portfolio strategy: simultaneous engagement with multiple external powers in order to secure security assistance, infrastructure finance, market access, diplomatic room, and domestic political resources. The puzzle is how a regional hegemon with significant assets but uneven capacity can

navigate external pressure without becoming a client of any single power.

Levels of analysis

Individual. Leadership matters, but it is not sovereign. Successive Nigerian administrations have weighted partners differently: some have emphasized security cooperation and counterterrorism with the United States; others have prioritized infrastructure and commercial ties with China; still others have sought Gulf capital, energy partnerships, or selective diplomatic engagement with Russia. Individual presidents, foreign ministers, and senior officials shape the tone and sequencing of these relationships, and personal networks can accelerate deals or create policy incoherence. Yet individual choice is constrained by bureaucratic capacity, fiscal stress, elite bargains, and the need to manage domestic constituencies. A president may announce a strategic pivot, but implementation depends on ministries, state governments, security agencies, and commercial actors whose interests are not identical. The individual level therefore explains variation in emphasis and rhetoric, but not the deeper continuity of multi-alignment.

State. At the state level, Nigeria's multi-alignment reflects the structure of its needs. No single external partner can simultaneously provide counterterrorism support, infrastructure finance, refined petroleum capacity, agricultural investment, diplomatic backing in regional crises, and macroeconomic stabilization. The Nigerian state faces Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province in the northeast, banditry and kidnapping in the northwest, separatist pressures in the southeast, and recurrent fiscal and foreign-exchange stress. Its regional hegemon role in ECOWAS also creates obligations, as seen in its responses to coups and constitutional crises in West Africa. Multi-alignment is thus a state-level adaptation to a mismatch between domestic demands and the limited supply of any one patron. It also reflects the federal and commercial character of the state: foreign policy is not only a diplomatic project but a channel for contracts, credit, and elite access.

Systemic. The international system has shifted from post-Cold War unipolarity toward sharper great-power competition, and Nigeria operates inside that transition. During the unipolar moment, the United States could more easily set terms for security cooperation and governance reform. China's rise created an alternative source of finance and infrastructure, often with fewer political conditions. Russia's invasion of Ukraine intensified pressure on African states to take sides, while Gulf states expanded their diplomatic and investment footprints. Nigeria's size, population, energy resources, and regional weight make it a prize in this competition. Systemically, its non-exclusive posture is tolerated because partners fear that excessive pressure will push Abuja toward rivals. Multi-alignment is therefore not merely a national preference; it is enabled by a multipolarizing system in which external powers compete for access and Nigeria can exploit that competition.

Transnational. Nigeria's foreign policy is also shaped by forces that cross borders. Oil and gas production involves multinational firms, global price cycles, and international shipping and refining networks. Infrastructure projects depend on foreign contractors, imported equipment, and external credit. The Nigerian diaspora sends remittances, influences domestic politics, and connects Abuja to Western capitals. Illicit financial flows, capital flight, and informal trade networks weaken state control over resources. Regional migration, cross-border insecurity, and ECOWAS market integration tie Nigeria to neighbors whose crises become Nigerian problems. These transnational structures mean that autonomy is never purely diplomatic: it is constrained by who owns assets, who finances projects, who moves capital, and who controls information.

Mechanism. The core mechanism is competitive courtship, or portfolio diplomacy. Nigeria maintains credible relationships with several external powers so that each suitor believes it must offer better terms to avoid

losing influence to the others. The mechanism works through three channels. First, diversification reduces vulnerability: if Washington conditions security assistance on governance reforms, Abuja can seek alternative training, equipment, or diplomatic cover elsewhere; if Beijing's lending terms tighten, Gulf or Western finance may become more attractive. Second, competitive courtship generates concessions: infrastructure packages, refinery investments, security cooperation, and diplomatic support become bargaining chips in a market for access. Third, it preserves decision-making space by preventing any single partner from acquiring a veto over Nigerian policy. The mechanism is conditional, however. It requires assets that external powers value—market size, energy resources, regional leadership, and UN or regional votes. It also requires enough domestic coherence to implement agreements; otherwise, partners discount Nigerian commitments and withhold their best offers. The risk is that multi-alignment becomes not strategic autonomy but fragmented dependence: many small dependencies rather than one large one, with debt, contract opacity, and elite capture replacing overt clientelism.

Perspective reconstruction

African (primary, longest). From an African vantage, Nigeria's multi-alignment is best understood as an exercise of agency within structural constraint. African scholarship and diplomacy have long rejected the idea that sovereignty requires isolation; instead, sovereignty is the capacity to choose partners, sequence engagements, and define the terms of cooperation. Nigeria's size and regional role allow it to resist binary choices imposed by great powers and to convert geopolitical competition into development gains. This reflects a broader African tradition of non-alignment updated for a multipolar era, in which the goal is not neutrality but strategic flexibility. Yet the African perspective also insists that agency is uneven and politically contested. Adebajo's work on African agency and Alden's analysis of China-Africa relations caution that external partnerships can reproduce dependence when state capacity is weak or elite bargains dominate. AU Agenda 2063 frames autonomy as part of a long-term project of self-reliance, not as a slogan for diplomatic hedging. Thus, Nigeria's strategy is promising but contingent: it is autonomy only if it strengthens domestic capacity, regional integration, and accountability rather than merely multiplying external patrons.

Chinese. China is likely to view Nigeria's multi-alignment as normal and acceptable so long as economic ties deepen and project continuity is preserved. Beijing's framing emphasizes mutual benefit, infrastructure, and non-interference; it does not require exclusive alignment and may see Nigeria's engagement with the United States or Gulf states as compatible with Chinese commercial interests. The Chinese perspective contributes a materialist account of why Nigeria courts Beijing: rail, ports, power, and trade matter. Its occlusion is to treat state-to-state deals as sufficient evidence of partnership, downplaying debt exposure, local costs, and the possibility that Nigerian publics do not experience these projects as mutually beneficial.

Russian. Russia is likely to frame Nigeria's refusal to join an anti-Russian bloc as sovereign choice and evidence of a multipolar world. Moscow can offer rhetorical support, security cooperation, and energy or mining interests, and it may seek Nigerian diplomatic backing in multilateral forums. The Russian perspective explains why anti-Western language resonates in parts of Africa, including Nigeria, especially where Western conditionality is seen as hypocritical. Its occlusion is that Russia's economic footprint in Nigeria is comparatively limited, and its engagement may prioritize geopolitical positioning over Nigerian development. It risks overstating shared interests and understating the asymmetry between Moscow's global ambitions and Abuja's domestic needs.

Western. The United States and European partners are likely to see Nigeria as indispensable but frustrating. They contribute security assistance, governance programs, trade preferences, and diplomatic support, and they expect cooperation on terrorism, maritime security, human rights, and great-power competition.

From this perspective, multi-alignment can look like hedging that weakens collective action, especially when Nigeria does not align with Western positions on Russia or China. The Western perspective contributes an accountability lens: autonomy should not become a shield for corruption or repression. Its occlusion is to misread non-alignment as defection rather than as a rational strategy by a state with multiple needs, and to underestimate how Western conditionality can push Nigeria toward alternative partners.

UN. The UN perspective is likely to treat Nigeria's multi-alignment as compatible with the Charter if it remains peaceful and respects sovereignty. It emphasizes multilateralism, development, African voice, and the idea that autonomy and interdependence are not mutually exclusive. The UN contributes a normative framework in which Nigeria can pursue diverse partnerships while remaining embedded in global institutions. Its occlusion is state-centrism: it may miss transnational constraints such as illicit financial flows, private capital, and cross-border insecurity, and its reform agenda has been too slow to give African states the institutional voice that multipolarity demands.

Explicit adjudication. The African perspective best explains Nigeria's multi-alignment because it captures the strategic logic of agency: Nigeria is not passive, not neutral, and not merely a battleground, but an actor seeking to convert external competition into domestic and regional gains. It also correctly identifies the normative stakes: autonomy is about capacity and choice, not isolation. However, the African perspective can overstate coherence if it treats "Nigeria" as a unitary actor with a unified interest. The state, systemic, and transnational levels show that multi-alignment is also driven by fiscal stress, security fragmentation, elite incentives, and external market structures. The Chinese perspective best explains the material incentives behind engagement with Beijing, but it understates asymmetry. The Russian perspective explains rhetorical anti-Westernism but not the economic core of the strategy. The Western perspective explains frustration and conditionality but misreads non-alignment as defection. The UN perspective supplies the normative vocabulary but not the power-political mechanism. The strongest overall explanation is therefore African agency operating under systemic and transnational constraint: Nigeria's multi-alignment is rational and often effective, but its success depends on state capacity, domestic accountability, and the ability to turn diplomatic access into developmental outcomes. Without those conditions, the strategy risks becoming a portfolio of dependencies rather than a project of autonomy.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. Identify the levels of analysis at which South Africa's abstention on the March 2022 UNGA resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be explained, and state which level you think carries the greatest explanatory weight.
2. Reconstruct the African perspective: how does Pretoria's position draw on anti-colonial solidarity, the Non-Aligned Movement legacy, and BRICS membership, and what does this perspective reveal that a purely Western framing misses?
3. Explain the mechanism by which abstention functions as a strategic signal rather than mere neutrality: what audience is it signaling to, and what cost is it absorbing?
4. Compare South Africa's Russia-Ukraine balancing with its December 2023 ICJ genocide case against Israel: what changed in the strategic calculus, and what remained constant?

5. Steel-man the strongest Western counterargument—that South Africa's non-alignment is incoherent or morally compromised—and then answer it.
6. Evaluate the limits of agency: which structural constraints (energy, fiscal, trade, institutional) most tightly bound Pretoria's room for maneuver between 2022 and 2025?

MODEL ANSWER

South Africa's abstention on the March 2022 UNGA resolution condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine is best explained at the intersection of the state and systemic levels, with the transnational level supplying the normative vocabulary. At the state level, the ANC's historical memory of Soviet support during the anti-apartheid struggle created a durable elite affinity that outlived the Cold War; this is not merely sentiment but a structured relationship embedded in party networks and diplomatic habit. At the systemic level, Pretoria's abstention registered a refusal to be conscripted into a binary great-power alignment at a moment when the unipolar order was visibly fraying. The transnational level supplied the language: non-alignment, sovereignty, and anti-colonial solidarity. The individual level—President Ramaphosa's personal diplomacy—mattered at the margin, particularly in the June 2023 African peace mission, but it operated within constraints set by party and system. The greatest explanatory weight belongs to the state level, because without the ANC's historical relationship with Moscow the systemic incentive to hedge would not have produced abstention specifically on Russia's behalf; a different governing party might have voted differently while still hedging.

The African perspective reconstructs this position from within as an exercise in strategic autonomy rather than moral indifference. From Pretoria's vantage, the war is a European security crisis whose framing as a universal moral emergency serves Western interests; the demand that African states choose sides reproduces the very paternalism that non-alignment was designed to resist. BRICS membership is not an ideological commitment to Moscow but a platform for diversifying partnerships and amplifying African voice in global governance. What this perspective reveals is that abstention is a positive strategy—preserving optionality, protecting energy and trade relationships, and asserting sovereign judgment—rather than an absence of position. What it occludes is the cost to Ukraine of great-power aggression and the risk that non-alignment, however principled, can be read by aggressors as license.

The mechanism by which abstention functions as a strategic signal operates through audience differentiation. The primary audience is domestic and continental: the ANC base and African peers, for whom principled non-alignment is a marker of sovereign dignity. The secondary audience is Moscow, to whom abstention signals that South Africa will not join sanctions coalitions. The tertiary audience is Washington and Brussels, to whom it signals that conditionality has limits. The cost absorbed is reputational: Western governments read abstention as alignment with Russia, and Pretoria pays in strained diplomatic capital, delayed trade negotiations, and heightened scrutiny of its financial system. The signal is thus costly, which is precisely what makes it credible.

The December 2023 ICJ genocide case against Israel marks both continuity and change. Continuity lies in the underlying principle: South Africa again refused to defer to Western framing of a conflict and asserted an independent legal-moral judgment rooted in anti-colonial solidarity—this time with Palestinians. Change lies in the strategic calculus: whereas abstention on Ukraine was defensive and preservative, the ICJ case was offensive and normative, deploying international law as a weapon rather than merely withholding endorsement. Pretoria could afford the latter because the domestic and continental audiences rewarded it, because the legal venue insulated it from direct economic retaliation, and because the case aligned with a

broad Global South coalition. What remained constant was the core commitment to sovereign judgment over alignment.

The strongest Western counterargument holds that South Africa's non-alignment is incoherent: it abstains on Russian aggression while prosecuting Israeli aggression, revealing not principle but opportunism, and that by refusing to condemn Moscow it undermines the very international legal order it invokes at The Hague. This argument has force but overstates its case. Incoherence would require that the two positions share no common principle; they do—opposition to great-power impunity and solidarity with the colonized. The apparent asymmetry reflects different strategic contexts, not different values: Russia is a BRICS partner with whom Pretoria has historical ties; Israel is a Western ally whose conduct Pretoria has long criticized. The counterargument also underestimates the constraint: a middle-income state with high unemployment and an energy crisis cannot afford the economic rupture that full alignment with either side would require. Non-alignment is not costless, but it is not incoherent.

The limits of agency were severe and structural. The energy crisis—persistent load shedding—made South Africa dependent on imported fuels and vulnerable to any disruption in trade finance. Fiscal constraints, including a debt-to-GDP ratio near 75 percent and a narrow tax base, limited the state's capacity to absorb sanctions or retaliation. Trade exposure to the EU, the US, and China meant that any decisive alignment would have imposed immediate economic costs that the state could not absorb. Institutional capacity constraints—corruption, state-owned enterprise dysfunction, and a fragmented security apparatus—further narrowed the space for bold initiative. The ICJ case was feasible precisely because it operated in a legal register that did not require economic rupture. Agency, in this case, was real but heavily bounded: Pretoria could choose its posture, but not its constraints.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description

In January 2024, Ethiopia formally joined BRICS, becoming one of the bloc's first African expansions beyond South Africa. The move followed the November 2022 Pretoria Agreement that ended the Tigray war, a conflict that had strained Addis Ababa's relations with Western donors and multilateral lenders. Ethiopia's accession came alongside its pursuit of a memorandum of understanding with Somaliland for Red Sea port access, which triggered a diplomatic crisis with Somalia and drew in Turkey and Egypt. Meanwhile, Ethiopia remained heavily indebted to Chinese creditors, dependent on IMF program negotiations, and reliant on Gulf states for budget support. The case asks how a post-conflict, landlocked regional hegemon with weak state capacity and multiple external dependencies can convert BRICS membership into genuine strategic autonomy rather than merely adding another patron.

(b) Required memo headings (prompts)

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking Ethiopia's BRICS accession to a change (or non-change) in its strategic autonomy. Specify the level(s) of analysis, the intervening variables, and the scope conditions under which the mechanism would operate.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) would interpret Ethiopia's BRICS accession and Red Sea port pursuit. Steel-man each; note what each occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one historical case of a post-conflict African state attempting to convert

multilateral membership into strategic autonomy. State the analogy's limits.

- **Falsifiers:** List three observable developments that would falsify your central claim about whether Ethiopia's BRICS accession increases its strategic autonomy.

(c) Self-check

Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen next), and prescription (what should be done), and that no single paragraph conflates two of these.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: South Africa's abstention on UNGA resolutions condemning Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine is best explained by which of the following?

A. A purely ideological commitment to Russia rooted in ANC-Soviet solidarity, with no strategic calculation.

B. A rational multi-alignment strategy preserving optionality across great-power blocs, constrained by energy, fiscal, and trade dependencies.

C. Western diplomatic pressure that inadvertently pushed Pretoria toward Moscow.

D. A legal obligation under the Non-Aligned Movement charter to abstain on great-power conflicts.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **A** overstates ideology and understates strategy: ANC-Soviet historical affinity is real and structures elite preferences, but it does not by itself explain the specific choice of abstention, which also served systemic hedging and domestic legitimation. This option confuses elite affinity with determinism and ignores the cost-absorbing signal mechanism.
- **C** reverses causality: Western pressure was largely a response to Pretoria's abstention, not its cause. It also overstates Western leverage, given South Africa's demonstrated willingness to absorb reputational costs. The mechanism runs from sovereign choice to Western reaction, not the reverse.
- **D** invents a legal obligation: the Non-Aligned Movement has no binding charter requiring abstention on great-power conflicts. This option confuses a normative tradition with a legal duty and misidentifies the source of Pretoria's position, which is political-strategic rather than juridical.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Nigeria: trade and FDI partners, selected years (approximate shares of total merchandise trade; FDI stock ranking)

Partner	Share of total trade, 2005 (%)	Share of total trade, 2015 (%)	Share of total trade, 2024 (%)	FDI stock rank, 2024	Principal flow
China	6	18	24	2	Imports of manufactures; infrastructure finance
European Union (aggregate)	34	26	19	1	Oil exports; manufactures imports
United States	16	9	6	3	Oil exports; security cooperation
India	4	9	11	5	Oil exports; pharmaceuti-cals
United Kingdom	9	5	4	4	Financial services; legacy FDI
Intra-African (ECOWAS + AU)	11	9	8	6	Informal cross-border trade; re-exports
Gulf states (UAE, Saudi Arabia)	2	4	6	7	Oil-market diplomacy; sovereign investment
Other	18	20	22	—	Residual

Note: figures are illustrative approximations compiled from trade-statistics conventions and secondary reporting; they are intended for analytical training, not for citation as official data. Source lineage: Adebajo (2016) on Nigeria's external bargaining; Alden (2019) on China–Africa economic relations.

Table 2 — South Africa: trade and FDI partners, selected years (approximate shares of total merchandise trade; FDI stock ranking)

Partner	Share of total trade, 2005 (%)	Share of total trade, 2015 (%)	Share of total trade, 2024 (%)	FDI stock rank, 2024	Principal flow
China	7	15	21	3	Manufactures imports; minerals exports
European Union (aggregate)	33	27	24	1	Manufactures; automotive; wine

Partner	Share of total trade, 2005 (%)	Share of total trade, 2015 (%)	Share of total trade, 2024 (%)	FDI stock rank, 2024	Principal flow
United States	10	8	7	4	AGOA exports; investment
Intra-African (SADC + AU)	14	16	19	2	Regional value chains; re-exports
India	4	5	6	6	Pharmaceuticals; minerals
United Kingdom	8	6	5	5	Financial services; mining FDI
Russia	1	1	2	8	Fertilizer; arms legacy; limited trade
Other	23	22	16	—	Residual

Note: illustrative approximations. South Africa's intra-African share is structurally higher than Nigeria's because of SADC integration and the SACU customs union. Source lineage: Tshabalala and Ndzendze (2022) on South Africa's foreign-policy positioning; AU Agenda 2063 on continental integration.

Table 3 — AfCFTA tariff liberalization categories and the DRC–Zambia battery value-chain initiative

Instrument / Milestone	Category / Status	Content	Implication for sovereignty
AfCFTA Category A	90% of tariff lines	Liberalized over 5 years (developed) / 10 years (LDCs)	Expands intra-African market access; exposes infant industry
AfCFTA Category B	7% of tariff lines	Sensitive products; longer phase-down (10/13 years)	Protects politically sensitive sectors (e.g., autos, textiles)
AfCFTA Category C	3% of tariff lines	Excluded from liberalization	Preserves revenue and strategic sectors
AfCFTA Protocol on Women and Youth	Adopted 2023	Targets informal cross-border traders	Recognizes gendered structure of African trade
DRC–Zambia MOU (battery value chain)	Signed 2022 (COP27 context)	Joint special economic zone for battery precursors (cobalt, copper, lithium)	Moves from raw export to precursor processing
DRC cobalt export regime	Partial processing incentives; no full raw-export ban	Royalties and local-content rules	Weaker than Indonesia's nickel ban; revenue-first logic

Instrument / Milestone	Category / Status	Content	Implication for sovereignty
Indonesia nickel export ban (comparator)	Full raw-export ban since 2020	Forced domestic smelting; FDI inflow to processing	Demonstrates leverage of resource control; higher state capacity required

Note: AfCFTA tariff categories per AfCFTA documentation; DRC–Zambia milestones per reported MOU texts. Figures are structural, not quantitative trade flows.

Analysis Questions

1. **Trend.** Looking at Tables 1 and 2 together, describe the directional shift in Nigeria's and South Africa's top trade partners between 2005 and 2024. What does the simultaneous rise of China and the relative decline of the EU and US imply about the geography of African economic dependence, and does the data support the claim that Africa has "decoupled" from Western markets?

2. **Level of analysis.** Using the four levels from Lesson 1 (individual, state, systemic, transnational), explain why Nigeria's multi-alignment (rising China share, persistent EU/US ties, Gulf engagement) is best analyzed at the *state* and *systemic* levels rather than the *individual* or *transnational* levels. What would an analysis at the transnational level add that the state level misses?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives would read Table 1 and Table 3:

    - *African:* agency, sovereignty, and the politics of strategic autonomy;
    - *Chinese:* partnership plus relational framing;
    - *Russian:* sovereign choice plus anti-Western rhetoric;
    - *Western:* conditionality plus frustration with non-alignment;
    - *UN:* multilateralism and African voice in global governance. Which perspective best explains the DRC–Zambia battery initiative, and which best explains the persistence of raw cobalt exports?

4. **Interpretation.** Table 3 shows AfCFTA Category A covering 90% of tariff lines but with a 5/10-year phase-down, and Category C excluding 3%. Does this structure imply that AfCFTA is primarily a *liberalization* project or a *sovereignty* project? Use the mechanism of "policy space preservation" to adjudicate, and connect to the DRC–Zambia battery initiative.

5. **Limitation.** What do these tables *not* show? Identify at least three gaps (e.g., informal trade, services, debt, illicit financial flows, intra-firm pricing, environmental externalities) and explain how each gap would change the conclusion about African agency drawn from the tables alone.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Multi-Alignment Compass" (Nigeria at the center)

What to draw: A large circle in the center labeled "NIGERIA (regional hegemon, 220m population, oil + gas + market size)". Draw four thick arrows radiating outward to four labeled boxes arranged like compass points: NORTH = "UNITED STATES (security, AGOA, dollar finance)"; EAST = "CHINA (infrastructure, trade, FDI, BRI)"; SOUTH = "GULF STATES (oil-market diplomacy, sovereign wealth, Islamic finance)"; WEST = "RUSSIA (arms, nuclear, anti-Western solidarity)". Add a fifth smaller arrow pointing inward from "EU" labeled "legacy trade + conditionality". Inside the central circle, draw a smaller inner circle labeled "Domestic constraints: FX shortage, fuel subsidy, insecurity, elections".

Labels to place: On each arrow, write the *exchange*: what Nigeria gives (oil, votes, market access, diplomatic cover) and what it receives (finance, arms, infrastructure, market access). Label the arrows with "bargaining chip" tags.

Perspective overlay to annotate: Color-code the arrows: green = African agency (Nigeria plays suitors against each other); red = Western frustration (non-alignment read as hedging); blue = Chinese relational framing (win-win, no conditionality); black = Russian sovereign-choice rhetoric; grey = UN multilateralism (Nigeria as African voice in UNSC reform debates). Add a legend in the corner.

Visual 2 — "AfCFTA Tariff Phase-Down Staircase"

What to draw: A staircase with three steps rising left to right. Step 1 (lowest, widest) labeled "CATEGORY A — 90% of tariff lines — liberalized 5 yrs (developed) / 10 yrs (LDCs)". Step 2 labeled "CATEGORY B — 7% — sensitive products — 10/13 yrs". Step 3 (highest, narrowest) labeled "CATEGORY C — 3% — excluded". Above the staircase, draw a horizontal arrow labeled "Intra-African trade share: ~15% → target 25%+". Below the staircase, draw a dashed line labeled "Revenue loss risk for LDCs (tariff revenue = 30-50% of fiscal revenue in some states)". Add a side box labeled "Rules of origin: 40% value addition threshold" with a question mark.

Labels to place: On each step, list example sectors: A = manufactures, food; B = autos, textiles, sugar; C = arms, strategic minerals, revenue-critical goods. Label the vertical axis "Policy space preserved" and the horizontal axis "Time (years from ratification)".

Perspective overlay to annotate: Annotate with five small flags/icons: African = "sovereignty through scale"; Chinese = "market access for Chinese firms via African integration"; Russian = "anti-Western bloc-building"; Western = "conditionality via rules of origin and standards"; UN = "SDG 17 partnerships and Agenda 2063 alignment". Place these as marginal notes, not as the main structure.

Visual 3 — "Resource Sovereignty Ladder: From Raw Cobalt to Battery Pack"

What to draw: A vertical ladder with five rungs from bottom to top: Rung 1 "RAW ORE (DRC cobalt, 70% of global supply)"; Rung 2 "CONCENTRATE / INTERMEDIATE (exported to China for refining)"; Rung 3 "REFINED METAL / PRECURSOR (DRC-Zambia SEZ ambition)"; Rung 4 "CELL / MODULE (Indonesia-style processing FDI)"; Rung 5 "BATTERY PACK / EV (value capture, jobs, technology transfer)". Draw a thick arrow on the left labeled "Value added (% of final price)" rising from ~5% at Rung 1 to ~60% at Rung 5. Draw a second arrow on the right labeled "State capacity required" rising similarly. Add a horizontal bar across Rung 2 labeled "INDONESIA COMPARATOR: raw nickel export ban (2020) → forced climb to Rung 4".

Labels to place: At each rung, note who currently captures value: Rung 1 = mining firms + state royalties; Rung 2 = Chinese refiners; Rung 3-5 = aspirational (DRC-Zambia MOU, 2022). Label the gap between Rung 2 and Rung 3 "THE SOVEREIGNTY GAP".

Perspective overlay to annotate: African = "resource sovereignty and value-chain climbing"; Chinese = "partnership plus relational framing (processing FDI as mutual gain)"; Russian = "sovereign choice (anti-Western resource nationalism)"; Western = "conditionality (ESG, traceability, due diligence)"; UN = "just transition and Agenda 2063 industrialization". Place as a vertical sidebar with five colored bands.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (Question / Prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is "strategic autonomy" in the African context?	Not non-alignment as neutrality, but the capacity to choose among partners without coercion; Adebajo (2016) frames it as "African agency" in a multipolar order; distinct from Cold War non-alignment.
Who are the three regional hegemons and how do they differ?	Nigeria (demographic/market/oil, ECOWAS anchor), South Africa (industrial/financial, SADC/SACU anchor), Ethiopia (demographic, AU host, Horn anchor). Different resource bases → different strategies. Alden (2019).
What is multi-alignment and why is it rational?	Playing suitors against each other to extract concessions; Nigeria's simultaneous US/China/Russia/Gulf ties. Logic: no single patron dominates; maximize bargaining leverage. Tshabalala and Ndzendze (2022).
What does AfCFTA aim to achieve?	Continental free trade area; 90/7/3 tariff categories; rules of origin; protocols on women/youth. Potential: intra-African trade 15% → 25%+. Limits: infrastructure, non-tariff barriers, state capacity. AU Agenda 2063.
What is resource sovereignty and the DRC-Zambia initiative?	2022 MOU for battery precursor SEZ (cobalt, copper, lithium); aims to climb value chain from raw ore to precursors. Comparator: Indonesia nickel export ban (2020) forced domestic processing.
What are Indonesia-style export bans and why do they matter?	Full raw-export bans to force domestic smelting; require state capacity and FDI absorption. DRC has partial incentives only; "sovereignty gap" between Rung 2 and 3.
What limits African agency?	Structural constraints (debt, commodity dependence, weak manufacturing), weak state capacity, dependence on external finance, conditionality, illicit financial flows. Agency is bounded, not absent.

Cue (Question / Prompt)	Notes (with source log)
How does the African perspective differ from the Western one?	African: sovereignty, voice, non-conditionality, historical redress. Western: conditionality, governance standards, frustration with non-alignment. Both describe same behavior differently.
What is the Chinese perspective on African agency?	"Partnership" and relational framing (guanxi-style); no political conditionality; infrastructure-for-resources; "win-win"; occludes debt sustainability and local labor concerns. Alden (2019).
What is the Russian perspective?	Sovereign choice + anti-Western rhetoric; arms, nuclear, Wagner/Africa Corps; frames African non-alignment as anti-hegemonic; occludes mercenary economics and regime support.
What is the UN perspective?	Multilateralism, African voice in global governance (UNSC reform, SDGs, Agenda 2063); supports AfCFTA and integration; limited enforcement; occludes power asymmetries.
How should one adjudicate between perspectives?	Match mechanism to evidence; specify scope conditions; avoid conflating description with prescription; check falsifiers (e.g., if multi-alignment produces no concessions, rationality claim weakens).

Source log: Adebajo (2016); Alden (2019); Tshabalala and Ndzendze (2022); AU Agenda 2063; AfCFTA documentation; reported DRC–Zambia MOU texts; Indonesia nickel policy (public record).

Summary (3–5 sentences): African agency in a multipolar order is exercised through multi-alignment, regional hegemony, and projects like AfCFTA and the DRC–Zambia battery initiative, but it is structurally bounded by weak state capacity, commodity dependence, and external finance. The five perspectives reconstruct the same behavior through different normative lenses—sovereignty, partnership, sovereign choice, conditionality, and multilateralism—each illuminating and occluding different mechanisms. Adjudication requires matching mechanisms to evidence and specifying scope conditions rather than treating any single perspective as settled truth.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** African countries are not just pawns in a new Cold War. Big African states like Nigeria and South Africa deliberately play the US, China, Russia, and Gulf states against each other to get better deals. They also try to trade more with each other through AfCFTA and to process their own minerals instead of just exporting raw ore, as in the DRC–Zambia battery plan. But they are held back by debt, weak governments, and lack of factories and skills. So agency is real but limited.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure how much multi-alignment actually delivers concessions versus just rhetoric; I conflated "sovereignty" with "capacity"; I did not specify the mechanism by which AfCFTA would raise intra-African trade beyond tariff cuts; I treated the DRC–Zambia MOU as progress without evidence of implementation; I did not distinguish description (what states do) from prescription (what they should do).
3. **Reread verification.** Re-reading Adebajo (2016) and Alden (2019) confirms that agency is framed as bargaining within constraint, not autonomy from structure; Tshabalala and Ndzendze (2022) show South Africa's balancing as cost-bearing, not costless; AfCFTA documentation confirms the 90/7/3 categories and the 5/10-year phase-down; the DRC–Zambia MOU is a 2022 commitment, not an operational plant. The gap between commitment and capacity is the key limit.
4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** Multi-alignment is like a shopper comparing prices at several stores: the shopper has real choice, but only if they have money, transport, and information. The analogy breaks down because states are not unitary shoppers—domestic factions, debt obligations, and security dependence constrain the "choice," and the "stores" (great powers) also shape the menu.
5. **Rewrite.** African strategic autonomy is a bounded, mechanism-driven practice: regional hegemons leverage multipolarity through multi-alignment; AfCFTA expands policy space through phased liberalization; resource-sovereignty projects like the DRC–Zambia battery initiative attempt value-chain climbing. Each is constrained by structural dependence, weak state capacity, and external finance. The five perspectives reconstruct these practices differently—African (sovereignty), Chinese (partnership), Russian (sovereign choice), Western (conditionality), UN (multilateralism)—and adjudication requires evidence on mechanisms, scope conditions, and falsifiers rather than normative assertion.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L32	Definition	What is "strategic autonomy" in the African IR context?	The capacity of an African state or the AU to set its own priorities, choose partners, and sequence reforms without external veto, while remaining embedded in global markets and institutions. It is not autarky; it is negotiated interdependence.	African perspective treats autonomy as relational and historically earned, not as isolation.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L32	Mechanism	How does multi-alignment differ from non-alignment?	Non-alignment (Cold War NAM) refused blocs; multi-alignment actively courts multiple suitors simultaneously to extract concessions, diversify risk, and avoid dependence on any single power.	African strategists frame multi-alignment as rational hedging, not ideological neutrality.
L32	Application	Name the three regional hegemons and their distinct resource bases.	Nigeria (hydrocarbons, demographic weight, ECOWAS leadership), South Africa (industrial base, financial depth, SADC/BRICS role), Ethiopia (demographic scale, AU host, Nile geopolitics). Each converts a different asset into regional influence.	African perspective stresses that hegemony is contested and resource-specific, not uniform.
L32	Comparison	What does AfCFTA promise and what limits it?	It promises a continental market, tariff reduction, and rules of origin to boost intra-African trade; limits include weak infrastructure, non-tariff barriers, uneven state capacity, and political will gaps.	African perspective sees AfCFTA as sovereignty project, not just trade liberalization.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L32	Source	What is Adebajo's (2016) core argument about African agency?	African states exercise agency through regional institutions and bargaining, but agency is constrained by external dependence and internal governance deficits.	African perspective: agency is real but bounded; not romanticized.
L32	Debate	What is the "limits of agency" thesis?	Structural constraints—debt, weak capacity, commodity dependence, external finance—mean African governments often cannot convert diplomatic autonomy into economic transformation.	African scholars (Bayart, Mamdani) insist on naming both agency and structure.
L32	Reconstruction	How does China frame its Africa engagement?	As partnership, mutual benefit, and relational development (FOCAC), emphasizing non-interference and infrastructure finance.	Chinese perspective occludes conditionality and debt-sustainability concerns.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L32	Occlusion	What does the Western perspective typically occlude about African non-alignment?	It often reads non-alignment as free-riding or hedging against Western interests, underestimating its roots in colonial experience and sovereign equality claims.	Western perspective privileges alliance loyalty over sovereign choice.
L32	Adjudication	How did South Africa balance Russia-Ukraine (2022-2025)?	Abstention at the UN, BRICS solidarity, then the ICJ genocide case against Israel—signaling autonomy from Western pressure while invoking international law.	African perspective: law as tool of the weak; Western reads inconsistency.
L32	Visual	What does the DRC-Zambia battery initiative illustrate?	An attempt to move up the value chain from raw cobalt/copper to battery precursors, using regional industrial policy to capture rents.	African perspective: resource sovereignty requires regional, not just national, scale.
L32	Mechanism	What is an Indonesia-style export ban and why does it matter?	A ban on raw mineral exports to force domestic processing; it raises state revenue and industrialization but risks investor flight and WTO disputes.	African perspective: sovereignty over terms of extraction, not just ownership.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L32	Source	What do Tshabalala and Ndzendze (2022) contribute?	They analyze South Africa's foreign policy choices and the tension between principled multilateralism and great-power pressure.	African perspective: documents the costs of autonomy.
L32	Comparison	How does Russia frame African sovereign choice?	As legitimate anti-Western self-determination, often paired with arms, grain, and Wagner/Africa Corps support.	Russian perspective occludes its own extractive and security interests.
L32	Debate	What is the UN perspective on African agency?	Multilateralism and African voice in global governance (e.g., Security Council reform, Agenda 2063 alignment) as the legitimate channel for autonomy.	UN perspective risks substituting procedural voice for material power.
L32	Application	What falsifies the claim that multi-alignment always increases African leverage?	Cases where suitors coordinate (e.g., joint IMF/World Bank conditionality) or where internal fragmentation lets external actors play factions against each other.	African perspective: agency is contingent on internal cohesion.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Competency	Score	Evidence of mastery
Define strategic autonomy and distinguish it from autarky		
Explain multi-alignment as rational strategy with mechanisms		
Compare the three regional hegemons' resource bases		
Assess AfCFTA's potential and limits		
Reconstruct all five perspectives on African agency		
Apply levels of analysis to Nigeria's multi-alignment		
Identify falsifiers for agency claims		
Use canonical sources (Adebajo, Alden, Tshabalala & Ndzendze) accurately		

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which perspective did you find hardest to steel-man from within, and what does that difficulty reveal about your own analytical defaults?
2. Where did you conflate description (what African states do) with explanation (why) or prescription (what they should do)?
3. Which falsifier would most seriously weaken your current view of African agency, and have you tested it against a case?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"African non-alignment is just fence-sitting or free-riding."	It is a historically grounded strategy of sovereign equality and hedging; abstention can be a deliberate bargaining tool.	South Africa's UN abstentions and ICJ case; Adebajo (2016) on regional bargaining.
"AfCFTA will automatically transform intra-African trade."	Tariff cuts are necessary but insufficient; non-tariff barriers, infrastructure gaps, and capacity constraints dominate.	AfCFTA documentation on rules of origin and implementation gaps.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Multi-alignment always increases leverage."	Leverage fails when suitors coordinate or when internal fragmentation invites divide-and-rule.	Nigeria's experience with coordinated conditionality; Bayart on extraversion.
"Resource sovereignty means nationalizing extraction."	It can mean value-chain upgrading and regional industrial policy, not just ownership.	DRC-Zambia battery MOU; Indonesia-style export bans.
"Western conditionality is the only constraint on agency."	Structural constraints (debt, capacity, commodity dependence) and internal governance also bind.	Alden (2019) on external dependence; Mamdani on state form.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Strategic autonomy; multi-alignment; regional hegemony; resource sovereignty; AfCFTA; limits of agency	Hedging across suitors; value-chain upgrading; export bans; tariff reduction; rules of origin; institutional bargaining	Adebajo (2016) on agency; Alden (2019) on external dependence; Tshabalala & Ndzendze (2022) on SA foreign policy; Bayart on extraversion; Mamdani on state form; Nkrumah on neo-colonialism	Nigeria multi-alignment; SA Russia-Ukraine balancing and ICJ case; DRC-Zambia battery MOU; AfCFTA tariff schedules; Nigeria/SA trade-FDI data 2000-2024	Agency vs. structure; sovereignty vs. interdependence; multilateralism vs. bilateralism; conditionality vs. non-interference	Coordinated suitor pressure; internal fragmentation; infrastructure gaps; debt distress; investor flight from export bans	L28 Pan-Africanism; L31 great power competition; L33 critical minerals; L34 Sahel synthesis; L49 Global South

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1):** Re-read Section 2.7 African perspective and flashcards; define strategic autonomy and multi-alignment in your own words.
- **R2 (Day 3):** Reconstruct all five perspectives on Nigeria's multi-alignment without notes; check against Section 2.8.

- **R3 (Week 2):** Work the Problem Pair (South Africa) again under timed conditions; compare to model answer.
- **R4 (Week 4):** Re-run the Data Lab tables; update one trend claim with new evidence.
- **R5 (Week 8):** Full Feynman compression of the lesson; teach it to a peer or record a 5-minute explanation.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define strategic autonomy and distinguish it from autarky.
☐ I can explain multi-alignment as rational strategy with mechanisms.
☐ I can compare Nigeria, South Africa, and Ethiopia as regional hegemons.
☐ I can assess AfCFTA's potential and limits.
☐ I can explain resource sovereignty via DRC-Zambia and export bans.
☐ I can articulate the limits of agency thesis.
☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives on African agency.
☐ I can apply levels of analysis to Nigeria's multi-alignment.
☐ I can analyze South Africa's Russia-Ukraine balancing.
☐ I can interpret the Data Lab tables.
☐ I can identify falsifiers for agency claims.
☐ I can cite Adebajo, Alden, and Tshabalala & Ndzendze accurately.
☐ I have completed the Independent Memo.
☐ I have answered the Hinge Question.
☐ I have filled the error log.
☐ I have scheduled R1–R5 reviews.
☐ I can explain the lesson without jargon (Feynman step 1).
☐ I can name one thing the African perspective reveals that others miss.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

African agency and sovereignty - Adebajo, A. (2016). *The Curse of Berlin: Africa After the Cold War*. Hurst. - Alden, C. (2019). *China in Africa*. Zed Books. - Bayart, J.-F. (2009). *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. Polity. - Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject*. Princeton University Press.

Pan-Africanism and regionalism - Nkrumah, K. (1963). *Africa Must Unite*. Heinemann. - AU (2015). *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*. African Union.

AfCFTA and economic sovereignty - AfCFTA Secretariat. *Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area* and tariff schedules. - UNECA. *Assessing Regional Integration in Africa* reports.

South Africa and multi-alignment - Tshabalala, N. & Ndzendze, B. (2022). South Africa's foreign policy and great-power competition. *South African Journal of International Affairs*.

Resource sovereignty - Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture. - Fanon, F. (1961). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.

Global South framing - Grovogui, S. (2006). *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*. Palgrave Macmillan.

End of Lesson 32. Say **Next** when you are ready.

34. Critical Minerals and Techno-Geopolitics in Africa

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 33 — Critical Minerals and Techno-Geopolitics in Africa
Module	Module 5: African Geopolitical Architecture
Prerequisites	L19 (energy/minerals), L29 (conflict political economy), L31 (great power competition)
Interleaved links	Forward to L34 (Sahel synthesis), L52–53 (semiconductors, minerals), L56 (innovation decoupling)
Reading load	7–9 hours
Content channels	Dense analytical prose; data tables; worked example; problem pair; visual anchor; flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7–9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is not geological but political: Africa holds a disproportionate share of the minerals that the global energy transition and the digital economy require, yet it captures a vanishingly small share of the value those minerals generate once they leave the continent. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) produces roughly two-thirds to three-quarters of global cobalt; the DRC and Zambia together dominate African copper; Zimbabwe, Namibia, and the DRC hold significant lithium; Mozambique and Tanzania hold graphite; South Africa and the DRC hold platinum-group metals and rare earth prospects. The International Energy Agency's *Critical Minerals Outlook* (2024) projects that demand for lithium, cobalt, nickel, and copper could grow several-fold by 2040 under net-zero scenarios. Yet the same documents show that refining, precursor manufacturing, cell production, and battery assembly remain concentrated in China, with the United States, the European Union, and Japan now racing to build parallel supply chains. Africa's position is therefore not merely "resource-rich"; it is structurally positioned at the lowest-value, highest-risk node of a techno-industrial chain whose governance is being renegotiated in real time. The question this lesson poses is whether that renegotiation can be turned into upward mobility for African states, or whether it will reproduce — in new, "green" language — the peripheralization that characterized the colonial and post-colonial mineral economy.

This puzzle sits at the intersection of three curriculum threads. From L19 (energy and minerals), the student inherits the "resource curse" debate: the Dutch-disease, rentier-state, and enclave-economy mechanisms through which mineral wealth can undermine rather than build state capacity. From L29 (conflict political economy), the student inherits the analysis of how mineral extraction finances armed groups, corrupts institutions, and fragments sovereignty — most visibly in the eastern DRC. From L31 (great power competition), the student inherits the frame of a multipolar order in which African states are not merely objects of

great-power rivalry but agents who can leverage competition. Lesson 33 synthesizes these: it asks how the *techno-geopolitical* moment — the scramble for inputs to batteries, semiconductors, and renewable-energy systems — reshapes the political economy of African minerals, and whether African governments can convert geological endowment into industrial capacity and bargaining power.

The theoretical stakes are high because the dominant vocabularies in circulation are not neutral. The term "critical minerals" itself is a security construct: a mineral becomes "critical" not by geology but by a state's assessment of supply risk to its own industrial base. The IEA, the US Department of Energy, and the European Commission each publish different criticality lists. This means that the "crisis" being managed is, from an African vantage, someone else's industrial vulnerability being projected onto African territory. African scholars from Walter Rodney through Thandika Mkandawire to Siba Grovogui have long argued that the international economic order systematically converts African abundance into external accumulation. The techno-geopolitical moment risks repeating this: "friend-shoring" and "de-risking" may simply relocate extraction and low-value processing to "trusted" jurisdictions while high-value manufacturing stays in the North and in China. Alternatively, the moment may create unprecedented leverage, because the energy transition cannot proceed without African inputs, and because the DRC-Zambia battery initiative and Zimbabwe's lithium export ban signal a new willingness to use state power to force value-chain upgrading.

The lesson therefore reconstructs five perspectives, with the African perspective primary and longest. The African perspective, drawing on Grovogui's critique of sovereignty, Mbembe's necropolitics, Bayart's "politics of the belly," Mamdani's bifurcated state, Rodney's underdevelopment thesis, and contemporary scholars such as Aning, Danso, and Tamale, treats mineral governance as a question of *resource sovereignty* and *bargaining power* rather than of supply security. The Chinese perspective treats state-backed offtake and developmental partnership as a model that delivers infrastructure and market access in exchange for long-term supply. The Russian perspective frames resource states as anti-hegemonic actors resisting Western conditionality. The Western perspective frames the problem as supply-chain security, friend-shoring, and the risk of peripheralization — a risk it sometimes acknowledges and sometimes obscures. The UN perspective frames it through resource governance, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), and just-transition norms. Each perspective reveals and occludes; the lesson's analytical task is to adjudicate among them on evidence.

Mechanistically, the lesson disaggregates the mineral value chain into stages — extraction, refining, precursor and component manufacturing, cell and battery assembly, and end-use integration — and asks where value, jobs, technology, and risk accumulate at each stage. It then examines the policy instruments states use to move up the chain: export bans (Zimbabwe's 2022 raw lithium ban), joint ventures and special economic zones (the DRC-Zambia battery initiative of 2023), local-content requirements, state equity, and regional integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It also examines the counter-instruments: WTO disciplines on export restrictions, investor-state dispute settlement, the conditionality embedded in Western critical-minerals agreements, and China's dominance of midstream refining. The student must learn to distinguish description (what is produced where), explanation (why value concentrates where it does), prediction (what happens if a given policy is adopted), and prescription (what ought to be done) — a distinction the independent memo explicitly tests.

By the end of the lesson, the student should be able to: (a) map Africa's position in the cobalt, copper, lithium, graphite, and rare-earth supply chains using USGS and IEA data; (b) explain the value-capture problem through the extraction-refining-manufacturing gradient; (c) evaluate Western supply-chain security responses (the US Inflation Reduction Act's critical-minerals provisions, the Minerals Security Partnership,

the EU Critical Raw Materials Act) for their peripheralization risk; (d) analyze Chinese state-backed offtake and the DRC-Zambia partnership as a developmental model with its own dependencies; and (e) adjudicate resource-nationalist experiments — the DRC-Zambia battery initiative and Zimbabwe's lithium ban — across levels of analysis and perspectives. The worked example (DRC-Zambia, 2023) and the problem pair (Zimbabwe, 2022) provide structured practice in mechanism identification, perspective reconstruction, and falsification. The data lab trains the student to read reserve, production, and refining-concentration data as political evidence rather than as neutral facts.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up Answer each question from memory before reading the lesson; note gaps for the metacognitive calibration in Section 7.

1. **L19 — Resource curse mechanisms.** What are the three canonical mechanisms through which mineral wealth can undermine development (Dutch disease, rentier state, enclave economy), and which African cases best illustrate each?
2. **L19 — Value addition.** Distinguish *extraction rents* from *value-added manufacturing* in a mineral economy, and explain why a state can be rich in ore yet poor in industrial capacity.
3. **L29 — Conflict political economy.** How does the "greed versus grievance" debate frame rebel financing in mineral-rich conflict zones, and what is the strongest critique of the greed thesis?
4. **L29 — Sovereignty fragmentation.** What is the relationship between mineral extraction and the fragmentation of state sovereignty in the eastern DRC, and how does this complicate "resource nationalism"?
5. **L31 — Great power competition.** Define "multi-alignment" as practiced by several African states, and explain how it differs from Cold War non-alignment in both structure and agency.
6. **L31 — Leverage.** Under what conditions can an African state convert great-power competition into bargaining leverage rather than into renewed dependency?

1.2 Orientation questions These questions frame the lesson's central puzzle; return to them after Section 2.7.

1. Does Africa's mineral endowment automatically translate into industrialization, or does geology without industrial policy reproduce extraction?
2. Can resource nationalism — export bans, joint ventures, state equity — overcome structural dependency in refining and manufacturing, or does it merely shift the terms of trade?
3. Does Western "friend-shoring" include Africa as a partner in value chains, or does it peripheralize Africa as a secure extraction zone?
4. How does the African perspective reframe "critical minerals" from a supply-security problem (whose problem?) into a sovereignty and value-capture problem?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach Provisional definitions; refine as you read.

- **Critical minerals** — minerals deemed essential to a state's or bloc's economic and security interests whose supply is judged at risk; the list is politically constructed and varies by jurisdiction (US, EU, IEA).

- **Value capture** — the share of total value added in a supply chain that accrues to a given country or firm at a given stage; in minerals, typically lowest at extraction and highest at manufacturing and end-use.
- **Value-chain upgrading** — movement from lower-value to higher-value stages (extraction → refining → precursors → components → assembly), requiring capital, skills, energy, and market access.
- **Resource nationalism** — state policies asserting greater control over natural resources, including export restrictions, local-content rules, state equity, and renegotiated contracts.
- **Offtake agreement** — a contract committing a buyer to purchase a specified volume of future production, often used to secure supply and finance mines.
- **Peripheralization** — the structural positioning of an economy at the low-value, high-risk end of global production networks, reproducing dependency.
- **Friend-shoring / near-shoring** — relocation of supply chains to geopolitically "trusted" or geographically proximate partners; may include or exclude African states.
- **EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative)** — a global standard for disclosure of payments and revenues in extractive industries, adopted by several African states.
- **Just transition** — the principle that the shift to low-carbon economies must be fair to workers and communities, including those in extractive regions.
- **Battery value chain** — the sequence from mineral extraction through refining, precursor and cathode/anode production, cell manufacturing, pack assembly, and integration into vehicles or grids.
- **Techno-geopolitics** — the intersection of technology, industrial capacity, and geopolitical competition, especially over inputs to batteries, semiconductors, and renewable energy.
- **Beneficiation** — the processing of raw minerals into higher-value products before export; a core demand of African resource-nationalist policy.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Identify** (Bloom: Remember/Understand) the principal critical minerals in which African states hold significant reserves and production shares—cobalt, copper, lithium, graphite, and rare earth elements—and locate each within the global supply chain from extraction through refining to battery and component manufacturing, drawing on USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries and the IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024).

2. **Explain** (Bloom: Understand/Apply) the mechanism of vertical disarticulation: why Africa's geological abundance in critical minerals does not automatically translate into industrial upgrading or value capture, specifying the roles of refining concentration, offtake structures, and the geographic distribution of midstream and downstream capacity.

3. **Analyze** (Bloom: Analyze) Western supply-chain security responses—the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), and the EU Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA)—as strategic reactions to Chinese refining dominance, evaluating the risk that these frameworks peripheralize African states as raw-material suppliers for Western green transitions.

4. **Evaluate** (Bloom: Evaluate) Chinese state-backed offtake and the DRC-Zambia partnership, weighing the Chinese developmental-partnership narrative against critiques of asymmetric bargaining, environmental and labor standards, and long-term dependency.
5. **Create** (Bloom: Create) a policy design for resource nationalism—such as Zimbabwe's 2022 raw lithium export ban or the DRC-Zambia joint battery initiative—that specifies the mechanism by which an upstream restriction is expected to generate downstream industrialization, the scope conditions under which it succeeds or fails, and the falsifiers that would indicate failure.

These objectives are assessable through the worked example, problem pair, independent memo, and hinge question in this lesson, and they connect backward to L19 (energy and minerals), L29 (conflict political economy), and L31 (great power competition), and forward to L34 (Sahel synthesis), L52–53 (semiconductors and minerals), and L56 (innovation decoupling).

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Cobalt, copper, lithium, graphite, and rare earth elements: Africa's position in the global supply chain

Bolded Causal Claim: Africa's geological endowment in cobalt, copper, lithium, graphite, and rare earth elements (REEs) positions the continent as an indispensable upstream node in the global energy-transition supply chain, yet this endowment alone does not confer bargaining power; rather, the structural position of extraction within a vertically segmented global division of labor systematically converts geological abundance into export revenue without industrial upgrading, unless specific institutional and policy conditions intervene.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three linked channels that together produce what can be called vertical disarticulation. First, geological concentration: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) accounts for roughly two-thirds to three-quarters of global cobalt production and holds a comparable share of reserves; the Central African Copperbelt spanning the DRC and Zambia anchors global copper supply; Zimbabwe (Bikita, Arcadia), Namibia, Mali, and the DRC hold significant lithium deposits; Mozambique (Balama) and Tanzania hold major graphite deposits; and several West and East African states hold REE occurrences. Second, demand pull: the energy transition—electric vehicles, grid-scale storage, wind turbines, and electronics—has shifted mineral demand from bulk commodities to "critical" minerals whose supply is geographically concentrated and politically salient, inflating both strategic attention and price volatility. Third, and decisive, supply-chain segmentation: extraction occurs in Africa, but refining, precursor and cathode manufacturing, cell fabrication, and battery assembly occur overwhelmingly in China, with secondary capacity in South Korea, Japan, and, increasingly, the European Union and the United States. The result is that African states capture the lowest-value, highest-risk segment—mining, with its capital intensity, environmental externalities, and price volatility—while downstream rents accrue elsewhere. The IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024) documents that processing and refining concentration, not reserve concentration, determines supply-chain leverage; USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries confirm African production shares in cobalt, copper, and graphite that far exceed African shares of value-added in the battery chain. The mechanism is not merely the classic "resource curse" of rentierism and Dutch disease; it is a specific form of vertical disarticulation in which the continent's geological rents are realized as export earnings rather than as industrial capability. Sanderson (2022) and Kalantzakos (2020) both trace how the green-transition minerals boom has reproduced, rather than disrupted, this pattern, because the capital, technology, and offtake agreements required for refining remain concentrated outside Africa. The mechanism is reinforced by concession agreements and stabilization clauses that lock in fiscal terms for decades, by the absence of domestic demand

for batteries and electric vehicles that would anchor local offtake, and by infrastructure deficits that raise the cost of midstream investment.

Scope Conditions: This claim holds under conditions of (a) continued Chinese dominance in refining and midstream processing, which the IEA (2024) places at roughly 60–90 percent across several critical minerals; (b) limited African domestic demand for batteries and EVs that would create a local market for refined products; (c) absence of binding local-content, beneficiation, or export-restriction requirements; and (d) global commodity price cycles that favor volume over value and reward extraction over processing. It weakens where African states impose export bans or joint ventures—Zimbabwe's 2022 raw lithium export ban, the DRC-Zambia 2023 battery initiative—where Western friend-shoring creates alternative offtake, or where technological substitution (cobalt-free chemistries, sodium-ion batteries) reduces demand for specific minerals. The claim also does not imply uniformity across African mineral states: Botswana's diamond beneficiation and South Africa's platinum-group-metal refining demonstrate that upstream position can be leveraged under specific institutional conditions, including state equity, skills development, and deliberate industrial policy. Conversely, where governance is weak and elite capture strong, the mechanism intensifies.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, one should observe: (i) rising African mineral export volumes alongside stagnant or falling manufacturing value-added in mineral sectors; (ii) persistent trade deficits in refined products and batteries despite mineral surpluses; (iii) foreign direct investment concentrated in extraction rather than processing; (iv) fiscal revenue volatility tied to commodity prices; and (v) environmental and social costs localized in mining regions, including artisanal cobalt mining in the DRC and graphite mining in Mozambique. Falsifying or qualifying evidence would include: rising African refining capacity, battery-assembly plants, technology-transfer agreements, or sustained increases in mineral-sector manufacturing value-added. The Africa Progress Panel reports have repeatedly documented the gap between resource wealth and human development, providing a longitudinal record against which to test these implications.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From within the African vantage point, the central issue is not whether Africa "has" minerals but who controls the terms under which they leave the continent. African scholarship—Rodney's underdevelopment thesis, Nkrumah's neo-colonialism, and contemporary work by Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, and Mamdani—frames mineral extraction as a continuation of colonial political economy in which sovereignty over subsoil resources is formally African but substantively constrained by concession agreements, stabilization clauses, and external offtake. The African perspective insists that geological abundance is a necessary but insufficient condition for development; what matters is the institutional architecture of bargaining, taxation, local content, and industrial policy. It highlights that "critical minerals" discourse itself is externally generated—driven by US, EU, and Chinese industrial policy—and risks reducing African states to suppliers of inputs for others' green transitions. The African lens thus reframes the question from "how to secure supply" to "how to secure transformation," and it treats resource nationalism not as aberration but as a rational response to structural subordination. It also foregrounds the internal politics of mineral governance: elite capture, artisanal mining, and the gendered and environmental costs borne by communities near extraction sites, which external supply-chain frameworks systematically underweight. The Africa Progress Panel reports and African Union mining frameworks (such as the Africa Mining Vision) embody this insistence on value addition and beneficiation as the measure of mineral policy success.

Chinese: China's perspective treats African minerals as inputs into a state-coordinated industrial strategy in which Chinese firms, backed by state finance, infrastructure packages, and long-term offtake agreements,

secure supply and build processing capacity both in China and, increasingly, in Africa. The Chinese view emphasizes developmental partnership, mutual benefit, and non-interference, and it points to Chinese-built smelters, roads, and power infrastructure as evidence of value-chain contribution. It tends to occlude labor and environmental standards, the asymmetry of bargaining power between state-backed Chinese enterprises and African governments, and the long-term dependency created by debt and offtake structures.

Russian: Russia frames African mineral wealth through an anti-hegemonic lens, emphasizing sovereignty and resistance to Western conditionalities. Moscow's perspective highlights Western hypocrisy in supply-chain security while downplaying Russian mercenary and mining interests. It contributes a critique of unipolar resource governance but occludes its own extractive practices and the limited scale of Russian mineral investment relative to China.

Western: The Western perspective, articulated through the IRA, MSP, and CRMA, treats African minerals as strategic inputs requiring diversified, "friend-shored" supply chains to reduce dependence on China. It emphasizes governance standards, ESG, and rule of law, but risks peripheralizing Africa as a raw-material periphery for Western green transitions, reproducing the very dependency it claims to solve.

UN: The UN perspective centers on resource governance, EITI transparency, and just transition, seeking to align mineral extraction with the Sustainable Development Goals. It contributes normative frameworks and multi-stakeholder platforms but often lacks enforcement power and can be captured by state and corporate interests.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — The value-capture problem: extraction vs refining vs battery manufacturing

Bolded Causal Claim: The structural asymmetry between where critical minerals are extracted (predominantly Africa) and where they are refined and manufactured into batteries (predominantly China and the West) reproduces a colonial division of labor that systematically strips African economies of value-added, fiscal revenue, and technological learning, unless deliberate industrial policy intervenes at the refining and manufacturing stages.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three interlocking channels that together constitute what development economists call the "value-capture gap." First, the geological endowment channel: Africa holds approximately 30% of global critical mineral reserves, including roughly 70% of cobalt (DRC), significant copper (Zambia, DRC), lithium (Zimbabwe, Namibia, DRC), graphite (Mozambique, Madagascar, Tanzania), and rare earth elements (South Africa, Burundi). Yet geological abundance does not translate into economic rents when the downstream stages of the value chain are controlled by external actors. The DRC produces over 70% of global cobalt but captures less than 5% of the final value of a lithium-ion battery. Zambia produces copper but imports copper wire and cable. Zimbabwe exports lithium concentrate but imports lithium carbonate and battery cells. This pattern is not accidental; it is structurally embedded in the global division of labor.

Second, the refining concentration channel: China processes approximately 60-70% of global cobalt, 60% of lithium, and dominates rare earth processing at over 80%. This concentration means that even when African states extract minerals, the value-added from refining—where margins are highest—accrues elsewhere. The "smiling curve" of value capture (Mudambi 2008) illustrates this dynamic: value concentrates at the R&D/design end and the branding/retail end, with manufacturing and extraction occupying the low-

value middle and bottom. In the battery value chain specifically, mining accounts for roughly 10-15% of total value, refining for 20-25%, cell manufacturing for 30-40%, and pack assembly and integration for the remainder. African economies are concentrated at the 10-15% mining stage, while China and the West capture the 50-65% refining and manufacturing stages. The mechanism is reinforced by technological barriers: refining cobalt to battery-grade standards requires specialized knowledge, equipment, and quality control that African states have not historically developed, in part because colonial and post-colonial investment patterns prioritized extraction over processing.

Third, the fiscal leakage channel: through transfer pricing, thin capitalization, and tax incentives granted to attract investment, African states capture a fraction of the resource rent. The Africa Progress Panel (2013) estimated that Africa lost $1.2-1.4 trillion in illicit financial flows over three decades, with extractive industries as a primary vector. Transfer pricing allows multinational mining companies to sell minerals to affiliated entities in low-tax jurisdictions at below-market prices, reducing taxable profits in the extracting country. Thin capitalization—loading African subsidiaries with debt from parent companies—allows interest payments to be deducted, further reducing tax liability. The result is that effective tax rates on mining operations in Africa are often well below statutory rates, and in some cases below those in developed countries. The mechanism is self-reinforcing: low value capture means low fiscal capacity means low investment in the infrastructure and skills needed to move up the value chain, which perpetuates low value capture.

The theoretical lineage runs through Prebisch-Singer (1950), which posited that terms of trade for primary commodities deteriorate relative to manufactured goods over time; through dependency theory (Frank 1967, Amin 1974) which argued that the global capitalist system structurally underdevelops the periphery; through global value chain analysis (Gereffi 1994, Humphrey and Schmitz 2002) which mapped how lead firms in the Global North coordinate production networks; and through more recent work on "upgrading" (Kaplinsky 2000, Pietrobelli and Rabellotti 2011) which asks whether and how suppliers can move from assembly to design. The African perspective adds a crucial dimension: the problem is not merely market failure but a historically constituted structure of power that requires political, not just economic, intervention to transform. Rodney's (1972) analysis of how colonialism "underdeveloped" Africa remains analytically relevant: the extraction-without-processing pattern is not a natural market outcome but a historically produced structure that requires deliberate policy to reverse.

Scope Conditions: The value-capture problem is most acute where three conditions coincide: (1) high concentration of global refining in a single country or bloc (currently China for most critical minerals); (2) weak domestic industrial capacity and infrastructure (power, transport, skills) in the extracting country; and (3) absence of regional coordination to pool markets and negotiate collectively. Where these conditions are absent—where refining capacity exists domestically (as in South Africa's PGM sector) or where regional integration is advanced—the problem is attenuated. The problem is also less severe for minerals with lower processing complexity or where African states have successfully negotiated local content requirements (as in Botswana's diamond beneficiation, though this is a non-critical mineral case). The scope condition of "technological learning" is critical: value capture requires not just physical infrastructure but absorptive capacity—the ability to learn from foreign investors and eventually substitute domestic for foreign inputs. Where foreign investors operate as enclaves with minimal linkages to the domestic economy, as in many African mining operations, technological learning is minimal. The scope condition of "state capacity" is equally important: moving up the value chain requires not just policy declarations but the ability to implement them—regulating transfer pricing, enforcing local content requirements, and investing in infrastructure and skills. Where state capacity is weak, as in the DRC, even well-designed policies may fail.

Observable Implications: If the value-capture thesis holds, we should observe: (a) rising export volumes of raw or semi-processed minerals from Africa alongside stagnant or declining manufacturing value-added as a share of GDP; (b) persistent trade deficits in processed goods despite mineral export surpluses; (c) foreign ownership of refining and manufacturing assets; (d) limited technology transfer and skills development; (e) fiscal revenue from minerals that is small relative to the value of exports. The data support this: Africa's share of global manufacturing value-added has declined from roughly 3% in 1970 to under 2% today, while its share of global mineral exports has risen. The DRC exports cobalt hydroxide (semi-processed) rather than refined cobalt metal or battery precursors. Zambia exports copper cathode but not copper wire or cable. Zimbabwe exports lithium concentrate but not lithium carbonate or hydroxide. The observable implication for policy is that export bans and local content requirements (as in Zimbabwe's 2022 lithium ban) are rational responses to this structural asymmetry, though their effectiveness depends on implementation capacity. A further observable implication is that African states with greater value-capture success (Botswana with diamonds, South Africa with PGMs) will have stronger industrial bases and higher fiscal capacity, creating a divergence within Africa that complicates continental solidarity.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective frames the value-capture problem as a continuation of colonial extraction patterns, now mediated by global value chains rather than direct colonial rule. Scholars such as Grovogui (2006) argue that the international system was designed to facilitate resource extraction from Africa, and that "development" discourse often serves to legitimize this extraction. Mbembe (2001) emphasizes the "necropolitics" of resource extraction—the ways in which mineral wealth coexists with, and even produces, human suffering. Bayart (2009) and Mamdani (1996) highlight how African states are often "extraverted"—oriented toward external patrons rather than domestic constituencies—making value capture difficult. The African perspective demands not just more revenue but structural transformation: the ability to process, manufacture, and innovate. Nkrumah's (1965) concept of "neo-colonialism" remains analytically relevant: the DRC-Zambia battery initiative represents an attempt to break this pattern, but its success depends on overcoming the very structural constraints it seeks to address. The African vantage point reveals that value capture is not a technical problem solvable by market mechanisms alone; it is a political problem of power, sovereignty, and historical justice. Oyěwùmí (1997) adds that the gendered dimensions of extraction—where women bear disproportionate costs of mining while men capture most benefits—must be addressed for value capture to be genuinely transformative. Tamale (2020) extends this to argue that decolonization of resource governance requires centering African feminist epistemologies.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective views the value-capture problem through the lens of developmental state theory and South-South cooperation. China's own experience—moving from raw material exporter to manufacturing powerhouse through state-directed industrial policy—provides a template. Chinese state-backed firms invest in African extraction but also in processing (e.g., cobalt refineries in the DRC, copper smelters in Zambia). The Chinese narrative emphasizes mutual benefit and "win-win" cooperation, while acknowledging that Chinese firms have sometimes replicated extractive patterns. The perspective contributes the insight that state capacity and long-term planning are prerequisites for value capture, but occludes the power asymmetry between Chinese state-backed firms and African states, and the environmental and labor costs of Chinese processing investments. Kalantzakos (2020) notes that China's critical minerals strategy is explicitly designed to secure supply chains for its own industrial upgrading, not necessarily to promote African industrialization.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames the value-capture problem as evidence of Western-dominated

global capitalism's exploitative nature, while positioning Russia as an alternative partner that respects African sovereignty. Russia's own experience as a resource exporter (oil, gas, minerals) shapes its view: resource wealth can fund state capacity if managed by a strong state. However, Russia's limited industrial diversification and its own resource dependence weaken its credibility as a model for value-chain upgrading. The perspective contributes anti-hegemonic rhetoric but occludes Russia's own extractive practices and limited capacity to support African industrialization. Sanderson (2022) notes that Russian mineral investment in Africa remains limited in scale relative to China, constraining its ability to influence value-chain dynamics.

Western: The Western perspective, articulated through the IRA, MSP, and CRMA, increasingly recognizes the value-capture problem as a supply-chain security risk: if Africa remains a raw-material periphery, Western green transitions depend on Chinese refining. The response is to promote "responsible" mining and ESG standards, but this often translates into compliance burdens that raise costs for African producers without building domestic capacity. The Western perspective contributes governance frameworks and capital but occludes the structural incentives that keep value capture in the Global North and China. It risks treating African minerals as inputs to Western industrial policy rather than as foundations for African development. The IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024) acknowledges that current supply chains are "highly concentrated" and that diversification is needed, but frames this primarily as a security issue for consuming countries rather than a development issue for producing countries.

UN: The UN perspective centers on resource governance, EITI, and the SDGs, seeking to ensure that mineral extraction contributes to sustainable development. It contributes normative frameworks and multi-stakeholder platforms but often lacks enforcement power. The UN perspective occludes the power asymmetries between states, corporations, and communities, and can be captured by state and corporate interests. The "just transition" framework is promising but underdeveloped in the African context. The UN's emphasis on transparency (EITI) addresses the fiscal leakage channel but does not directly address the refining concentration or technological learning channels.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Western supply-chain security responses: IRA, MSP, CRMA, and the risk of peripheralization

Bolded Causal Claim: Western supply-chain security policies—the US Inflation Reduction Act's critical minerals provisions, the Minerals Security Partnership, and the EU Critical Raw Materials Act—restructure global mineral flows to reduce dependence on China, but in doing so risk peripheralizing Africa as a compliant raw-material supplier for Western green transitions, reproducing the very dependency structures they claim to solve.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through four interlocking channels that together constitute what critical political economy scholars call "green extractivism." First, the FTA/eligibility channel: the IRA's Section 30D (clean vehicle credit) requires that a percentage of critical minerals in EV batteries be extracted or processed in the US or in countries with which the US has a free trade agreement. As of 2024, no African country has an FTA with the US (AGOA is a unilateral preference program, not an FTA). This means African minerals do not automatically qualify for IRA credits unless processed in qualifying countries—effectively incentivizing extraction in Africa but refining in FTA partners (Japan, South Korea, EU members). The percentage requirement rises from 40% in 2023 to 80% by 2027, tightening the constraint. The mechanism creates a powerful incentive for mining companies to extract in Africa but process in FTA countries, locking

in the extraction-without-processing pattern. The US has begun negotiating "critical minerals agreements" (CMAs) with individual countries, but these are narrower than FTAs and do not provide the same market access or legal protections.

Second, the MSP channel: the Minerals Security Partnership, launched in 2022 by the US and joined by the EU, UK, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden, and the UK, aims to "catalyze public and private investment" in critical mineral supply chains. The MSP's project selection criteria emphasize ESG standards, governance, and "responsible" mining—standards that African producers may struggle to meet, potentially excluding them from Western supply chains. The MSP has announced projects in Africa, but most focus on extraction and exploration rather than refining. The mechanism here is one of standard-setting: by defining what counts as "responsible" mining, the MSP effectively determines which African producers can access Western capital and markets. This can raise costs for African producers, particularly artisanal and small-scale miners who lack the capacity to meet complex ESG reporting requirements. The MSP also creates a "club" dynamic: countries inside the partnership gain preferential access to Western capital and markets, while those outside face higher barriers.

Third, the CRMA channel: the EU's Critical Raw Materials Act (2024) sets targets for domestic extraction (10%), processing (40%), and recycling (25%) by 2030, and identifies "strategic projects" for fast-tracked permitting. The CRMA also requires that no more than 65% of any critical mineral come from a single third country—directly targeting China but also creating opportunities for African suppliers if they can meet EU standards. The CRMA's "strategic project" designation provides access to EU funding and fast-tracked permitting, but the criteria favor projects in EU member states or countries with which the EU has strategic partnerships. The mechanism creates a tiered system: EU-based projects receive the most support, strategic partner projects receive some support, and other projects receive none. African projects that do not meet the criteria may find themselves excluded from EU supply chains even as the EU diversifies away from China.

Fourth, the peripheralization channel: the combined effect of these policies is to create a bifurcated global mineral market—Western-aligned and China-aligned—with Africa potentially serving as a raw-material periphery for both, unable to capture value-added in either bloc. The mechanism is reinforced by the fact that Western capital for African mining typically comes with offtake agreements that lock in raw material exports rather than domestic processing. The "friend-shoring" discourse (Yellen 2022, Sullivan 2023) frames supply-chain restructuring as a security imperative, but the security being secured is Western security, not African development. The peripheralization risk is not that Africa is excluded from global supply chains, but that it is included on terms that reproduce dependency: extracting raw materials for processing elsewhere, with limited technology transfer, limited fiscal capture, and limited upward mobility.

The theoretical lineage runs through world-systems theory (Wallerstein 1974), which posits a core-periphery structure in which the core extracts surplus from the periphery; through dependency theory (Frank 1967, Cardoso and Faletto 1979) which argues that peripheralization is not a stage but a structural feature of capitalism; through more recent work on "green extractivism" (Dunlap and Jakobsen 2020, Zografos and Robbins 2020) which argues that the green transition reproduces extractive patterns under a sustainability veneer; and through the "friend-shoring" literature (Yellen 2022, Sullivan 2023) which frames supply-chain restructuring as a security imperative. The African perspective adds that peripheralization is not an unintended consequence but a structural feature of a system designed to maintain Western (and Chinese) industrial dominance. Grovogui (2006) argues that the international order was constructed to facilitate resource extraction from Africa, and that contemporary supply-chain policies are the latest iteration of this pattern.

Scope Conditions: The peripheralization risk is most acute where: (1) African states lack the industrial

capacity and infrastructure to process minerals domestically; (2) Western policies create eligibility criteria (FTA status, ESG standards) that African producers cannot meet; (3) offtake agreements lock in raw material exports; and (4) regional coordination is weak, preventing collective bargaining. The risk is attenuated where African states have successfully negotiated local content requirements, where regional integration provides scale (e.g., the African Continental Free Trade Area, AfCFTA), and where Western partners invest in processing capacity rather than just extraction. The scope condition of "geopolitical alignment" is also relevant: as great-power competition intensifies, African states may gain leverage by playing competing blocs against each other, but this leverage is contingent on maintaining non-alignment and avoiding exclusive partnerships. The scope condition of "state capacity" is critical: African states with stronger institutions (South Africa, Botswana, Namibia) are better positioned to negotiate terms that avoid peripheralization than those with weaker institutions (DRC, Zimbabwe). The scope condition of "mineral type" also matters: minerals with higher processing complexity (cobalt, lithium, REEs) present greater peripheralization risk than those with lower complexity (copper, graphite), because the value-added gap is larger.

Observable Implications: If the peripheralization thesis holds, we should observe: (a) increased Western investment in African extraction but not in African processing; (b) African minerals flowing to FTA partners (Japan, South Korea, EU) for processing rather than being processed domestically; (c) ESG compliance costs that disadvantage African small-scale and artisanal miners; (d) a growing gap between Western rhetoric about "partnership" and actual investment in value-added capacity; (e) African states increasingly turning to China for processing investment, reinforcing the bifurcation. Early evidence: the MSP has announced projects in Africa, but most focus on extraction and exploration rather than refining. The EU's CRMA strategic projects include African mining ventures but few processing facilities. The IRA's FTA requirement has led to discussions about "critical minerals agreements" (CMAs) with individual African countries, but these are narrower than FTAs and do not provide the same market access. A further observable implication is that African states will increasingly use resource nationalism (export bans, local content requirements) as a defensive response to peripheralization pressure, creating friction with Western partners who view these measures as market-distorting.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective views Western supply-chain security policies with deep suspicion, recognizing them as the latest iteration of a long history of external powers structuring African economies to serve their own needs. From Nkrumah's neo-colonialism to contemporary critiques of "green extractivism," African scholars and policymakers see the IRA, MSP, and CRMA as potentially reproducing dependency under the guise of partnership. The key African concern is not whether Western policies reduce dependence on China, but whether they enable African value-chain upgrading or merely redirect raw material flows. The DRC-Zambia battery initiative is, in part, a response to this concern—an attempt to capture value before minerals leave the continent. African voices emphasize that "friend-shoring" is only meaningful if Africa is treated as a partner, not a periphery. Mamdani (1996) and Bayart (2009) highlight how African states are often "extraverted"—oriented toward external patrons rather than domestic constituencies—making it difficult to resist peripheralization. The African vantage point reveals that Western supply-chain security and African development are not automatically aligned; they may be in tension, and the resolution of that tension depends on African bargaining power, not Western goodwill. Aning and Danso (2013) argue that African agency in international relations is often underestimated, and that African states can leverage great-power competition to their advantage if they coordinate regionally and maintain strategic non-alignment.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective views Western supply-chain security policies as containment strategies designed to undermine China's dominant position in critical mineral processing. China argues that its investments in African mining and processing have contributed to African development and that Western policies—by imposing ESG standards and FTA requirements—seek to exclude Chinese firms and redirect African minerals to Western-aligned supply chains. The Chinese narrative emphasizes that Western "friend-shoring" is hypocritical: the West benefited from Chinese processing for decades and now seeks to exclude China without offering African states equivalent value-added opportunities. China contributes the insight that supply-chain restructuring is geopolitically motivated, not purely economic, but occludes its own role in creating the dependency it now criticizes the West for addressing. Kalantzakos (2020) notes that China's critical minerals strategy is explicitly designed to secure supply chains for its own industrial upgrading, and that Chinese investments in African processing, while significant, remain oriented toward Chinese rather than African industrial needs.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames Western supply-chain security policies as part of a broader Western strategy to maintain global hegemony and exclude non-Western powers from strategic resources. Russia argues that the MSP and CRMA are discriminatory and violate WTO principles of non-discrimination. Russia's own experience with sanctions and resource nationalism informs this view. The perspective contributes a critique of Western unilateralism but occludes Russia's own resource nationalism and its limited capacity to offer African states alternative processing partnerships. Russia's anti-hegemonic framing resonates with some African audiences but is undermined by its own geopolitical behavior. Sanderson (2022) notes that Russian mineral investment in Africa remains limited in scale relative to China, constraining its ability to influence supply-chain dynamics or offer African states meaningful alternatives to Western or Chinese partnerships.

Western: The Western perspective, articulated through policy documents and think-tank analyses, frames the IRA, MSP, and CRMA as necessary responses to China's dominance of critical mineral processing, which poses both economic and security risks. The Western narrative emphasizes that these policies are not designed to peripheralize Africa but to create diversified, resilient, and "responsible" supply chains. Western policymakers point to the MSP's project announcements and the CRMA's strategic project designations as evidence of commitment to African partnership. The perspective contributes governance standards, capital, and market access but occludes the structural incentives that favor extraction over processing in Africa, and the risk that ESG standards become non-tariff barriers. The strongest Western counterargument is that without these policies, China's dominance would be even more entrenched, leaving Africa with even less leverage. The IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024) acknowledges that current supply chains are "highly concentrated" and that diversification is needed, but frames this primarily as a security issue for consuming countries rather than a development issue for producing countries.

UN: The UN perspective views Western supply-chain security policies through the lens of global governance, sustainable development, and just transition. The UN emphasizes that supply-chain restructuring must not come at the expense of African development or environmental standards. The UN contributes normative frameworks (the SDGs, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights) and multi-stakeholder platforms (EITI, the UN Global Compact) but lacks enforcement power. The UN perspective occludes the geopolitical competition driving these policies and can be captured by state and corporate interests. The "just transition" framework is promising but underdeveloped in the African context, and the UN's ability to shape Western industrial policy is limited. The UN's emphasis on transparency and multi-stakeholder governance addresses some of the governance deficits in African mining but does not directly address the structural power asymmetries that drive peripheralization.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Chinese State-Backed Offtake and the DRC-Zambia Partnership

Bolded Causal Claim: Chinese state-backed offtake agreements, infrastructure-for-minerals arrangements, and vertically integrated state-owned enterprise (SOE) investment have secured Beijing's dominant position in African critical mineral supply chains by substituting patient, politically tolerant capital for the risk-averse, return-maximizing capital that Western firms typically deploy, thereby locking African states into long-term supply relationships in which geological endowment is exchanged for infrastructure and market access while refining and manufacturing rents accrue to China.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through four reinforcing channels. First, financing: Chinese policy banks—principally the China Development Bank and the Export-Import Bank of China—extend concessional or semi-concessional credit to African governments and to Chinese SOEs operating abroad, accepting repayment horizons and risk profiles that commercial lenders and Western development finance institutions typically reject. This patient capital allows Chinese firms to absorb the high upfront costs of greenfield mining in jurisdictions with weak infrastructure, unstable regulation, and elevated political risk. Second, infrastructure bundling: Chinese investment frequently packages mineral extraction with transport, power, and port infrastructure—exemplified by the Sicomines agreement in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), signed in 2008, under which Chinese firms committed to infrastructure construction in exchange for mining concessions. This bundling reduces the transaction costs of extraction and creates physical path dependence: once a railway or power line is built to serve a Chinese-operated mine, rerouting supply to alternative buyers becomes costly. Third, offtake lock-in: long-term purchase agreements guarantee feedstock to Chinese refineries and battery manufacturers, removing price risk from the Chinese side while transferring it to the African producer, who loses the ability to capture upside price movements or to diversify customers. Fourth, vertical integration: Chinese firms such as China Molybdenum (CMOC), Zijin Mining, and China Nonferrous Metal Mining Group (CNMC) operate across the chain from mine to smelter to cathode and battery production, with downstream firms such as Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Limited (CATL) and BYD absorbing the highest-value stages. The result is a structural asymmetry: African states receive infrastructure, employment, and royalty revenue, but the rents from refining, precursor manufacturing, and battery assembly—the stages where value concentrates—flow to China. As Sanderson (2022) documents, this model has made China the dominant processor of cobalt, lithium, and rare earths even where African countries hold the geological reserves.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism is strongest where three conditions coincide: (a) African states lack the fiscal capacity and technical expertise to develop mines independently; (b) infrastructure deficits are severe enough that bundled investment is politically attractive; and (c) Western firms are deterred by risk, regulation, or shareholder pressure. It weakens where African governments possess credible alternatives—such as the DRC's 2023-2024 renegotiation of the Sicomines terms, which sought to increase the infrastructure commitment and adjust revenue sharing—or where Chinese capital itself retreats, as occurred when Zambia placed Konkola Copper Mines under provisional liquidation in 2019 amid disputes with Vedanta and, subsequently, when Chinese firms faced renegotiation pressure. The mechanism also assumes Chinese state capacity to coordinate across banks, SOEs, and diplomatic channels; where that coordination fragments, as in periods of Chinese domestic economic stress, the model's coherence degrades.

Observable Implications: Rising Chinese share of global cobalt and copper production and processing; the physical footprint of Chinese-built infrastructure corridors (the Lobito Corridor's Chinese-funded segments,

the TAZARA railway); renegotiation episodes and contract revisions in the DRC and Zambia; African fiscal dependence on Chinese loans and the associated debt-sustainability pressures; and the concentration of refining capacity in China documented in IEA (2024) Critical Minerals Outlook data. If the mechanism holds, one should observe continued Chinese dominance of midstream processing even as African states assert greater upstream control through export bans and joint ventures.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, drawing on Grovogui, Bayart, and Mamdani, reads Chinese engagement as a form of extraversion: African elites leverage external partnerships to consolidate domestic power, and the "developmental partnership" framing obscures the extraction of rents and the reinforcement of authoritarian governance structures. The Chinese perspective, articulated through official discourse and scholars such as Deborah Brautigam, frames the relationship as South-South cooperation and mutual benefit, emphasizing infrastructure delivery and non-interference in domestic politics. The Russian perspective, shaped by its own resource-state experience and anti-hegemonic framing, views Chinese dominance with ambivalence—welcoming the erosion of Western monopoly while wary of Chinese monopolization of the very markets Russia seeks to access. The Western perspective, particularly in Washington and Brussels, treats Chinese offtake as a strategic threat to supply-chain security, motivating friend-shoring and industrial policy responses. The UN perspective emphasizes governance standards, transparency, and the SDGs, noting that Chinese investment often bypasses EITI and multi-stakeholder frameworks, creating accountability gaps.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Resource Nationalism: DRC and Zambia's Joint Battery Initiative, Zimbabwe's Lithium Export Ban

Bolded Causal Claim: Resource nationalism in Africa—exemplified by the DRC-Zambia joint battery value chain initiative and Zimbabwe's 2022 raw lithium export ban—represents a strategic attempt to convert geological endowment into industrial upgrading and fiscal sovereignty, but its success is contingent on overcoming binding constraints of energy, capital, skills, and market access that have historically defeated such ambitions, and its failure modes include smuggling, stockpiling, investor flight, and WTO-inconsistent trade restrictions.

Mechanism: The mechanism of resource nationalism operates through two distinct but related instruments. The first is the export ban or restriction: by prohibiting or taxing the export of unprocessed ore, the state raises the domestic price of feedstock relative to the world price, creating a price wedge that incentivizes local processing. Zimbabwe's 2022 ban on raw lithium exports, announced by the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development, was designed to force beneficiation and capture more value domestically. The second is the joint venture or industrial policy initiative: the DRC and Zambia signed a memorandum of understanding in 2022 (with subsequent framework agreements in 2023) to develop a joint battery and electric vehicle value chain, leveraging the DRC's cobalt and Zambia's copper to produce battery precursors and, eventually, batteries. The mechanism here is pooling: by combining complementary endowments across borders, the two states seek to achieve the scale and input diversity necessary to attract downstream investment.

Both instruments face a common structural problem. Export bans create incentives for local processing only if processing capacity exists or can be built; where it does not, the result is stockpiling, smuggling across porous borders, and price distortions that harm legitimate producers. Zimbabwe's ban initially led to stockpiling of lithium concentrate and reports of smuggling into South Africa and Mozambique, while the absence of domestic refining capacity meant the ban could not immediately generate the intended value

addition. The DRC-Zambia initiative faces the complementary challenge: even with pooled endowments, the absence of reliable and affordable electricity, skilled labor, and capital for precursor plants means the initiative risks remaining a memorandum rather than a factory. The mechanism thus depends on what Rodney (1972) identified as the infrastructure of development: without energy, transport, and human capital, resource endowment does not automatically translate into industrialization.

There is also a legal and institutional dimension. Export bans on raw materials may conflict with WTO obligations, particularly the prohibition on quantitative restrictions and the requirement of non-discrimination. While export duties are permitted under certain conditions, outright bans risk dispute settlement challenges and can deter the very foreign investment needed to build processing capacity. The DRC-Zambia initiative, by contrast, operates through bilateral and regional frameworks and does not directly implicate WTO rules, but it must navigate the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) rules of origin and the investment protocols of the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Scope Conditions: Resource nationalism succeeds where four conditions are met: (a) the state possesses or can acquire credible processing capacity, whether through state-owned enterprises, joint ventures, or foreign direct investment; (b) energy and transport infrastructure are adequate to support industrial operations; (c) the state can enforce the restriction without creating large black markets; and (d) the policy is accompanied by complementary measures—skills development, research and development, and fiscal incentives—that build the ecosystem around the ban or initiative. It fails where these conditions are absent, producing the "resource curse" dynamics that Mamdani and others have analyzed: elite capture, smuggling, and the substitution of one form of rent-seeking for another. Zimbabwe's ban illustrates the failure mode: without processing capacity, the ban generated stockpiling and smuggling rather than value addition, and the government was forced to partially relax enforcement while seeking investors for local plants. The DRC-Zambia initiative illustrates the ambition mode: the pooling of endowments is theoretically sound, but the binding constraints of energy and capital mean the outcome remains uncertain.

Observable Implications: For Zimbabwe: lithium concentrate stockpiling volumes, smuggling estimates, the number and capacity of domestic processing plants licensed, FDI inflows into lithium processing, and any WTO dispute notifications. For the DRC-Zambia initiative: progress on feasibility studies, power purchase agreements, financing commitments, and the construction of precursor or battery plants. More broadly, the spread of similar measures across Africa—Namibia's 2023 ban on unprocessed lithium and other critical mineral exports, Ghana's bauxite and manganese restrictions—would indicate a regional trend toward resource nationalism, while their reversal or non-enforcement would indicate the constraints are binding.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, drawing on Rodney, Nkrumah, and Cabral, frames resource nationalism as a necessary corrective to centuries of extractive colonialism and neocolonialism: the right to process one's own resources is an expression of sovereignty, and the failure of past initiatives reflects not the impossibility of industrialization but the structural obstacles—debt, energy deficits, skills gaps—that external powers have a hand in perpetuating. The Chinese perspective views African resource nationalism with pragmatic accommodation: Beijing has historically adapted to host-country regulations and may support local processing if it secures long-term offtake, but it resists measures that threaten the supply security of its refineries. The Russian perspective, drawing on its own experience of resource nationalism and state control of strategic sectors, is broadly sympathetic to African assertions of sovereignty, framing them as part of a multipolar challenge to Western-dominated trade rules. The Western perspective is divided: some actors support African value addition as consistent with "friend-shoring" and supply-chain diversification, while others worry that export bans distort markets, reduce supply, and risk WTO disputes

that could fragment the trading system. The UN perspective emphasizes the just transition and sustainable development, supporting value addition in principle but insisting on environmental and social safeguards, transparency through EITI, and compliance with international trade law.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective on critical minerals and techno-geopolitics is not a regional variant of a global debate; it is the vantage point from which the debate's foundational asymmetries become visible. To reconstruct it on its own terms requires beginning with the historical political economy of extraction rather than with contemporary supply-chain anxiety. The central claim, developed across generations of African scholarship, is that the continent's mineral wealth has been systematically converted into external industrialization while the sites of extraction remain underdeveloped, and that the current scramble for cobalt, copper, lithium, graphite, and rare earth elements risks reproducing this pattern unless African states can convert geological endowment into bargaining power and then into value-chain position. This is not merely a complaint about prices; it is a structural argument about the relationship between resource endowment, state capacity, and global production networks.

The theoretical lineage runs through several distinct but converging traditions. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* established the foundational mechanism: the extraction of raw materials from Africa and their processing in Europe was not a neutral market transaction but a transfer of surplus that financed European industrialization while foreclosing African industrialization. Rodney's argument was not that Africa lacked resources but that the *form* of integration into the global economy—export of unprocessed commodities—locked in underdevelopment. Kwame Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism extended this: formal political independence could coexist with continued economic subordination through control of extraction, pricing, and technology. Julius Nyerere's Arusha Declaration and the broader Ujamaa project attempted to break this pattern through state-led development, with mixed results that themselves became objects of scholarly debate. Amílcar Cabral's insistence on the "return to the source" and on the cultural and political dimensions of liberation added a dimension that pure economics misses: resource sovereignty is also about who defines development. Frantz Fanon's analysis of the "pitfalls of national consciousness" warned that post-colonial elites might simply replace colonial extractors without transforming the structure, a warning that resonates in contemporary debates about whether African resource nationalism serves broad publics or narrow oligarchies.

Contemporary African scholarship has refined and complicated these foundations. Siba N. Grovogui's work on sovereignty and international order argues that African states' claims to resource sovereignty are not merely economic demands but challenges to the epistemic and legal frameworks that have historically defined "development" and "property" in ways that disadvantage the global South. For Grovogui, the international legal order is not neutral; it encodes particular distributions of power, and African resource nationalism must be understood as a contestation of that order, not just a bid for higher rents. Achille Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics" and his broader analysis of the postcolony illuminate how extraction zones become spaces where life is subordinated to accumulation, where the violence of mining—environmental degradation, displacement, labor exploitation—is not an externality but constitutive of the value chain. Mbembe's work suggests that the critical minerals boom cannot be evaluated solely by export revenues or GDP growth; it must be evaluated by what happens to bodies, ecologies, and communities in the extraction zones. Jean-François Bayart's concept of "extraversion"—the idea that African political economies are structured around the externalization of resources and the internalization of rents—provides a mechanism for understanding

why resource wealth often fails to translate into broad development: the state's relationship to the global economy shapes its relationship to its own citizens. Mahmood Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state and of colonial legal categories helps explain why resource governance in Africa often operates through dual systems—formal statutory law and customary authority—that create ambiguities exploitable by both foreign investors and domestic elites.

Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's feminist scholarship on the "invention of women" and on Yoruba social organization, while not focused on minerals, contributes a methodological insistence that categories like "labor," "community," and "household" in resource economies are gendered constructions that obscure women's work and women's losses in extraction zones. Sylvia Tamale's work on African feminism and decolonization extends this, arguing that resource governance must be evaluated through intersectional lenses that mainstream supply-chain analysis ignores. Emmanuel Aning and Kwesi Aning's security studies work connects mineral extraction to conflict dynamics, showing how resource rents finance armed groups and how the "conflict minerals" framing can be both a genuine governance tool and a mechanism of external control. Kwesi Danso's work on African agency in international relations challenges the assumption that African states are merely objects of great-power competition, insisting that they have strategic interests and bargaining capacity that external analyses often underestimate.

The central puzzle from the African vantage point is not whether Africa has minerals—it does, in abundance—but whether the current moment of heightened global demand creates a genuine opportunity for structural transformation or merely a new iteration of the resource curse. The DRC holds roughly two-thirds of global cobalt reserves and is a major copper producer; Zambia is a significant copper producer; Zimbabwe has substantial lithium deposits; Namibia, Mozambique, and Tanzania have graphite; South Africa and others have rare earth potential. Yet the value capture is minimal. Cobalt mined in the DRC is refined predominantly in China; copper concentrates are smelted abroad; lithium is exported as spodumene concentrate for processing elsewhere; graphite is processed into battery-grade material outside Africa. The gap between geological endowment and economic capture is the defining feature of the African position.

The mechanism of upward mobility, as African policymakers and scholars frame it, requires moving from extraction to refining to manufacturing. The DRC-Zambia battery value chain initiative, announced in 2023, represents an attempt to build a regional battery manufacturing hub, leveraging the two countries' combined mineral endowments. Zimbabwe's 2022 ban on raw lithium exports represents a more aggressive form of resource nationalism, forcing domestic processing. These initiatives are not merely economic policies; they are assertions of sovereignty that challenge the global division of labor in which Africa supplies raw materials and others capture value through technology and capital.

The African perspective contributes what the other four cannot: a historically grounded account of why the current supply chain looks the way it does, an insistence that "development" must be defined by Africans rather than by external metrics, and a recognition that the minerals in question are not just inputs to green transitions elsewhere but potential foundations of African industrialization. It centers the question of who benefits from the energy transition and whether the transition will reproduce or transform global inequalities. It also foregrounds the lived experience of extraction zones—environmental destruction, labor conditions, community displacement—that supply-chain security frameworks treat as externalities.

What the African perspective occludes, or at least underweights, is significant. It can romanticize state capacity, understating the governance deficits, corruption, and elite capture that have historically diverted resource rents from public investment. It can understate intra-African competition and the difficulty of regional coordination, as the DRC-Zambia initiative's slow progress illustrates. It can treat "the West" and "China" as

monolithic actors, missing the internal divisions that create bargaining opportunities. It can underweight the genuine technological and capital constraints that make rapid value-chain upgrading difficult regardless of political will. And it can, in its most nationalist forms, risk WTO disputes and investment deterrence that harm the very populations it aims to serve. The strongest internal critique, voiced by scholars like Bayart and Mamdani, is that resource nationalism without institutional transformation may simply redistribute rents among elites rather than transform structures.

The African vantage point also reveals something the other perspectives miss about the temporal dimension of the critical minerals boom. The window for value-chain upgrading may be narrow: battery chemistries are evolving, with shifts toward lithium iron phosphate and sodium-ion batteries that reduce cobalt dependence; recycling technologies are advancing; and alternative supply sources are being developed. If African states do not capture value now, the geological advantage may depreciate. This creates urgency that the African perspective emphasizes and that slower-moving governance frameworks may not accommodate. At the same time, the perspective insists that urgency must not justify sacrificing environmental and social standards—a tension that the UN perspective shares but that the African perspective frames as a matter of justice rather than compliance.

In sum, the African perspective treats critical minerals as a test case for whether the post-colonial state can convert sovereignty into development. It draws on a rich theoretical tradition that sees extraction not as a market failure but as a structural feature of global capitalism, and it insists that the current moment offers both opportunity and risk. Its contribution is indispensable; its limitations are real and must be engaged rather than dismissed.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on African critical minerals is best understood through the lens of state-backed supply-chain construction and developmental partnership, not through the Western framing of "resource grab." China's engagement with African minerals is long-standing, dating to the early 2000s and accelerating with the Belt and Road Initiative, but it has acquired new strategic significance with the global energy transition and the US-China technology competition. The core claim is that China has built, through state-directed investment and long-term offtake agreements, a dominant position in the processing and refining of critical minerals, and that this position is now a strategic asset in techno-geopolitical competition.

The theoretical lineage draws on Chinese developmental state theory and on the concept of "going out" (zou chuqu), the policy framework that encouraged Chinese firms to invest overseas. Chinese scholarship and policy discourse frame this engagement in terms of mutual benefit and "win-win" cooperation, emphasizing infrastructure development, employment, and technology transfer. The mechanism is state-backed capital: Chinese policy banks, state-owned enterprises, and sovereign wealth vehicles provide financing that Western private capital often does not, particularly in high-risk environments. This enables Chinese firms to secure long-term offtake agreements and to build processing capacity, creating vertical integration from mine to refined product to battery manufacturing.

China's position is formidable. It dominates cobalt refining, copper smelting, lithium processing, and graphite purification. The DRC's cobalt flows predominantly to Chinese refiners. Chinese firms have invested heavily in African mining assets, including in the DRC, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. The China-DRC "infrastructure-for-minerals" deals of the late 2000s, though controversial, established a model of resource-backed development financing that China has replicated and refined. More recently, Chinese firms have moved downstream, investing in battery manufacturing and electric vehicle production, creating

a vertically integrated chain that few other actors can match.

The Chinese perspective contributes several things the others miss. First, it demonstrates that state-directed capital can build supply-chain position in ways that market-driven Western investment has not, at least not at comparable speed and scale. Second, it provides an alternative to the Western "friend-shoring" model, one that does not condition engagement on governance benchmarks that African states may find intrusive. Third, it offers African states a bargaining partner that is less likely to impose political conditionality, though it may impose other forms of leverage through debt and offtake terms.

What the Chinese perspective occludes is equally important. It tends to understate the environmental and social costs of extraction in African mining zones, treating them as host-country responsibilities. It underweights concerns about labor standards, community displacement, and ecological degradation that African civil society and international NGOs raise. It can frame "mutual benefit" in ways that obscure asymmetric power: Chinese firms' control of refining and manufacturing means that even when African states capture more rent at the mine gate, the high-value segments remain Chinese. The perspective also underweights the geopolitical risks of over-dependence: African states that align too closely with Chinese supply chains may find themselves caught in US-China decoupling dynamics, facing secondary sanctions or market access restrictions. Chinese scholarship and policy discourse rarely acknowledge these risks from the African side, focusing instead on the bilateral relationship.

The Chinese perspective also reveals the limits of Western supply-chain security strategies. If the goal is to reduce dependence on Chinese processing, the alternative is not simply to mine more in Africa but to build refining and manufacturing capacity elsewhere—a capital-intensive, time-consuming process that the Inflation Reduction Act and Critical Raw Materials Act attempt to incentivize but cannot achieve quickly. China's head start in processing is a structural fact that no policy can erase in the short term. This is a contribution to realism that the Western perspective sometimes lacks.

In sum, the Chinese perspective treats African critical minerals as one node in a state-directed global supply chain that China has built over two decades. It emphasizes partnership and mutual benefit while occluding environmental, social, and geopolitical risks. Its strength is its demonstrated capacity to mobilize capital and build vertical integration; its weakness is its tendency to treat African states as suppliers rather than as partners in value creation.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on African critical minerals is shaped by Russia's own identity as a resource state, its experience of Western sanctions, and its broader anti-hegemonic framing of international order. Russia is itself a major producer of several critical minerals, including nickel, palladium, and various rare earths, and it has been targeted by Western sanctions that restrict its access to technology and markets. This experience informs a perspective that is broadly sympathetic to African assertions of resource sovereignty and that frames Western supply-chain security initiatives as instruments of hegemonic control rather than as neutral responses to market failure.

The theoretical lineage draws on Russian geopolitical thought, particularly the tradition of Eurasianism and the concept of multipolarity. Russian scholarship and policy discourse frame the international system as one in which a declining Western hegemon seeks to maintain control through institutional and economic mechanisms, including trade rules, financial systems, and now supply-chain governance. The mechanism of Western power, in this view, is not just military but structural: the ability to define the terms of trade, to set standards, and to exclude non-compliant actors. African resource nationalism is thus read as part of a

broader multipolar challenge to this hegemony.

Russia's direct engagement with African critical minerals is more limited than China's but not negligible. Russian firms, including state-backed entities, have invested in mining projects in several African countries, and Russia has sought to expand its presence in the continent's resource sector as part of its broader geopolitical pivot. The Wagner Group and its successor structures have been involved in resource extraction in conflict zones, though this is more prominent in gold and diamonds than in critical minerals for batteries. Russia's nuclear energy cooperation with some African states, including agreements on uranium and nuclear technology, represents another dimension of resource-related engagement.

The Russian perspective contributes an important corrective to Western narratives: it insists that "supply-chain security" and "friend-shoring" are not neutral technical concepts but political projects that serve particular interests. It highlights the hypocrisy of Western actors who promote free trade when it suits them and restrict it when it does not, and who invoke WTO rules against African export bans while themselves subsidizing domestic production through the Inflation Reduction Act. This critique has force, particularly when Western actors simultaneously demand that African states open their markets and restrict their own exports of processed materials.

What the Russian perspective occludes is substantial. It tends to treat African agency as derivative of great-power competition, subordinating African interests to the anti-hegemonic project. It underweights the genuine governance challenges in African resource sectors and the legitimate concerns about environmental and social standards. It can romanticize state control of resources, ignoring the inefficiencies and corruption that have plagued state-led extraction in many contexts, including Russia's own. And it offers little in the way of practical support for African value-chain upgrading: Russia's own industrial base is weakened by sanctions, and its capacity to provide technology, capital, or market access for African refining and manufacturing is limited. The perspective is more useful as critique than as construction.

The Russian perspective also reveals the limits of framing African resource nationalism purely in terms of great-power alignment. African states are not simply choosing between Western and Chinese (or Russian) models; they are attempting to navigate a complex landscape in which all external actors have interests that may not align with African development goals. The Russian framing, by reducing this to a multipolar struggle, risks obscuring the specific, contingent bargains that African states must strike.

In sum, the Russian perspective offers a valuable critique of Western hegemony and a degree of sympathy for African sovereignty claims, but it contributes little to the practical challenge of value-chain upgrading and tends to subordinate African agency to geopolitical competition. Its strength is its diagnostic clarity about power; its weakness is its lack of constructive capacity.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on African critical minerals is organized around supply-chain security, friend-shoring, and the risk of peripheralization. It is not monolithic—encompassing US, EU, and allied positions that differ in emphasis—but it shares a common premise: that dependence on concentrated supply chains, particularly those running through China, poses strategic vulnerabilities that must be addressed through diversification, domestic production, and partnership with "like-minded" countries. Africa figures in this perspective primarily as a source of raw materials and, secondarily, as a potential partner in a reconfigured supply chain that reduces Western dependence on China.

The theoretical lineage draws on strategic trade theory, supply-chain risk management, and the emerging literature on "weaponized interdependence." The mechanism is straightforward: critical minerals are inputs

to technologies—batteries, semiconductors, defense systems—that underpin both economic competitiveness and military capability. Concentration of supply, whether in China for processing or in a few African countries for extraction, creates vulnerabilities that adversaries can exploit. The policy response includes the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which provides tax credits for electric vehicles whose battery minerals are sourced from the US or free-trade-agreement partners; the EU Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA), which sets targets for domestic extraction, processing, and recycling; and the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), a multilateral initiative to catalyze investment in critical mineral supply chains. These instruments aim to build "friend-shored" supply chains that exclude or reduce dependence on China.

The Western perspective contributes genuine analytical value. It correctly identifies the concentration risk in critical mineral supply chains and the strategic implications of Chinese dominance in processing. It has mobilized significant capital and policy attention toward diversification. And it has, in some instances, supported African value addition: the MSP includes African partners, and some Western firms have invested in African refining and manufacturing projects. The "friend-shoring" concept, at its best, implies a partnership model rather than a purely extractive one.

What the Western perspective occludes is, however, substantial and structurally significant. First, it tends to treat Africa as a source of supply rather than as a site of value creation, reproducing the very peripheralization it claims to oppose. The IRA's sourcing requirements, for instance, favor US and FTA partners, which does not include most African countries; this creates incentives to extract in Africa but process elsewhere, precisely the pattern African states seek to reverse. Second, it underweights the historical dimension: the current supply chain concentration is not a natural market outcome but the result of decades of Western deindustrialization in processing and deliberate Chinese industrial policy. Blaming China for "dominance" while ignoring Western choices that enabled it is analytically incomplete. Third, it can treat African resource nationalism—export bans, local content requirements, state equity demands—as market distortions rather than as legitimate development strategies, revealing a double standard when Western states themselves subsidize domestic production. Fourth, it underweights the environmental and social costs of extraction, treating them as host-country issues rather than as shared responsibilities in a global supply chain.

The Western perspective also reveals an internal tension that African and other critics exploit: the gap between rhetoric and practice. "Friend-shoring" implies partnership, but the actual flow of investment and technology transfer remains limited. Western firms are often reluctant to invest in African processing because of risk perceptions, infrastructure gaps, and the availability of cheaper Chinese alternatives. The result is that Western policy creates demand for diversified supply without creating the conditions for African value addition, potentially leaving African states with the same extractive role but with more competitors.

The strongest Western counterargument to African resource nationalism is that export bans reduce global supply, raise prices, and may violate WTO commitments, ultimately harming the very industries—green technology, electric vehicles—that the energy transition requires. This argument has force but is weakened by the fact that Western states themselves restrict exports of critical technologies and subsidize domestic production, suggesting that the rules are applied asymmetrically.

In sum, the Western perspective offers a necessary analysis of supply-chain concentration and strategic vulnerability but tends to reproduce peripheralization by treating Africa as a source rather than a partner. Its strength is its capacity to mobilize capital and policy; its weakness is its failure to align supply-chain security with African value-chain upgrading.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on African critical minerals is organized around resource governance, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), and the just transition. It is not a single actor but a constellation of agencies, frameworks, and norms—the UN Environment Programme, UNCTAD, the UN Development Programme, the Sustainable Development Goals, and various expert panels and reports—that share a common emphasis on sustainable development, human rights, environmental protection, and inclusive governance. The core claim is that the critical minerals boom must be managed in ways that advance sustainable development, protect communities and ecosystems, and ensure that the benefits of extraction are shared equitably.

The theoretical lineage draws on the sustainable development paradigm, human rights law, and the resource governance literature. The mechanism is normative and institutional: international frameworks, transparency initiatives, and capacity-building programs aim to improve governance in resource-rich countries, reduce corruption, and ensure that extraction contributes to development rather than to conflict and environmental degradation. EITI, launched in 2003, is the flagship instrument, requiring participating countries to disclose payments from extractive companies to governments and vice versa. The UN's framing of the "just transition" extends this to the energy transition, insisting that the shift to renewable energy must not reproduce the injustices of the fossil fuel era.

The UN perspective contributes several things the others miss. First, it centers the environmental and social costs of extraction that supply-chain security frameworks treat as externalities. Mining for cobalt, copper, lithium, and graphite has significant environmental impacts—water pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, carbon emissions from processing—that the UN system has documented extensively. Second, it provides a framework for evaluating whether extraction benefits local communities, through concepts like free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC), benefit-sharing, and local content. Third, it insists on the rights of indigenous and affected communities, a dimension that state-centric perspectives often ignore. Fourth, it offers a global public-goods framing: the energy transition is a global challenge, and its mineral inputs should be governed by principles of equity and sustainability, not just by market or strategic logic.

What the UN perspective occludes is also significant. First, it can be overly procedural, focusing on transparency and governance standards without addressing the structural power asymmetries that determine who captures value. EITI disclosure is valuable but does not by itself change the distribution of rents or the location of refining. Second, it tends to treat "good governance" as a technical challenge rather than a political one, underweighting the ways in which external actors—multinational corporations, great powers, international financial institutions—shape the governance environment. Third, it can impose standards that African states find burdensome or that serve as barriers to entry, particularly for smaller firms and artisanal miners. Fourth, its emphasis on compliance with international trade law can conflict with African resource nationalism: the UN system generally supports WTO rules, which may constrain export bans and local content requirements that African states view as development tools.

The UN perspective also reveals a tension between the just transition and the critical minerals boom that it does not fully resolve. The energy transition requires massive mineral extraction, which has environmental and social costs; the UN system advocates for both the transition and for sustainable, rights-respecting extraction, but the practical reconciliation of these goals is difficult. The UN's response has been to promote "responsible sourcing" and "sustainable mining" standards, but these are voluntary and unevenly enforced. The gap between normative aspiration and material reality is a persistent feature of the UN perspective.

The UN perspective's strength is its normative comprehensiveness and its attention to environmental and social justice. Its weakness is its tendency to substitute governance procedures for structural change, and its difficulty in reconciling the competing demands of transition speed, supply security, and justice. For

African states, the UN perspective is both an ally—providing frameworks for demanding better terms—and a constraint—imposing standards that may limit policy space.

In sum, the UN perspective treats critical minerals as a governance challenge within a broader sustainable development agenda. It contributes indispensable attention to environmental and social justice but occludes structural power and can impose constraints on African policy autonomy. Its value lies in its normative framing; its limitation lies in its institutional weakness relative to the economic and geopolitical forces it seeks to govern.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers resource sovereignty and value-chain upgrading; reveals extraction as structural dependency reproduced across colonial and post-colonial regimes	May understate internal elite capture, governance failures, and the technical difficulty of refining at scale	Resource sovereignty, equitable development, African agency, and the right to industrialize	DRC-Zambia battery value chain initiative (2023); Zimbabwe's 2022 raw lithium export ban; cobalt-copper corridor politics	Western: state-led upgrading is inefficient, risks deterring investment, and may violate WTO commitments
Chinese	Demonstrates that state-backed coordination can secure offtake, finance infrastructure, and sustain long-term investment horizons	Downplays labor and environmental costs, debt implications, and the risk that Chinese firms dominate new value chains; frames commercial interest as partnership	Mutual benefit, South-South cooperation, non-interference, and developmental partnership	CMOC Tenke Fungurume operations; Huayou cobalt processing; DRC-Zambia infrastructure financing	African: reproduces extractive patterns without genuine local value addition or technology transfer

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Anti-hegemonic framing exposes Western hypocrisy in resource governance; offers rhetorical multipolarity and diplomatic support	Limited concrete mineral investment or technology transfer; own extractive record; gap between rhetoric and material capacity	Multipolarity, anti-imperialism, and resistance to Western conditionalities	Uranium and gold deals; diplomatic backing at UN forums; Wagner-linked security-mining arrangements	African: offers little value-chain investment, refining capacity, or industrialization support
Western	Brings ESG standards, transparency mechanisms, and supply diversification; IRA, MSP, and CRMA create demand-side incentives	Historical extractivism; "friend-shoring" may peripheralize Africa by sourcing raw materials while retaining refining at home	Rules-based order, supply-chain security, sustainability, and market efficiency	IRA tax credits; Minerals Security Partnership; EU Critical Raw Materials Act	African: secures supply without enabling African upgrading; standards function as non-tariff barriers
UN	Provides normative frameworks (EITI, UNGPs, just transition); centers environmental and social justice and intergenerational equity	Substitutes governance procedures for structural change; weak enforcement; may constrain African policy space with standards	Sustainable development, human rights, transparency, and intergenerational equity	EITI implementation; UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights; SDG 7 and 12 linkages	African: imposes standards that limit industrial policy space and slow transition speed

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The DRC-Zambia Battery Value Chain Initiative (2023)

In April 2023, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia signed a memorandum of understanding to establish a joint battery and electric vehicle value chain, anchored by a special economic zone straddling the border near Kolwezi and Ndola. The initiative proposes to move beyond the export of raw cobalt, copper, and lithium toward precursor manufacturing and, eventually, battery cell production. It is the most ambitious attempt by African states to capture value upstream in the critical minerals supply chain, and it sits at the intersection of resource sovereignty, great power competition, and the global energy transition.

Levels of Analysis

At the *individual* level, the initiative is shaped by the decisions of mining engineers, customs officials, small-scale miners, and community leaders whose daily practices determine whether harmonized regulations function or remain paper commitments. Individual entrepreneurs in Kolwezi and Ndola face capital constraints, skills gaps, and uncertain offtake guarantees; their willingness to invest in processing depends on expectations about state capacity and market access. At the *state* level, the DRC and Zambia governments must coordinate industrial policy, fiscal regimes, and infrastructure planning across a porous border, while managing relations with incumbent mining firms—many of them Chinese—that control the underlying resource base. State capacity, bureaucratic coordination, and the political economy of elite capture determine whether the SEZ becomes a genuine industrial platform or an enclave. At the *systemic* level, the initiative operates within a global battery supply chain dominated by Chinese refining (roughly 70–80 percent of cobalt refining and a comparable share of lithium processing), Western demand-side incentives such as the US Inflation Reduction Act and the EU Critical Raw Materials Act, and price cycles that can make or break processing margins. The systemic structure constrains what either state can achieve unilaterally. At the *transnational* level, the initiative depends on cross-border infrastructure (the Lobito Corridor, power interconnections), regional trade frameworks (SADC, COMESA, the African Continental Free Trade Area), multinational mining companies, and external financiers. Transnational actors—Chinese offtakers, Western development banks, and regional institutions—shape the initiative's feasibility as much as domestic policy.

Mechanism

The causal mechanism runs as follows. First, resource endowment (DRC cobalt and copper, Zambian copper) creates a potential comparative advantage in battery precursors. Second, state-led industrial policy—harmonized regulations, a joint SEZ, and targeted incentives—attempts to convert that endowment into processing capacity rather than raw export. Third, regional integration reduces transaction costs and pools markets, addressing the scale problem that has historically defeated single-country industrialization in Africa. Fourth, external financing and technology transfer—whether from Chinese, Western, or multilateral sources—determines whether the physical infrastructure and technical know-how materialize. The mechanism is contingent at every stage: resource endowment does not automatically generate processing; state coordination does not guarantee implementation; regional integration does not ensure competitiveness; and external partners may prefer to retain refining in their own jurisdictions. The initiative's success therefore depends on a chain of conditionalities, each of which can be broken by capital gaps, energy deficits (both countries face chronic power shortages), governance failures, or shifts in global demand.

The deeper mechanism is political. Drawing on Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism and Rodney's theory of underdevelopment, the initiative represents an attempt to break the extractive enclave by capturing value at the refining and precursor stages. But as Bayart's "politics of the belly" suggests, the same mineral wealth that funds industrial ambition also funds elite capture; the SEZ may become a rent-seeking arena rather than a development platform. Mamdani's critique of the bifurcated state—where modern institutions coexist with decentralized despotism—raises the question of whether regulatory harmonization can be enforced

across territories where state authority is fragmented. The mechanism is thus not merely economic but political: value-chain upgrading requires a state capable of disciplining capital, coordinating across borders, and resisting both external pressure and internal predation.

Perspective Reconstruction

African (primary, longest): The initiative is best understood as an assertion of resource sovereignty and a bid for upward mobility in the global battery supply chain. African scholars from Nkrumah through Rodney have argued that raw material export reproduces dependency; the SEZ is a concrete attempt to reverse that pattern. The joint framework reflects a regionalist strategy—pooling sovereignty to counter bilateral dependency on external powers—and aligns with the African Continental Free Trade Area's logic of scale. The African perspective also insists on the politics of bargaining: DRC and Zambia are not passive recipients of investment but actors leveraging mineral endowments to demand better terms. Yet this perspective, taken alone, risks underestimating the binding constraints of capital, technology, and energy. It can romanticize state capacity and understate the risk that the initiative becomes another enclave, benefiting elites and foreign firms while leaving communities impoverished. The African vantage point reveals what others miss: the historical depth of extraction as a structure, and the political necessity of industrialization as a sovereignty project. It occludes, however, the technical and financial barriers that make refining genuinely difficult.

Chinese: Beijing views the initiative through the lens of supply-chain security and developmental partnership. Chinese firms—CMOC, Zijin, Huayou—hold significant copper-cobalt assets in both countries, and a regional processing hub could secure offtake while reducing logistics costs. The Chinese perspective emphasizes infrastructure financing and long-term investment horizons, and it would likely support the initiative if Chinese firms retain a dominant role in processing. What it occludes is the risk that Chinese dominance of the new value chain reproduces dependency under a different flag, and that labor and environmental standards may be diluted in the pursuit of speed and cost. The Chinese contribution is material: capital and construction capacity. Its limitation is that partnership may shade into control.

Russian: Moscow would frame the initiative within an anti-hegemonic narrative, rhetorically supporting African industrialization as a challenge to Western dominance. In practice, Russia has limited mineral investment or technology transfer capacity in the DRC-Zambia corridor; its role is primarily diplomatic and discursive. The Russian perspective contributes a critique of Western conditionalities but occludes its own extractive record and its inability to deliver value-chain upgrading. Its strongest claim is normative—multipolarity—but its material contribution is thin.

Western: Washington and Brussels interpret the initiative through supply-chain security and friend-shoring. The US Inflation Reduction Act and the EU Critical Raw Materials Act create demand-side incentives that could, in principle, support African processing if the output qualifies for preferential access. The Western perspective contributes attention to ESG standards, transparency, and governance, and it worries about Chinese dominance of the new hub. What it occludes is the possibility that Western frameworks prefer raw material exports to Western refineries over African industrialization—that "friend-shoring" may peripheralize Africa by sourcing cobalt in Kolwezi while refining in Texas or Finland. The Western stance is normatively attractive (rules, standards, sustainability) but structurally self-interested.

UN: The UN perspective frames the initiative within sustainable development and just transition. It emphasizes EITI compliance, environmental and social safeguards, community benefit, and intergenerational equity. Its contribution is normative guardrails: without them, the SEZ risks becoming a pollution and labor-abuse enclave. What it occludes is structural power—it treats governance as the binding constraint

rather than capital, technology, and energy gaps—and it may constrain African policy space by imposing standards that raise costs and slow implementation. The UN perspective is an ally in demanding better terms but a constraint on the speed and autonomy of industrialization.

Explicit Adjudication

The African perspective best explains the initiative's motivations and its significance: it captures the political economy of bargaining, the historical legacy of extraction, and the sovereignty logic that drives DRC and Zambia to attempt upward mobility. No other perspective takes African agency as seriously or situates the initiative within the longue durée of resource dependency. However, the African perspective underestimates the binding constraints that the Chinese, Western, and UN perspectives highlight—capital intensity, technology gaps, energy deficits, and governance capacity. The best explanation is therefore synthetic: the initiative is a genuine and politically necessary attempt at value-chain upgrading whose feasibility is determined by transnational capital and technology flows that African states do not control. The African perspective misses the extent to which the initiative's success depends on whether external powers—Chinese offtakers, Western standard-setters, multilateral financiers—permit African industrialization or prefer to retain refining dominance. The case adjudicates in favor of African agency as the driver but systemic and transnational constraints as the limit.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. **Mechanism.** Trace the causal chain from Zimbabwe's December 2022 ban on raw lithium exports to its intended outcome of domestic value capture. Identify the intermediate steps and the point at which the chain is most fragile.
2. **Level of analysis.** Is the ban primarily a state-level, systemic, or transnational phenomenon? Justify your classification and note what each level reveals and obscures.
3. **Perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct how the African resource-sovereignty, Chinese state-backed, Western supply-chain security, Russian anti-hegemonic, and UN governance perspectives would each frame the ban.
4. **Historical analogue.** Compare the ban to Indonesia's nickel export restrictions (2014/2020) and the DRC's 2018 mining code revision. What transfers, and what does not?
5. **Falsifiers.** List three to five pieces of evidence that would disprove the claim that the ban successfully upgraded Zimbabwe's position in the lithium value chain.
6. **Description, explanation, prediction, prescription.** Distinguish what the ban did, why it was adopted, what it is likely to achieve, and what policy complements would be required for success.

MODEL ANSWER

Zimbabwe's December 2022 prohibition on raw lithium exports operates through a mechanism that is simple in design but fragile in execution: by criminalizing the export of unprocessed ore, the state attempts to force downstream processing—concentrate production, then chemical conversion—onto domestic soil, thereby capturing a larger share of value added and creating industrial employment. The causal chain runs from policy lever (export prohibition) through intermediate effect (investor relocation of processing capacity) to outcome (domestic value capture). Yet each link is contingent. Processing requires reliable energy, water,

reagents, skilled labor, and capital; Zimbabwe's infrastructure deficits mean the ban alone cannot conjure a refining industry. The mechanism is therefore better understood as a bargaining instrument than as a self-sufficient industrial policy: it raises the cost of extraction for foreign firms and signals sovereign intent, but value capture depends on complementary investments that the ban does not itself generate.

At the level of analysis, the ban is primarily a state-level act with systemic and transnational reverberations. The state is the unit that legislates and enforces; but the decision is unintelligible without the systemic context of surging global lithium demand driven by electric-vehicle transitions and the transnational structure of Chinese-dominated processing. Zimbabwe's agency is real but bounded: it can withhold ore, yet it cannot independently set prices or standards in a market where refining capacity is concentrated in China. The transnational dimension appears in the immediate response—Chinese firms already operating in Zimbabwe, including Prospect Lithium Zimbabwe and Bikita Minerals, accelerated local processing plans—suggesting the ban functioned as a credible commitment device within an asymmetric bargaining relationship rather than as autarky.

Reconstructed from five perspectives, the ban looks different. From an African resource-sovereignty vantage, it is a legitimate assertion of permanent sovereignty over natural resources, correcting a colonial pattern in which raw materials leave and value returns as finished goods; the ban is read as a necessary, if blunt, corrective to extractive enclaves. From a Chinese perspective, the ban is a manageable friction in a developmental partnership: Chinese firms adapt by investing in local processing, consistent with Beijing's stated preference for industrialization in partner countries, though the risk of stranded assets and policy unpredictability is noted. From a Western supply-chain security perspective, the ban is a warning about concentration risk and the fragility of friend-shoring strategies that depend on predictable African supply; it reinforces the case for diversified sourcing and for Western investment in processing capacity outside China. From a Russian anti-hegemonic perspective, the ban exemplifies Global South resistance to Western-dominated value chains and the weaponization of resource control against unipolar economic structures, though Moscow's own interest in African minerals complicates the solidarity narrative. From a UN governance perspective, the ban raises questions about WTO consistency—export restrictions on raw materials are permitted under GATT Article XI exceptions but must not constitute arbitrary discrimination—about EITI transparency in licensing, and about whether the transition to processing will be "just," respecting labor rights, environmental standards, and community consent.

The closest historical analogue is Indonesia's 2014 and 2020 nickel export bans, which did attract significant downstream investment and transformed Indonesia into a major nickel-processing hub. What transfers is the logic of using export restrictions to force processing relocation; what does not transfer cleanly is Indonesia's larger domestic market, greater fiscal capacity, more developed infrastructure, and the specific structure of Chinese investment in Indonesian stainless steel and battery precursors. Zimbabwe's smaller scale and weaker state capacity mean the Indonesian outcome is an upper bound, not a baseline. A secondary analogue is the DRC's 2018 mining code revision, which raised royalties and introduced "strategic minerals" categories; like Zimbabwe's ban, it combined revenue extraction with sovereignty signaling, but its implementation was diluted by renegotiation and investor pushback.

Falsifiers of the claim that the ban upgraded Zimbabwe's value-chain position would include: continued export of lithium concentrate or ore through loopholes or smuggling; absence of commissioned chemical-conversion plants by 2026; declining fiscal revenue from lithium as production shifts to informal channels; increased import dependence on processed lithium products; a WTO dispute settlement ruling against the ban; or investor exit without replacement. Conversely, confirming evidence would be commissioned processing

facilities, rising export value per ton, increased formal employment in processing, and technology transfer agreements.

The ban illustrates the distinction between description (what happened: an export prohibition), explanation (why: sovereign bargaining and industrial ambition), prediction (likely partial success contingent on infrastructure and investment), and prescription (what should be done: pair bans with energy, infrastructure, skills, and transparent licensing). The lesson is that resource nationalism is a necessary but insufficient condition for value-chain upgrading; without complementary state capacity, it risks becoming a revenue-losing gesture.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Instructions only. Do not write a sample memo.

(a) Case description (150–200 words). In 2023, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia signed a memorandum of understanding to jointly develop a battery value chain, including a special economic zone for precursor manufacturing, with support from the African Development Bank and the US-backed Minerals Security Partnership. The initiative aims to move both countries from cobalt and copper extraction into cathode precursor production. Despite high-level commitments, as of 2024 no commercial-scale precursor plant is operational; feasibility studies are ongoing, and the zone lacks reliable power and transport links. Chinese firms dominate existing cobalt refining; Western partners have pledged technical assistance but limited capital. The case asks whether this initiative represents genuine upward mobility or aspirational diplomacy.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts.

- **Mechanism:** Trace the causal chain from the DRC-Zambia MoU to intended value capture. Where is the chain most fragile, and what complementary inputs are missing?
- **Perspective reconstruction:** How would African resource-sovereignty, Chinese state-backed, Western supply-chain security, Russian anti-hegemonic, and UN governance perspectives each frame this initiative?
- **Historical analogue:** Compare to a prior attempt at African value-chain upgrading (e.g., DRC's 2018 mining code, or Indonesia's nickel downstreaming). What transfers, what does not?
- **Falsifiers:** What evidence would disprove the claim that the initiative has upgraded either country's position in the battery value chain?

(c) Self-check. Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why), prediction (what is likely), and prescription (what should be done), and that no single perspective is treated as settled truth.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question. Zimbabwe's 2022 raw lithium export ban is best understood as:

A. A successful industrial policy that has already moved Zimbabwe into battery-grade lithium processing. B. A bargaining instrument whose value-capture outcome depends on complementary infrastructure and investment, with Indonesia's nickel ban as an upper-bound analogue. C. A WTO-prohibited measure with no legal basis under GATT exceptions. D. A purely symbolic gesture with no effect on investor behavior.

Distractor diagnoses.

- **A** conflates policy intent with realized outcome; it ignores the absence of commissioned chemical-conversion plants and the infrastructure deficits that constrain processing.
- **C** overstates WTO illegality; export restrictions on raw materials may be justified under GATT Article XI exceptions provided they are non-discriminatory and not arbitrary.
- **D** ignores documented evidence that Chinese firms already operating in Zimbabwe accelerated local processing plans in response to the ban.
- **B is correct** because it captures the mechanism (bargaining instrument), the contingency (complementary infrastructure and investment), and the appropriate historical comparator (Indonesia as upper bound, not baseline).

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. African Critical Mineral Endowment (approximate shares of global reserves and production, USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries, 2023–2024)

Mineral	Primary African holders	Approx. share of global reserves	Approx. share of global production	Key non-African competitor
Cobalt	DRC (Katanga/Copperbelt)	~50–55%	~70%	Indonesia (by-product nickel), Russia
Copper	DRC, Zambia	~6–8% combined	~10–12%	Chile, Peru
Lithium (hard rock/spodumene)	Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mali, DRC	~5–8% (growing)	~3–5% (growing)	Australia, Chile, China
Graphite (natural)	Mozambique, Madagascar, Tanzania	~25–30%	~15–20%	China (~65% production)
Rare earth elements (REEs)	Burundi, Madagascar, South Africa, Tanzania	~5–8%	<5%	China (~60% reserves, ~90% processing)
Platinum group metals (PGMs)	South Africa	~80% (PGM reserves)	~70%	Russia, Zimbabwe (minor)
Manganese	South Africa, Gabon	~75%+	~40%	Australia, Brazil
Nickel (laterite)	(limited African share)	<5%	<5%	Indonesia, Philippines
Tantalum/coltan	DRC, Rwanda	~60%+	~50%+	Brazil, Australia

Note: Figures are indicative ranges drawn from USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries and IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024); exact percentages vary by year and by whether "reserves" or "resources" are counted. Cobalt and PGM figures are the most stable; lithium and graphite shares are rising rapidly as new projects reach production.

Table 2. Refining and Processing Concentration (share of global refining/processing capacity, IEA 2024)

Stage / Mineral	Dominant refiner	Approx. share	African refining share	Implication
Cobalt refining	China	~75–80%	<5% (DRC has limited capacity)	DRC exports concentrate; value added abroad
Lithium chemical processing	China	~60–65%	<2% (Zimbabwe banned raw export; processing nascent)	Ban creates pressure but capacity lags
REE separation/processing	China	~85–90%	negligible	No African REE refinery at scale
Copper smelting/refining	China (~40%), Chile, Japan	~40% (China)	~5–8% (DRC, Zambia smelters)	Some African midstream capacity exists
Graphite anode processing	China	~90%+	negligible	Mozambique exports flake; China converts
Battery cell manufacturing	China, South Korea, Japan	~75%+ (China dominant)	~0%	No African gigafactory at scale
EV assembly	China, EU, US	~60%+ (China)	negligible	Downstream entirely offshore

Table 3. Illustrative Value Capture by Stage (indicative share of final EV value, industry estimates)

Stage	Activity	Approx. share of final EV value	African presence today
1. Extraction	Mining ore/concentrate	1–5%	Strong (DRC, Zambia, Zimbabwe, etc.)
2. Beneficiation	Concentration, smelting	5–15%	Partial (copper smelters in DRC/Zambia)
3. Refining	Chemical conversion to battery-grade material	15–30%	Minimal
4. Precursor/cathode	Active material production	20–35%	None at scale
5. Cell manufacturing	Battery cells	25–40%	None
6. Pack/system integration	Battery packs, BMS	10–20%	None
7. Vehicle assembly	EV manufacturing	15–30%	None
8. Services/software	Charging, software, finance	10–25%	Minimal

Interpretation: The bulk of value (stages 3–7) is captured outside Africa. The DRC-Zambia battery initiative and Zimbabwe's export ban are attempts to shift African participation from Stage 1 toward Stages 2–4.

Five Analysis Questions

1. **Trend.** Between 2015 and 2024, African lithium and graphite production shares rose while cobalt's share of global production remained dominant but its share of global *reserves* stayed flat. What does this divergence between "reserves" and "production" imply about the difference between geological endowment and investable supply? Which African countries gained most, and which lost relative position?

2. **Level of analysis.** Table 1 shows country-level reserve shares; Table 2 shows firm- and country-level refining concentration; Table 3 shows stage-level value capture. At which level of analysis does the "resource curse" argument operate most persuasively, and at which level does the "value-chain upgrading" argument operate? Explain why conflating the two levels produces analytical error.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives reads Table 2's refining concentration data: (a) African (resource sovereignty), (b) Chinese (developmental partnership), (c) Russian (anti-hegemonic), (d) Western (supply-chain security), (e) UN (resource governance/just transition). Which perspective best explains *why* refining concentrated in China rather than in Africa or the West?

4. **Interpretation.** Does the DRC-Zambia battery initiative (2023) represent a genuine attempt at upward mobility in the value chain, or a bargaining tactic to extract better terms from existing offtakers? Use Tables 2 and 3 to construct an argument for each reading, then adjudicate on the evidence available in 2024.

5. **Limitation.** What do these tables *not* capture that would be necessary to evaluate whether African resource nationalism (e.g., Zimbabwe's lithium ban) actually increases domestic value capture? Identify at least three missing variables and explain how their absence biases policy conclusions.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1: The Value-Chain Ladder with Perspective Overlays

What to draw: A vertical ladder with seven rungs, bottom to top: (1) Extraction (ore), (2) Beneficiation (concentrate), (3) Refining (battery-grade chemicals), (4) Precursor/Cathode, (5) Cell Manufacturing, (6) Pack Integration, (7) Vehicle/Device Assembly. Draw each rung as a horizontal bar whose width indicates approximate value capture (widest at top). Color-code: green for stages where Africa has meaningful presence (rungs 1–2), yellow for partial (rung 3 in copper only), red for absent (rungs 4–7).

Labels to place: On the left margin, label each rung with its stage name and approximate value-share range (from Table 3). On the right margin, annotate which countries dominate each rung (DRC/Zambia at rung 1–2; China at rungs 3–5; South Korea/Japan at rung 5; EU/US at rungs 6–7).

Perspective overlay to annotate: Draw five small icons or colored dots along the right side, one per perspective, each with a one-line claim: African (green): "Climb the ladder or stay poor"; Chinese (red): "We

built the ladder, we own the middle rungs"; Russian (orange): "Western monopoly replaced by Eastern monopoly"; Western (blue): "Friend-shore the middle rungs"; UN (purple): "Climb sustainably or not at all." Draw arrows showing where each perspective wants Africa to move.

Visual 2: Map of African Critical Mineral Endowment with Great-Power Overlays

What to draw: A simplified outline map of Africa. Place mineral icons (small circles labeled Co, Cu, Li, Gr, REE, Pt, Mn) at approximate locations: Co/Cu in DRC-Zambia Copperbelt; Li in Zimbabwe, Namibia, Mali; Gr in Mozambique, Madagascar, Tanzania; REE in Burundi, Madagascar, South Africa; Pt in South Africa (Bushveld); Mn in South Africa, Gabon. Draw three overlay layers as semi-transparent shaded regions: (a) Chinese offtake/processing dominance (shaded red, covering DRC-Zambia cobalt/copper flows to China); (b) Western friend-shoring interest (shaded blue, covering DRC cobalt and Zambia copper as MSP targets); (c) Russian presence (shaded orange, covering limited but growing interest in DRC, Zimbabwe, Mali).

Labels to place: Country names for the eight mineral-holding states; a legend distinguishing "reserve location" from "processing destination"; a small inset box showing "Refining destination: China ~75% of cobalt."

Perspective overlay to annotate: At the bottom, a five-column mini-table (one column per perspective) with a single keyword each: African = "sovereignty"; Chinese = "partnership"; Russian = "multipolarity"; Western = "security"; UN = "governance." Draw a compass rose labeled "Value flows north/east, not south."

Visual 3: The Peripheralization Risk Diagram

What to draw: A concentric-circle (target) diagram. Inner circle: "Core value capture (refining, cells, EVs)" — labeled China/EU/US. Middle ring: "Midstream (smelting, some refining)" — labeled DRC, Zambia, South Africa (partial). Outer ring: "Extraction only" — labeled most African producers. Draw arrows from outer ring to inner circle showing value flow; draw a dashed arrow labeled "DRC-Zambia battery initiative (2023)" attempting to move from outer to middle/inner. Draw a second dashed arrow labeled "Zimbabwe lithium ban (2022)" blocking the outer-to-inner flow.

Labels to place: Each ring labeled with its stage and dominant actors. Annotate the gap between rings as "the missing middle" (a concept from African industrialization literature). Add a small scale: "1 unit of ore value → 20–60 units of battery value."

Perspective overlay to annotate: Five small callout boxes around the diagram, each from one perspective, stating what the diagram shows and what it hides: African: "Shows the trap; hides our agency"; Chinese: "Shows efficiency; hides dependency"; Russian: "Shows Western hypocrisy; hides Russian absence"; Western: "Shows security risk; hides historical extraction"; UN: "Shows inequality; hides governance gaps." This visual teaches that the same diagram is read five ways.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the "value-capture problem" in African critical minerals?	Extraction yields 1–5% of final EV value; refining and manufacturing occur offshore, mainly in China. African states hold reserves but not midstream capacity. Source: IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024); Sanderson (2022).
Which African country dominates cobalt?	DRC holds ~50–55% of reserves and ~70% of production. Cobalt is a by-product of copper mining in the Katanga/Copperbelt. Source: USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries.
What is the DRC-Zambia battery initiative (2023)?	A bilateral agreement to develop a joint battery value chain (precursor materials, eventually cells) using DRC cobalt and Zambia copper, with Afreximbank and other partners. Aimed at upward mobility. Source: African Union / Afreximbank announcements (2023).
What did Zimbabwe's 2022 lithium ban do?	Banned export of raw lithium ore; required local processing. Aimed at value capture; faced capacity constraints and WTO-compliance questions. Source: Government of Zimbabwe (2022); trade press.
What is "peripheralization" in this context?	The risk that Western supply-chain security policies (IRA, MSP, CRMA) secure mineral access for Western industry without transferring refining/manufacturing capacity to Africa, leaving Africa as extraction periphery. Source: Kalantzakos (2020); Sanderson (2022).
What are IRA, MSP, CRMA?	US Inflation Reduction Act (2022) EV tax credits requiring non-Chinese sourcing; Minerals Security Partnership (MSP, 2022) for allied supply chains; EU Critical Raw Materials Act (2023) setting domestic extraction/processing targets. Source: US/EU legislation.
What is Chinese state-backed offtake?	Long-term purchase agreements and equity stakes (e.g., CMOC in DRC cobalt) securing raw material flows to Chinese refineries; framed as developmental partnership. Source: Sanderson (2022); IEA (2024).
What is resource nationalism?	State assertion of sovereign control over minerals via export bans, local-content rules, state equity, or renegotiated contracts. African examples: Zimbabwe lithium ban, DRC mining code revisions, Zambia's copper renegotiations. Source: Africa Progress Panel reports.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is EITI?	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative — voluntary standard for revenue transparency; UN/World Bank-backed. Relevance: governance of mineral rents. Source: EITI (2023).
What is "the missing middle"?	The absence of midstream processing capacity (smelting, refining, precursor production) in African economies, which traps them in raw extraction. Source: African industrialization literature; Africa Progress Panel.
How does the UN frame just transition?	Critical minerals for green energy must not reproduce extractive harm; requires community consent, environmental safeguards, benefit-sharing. Source: UN (2023) and IEA (2024) just-transition language.
What is the strongest counterargument to resource nationalism?	Without processing capacity, export bans may reduce revenue, deter investment, and fail to create jobs; WTO compliance risk. Source: trade economists; Zimbabwe case (2022–2024).

Summary (3–5 sentences): Africa holds a disproportionate share of global critical mineral reserves but captures only 1–5% of final value because refining, cell manufacturing, and assembly occur offshore, predominantly in China. Western supply-chain security policies (IRA, MSP, CRMA) risk peripheralizing Africa as a raw-material supplier, while Chinese state-backed offtake secures flows eastward. African states have responded with resource nationalism (Zimbabwe's lithium ban) and value-chain initiatives (DRC-Zambia battery project), but both face the "missing middle" problem of absent processing capacity. The five perspectives disagree on whether the core problem is sovereignty, efficiency, multipolarity, security, or governance — and each reading is partially supported by the data.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Africa has most of the rocks the world needs for electric cars and phones, but almost none of the factories that turn those rocks into batteries. So Africa sells cheap rocks and buys expensive batteries. China does most of the turning-rocks-into-batteries work. America and Europe now want their own secure rock supplies, which could leave Africa still just selling rocks. Some African governments are trying to force companies to process rocks at home (Zimbabwe's lithium ban) or build joint factories (DRC and Zambia's battery plan), but they lack the machines, skills, and money to do the processing yet.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure whether the DRC-Zambia battery initiative has secured actual offtake contracts or is still a memorandum of understanding; I cannot state its financing status with confidence. I am also unsure of the exact WTO ruling status on Zimbabwe's ban. I conflated "reserves" and "resources" in Table 1 without flagging the distinction. I did not quantify the employment effects of

refining versus extraction.

3. **Reread verification.** Re-checking: IEA (2024) confirms China's ~75% cobalt refining share; USGS confirms DRC ~70% cobalt production. Sanderson (2022) documents Chinese state-backed offtake in DRC. Kalantzakos (2020) frames the peripheralization risk. The DRC-Zambia initiative was announced in 2023 with Afreximbank involvement; its implementation status remains uncertain. Zimbabwe's ban was enacted December 2022. These checks confirm the core claims; the gaps in Step 2 remain genuine uncertainties, not errors.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** *Analogy:* Africa is like a farmer who owns the best soil but sells raw wheat to a miller who bakes the bread and sells it back at ten times the price; the farmer's government now bans raw wheat exports to force a local mill, but the farmer has no mill. *Limits:* The analogy implies passivity and ignores African agency (states are actively bargaining, not just victims); it treats minerals as renewable like wheat when they are finite and geographically fixed; it understates the capital intensity and technology requirements of refining versus milling; and it obscures the geopolitical competition among buyers that gives African states leverage.

5. **Rewrite.** Africa's critical mineral endowment is a source of structural leverage that is currently underutilized: states hold ~50–70% of global cobalt and large shares of copper, lithium, graphite, and PGMs, but capture only 1–5% of final value because refining and manufacturing are concentrated in China. Western supply-chain security policies risk locking in this asymmetry by securing raw access without transferring capacity. African responses — resource nationalism (Zimbabwe) and value-chain initiatives (DRC-Zambia) — are rational but constrained by the "missing middle" of processing capacity. The five perspectives disagree on whether the remedy is sovereignty, partnership, multipolarity, security, or governance; the evidence supports a synthesis in which African bargaining power is real but bounded by capital and technology gaps that no single perspective fully addresses.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L33	Definition	What is the "value-capture problem" in critical minerals?	It is the gap between where minerals are extracted and where value is added through refining, processing, and manufacturing; African states often export raw ore while capturing only a small share of total value.	African perspective centers on structural inequality in global value chains.
L33	Mechanism	How does the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) affect African mineral producers?	The IRA's clean-vehicle credit requires critical minerals to be extracted or processed in the US or FTA countries, which can exclude or marginalize non-FTA African suppliers unless they restructure supply chains.	Western perspective frames this as supply-chain security; African perspective sees peripheralization risk.
L33	Application	What is the DRC-Zambia battery value chain initiative (2023)?	A bilateral effort to move from exporting cobalt and copper ore toward local refining and battery precursor production, aiming at upward mobility in the EV supply chain.	African perspective treats it as resource sovereignty and bargaining; Western/Chinese perspectives assess feasibility and offtake.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L33	Comparison	How does Zimbabwe's 2022 raw lithium export ban differ from the DRC-Zambia initiative?	Zimbabwe used a unilateral export restriction to force domestic processing, while DRC-Zambia pursued a cooperative, investment-led industrialization strategy; both are resource nationalism but with different compliance and capacity risks.	African perspective highlights divergent state strategies; Western perspective worries about WTO compliance.
L33	Source	What does the IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024) emphasize?	It stresses that demand for lithium, cobalt, nickel, and copper will surge with clean-energy transitions, and that supply concentration and ESG risks require diversified, resilient supply chains.	UN/Western perspectives use it to justify governance and security frameworks.
L33	Debate	What is "peripheralization" in techno-geopolitics?	It is the risk that Africa remains a raw-material supplier while refining and manufacturing occur elsewhere, locking in low-value extraction despite high global demand.	African perspective frames it as neocolonial value-chain lock-in; Western perspective often treats it as market efficiency.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L33	Reconstruction	How does the Chinese perspective frame state-backed offtake in Africa?	Chinese firms and state banks secure long-term mineral supply through infrastructure-for-resources deals and processing investments, framed as developmental partnership and mutual benefit.	Chinese perspective emphasizes South-South cooperation; African critics raise debt and opacity concerns.
L33	Occlusion	What does the Russian perspective typically occlude in mineral debates?	It often foregrounds anti-hegemonic solidarity and resource sovereignty while downplaying governance deficits, conflict financing, and environmental costs in extractive zones.	Russian perspective amplifies sovereignty rhetoric; African scholars note selective solidarity.
L33	Adjudication	How should one adjudicate between "friend-shoring" and "resource sovereignty" claims?	Friend-shoring prioritizes allied supply security and may exclude African states; resource sovereignty prioritizes domestic processing and bargaining power; evidence on investment flows, FTA status, and local capacity should decide case by case.	Western and African perspectives clash; adjudication requires metric-specific evidence.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L33	Visual	What does a value-chain stage diagram show for cobalt?	It maps extraction in DRC, refining largely in China, and battery manufacturing in Asia/Europe, revealing where value and emissions concentrate.	African perspective uses it to argue for midstream capture; Western perspective uses it for security planning.
L33	Mechanism	What is the role of EITI in critical minerals governance?	The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative promotes disclosure of payments and contracts to reduce corruption and improve accountability in mineral sectors.	UN perspective treats EITI as governance baseline; African activists note enforcement gaps.
L33	Application	Why is graphite strategically significant?	Graphite is essential for battery anodes; Africa (especially Mozambique and Madagascar) holds large reserves, but processing capacity is limited, creating offtake and value-capture tensions.	African perspective stresses reserve endowment vs. processing deficit.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L33	Debate	What is the "just transition" concern in African mining?	It refers to ensuring that the shift to green technologies does not reproduce extractive harm, labor abuse, or environmental degradation in mining communities.	UN/African perspectives converge on equity; Western security framing often sidelines it.
L33	Source	What do USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries provide?	They provide annual data on reserves, production, and trade for minerals including cobalt, copper, lithium, and REEs, enabling cross-country comparison.	All perspectives use USGS data, but interpret concentration and dependency differently.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit (score 0–100)

Competency	Score (0–100)	Evidence of mastery
Define value-capture stages in mineral supply chains		
Explain IRA/MSP/CRMA mechanisms and African implications		
Reconstruct Chinese state-backed offtake logic		
Analyze DRC-Zambia battery initiative		
Evaluate Zimbabwe lithium export ban		
Compare five perspectives on techno-geopolitics		
Identify falsifiers for resource nationalism claims		

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which perspective did you find hardest to steel-man, and what evidence would change your view?
2. Did you conflate description (what is happening) with prescription (what should happen) in your memo?
3. Which mechanism—value capture, friend-shoring, or resource nationalism—best explains a case you know, and what would falsify it?

7.3 Error-log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Africa lacks critical minerals; it only has cobalt."	Africa holds major reserves of copper, lithium, graphite, manganese, and REEs across multiple countries.	USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries; IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024)
"Export bans automatically create domestic industry."	Bans can raise prices and attract smuggling or retaliation without processing capacity, skills, or energy.	Zimbabwe lithium ban debates; WTO compliance concerns
"Chinese investment is purely exploitative."	Chinese offtake includes infrastructure and processing investments; outcomes vary by contract transparency and local capacity.	Sanderson (2022); Kalantzakos (2020)
"Western friend-shoring includes Africa by default."	FTA and allied-country criteria can exclude African suppliers unless explicitly negotiated.	IRA clean-vehicle credit rules; MSP/CRMA frameworks
"EITI membership guarantees clean governance."	EITI improves disclosure but enforcement and political will vary; it is a floor, not a ceiling.	Africa Progress Panel reports

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Value capture; peripheralization; resource sovereignty; techno-geopolitics; just transition	Extraction→refining→manufacturing value gaps; offtake agreements; export bans; FTA gating; infrastructure-for-resources	Sanderson (2022); Kalantzakos (2020); IEA (2024); Africa Progress Panel; USGS summaries	DRC–Zambia battery initiative (2023); Zimbabwe lithium ban (2022); DRC cobalt; Mozambique graphite	Friend-shoring vs. resource sovereignty; EITI effectiveness; Chinese developmental partnership claims	No local processing growth after ban; FTA inclusion of African states; transparent contract outcomes	L19 energy/minerals; L29 conflict political economy; L31 great power competition; L34 Sahel; L52-53 semiconductors/minerals; L56 innovation decoupling

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 20 min):** Re-read Key Ideas 1–2; redraw the value-chain stage diagram from memory; check against Section 3 visual.
- **R2 (Day 3, 30 min):** Reconstruct all five perspectives on the DRC-Zambia initiative in one paragraph each; compare with Section 2.7.
- **R3 (Day 7, 45 min):** Complete the Problem Pair (Zimbabwe ban) without notes; then check model answer; log errors in Section 7.3.
- **R4 (Day 14, 60 min):** Write a 500-word memo on a new mineral case using the four required headings; self-check description vs. explanation vs. prediction vs. prescription.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 min):** Full timed practice: answer the hinge question, two flashcard rounds, and one Feynman compression rewrite; update confidence audit.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can name Africa's major critical minerals and their global supply-chain positions.
☐ I can explain the value-capture problem across extraction, refining, and manufacturing.
☐ I can describe IRA, MSP, and CRMA mechanisms and their African implications.
☐ I can reconstruct Chinese state-backed offtake logic from within.
☐ I can analyze the DRC-Zambia battery initiative as upward mobility.
☐ I can evaluate Zimbabwe's lithium export ban and its WTO risks.
☐ I can define resource nationalism and its scope conditions.
☐ I can distinguish friend-shoring from resource sovereignty.
☐ I can explain EITI and its limitations.
☐ I can articulate the just-transition concern in mining.
☐ I can steel-man all five perspectives on techno-geopolitics.
☐ I can identify what each perspective occludes.
☐ I can apply four levels of analysis to a mineral case.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I can identify falsifiers for key claims.
☐ I can use USGS and IEA data to support an argument.
☐ I can connect this lesson to L19, L29, L31, L34, L52-53, L56.
☐ I have updated my error log and confidence audit.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Supply chains and value capture - Sanderson, Henry. *Cobalt Red* (2022) — cobalt extraction and value chains. - Kalantzakos, Sophia. *China and the Geopolitics of Rare Earths* (2020) — Chinese mineral strategy.

Data and outlooks - IEA. *Critical Minerals Outlook* (2024) — demand, supply, and policy scenarios. - USGS. *Mineral Commodity Summaries* (annual) — reserves and production data.

Governance and development - Africa Progress Panel reports — resource governance and transparency. - EITI. *EITI Standard and country reports* — disclosure frameworks.

Perspective and theory - Grovogui, Siba N. *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) — sovereignty and international hierarchy. - Mamdani, Mahmood. *Citizen and Subject* (1996) — state and resource politics. - Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) — structural value

extraction.

Techno-geopolitics and decoupling - Related lessons L52–53 (semiconductors, minerals) and L56 (innovation decoupling) for cross-module links.

End of Lesson 33. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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35. Sahel Synthesis: Insurgency, External Intervention, and Civilian Harm

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 34 — Sahel Synthesis: Insurgency, External Intervention, and Civilian Harm
Module	Module 5: African Geopolitical Architecture
Prerequisites	L23 (asymmetric warfare), L29 (conflict political economy), L30 (regional security complexes), L31 (great power competition)
Interleaved links	Forward to L35–L40 (Ukraine/Eastern Europe), L43–L44 (proxy warfare), L54 (AI and warfare)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data (ACLED/UNHCR), visual (maps/timelines), case reconstruction
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Synthesize
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple and profoundly destabilizing for the study of international security: between 2013 and 2023, France, the United States, the United Nations, and a constellation of regional partners deployed tens of thousands of troops, billions of dollars, and an elaborate architecture of counter-terrorism cooperation across the Sahel, and yet by 2023 the region contained more jihadist-controlled territory, more displaced civilians, more coups, and more Russian military presence than at any point since independence. The question is not merely why intervention failed, but what kind of political order the intervention itself produced, and whether the failure was contingent on bad strategy or structural to the form of external security provision in a postcolonial space. This lesson treats the Sahel not as a case of African state failure to which external actors responded, but as a hybrid-governance laboratory in which states, jihadists, militias, private military companies, and civilians continuously renegotiate authority, and in which external intervention is itself a variable that reshapes the laboratory rather than a neutral corrective applied to it.

The theoretical stakes are considerable. Conventional security studies frames the Sahel through the lens of state capacity: weak states cannot control territory, insurgents exploit the vacuum, and external assistance fills the gap. African scholarship has long contested this framing. Bayart's analysis of the politics of the

belly, Mbembe's work on necropolitics and the postcolony, Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject, and Grovogui's critique of sovereignty as a Eurocentric legal construct all suggest that the Sahelian state was never simply weak; it was historically constituted through selective, extractive, and often violent relationships with its peripheries. From this vantage point, the arrival of French, American, and UN forces did not restore a pre-existing legitimate order; it inserted new external patrons into an already layered field of authority, empowering some actors (central governments, certain militias) and disempowering others (local communities, rival factions), with effects that outlasted the interventions themselves. The lesson therefore asks students to hold two explanations in tension: the Western account of insufficient resources and flawed tactics, and the African account of structural mismatch between external security templates and local political realities.

Placed in the curriculum, this lesson is the capstone of Module 5, African Geopolitical Architecture, and it synthesizes four prerequisite threads. From Lesson 23 on asymmetric warfare, it takes the tactical repertoire of jihadist groups—mobility, embedding in civilian populations, exploitation of state absence—and asks how that repertoire interacts with external force structures designed for conventional or counter-insurgency warfare. From Lesson 29 on conflict political economy, it takes the financing of armed groups through smuggling, artisanal mining, and protection rackets, and asks how intervention altered or failed to alter those economies. From Lesson 30 on regional security complexes, it takes the architecture of ECOWAS, the G5 Sahel, and the African Union's peace and security framework, and asks why regional mechanisms fragmented precisely when they were most needed. From Lesson 31 on great power competition, it takes the re-entry of Russia through Wagner and its successor Africa Corps, the continued Chinese security partnerships, and the Western retreat, and asks how the Sahel became a theater of multipolar contestation. Forward links to Lessons 35–40 on Ukraine and Eastern Europe, Lessons 43–44 on proxy warfare, and Lesson 54 on AI and warfare are not decorative: the Sahel is where several of those later themes—private military companies, drone warfare, information operations, and the erosion of the monopoly on legitimate force—were field-tested before appearing in European or technological registers.

By the end of this lesson, a student should be able to do five things that are not reducible to memorization. First, reconstruct the hybrid-governance landscape of the Sahel as a system of overlapping authorities rather than a state vacuum, using African scholarly frameworks rather than importing Western state-failure templates. Second, trace the intervention trajectories of France, the United States, the United Nations, and Russia from 2013 to 2025, identifying the specific mechanisms through which each altered local power balances and the specific points at which each produced unintended consequences. Third, read ACLED data on civilian targeting by perpetrator—state forces, Russian private military companies, jihadist groups—and interpret what the data can and cannot establish about causation, underreporting, and definitional bias. Fourth, analyze the collapse of the G5 Sahel and the ECOWAS crisis of 2023–2024 as institutional failures with both regional and great-power dimensions. Fifth, and most demanding, adjudicate the counterfactual question of whether any intervention could have worked, specifying the conditions under which external security provision might be compatible with local legitimacy, and identifying the falsifiers that would refute one's own conclusion. The lesson's assessment architecture—the worked example on the 2023 Niger coup, the problem pair on Mali 2012–2025, the independent memo, and the hinge question—is designed to test these capacities rather than recall.

The five perspectives that structure the lesson are not presented as neutral viewpoints to be balanced; they are epistemic positions that each reveal and occlude. The African perspective, treated as primary throughout, centers sovereignty, the agency of juntas and communities, and the cumulative failure of external intervention to produce durable security. It asks questions the others do not: who authorized the intervention,

whose security was being protected, and what forms of political life were foreclosed by the security template imposed. The Chinese perspective emphasizes non-interference combined with security partnerships and economic engagement, offering a model that avoids the legitimacy costs of Western intervention while raising its own questions about accountability and opacity. The Russian perspective frames its presence as sovereign choice by host governments and anti-Western solidarity, leveraging anti-colonial rhetoric while deploying private military companies whose conduct has been documented in civilian harm data. The Western perspective combines intervention failure, institutional self-critique, and a contested lessons debate that oscillates between "we did too little" and "we did the wrong things." The United Nations perspective centers MINUSMA's protection-of-civilians mandate, humanitarian access, and the institutional lessons of a mission that was asked to do more than its mandate and resources permitted. Each perspective is steel-manned from within; none is treated as the transparent truth, and the lesson's analytical payoff comes from the friction between them.

A methodological caution runs through the entire lesson and should be internalized before any data is read. Description, explanation, prediction, and prescription are distinct operations, and conflating them is the most common error in security analysis. Describing that civilian fatalities rose after 2019 is not explaining why; explaining that state forces and Russian contractors contributed to that rise is not predicting that their withdrawal would reduce it; predicting that a different force posture would help is not prescribing that it should be attempted. The lesson repeatedly asks students to mark which operation they are performing and to identify the evidentiary threshold that would be required to move from one to the next. This discipline matters because the Sahel has generated an enormous volume of policy prescription built on thin causal identification, and the student who masters this lesson should be able to distinguish a well-supported mechanism from a compelling narrative. The ACLED data, the UNHCR displacement figures, and the troop deployment timelines are tools for disciplined inference, not ammunition for predetermined conclusions.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. (From L23, asymmetric warfare) Define asymmetric warfare and explain why a conventionally weaker actor might prefer protracted, low-intensity violence over decisive engagement. Give one Sahelian example of how jihadist groups have exploited this logic against state and external forces.
2. (From L29, conflict political economy) How does the "greed versus grievance" debate frame rebel financing, and what are the principal economic activities—licit and illicit—that have sustained armed groups in the Sahel since 2012?
3. (From L30, regional security complexes) What is a regional security complex, and how did the G5 Sahel joint force and ECOWAS mechanisms embody both the promise and the fragility of regional security cooperation in West Africa?
4. (From L31, great power competition) In what ways has great power competition in Africa moved beyond military bases to include private military companies, information operations, and security partnerships, and how does the Sahel illustrate this shift?
5. (From L23) What is the "ink spot" or oil-spot counter-insurgency strategy, and what are its principal limitations when applied to populations that do not trust the state providing security?
6. (From L29) Distinguish between the onset and the duration of civil conflict: which economic and political variables are more predictive of how long a conflict lasts than of whether it begins?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Why did civilian harm in the central Sahel rise to record levels during and after the period of peak external intervention, and what does this imply about the relationship between counter-terrorism operations and protection of civilians?
2. How did the G5 Sahel collapse and the 2023–2024 ECOWAS crisis reconfigure regional security architecture, and what replaced the cooperative frameworks that had existed since 2017?
3. What do ACLED data show about the distribution of civilian targeting among state forces, Russian private military companies, and jihadist groups, and what are the principal methodological cautions in reading those data?
4. Could any external intervention have worked in the Sahel, and if so, under what conditions of mandate, force posture, political strategy, and local legitimacy? What evidence would falsify your answer?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Hybrid governance**: A political order in which authority is exercised by multiple, overlapping actors—states, insurgents, militias, traditional authorities, and external forces—none of which holds a monopoly on legitimate violence; the Sahel is treated in this lesson as a laboratory of such orders rather than a case of state absence.
- **Private military company (PMC)**: A commercial entity providing armed security, training, or combat support to states or other clients; in the Sahel, Wagner and its successor Africa Corps became the principal Russian instrument after 2021.
- **Africa Corps**: The Russian state-affiliated successor structure to Wagner's African operations, deployed in Mali and elsewhere following the 2023 mutiny and reorganization of Russian private military capacity.
- **MINUSMA**: The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, deployed from 2013 to 2023, with a mandate spanning security, political support, and protection of civilians.
- **G5 Sahel**: A regional framework established in 2014 by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, including a joint force intended to coordinate counter-terrorism operations across borders.
- **ECOWAS**: The Economic Community of West African States, a regional organization whose security and political mechanisms were severely tested by the 2020–2023 wave of coups.
- **ACLED**: The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, a disaggregated dataset recording political violence and protest events, including civilian targeting, used in this lesson as the primary quantitative source on perpetrator patterns.
- **Civilian targeting**: Acts of violence in which civilians are the deliberate object of attack, as distinct from collateral harm; ACLED codes this as a specific event category, and its measurement carries definitional and underreporting caveats.
- **Coup belt**: A journalistic and analytical term for the contiguous band of states from Guinea through Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger that experienced military takeovers between 2020 and 2023.
- **Sovereignty**: In this lesson, treated not as a fixed legal attribute but as a contested practice; African scholarship emphasizes how sovereignty claims by juntas, communities, and external actors compete and overlap.
- **Necropolitics**: Achille Mbembe's concept describing the subjugation of life to the power of death, used here to analyze how counter-terrorism and militia violence in the Sahel distribute vulnerability and mortality.
- **Protection of civilians (PoC)**: A normative and operational framework, central to UN peacekeep-

ing, requiring active measures to prevent and respond to violence against civilians; its application in MINUSMA is a key case in the lesson.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the Sahel as a hybrid-governance laboratory in which state institutions, jihadist movements, ethnic and community militias, private military companies, and civilian populations co-produce authority, taxation, and violence, rather than treating the region as a simple absence of statehood. This objective requires you to move beyond the "failed state" frame and to identify the specific institutional arrangements through which non-state actors exercise governmental functions.
2. **Evaluate** the trajectories of external military intervention—French Operation Serval/Barkhane, the United States' train-and-equip and drone programs, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and Russian Wagner Group/Africa Corps deployments—by weighing their stated objectives against documented outcomes in civilian protection, territorial control, and political legitimacy, using ACLED event data and Crisis Group reporting as evidentiary anchors.
3. **Interpret** ACLED civilian-targeting data disaggregated by perpetrator category (state forces, Russian PMCs, jihadist groups, militias) to distinguish patterns of violence, identify temporal shifts following intervention transitions, and assess claims about which actors pose the greatest threat to civilians in specific periods and locations.
4. **Synthesize** the collapse of the G5 Sahel joint force and the ECOWAS crisis of 2023–2024 into a coherent account of regional security architecture failure, connecting institutional design flaws, sovereignty disputes, and the political economy of coups to the broader fragmentation of West African collective security.
5. **Judge** whether any external intervention in the Sahel could have succeeded under alternative conditions, and specify the necessary (not merely sufficient) conditions—political, institutional, economic, and normative—that would have been required, drawing on comparative cases and the African scholarly tradition's critique of externally imposed security templates.

These objectives are assessed through the worked example, problem pair, independent memo, and hinge question that follow.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The Sahel as Hybrid-Governance Laboratory

Bolded Causal Claim: The Sahel is not a vacuum of authority produced by state failure; it is a hybrid-governance laboratory in which states, jihadist movements, militias, private military companies, and civilians co-produce sovereignty, taxation, and violence, and in which the boundary between "state" and "non-state" authority is analytically misleading.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through four interlocking processes. First, *selective state presence*:

post-colonial Sahelian states never achieved uniform territorial penetration; as Bayart (2009) argues, African states have historically governed through extraversion and brokerage rather than Weberian monopoly, and the Sahel represents an extreme case where the state's presence is concentrated in capitals and garrison towns while rural peripheries are governed through indirect rule, customary authorities, and negotiated neglect. Second, *jihadist proto-state formation*: groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS, now Islamic State Sahel Province) do not merely destroy state authority but replace it with alternative governance—zakat collection, qadi courts, dispute resolution, and protection rackets—filling the vacuum left by absent or predatory state services. Mamdani's (1996) analysis of decentralized despotism is instructive here: colonial indirect rule created "native authorities" that were accountable upward to the colonial state rather than downward to populations, and post-colonial Sahelian states inherited this architecture, producing local authorities who extract without protecting. Third, *militia mobilization*: community self-defense groups (Dozo hunters in central Mali, Dan Na Ambassagou among Dogon communities, GATIA among Tuareg) emerge where the state cannot protect and where jihadist incursion threatens communal survival; these militias become autonomous power centers with their own taxation and justice systems, often committing atrocities against rival communities. Fourth, *PMC subcontracting*: the state's monopoly on legitimate violence is further fragmented when governments hire private military companies—Wagner Group, later rebranded Africa Corps—to conduct counterinsurgency, creating a parallel chain of command accountable to the executive rather than to parliament or military hierarchy, and generating documented civilian harm that is difficult to attribute or sanction.

The interaction of these four processes produces *hybrid governance*: no single actor holds a monopoly; instead, authority is layered, contested, and transactional. Civilians are not passive victims but strategic actors who navigate among providers—paying zakat to jihadists for protection, taxes to the state for identity documents, fees to militias for safe passage—what Mbembe (2003) theorizes as the "becoming-necropolitical" of African sovereignty, where the power to dictate who may live and who must die is distributed across multiple agents. Grovogui (2006) sharpens this: sovereignty in the Sahel is not a legal status but a *practice* performed through violence, negotiation, and recognition, and the international community's insistence on recognizing only the state as sovereign systematically misreads the political field.

Scope Conditions: This model applies where (a) state territorial penetration is low and uneven; (b) jihadist groups possess both military capacity and governance ambition; (c) ethnic or communal boundaries are politically salient and militarized; (d) external actors subcontract coercion to non-state forces; and (e) civilian populations have experience navigating multiple authorities. It is less applicable where the state has maintained robust rural administration (e.g., parts of Senegal) or where jihadist groups lack governance capacity (e.g., purely predatory banditry in northwest Nigeria, though the boundary is porous). The model also assumes that violence is instrumental to governance rather than purely expressive; where violence is primarily criminal or resource-extractive, the hybrid-governance frame must be supplemented with political-economy analysis (see Lesson 29).

Observable Implications: If the Sahel is a hybrid-governance laboratory, we should observe: (1) multiple taxation and justice systems operating in the same territory; (2) ACLED data showing significant civilian targeting by state forces, militias, and PMCs—not only jihadists; (3) fluid alliances among actors (militias collaborating with jihadists against state forces, or with state forces against rival militias); (4) civilian strategies of hedging, flight, and selective compliance; and (5) international interventions that target "terrorists" while ignoring the governance vacuum that sustains them, thereby failing to alter the underlying political economy. The ACLED Sahel reports (2023–2025) document precisely this: civilian fatalities attributed to state forces and Russian PMCs rose sharply after 2021, even as jihadist violence continued, indicating that

the intervention transition did not reduce overall civilian harm but redistributed it among perpetrators.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African scholarly tradition treats the Sahel not as a security problem to be solved by external force but as a political crisis rooted in colonial state formation and post-colonial extraversion. Grovogui (2006) and Mbembe (2003) insist that sovereignty must be understood as practice rather than legal fiction; Bayart (2009) and Mamdani (1996) trace the hybridity of authority to colonial indirect rule and its post-colonial inheritance. African security scholars such as Aning emphasize that external interventions which ignore this genealogy reproduce the very conditions they claim to address. The African vantage point reveals what Western security frameworks occlude: that jihadist groups are not simply "terrorists" but political actors offering governance alternatives in spaces where the state has failed, and that civilian harm by state forces is not an aberration but a structural feature of externally supported counterinsurgency. The agency of juntas—however problematic—is read not as irrational authoritarianism but as a rejection of a security architecture that subordinated African sovereignty to French operational command.

Chinese: China's perspective, rooted in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the principle of non-interference, treats the Sahel's hybrid governance as an internal matter to be addressed through state-to-state capacity building rather than external military intervention. Beijing's security partnerships—police training, equipment transfers, intelligence sharing—operate through bilateral channels that do not challenge host-state sovereignty, and Chinese analysts tend to frame jihadist violence as a development and governance problem rather than a military one. This perspective contributes an emphasis on infrastructure and economic integration as stabilizing forces, but it occludes the question of accountability for civilian harm and tends to treat host governments as the sole legitimate interlocutors, ignoring the hybrid reality on the ground.

Russian: Russia's framing, amplified through Wagner/Africa Corps operations, presents the Sahel's hybrid governance as evidence of Western failure and African sovereignty denied. Moscow's narrative emphasizes "sovereign choice"—the right of Sahelian juntas to select security partners without Western conditionality—and casts Russian PMCs as instruments of state restoration rather than external intervention. This perspective contributes a critique of Western conditionality and a recognition that African governments seek alternatives to French operational dominance, but it occludes the documented civilian harm attributed to Russian PMCs by ACLED and the UN, and it conflates anti-Western rhetoric with genuine sovereignty, since PMC dependence creates a new form of external subordination.

Western: The Western perspective, dominant in French and US policy circles, has historically framed the Sahel through a counterterrorism lens: jihadist groups are threats to international security, state weakness is an enabling condition, and external military force is the necessary response. This perspective contributed substantial resources, intelligence, and training, and generated important data through ACLED and MINUSMA reporting. However, it occludes the political and governance dimensions of the conflict, treats civilian harm by partner forces as collateral rather than structural, and has been slow to acknowledge that military-first strategies may have accelerated state collapse by delegitimizing governments that depended on foreign force for survival.

UN: The UN perspective, articulated through MINUSMA and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, frames the Sahel through protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and human rights monitoring. It contributes systematic documentation of violations by all parties, a normative framework for accountability, and a recognition that military solutions alone are insufficient. However, it occludes the political economy of intervention and the structural constraints on UN peacekeeping in active counterin-

surgency environments; MINUSMA's mandate was progressively narrowed by host-government resistance, and its withdrawal from Mali in 2023 illustrated the limits of consent-based peacekeeping when the host state prefers alternative security partners.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — External Intervention Trajectories: France, US, UN, Russia (Wagner/Africa Corps), and the Consequences

Bolded Causal Claim: External military intervention in the Sahel did not fail merely because of insufficient force or poor tactics; it failed because each intervenor substituted its own security logic for the political bargains that would have made force legitimate, thereby accelerating state fragmentation, normalizing coup politics, and expanding the space in which jihadists, militias, and private military companies could compete for coercive authority.

Mechanism: The mechanism is a sequence of security substitutions rather than cumulative state-building. France's Operation Serval in 2013 reversed the jihadist advance in northern Mali and prevented the collapse of the Malian state, but its successor, Operation Barkhane, transformed a short-term stabilization mission into a regional counterterrorism campaign that embedded French forces across the Sahel. That embedding changed the political meaning of French presence: what began as emergency assistance became, in the eyes of many Sahelian publics and elites, a standing foreign military architecture. The United States, operating through AFRICOM and special-operations partnerships, emphasized partner capacity-building, intelligence, and drone-enabled targeting; bases and logistical arrangements in Niger and elsewhere turned host states into platforms for U.S. operations, tying sovereign control over territory to external access. The United Nations, through MINUSMA from 2013 to 2023, provided stabilization, protection-of-civilians functions, and political support, but its consent-based mandate narrowed as host governments changed and as the security environment deteriorated. Russia, entering through Wagner and later reorganized as Africa Corps, offered a different package: regime security, direct combat support, and an anti-Western narrative, with fewer public conditionality requirements and less emphasis on governance reform. Each intervention altered local incentives by creating security rents for elites, security forces, and intermediaries. When those rents shifted—whether through French withdrawal, U.S. retrenchment, UN exit, or Russian entry—domestic actors recalculated their alliances, and coups became a mechanism for renegotiating external patronage. The consequence was not simply the failure to defeat jihadist groups; it was the internationalization of local authority crises, in which external patrons became stakes in domestic power struggles and civilian populations bore the costs of competitive coercion.

Scope Conditions: This claim applies most strongly where the host state has limited territorial control, a fragmented security sector, elites capable of shopping among external patrons, and regional organizations with weak enforcement capacity. It also applies where external actors prioritize counterterrorism or regime survival over political settlement, accountability, and inclusive governance. It does not imply that all external intervention is futile; interventions can be stabilizing where the host state has a coherent reform agenda, local legitimacy, and external support is clearly subordinate to a domestically owned political process. The Sahel's condition of hybrid governance—where state institutions, jihadist movements, ethnic and community militias, private military companies, and civilians overlap in the same spaces—meant that external force could not be politically neutral. In such settings, even technically successful operations can deepen dependency and resentment if they are not embedded in a credible bargain over authority, resources, and accountability.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is correct, one should observe not only the persistence or

expansion of jihadist violence but also a pattern of external substitution and domestic rupture: French withdrawal from Mali in 2022, from Burkina Faso in 2023, and from Niger in 2023; the end of MINUSMA's presence in Mali in 2023; U.S. withdrawal from Niger in 2024; the expansion of Russian-linked forces in Mali and the rebranding of Wagner as Africa Corps; coups in Mali in 2020 and 2021, Burkina Faso in 2022, and Niger in 2023; the weakening or collapse of the G5 Sahel; and ECOWAS crises over sanctions, suspension, and the formation of alternative regional alignments. One should also observe rising civilian harm associated with state forces and their auxiliaries, because external withdrawal and PMC entry often reduce external oversight while increasing the autonomy of coercive actors. Crisis Group and International Peace Institute analyses of the Sahel emphasize that military solutions repeatedly outran political strategies, while UN reporting on MINUSMA highlights the narrowing of consent and the difficulty of protecting civilians in an active counterinsurgency environment.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African:* The African perspective, reconstructed from within and drawing on scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, and Oyěwùmí, treats external intervention not as a neutral technical project but as a continuation of postcolonial asymmetry. From this vantage point, French, U.S., UN, and Russian interventions are different modalities of external power insertion into African political space; even when requested by governments, they reproduce dependency and constrain sovereign self-determination. The agency of juntas is therefore double-edged: their expulsion of French troops can express popular frustration with neocolonial military presence, yet coups also concentrate power, suppress dissent, and substitute one external patron for another. African scholarship emphasizes that security cannot be separated from the political economy of extraction, elite capture, and the historical weakening of state-society bargains. What the African perspective reveals that others often miss is that intervention failure is not only a strategic error by outsiders; it is also a symptom of unresolved postcolonial sovereignty, in which external actors and domestic elites jointly manage insecurity while civilians absorb its costs. *Chinese:* China's perspective emphasizes non-interference, sovereignty, and security partnership without political conditionality. It contributes an alternative to Western interventionism by framing external military presence as a violation of sovereign equality and by offering training, equipment, and infrastructure without demanding governance reform. It occludes, however, the accountability problems of partner states and the possibility that non-interference can shield abusive security practices from scrutiny. *Russian:* Russia frames its engagement as a sovereign choice requested by legitimate governments and as an anti-Western correction to neocolonial intervention. It contributes a narrative of multipolarity and a willingness to provide direct combat support where Western actors withdraw. It occludes the conduct of Wagner and Africa Corps, the dependency created by PMC protection of regimes, and the civilian harm associated with unaccountable external forces. *Western:* The Western perspective combines intervention failure, self-critique, and a lessons debate. It acknowledges overreliance on military tools, underinvestment in governance, and the unintended consequences of counterterrorism partnerships. It contributes valuable strategic reassessment and documentation of abuses. It often occludes, however, the structural and historical dimensions of sovereignty and may still center Western agency in diagnosing a crisis whose primary costs are borne by Sahelian civilians. *UN:* The UN perspective frames the Sahel through protection of civilians, humanitarian access, human rights monitoring, and consent-based peacekeeping. It contributes systematic documentation of violations by all parties and a normative framework for accountability. It occludes the political economy of intervention and the structural constraints on peacekeeping in active counterinsurgency; MINUSMA's withdrawal from Mali in 2023 illustrated the limits of consent-based operations when the host state prefers alternative security partners.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — ACLED Data on Civilian Harm by Perpetrator: State Forces, Russian PMCs, and Jihadists

Bolded Causal Claim: ACLED data on civilian harm in the Sahel support the interpretation that civilian targeting is not merely an unfortunate byproduct of counterterrorism or jihadist insurgency; it is a mode of governance and competition among multiple armed actors, and the distribution of perpetrators shifts as external interventions reconfigure local power, impunity, and accountability.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with ACLED's event-based methodology, which records incidents by date, location, actor, interaction type, and estimated fatalities, including whether civilians were targeted. In the Sahel, this data can reveal patterns that narrative accounts alone cannot: where violence concentrates, which actors are recorded as perpetrators, how civilian-targeting events change over time, and how geographic diffusion follows political and military ruptures. State forces and their auxiliaries may target civilians through sweeps, airstrikes, collective punishment, or reprisals against communities suspected of supporting jihadists. Russian-linked private military companies may be recorded in direct combat, village-level operations, or reprisals where they operate alongside or in support of state forces. Jihadist groups may target civilians through assassinations, improvised explosive devices, massacres, and punitive violence intended to enforce compliance, punish collaboration, or demonstrate control. The underlying mechanism is competitive governance: each actor uses violence not only to defeat rivals but to extract resources, regulate populations, and signal dominance. External intervention changes this competition by altering who has weapons, airpower, intelligence, impunity, and external backing. French withdrawal, UN exit, and U.S. retrenchment can reduce external oversight and increase the autonomy of state forces; Russian PMC entry can introduce a new coercive actor with limited transparency; jihadist groups can exploit grievances generated by state and PMC abuses. ACLED data therefore capture the shifting ecology of violence, but they do so through a reporting system that depends on media, civil society, official statements, and, in some cases, remote verification. The data are strongest for identifying trends, relative shifts, and geographic patterns; they are weaker for establishing precise casualty totals or the full scope of violence in inaccessible areas.

Scope Conditions: This claim is most defensible when ACLED data are used comparatively and longitudinally rather than as a complete census of harm. The data are useful for identifying changes in perpetrator composition, the spread of violence across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, and the association between military operations and civilian-targeting events. They are less useful for adjudicating legal responsibility in individual cases, for measuring violence in areas with no media or humanitarian access, or for distinguishing combatants from civilians in contested incidents. Scope conditions include consistent coding rules, sufficient source coverage, and the ability to compare like with like across time. Limitations include underreporting in remote or insecure areas, definitional ambiguity, political pressure on reporting, and the possibility that state or PMC violence is less visible than jihadist violence because of access restrictions and information control. The claim also assumes that civilian targeting is analytically distinguishable from battlefield fatalities, which is not always straightforward in irregular warfare where armed actors embed among populations.

Observable Implications: If the claim holds, ACLED-based analyses should show several patterns. First, civilian-targeting events should not be concentrated exclusively among jihadist perpetrators; state forces and, where present, Russian-linked PMCs should account for a significant and sometimes rising share of recorded civilian harm in certain periods and regions. Second, spikes in state or PMC violence should coincide with major operations, reprisal campaigns, or periods of reduced external oversight. Third, jihadist violence should remain persistent and geographically diffuse, but its relative share of total civilian harm may fluctuate as other actors become more active. Fourth, rising civilian harm should correlate with displacement,

humanitarian access constraints, and the erosion of local trust in security institutions. Fifth, the geographic spread of violence from northern Mali into central Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger should be visible in the data, reflecting the regionalization of conflict and the limits of territorially bounded intervention. ACLED's Sahel reporting and related analyses by Crisis Group and UN bodies provide the evidentiary basis for these patterns, while also warning that the data likely understate harm in the most inaccessible conflict zones.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African:* The African perspective, informed by scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, and Oyěwùmí, treats ACLED data as both useful and insufficient. It can support African claims that state militarization, external intervention, and PMC deployment harm civilians, and it can challenge narratives that attribute civilian suffering solely to jihadists. Yet the African perspective also insists that data produced by external institutions may miss locally meaningful categories of harm, including structural violence, everyday insecurity, gendered vulnerability, and the destruction of social reproduction. African scholarship emphasizes that numbers can document violence without capturing agency, survival, or the political meaning of harm. What this perspective reveals is that ACLED can show who is recorded as harming civilians, but it cannot by itself explain why communities experience the state, jihadists, and foreign forces as overlapping systems of domination. *Chinese:* China's perspective may use ACLED data to argue for non-interference and for the dangers of externally driven militarization, while emphasizing capacity-building and development as alternatives. It contributes a technocratic reading of violence data and a preference for state-to-state security cooperation. It occludes, however, the accountability of partner regimes and the possibility that Chinese security partnerships may also lack transparency. *Russian:* Russia may cite ACLED trends to argue that Western intervention created chaos and that state forces are engaged in legitimate counterterrorism. It may acknowledge some civilian harm while attributing it to the broader security crisis or to jihadist provocation. It occludes the specific conduct of Wagner and Africa Corps and deflects responsibility from unaccountable external forces. *Western:* The Western perspective often uses ACLED data for self-critique, policy adjustment, and human-rights monitoring. It contributes rigorous documentation and a willingness to reassess intervention strategies. It may, however, overfit to measurable violence and underweight political legitimacy, local knowledge, and the structural conditions that make civilian targeting possible. *UN:* The UN perspective uses data to support protection of civilians, accountability, humanitarian planning, and human-rights monitoring. It contributes normative frameworks and systematic documentation by all parties. It occludes, however, the gap between data and access: knowing that civilians are harmed does not by itself secure humanitarian corridors, consent for monitoring, or accountability in environments where host states resist external scrutiny.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The collapse of the G5 Sahel and the ECOWAS crisis

Bolded Causal Claim: The collapse of the G5 Sahel and the ECOWAS crisis were not merely diplomatic accidents or personality conflicts; they were the regional expression of a legitimacy deficit in which externally funded security architectures and coercive regional norms lost authority when they were perceived to protect incumbent regimes and foreign interests rather than civilian populations, producing withdrawals, coups, and parallel alliances.

Mechanism: The G5 Sahel Joint Force, created in 2017 by Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad, was designed to coordinate cross-border counterterrorism in the Liptako-Gourma region. Its mechanism of action depended on a chain of assumptions: that member states would pool sovereignty, that external donors

would provide sustained funding and logistics, that national armies would act as professional partners, and that counterterrorism operations would not alienate local communities. Each assumption was fragile. The force relied heavily on European and French financing, intelligence, and air support; it lacked autonomous airlift, unified command culture, and reliable national contributions. When France's political position deteriorated and its troops withdrew, the G5 lost not only operational capacity but also the external scaffolding that had made coordination possible. Mali withdrew from the G5 in 2022, and Burkina Faso and Niger followed, leaving the framework hollowed out.

ECOWAS experienced a different but related mechanism. Its Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, adopted in 2001, gave the organization a normative mandate to deter coups through sanctions, mediation, and, in extreme cases, collective military action. In the Sahel, however, this mandate collided with a legitimacy crisis. Coups in Mali in 2020 and 2021, Burkina Faso in 2022, and Niger in 2023 were not simply elite seizures of power; in several cases they were accompanied by popular mobilization, anti-French sentiment, and claims that elected governments had failed to protect citizens from jihadist violence. ECOWAS sanctions, intended to restore constitutional order, were experienced by many civilians as collective punishment that worsened food insecurity, fuel shortages, and economic precarity. The threat of military intervention in Niger in 2023, even if never executed, became a rallying point for sovereignty claims and accelerated the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

The mechanism of collapse can be described as a legitimacy inversion. Regional organizations that had once been seen as vehicles for African collective security were increasingly interpreted, by juntas and their supporters, as instruments of external preference enforcement. The G5 was associated with French counterterrorism priorities; ECOWAS was associated with Western democratic conditionality and, in the Niger case, with a threatened intervention that many West Africans viewed as disproportionate. Sanctions, rather than isolating juntas, often strengthened their nationalist framing. The result was counter-regionalism: the Alliance of Sahel States, mutual-defense commitments, parallel summits, and formal withdrawal notices from ECOWAS. This fragmentation weakened cross-border security cooperation precisely in the zone where jihadist groups operate across borders.

The collapse also reveals a principal-agent problem at the regional level. ECOWAS and the G5 depended on member states whose interests diverged. Nigeria, Senegal, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire did not share the same threat perceptions or political incentives as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Some members were themselves suspended or under sanctions, reducing organizational coherence. External donors, including the European Union and France, often treated regional organizations as force multipliers for their own priorities, which made those organizations vulnerable to accusations of dependency. When the external powers withdrew or were expelled, the regional architecture lacked autonomous resources to sustain itself.

Theoretically, this case illustrates the limits of regional security complexes when security interdependence is not matched by legitimacy and capacity. Buzan's regional security complex theory emphasizes that states in a region share security concerns that cannot be separated from one another; the Sahel confirms that interdependence can produce not cooperation but competitive fragmentation if the institutions meant to manage it are seen as illegitimate. It also supports critiques of "new regionalism" that warn against conflating institutional creation with institutional effectiveness. Regional organizations may proliferate while their authority erodes.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism applies most strongly where regional organizations are donor-dependent, where member states have weak domestic legitimacy, where external powers use regional frameworks as instruments for their own security agendas, and where coups are popularly legitimated

by anti-foreign or anti-elite sentiment. It applies less where regional norms align with domestic political legitimacy, where organizations possess autonomous funding and enforcement capacity, and where security cooperation produces visible civilian benefits. It does not imply that all regional integration in Africa has failed; ECOWAS's economic and free-movement achievements, however uneven, are analytically distinct from its security and democratic-governance crises. Nor does it imply that the Alliance of Sahel States represents a durable alternative; it may reproduce the same legitimacy and capacity problems under a different ideological banner.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is operating, one should observe formal withdrawal notices, the creation of parallel regional bodies, reduced joint military operations, increased bilateral deals between Sahelian juntas and external powers outside ECOWAS frameworks, and continued or worsening jihadist activity in border zones. One should also observe ECOWAS mediation efforts that fail to restore constitutional order, followed by partial sanctions relief as the organization adjusts to new realities. Displacement data should show continued cross-border movement, and ACLED data should show violence concentrated in areas where state presence is fragmented and regional coordination has collapsed. Conversely, if regional legitimacy were being rebuilt, one would expect sustained joint operations, reduced border violence, and declining displacement.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* The African perspective treats the collapse as a crisis of sovereignty and regional legitimacy rather than a mere institutional failure. From this vantage point, the G5 and ECOWAS were not neutral African mechanisms; they were entangled with French counterterrorism and Western democratic conditionality. African scholarship on sovereignty and postcolonial statehood—Grovogui's critique of international legal hierarchies, Mbembe's analysis of necropolitical governance, Bayart's "politics of the belly," Mamdani's work on decentralized despotism, and Aning's analyses of ECOWAS security governance—helps explain why regional organizations lost credibility when they appeared to serve external agendas. The agency of juntas matters: they are not simply puppets of Russia or China, but actors who exploit popular resentment against foreign intervention and regional coercion. Yet the African perspective is not uniformly pro-junta. Many African scholars and civil-society actors warn that sovereignty rhetoric can mask authoritarianism, civilian harm, and the erosion of democratic accountability. The key insight is that regional order cannot be imposed through sanctions and donor-funded force; it must be grounded in popular legitimacy, civilian protection, and accountable security institutions. *Chinese:* China emphasizes non-interference, sovereignty, and development-security linkages. It generally supports regional organizations rhetorically while avoiding coercive sanctions and regime-change pressures. Its contribution is to offer an alternative to Western conditionality, but it may occlude accountability for civilian harm and the political roots of insurgency. *Russian:* Russia frames the crisis as evidence of Western failure and presents itself as a defender of sovereign choice. It supports juntas diplomatically and through security partnerships, using anti-Western narratives. Its contribution is to provide an alternative patron, but it occludes PMC abuses, dependency, and the lack of accountability in its security model. *Western:* Western actors view the collapse as a failure of intervention and regional partnership, often emphasizing Russian influence and democratic backsliding. They contribute self-critique and policy reassessment, but may overstate external causation and understate their own legitimacy deficits. *UN:* The UN perspective emphasizes regional partnership, protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and lessons from MINUSMA. It contributes normative frameworks and documentation, but is constrained by host-state consent and the gap between data and access.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Comparative lessons: could any intervention have worked? What would have been needed?

Bolded Causal Claim: No single external intervention could have "worked" in the Sahel under the logics actually deployed—counterterrorism, regime stabilization, or proxy competition—because the central problem was not a shortage of force but a mismatch between intervention designs and local political orders; a genuinely successful intervention would have required a protection-first, legitimacy-centered, and long-horizon strategy that the prevailing frameworks were structurally disinclined to provide.

Mechanism: The Sahel became a comparative laboratory for external intervention. France's Operation Serval in 2013 demonstrated that a rapid, well-resourced military intervention could halt a jihadist advance and prevent the collapse of the Malian state. But Serval's tactical success did not translate into strategic success. Operation Barkhane, which followed, embedded French forces in a long-term counterterrorism campaign that relied on partner armies, local militias, and intelligence networks. Its mechanism assumed that killing or capturing jihadist leaders and holding territory would create space for state recovery. Instead, the campaign often alienated civilians through collateral damage, reinforced predatory security practices, and created dependency. When political conditions shifted and French forces withdrew in 2022–2023, the security vacuum exposed the absence of legitimate local institutions.

The United States pursued a different mechanism: train-and-equip programs, security assistance, drone surveillance, and special operations partnerships. This model assumed that professionalizing African militaries would improve counterterrorism capacity and reduce the need for large Western deployments. The mechanism was undermined by principal-agent problems. Security assistance often strengthened coercive capacity without corresponding accountability, and in several cases officers who received U.S. training later participated in coups. The U.S. model also struggled to reconcile counterterrorism partnerships with democratic conditionality, especially after coups triggered legal suspensions of aid.

The United Nations, through MINUSMA from 2013 to 2023, pursued a stabilization and protection-of-civilians mandate. Its mechanism was to support the Malian state, protect civilians, and facilitate political processes. But MINUSMA operated in an environment with no durable peace agreement, asymmetric threats, and a host government that increasingly viewed the mission as an obstacle. The mission's constraints illustrate a general mechanism: peacekeeping can protect civilians and document abuses, but it cannot substitute for political settlement or overcome host-state resistance.

Russia's Wagner Group, and later the Africa Corps, introduced a fourth mechanism: regime protection, resource-linked security deals, information operations, and direct combat support. This model offered juntas short-term survival and an anti-Western narrative. Its mechanism, however, traded accountability for loyalty. It could suppress immediate threats and protect ruling elites, but it did not address the political and economic grievances driving recruitment into armed groups. Allegations of civilian harm and resource extraction further complicated its legitimacy.

Comparing these models reveals a common failure mode. Each intervention prioritized a measurable output—territory held, militants killed, regimes stabilized, or partnerships maintained—over the slower and less measurable work of building legitimate authority. Counterterrorism metrics crowded out civilian-protection metrics; regime stabilization crowded out accountability; external partnerships crowded out local ownership. The mechanism of failure was not simply bad tactics but a theory of change that treated armed groups as the disease rather than as symptoms of political breakdown, economic marginalization, and abusive security practices.

What would have been needed is not a larger version of the same interventions but a different causal chain. First, civilian protection would have to be the primary metric, not a secondary constraint on counterterrorism. Second, security sector reform would need to address command accountability, human-rights violations, and the integration or disarmament of militias. Third, political settlement would need to include marginalized communities, not just central governments and external partners. Fourth, regional coordination would need to be African-led and adequately resourced, rather than donor-dependent. Fifth, interventions would need time horizons measured in decades, not electoral or budget cycles. Sixth, local knowledge and consent would need to shape operational decisions.

Yet scope conditions matter. Even an optimally designed intervention might fail where structural drivers—climate stress, poverty, illicit economies, demographic pressures, and weak state capacity—are severe. The claim is not that a perfect intervention was available and ignored. It is that the interventions actually attempted were mismatched to the problem and that their failure was overdetermined by their own design. A protection-first strategy might have reduced civilian harm and displacement even if it could not eliminate insurgency. The relevant counterfactual is therefore not "victory" but "less harm and more legitimacy."

Scope Conditions: This comparative lesson applies to external interventions in contexts of fragmented authority, weak state legitimacy, and cross-border insurgency. It applies less where host states possess robust legitimacy, professional security institutions, and broad social consent. It also depends on the type of intervention: humanitarian protection, peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and regime support have different theories of change and different success conditions. The argument does not imply that all external involvement is illegitimate; it implies that intervention success is conditional on local legitimacy, accountability, civilian protection, and long-term commitment. Where these conditions are absent, even well-resourced interventions are likely to produce tactical gains and strategic losses.

Observable Implications: If a protection-first and legitimacy-centered approach had been adopted, one would expect lower civilian targeting by state forces and their partners, reduced displacement, improved local trust in security institutions, and more durable governance arrangements. If the prevailing counterterrorism and regime-stabilization approaches continued, one would expect territorial fluctuations, rising civilian harm, increased displacement, coups, and eventual external withdrawal. The Data Lab focus on ACLED civilian targeting by perpetrator, UNHCR displacement, and external troop deployments by year provides observable indicators for adjudicating these expectations. The absence of protection-first outcomes under actual interventions does not prove that such an approach was impossible; it demonstrates that the strategies chosen did not produce it.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* The African perspective asks whether any intervention could have worked on African terms, not merely whether Western or Russian strategies failed. African scholarship—Rodney on underdevelopment, Nkrumah on neocolonialism, Nyerere on ujamaa and self-reliance, Cabral on class and national liberation, Fanon on violence and decolonization, and contemporary scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Aning, Danso, and Tamale—suggests that external intervention often reproduces dependency and distorts local political struggles. From this vantage point, a successful intervention would have required African ownership, accountability to civilians rather than to donors, and a shift from counterterrorism to political reconstruction. The agency of juntas and communities matters: external actors cannot manufacture legitimacy. Yet the African perspective also contains internal debate. Some argue that African-led regional forces could have succeeded where France failed; others warn that regional powers may reproduce the same abuses. The key insight is that "could have worked" must be evaluated against local legitimacy, not against the preferences of external patrons. *Chinese:* China's

perspective emphasizes non-interference, sovereignty, and development. It would view a successful intervention as one that respects host-state consent, avoids regime change, and supports economic development. Its contribution is to challenge Western interventionism, but it may occlude the need for accountability and civilian protection. *Russian:* Russia frames success in terms of sovereign choice, regime survival, and multipolarity. It presents its security partnerships as alternatives to Western failure. Its contribution is to exploit Western legitimacy deficits, but it occludes PMC abuses, dependency, and the absence of political reform. *Western:* Western actors increasingly engage in self-critique, debating whether better strategy, more patience, or less intervention would have worked. Their contribution is policy learning and human-rights monitoring, but they may overfit to measurable violence and underweight local political legitimacy. *UN:* The UN perspective emphasizes protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and lessons from MINUSMA. It contributes normative frameworks and systematic documentation, but is constrained by host-state consent and the gap between data and access.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective on the Sahel crisis is not a regional variant of Western security studies; it is a distinct epistemological and political tradition that begins from the experience of post-colonial state formation, the unfinished project of decolonization, and the structural violence of the international order. To reconstruct it from within requires abandoning the premise that the Sahel is primarily a security problem to be solved by external actors, and instead treating it as a site where the contradictions of the post-colonial state, global capitalism, and great-power competition converge and are lived by African populations. This perspective is the longest of the five because it carries the analytical weight of the lesson's central puzzle: why did a decade of external intervention produce not stability but state collapse, junta rule, and expanded civilian harm?

The post-colonial state as the central problematic. The foundational insight of African political thought, from Fanon's analysis of the colonial state's reproduction in the post-colonial era to Mamdani's distinction between "citizens" and "subjects" in the bifurcated state, is that the Sahelian state was never designed to govern its populations democratically. Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) argues that colonial rule created a dual state: a "civil" sphere for settlers and a "customary" sphere for natives, with the latter governed through decentralized despotism. The post-colonial state inherited this architecture, and the Sahelian variant—weak, extractive, and dependent on external rents—has proven unable to extend services, justice, or security to peripheral populations. Bayart's concept of the "politics of the belly" (*La politique du ventre*, 1989) captures the clientelist logic through which state resources are captured by elites and distributed through patronage networks rather than public goods. In the Sahel, this means that the state's presence in rural areas is often experienced not as protection but as predation—taxation without services, arbitrary arrest, and ethnic favoritism. The jihadist insurgencies that erupted after 2012 did not create this governance vacuum; they exploited and, in some areas, temporarily filled it by providing dispute resolution, taxation with some redistribution, and a rough justice that the state had failed to deliver. Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) supplies the deeper historical frame: the Sahelian state's weakness is not a natural condition but the product of centuries of extraction, slave raiding, colonial conquest, and post-colonial structural adjustment that systematically underdeveloped the region's productive capacity and state institutions.

Sovereignty as lived practice, not juridical fiction. African scholarship insists on distinguishing between sovereignty as recognized by the international community and sovereignty as exercised on the ground.

Grovogui's *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy* (2006) argues that the international system's recognition of African states as sovereign equals masks a reality of structural subordination in which African agency is constrained by debt, conditionality, and security dependence. In the Sahel, this gap between juridical and substantive sovereignty has been acute: Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso were formally sovereign but functionally dependent on French military support, EU budget support, and UN peacekeeping. The juntas that seized power in 2020-2023 framed their coups not merely as power grabs but as assertions of substantive sovereignty—the right to choose security partners, to expel foreign troops, and to define national interest without external veto. Whether one accepts this framing or not, the African perspective takes it seriously as a political claim rooted in a long history of anti-colonial struggle. Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) provides the theoretical vocabulary: formal independence without economic and military autonomy is neo-colonialism, and the Sahelian states' dependence on Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA exemplified this condition. Nyerere's vision of African socialism and self-reliance, articulated across his speeches and writings, reinforces the point that genuine sovereignty requires not just flag independence but the capacity to determine one's own development path.

The agency of juntas and the legitimacy question. A distinctive contribution of the African perspective is its refusal to reduce juntas to either democratic heroes or authoritarian villains. The coups in Mali (2020, 2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) occurred in contexts of mass popular mobilization against incumbent governments perceived as corrupt, ineffective, and subservient to foreign powers. The juntas' popularity—evidenced by large rallies in Bamako, Ouagadougou, and Niamey—cannot be dismissed as mere manipulation or Russian disinformation, though both elements exist. African scholars such as Aning and Danso have emphasized that African populations evaluate governments by their capacity to deliver security and dignity, and that the failure of elected governments to do so created a legitimacy crisis that juntas exploited. At the same time, the African perspective is not uncritical: the same scholars note that juntas have delayed transitions, restricted civil liberties, and in some cases worsened civilian harm. The point is that the junta phenomenon must be understood as a response to a governance crisis, not as an exogenous shock, and that external actors who treat juntas solely as problems to be managed miss the political dynamics that produced them. Cabral's insight that the liberation struggle must be both political and military, and that the people must be the subjects rather than objects of history, is directly relevant: the juntas' claim to represent popular will must be tested against their actual practice, not assumed or dismissed.

Civilian harm and the racialization of violence. The ACLED data showing that state forces and Russian PMCs have been responsible for significant civilian casualties in the Sahel must be read through the lens of African scholarship on the racialization and ethnicization of violence. Mamdani's *When Victims Become Killers* (2001) demonstrates how colonial categories of race and ethnicity were politicized and became the basis for mass violence in Rwanda; similar dynamics operate in the Sahel, where Fulani communities have been disproportionately targeted by state forces and militias on suspicion of jihadist sympathies. The African perspective insists that civilian harm is not merely a tactical failure or a human-rights violation to be documented; it is a political act that reshapes communal relations, drives recruitment into armed groups, and undermines the legitimacy of the state. Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics" (*On the Postcolony*, 2001) is relevant here: the power to decide who lives and who dies is exercised not only by insurgents but by states and their external partners, and the Sahel has become a space where multiple actors compete in the exercise of death-dealing power. Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) adds a gendered dimension: the categories through which violence is understood and justified are themselves colonial constructs, and the experiences of women in the Sahel—often the primary victims of displacement, sexual violence, and economic disruption—are systematically underrepresented in security analyses. Tamale's *Decolonization and*

Afro-Feminism (2020) extends this critique, arguing that African feminist scholarship must be central to any analysis of conflict and security, not an afterthought.

The collapse of regional architectures. The G5 Sahel and ECOWAS were designed as African-led solutions to African security problems, and their collapse is a central concern of the African perspective. The G5 Sahel Joint Force, created in 2017, was intended to demonstrate African ownership of security; its failure reflects not only resource constraints but the deeper problem that regional organizations in Africa are often instruments of member-state elites rather than expressions of popular will. ECOWAS's response to the 2023 Niger coup—threatening military intervention, imposing sanctions, and then retreating—exposed the organization's dependence on Nigerian leadership and its inability to act without Western backing. The African perspective, drawing on Nyerere's vision of regional solidarity and Cabral's emphasis on the unity of political and military struggle, sees this as a failure of pan-African institutional capacity. The withdrawal of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger from ECOWAS in 2024 and their formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES) represents a reconfiguration of regional order that the African perspective treats as significant, though its long-term viability remains uncertain. The AES is both a rejection of ECOWAS's perceived subservience to Western interests and an experiment in alternative regionalism, but it also risks fragmenting the West African security architecture and creating competing spheres of influence.

What the African perspective contributes that others cannot. First, it centers the lived experience of Sahelian populations rather than the strategic interests of external actors. Second, it provides a historical framework—colonialism, neo-colonialism, structural adjustment—that explains why Sahelian states are weak without blaming African culture or governance. Third, it takes seriously the political claims of juntas and popular movements, treating them as responses to real grievances rather than as pathologies. Fourth, it insists that civilian harm be understood as a political phenomenon with communal and historical dimensions, not merely as a data point. Fifth, it frames the crisis as a crisis of the post-colonial state and the international order that sustains it, pointing toward structural solutions—debt relief, fair trade, democratic reform, and genuine sovereignty—rather than military ones. Sixth, it brings gender and racial analysis to bear on security questions that are typically treated as gender-neutral and race-blind.

What the African perspective occludes. It can underweight the genuine security threats posed by jihadist groups to African populations, particularly women, minorities, and secular activists. It can romanticize junta rule and understate the authoritarian turn in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. It can be slow to acknowledge that some external interventions, however flawed, did provide temporary protection to civilians. It can treat "the West" as a monolithic actor, obscuring differences between French, American, EU, and UN approaches. It can struggle to generate actionable policy prescriptions beyond the call for sovereignty and structural reform, which are necessary but insufficient for immediate civilian protection. And it can understate the agency of jihadist groups as political actors with their own ideologies and constituencies, rather than treating them solely as symptoms of state failure.

Key scholars and sources. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961); Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism* (1965); Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972); Cabral, *Return to the Source* (1973); Bayart, *The State in Africa* (1993); Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (1996) and *When Victims Become Killers* (2001); Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (2001); Grovogui, *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy* (2006); Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women* (1997); Tamale, *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020); Aning and Danso (various works on African security governance). Crisis Group Sahel reports and ACLED analyses provide empirical grounding.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

China's perspective on the Sahel crisis is shaped by three interlocking principles: non-interference in internal affairs, the primacy of development over security, and the pursuit of strategic partnerships that advance Chinese economic and diplomatic interests without entangling China in local conflicts. This perspective is neither naive nor disinterested; it is a calculated position that reflects China's own historical experience, its global strategy, and its assessment of Western intervention failure.

Non-interference as doctrine and practice. The principle of non-interference is enshrined in China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (1954) and has been consistently reaffirmed in FOCAC declarations and UN voting behavior. In the Sahel context, this means China has avoided military intervention, declined to participate in MINUSMA, and refrained from conditioning aid on governance reforms. Chinese officials have repeatedly cited the failures of Western intervention in Libya, Mali, and the broader Sahel as validation of this approach. The argument is straightforward: external military intervention disrupts local political balances, creates power vacuums, and produces unintended consequences that harm civilians. China's own experience with Western intervention in Libya—where China lost significant investments and saw the country descend into chaos—reinforced this conviction. The Chinese perspective thus treats non-interference not as indifference but as a principled alternative to a failed Western model, and it has been remarkably consistent across decades and regions.

Development as the root cause and the solution. Chinese discourse frames the Sahel crisis primarily as a development problem rather than a security problem. Poverty, underdevelopment, and lack of infrastructure are identified as the root causes of instability, and the solution is economic growth, connectivity, and state capacity-building through infrastructure. China's engagement in the Sahel has focused on mining, energy, telecommunications, and infrastructure projects, often financed through loans and implemented by Chinese companies. The Belt and Road Initiative extends to the Sahel, though with less density than in East Africa. Chinese officials argue that economic development creates the conditions for stability and that security without development is unsustainable. This framing has the advantage of addressing structural drivers that Western counterterrorism often ignores, but it can underweight the immediate security threats faced by populations and the political grievances that drive recruitment into armed groups. It also assumes a linear relationship between economic growth and political stability that the Sahelian experience does not consistently support.

Security partnerships without boots on the ground. China has not deployed combat troops to the Sahel, but it has developed security partnerships that include arms sales, police training, intelligence sharing, and peacekeeping contributions to UN missions elsewhere in Africa. China is the largest contributor of peacekeepers among the P5, though primarily in non-combat roles. In the Sahel, China has sold military equipment to several governments and has expressed willingness to support counterterrorism efforts through capacity-building rather than direct intervention. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that these partnerships are conducted on the basis of host-state consent and without political conditionality, distinguishing them from Western security assistance. This is attractive to Sahelian juntas seeking alternatives to Western dependence, but it raises questions about accountability and the end-use of Chinese-supplied equipment. The Chinese perspective does not have a robust framework for monitoring how its security assistance is used or for addressing abuses by partner forces.

Anti-Western framing and multipolarity. China's Sahel policy is embedded in its broader narrative of multipolarity and opposition to Western hegemony. Chinese media and officials have criticized French intervention as neo-colonial and have portrayed the expulsion of French troops as a legitimate assertion of African sovereignty. This framing aligns with Chinese interests in displacing Western influence in Africa, but

it also resonates with genuine African grievances. The Chinese perspective contributes a critique of Western interventionism that is sharper and more consistent than Western self-critique, but it can be opportunistic—exploiting Western failures without offering substantive alternatives for civilian protection. China's voting behavior at the UN, including abstentions on resolutions critical of Sahelian juntas, reflects this strategic positioning.

What the Chinese perspective contributes. It offers a non-military approach to root causes, a critique of interventionism grounded in historical experience, and a model of engagement based on consent rather than conditionality. It has helped diversify Sahelian states' partnerships, reducing dependence on any single external actor. Its emphasis on development addresses structural drivers that security-focused approaches neglect.

What it occludes. It underweights the immediate security threats to civilians, avoids accountability for how Chinese-supplied equipment is used, and can be indifferent to governance quality and human rights. It treats development as a technocratic fix rather than a political process, and its non-interference principle can become a shield for authoritarian partners. It has not articulated a coherent approach to civilian protection or humanitarian access in conflict zones. And it can understate the degree to which Chinese economic engagement itself creates dependencies and vulnerabilities, particularly in the mining and resource sectors.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

Russia's perspective on the Sahel is the most overtly geopolitical of the five, framing the region as a theater of great-power competition in which Western failure has created an opportunity for Russian influence. This perspective combines anti-Western rhetoric, security provision through private military companies, and resource extraction, all presented under the banner of sovereign choice and multipolarity.

Anti-Western framing as ideology and strategy. Russian discourse on the Sahel is saturated with anti-Western and anti-colonial rhetoric. Russian officials and media portray French intervention as neo-colonial, Western counterterrorism as a failure, and the expulsion of French troops as a victory for African sovereignty. This framing draws on a long Russian tradition of anti-imperialism, but it is deployed instrumentally: it delegitimizes Western actors while legitimizing Russian presence. The Russian perspective treats the Sahel not as a region with its own dynamics but as a front in a global struggle against Western hegemony. This has proven effective in Sahelian capitals where anti-French sentiment is genuine and deep, but it risks reducing complex local conflicts to a binary of Western vs. non-Western. Russian information operations in the Sahel, including disinformation campaigns and social media manipulation, have amplified anti-Western narratives and supported junta governments, though the extent of their impact on popular opinion is debated.

Wagner/Africa Corps as security provider. Russia's primary security instrument in the Sahel has been the Wagner Group, now rebranded as Africa Corps under Russian military intelligence (GRU) control following the 2023 mutiny and Prigozhin's death. Wagner deployed to Mali in 2021 and has been implicated in severe civilian harm, including the massacre at Moura in March 2022, where hundreds of civilians were killed. Russian officials have denied or downplayed these allegations, framing Wagner as a legitimate security partner invited by sovereign governments. The Russian perspective presents PMC deployment as a model of security cooperation that is more effective and less hypocritical than Western intervention: no lectures on human rights, no conditionality, and a willingness to use force decisively. The evidence, however, suggests that Wagner's operations have been associated with high civilian casualties and have not significantly degraded jihadist capabilities. The transition from Wagner to Africa Corps represents an attempt to institutionalize Russian military presence under state control, but the fundamental model—PMC-based security provision

with limited accountability—remains unchanged.

Sovereign choice and the legitimacy of juntas. Russia has been the most consistent external supporter of Sahelian juntas, recognizing their governments, providing diplomatic cover at the UN, and blocking resolutions critical of human rights abuses. The Russian perspective frames this as respect for sovereignty: African states have the right to choose their partners, and Western attempts to isolate juntas are illegitimate interference. This resonates with African grievances about Western double standards, but it also serves Russian interests in gaining strategic footholds, access to resources (gold, uranium), and voting support at the UN. The Russian perspective occludes the authoritarian nature of junta rule and the absence of political reform, treating sovereignty as a formal principle rather than a substantive practice. Russia's support for juntas is not unconditional—it expects returns in the form of resource access, military basing rights, and diplomatic alignment—but the terms of these arrangements are typically opaque.

Resource extraction and economic interests. Russian engagement in the Sahel is not purely ideological. Wagner/Africa Corps has secured mining concessions, particularly in gold, and Russian companies have pursued uranium and other mineral interests. The Russian perspective does not emphasize these economic dimensions publicly, framing engagement instead in terms of security and solidarity. This gap between rhetoric and practice is a significant vulnerability: if Sahelian populations come to perceive Russian presence as extractive rather than supportive, the legitimacy Russia has gained through anti-Western framing could erode. The model of PMC-based resource extraction has precedents in other regions and has consistently generated local resentment over time.

What the Russian perspective contributes. It has provided Sahelian juntas with an alternative to Western dependence, validated African grievances about neo-colonialism, and exposed the hypocrisy of Western actors who preach human rights while supporting authoritarian partners. It has forced a reckoning with the limits of Western intervention and demonstrated that the international order is more multipolar than Western actors assumed. Its anti-Western framing, while instrumental, resonates with genuine popular sentiment.

What it occludes. It ignores or denies PMC abuses, including mass civilian killings. It offers no political reform agenda, no development strategy, and no framework for civilian protection. It treats the Sahel as a geopolitical chessboard rather than a region with its own agency. Its anti-Western framing, while resonant, can become a substitute for substantive policy. It has not demonstrated that Russian security provision produces better outcomes for civilians than Western intervention did, and ACLED data suggests the opposite. And it underestimates the possibility that Sahelian populations will eventually apply the same critical standards to Russian presence that they applied to French presence.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on the Sahel is characterized by a tension between interventionist ambition and growing self-critique. For over a decade, Western actors—France, the US, the EU, and NATO allies—pursued counterterrorism and stabilization in the Sahel, and the results have been widely judged as failure. The Western perspective now encompasses both defenders of intervention who argue that more resources and patience were needed, and critics who argue that intervention was fundamentally misconceived.

The interventionist consensus and its premises. The Western approach to the Sahel was built on several premises: that jihadist groups posed a threat to international security; that weak states needed external support to defeat them; that military force could create space for governance and development; and that Western values—democracy, human rights, rule of law—were compatible with security objectives. Operation Serval (2013) and its successor Barkhane (2014-2022) embodied this approach, with France deploying thousands

of troops to Mali and the broader Sahel. The US provided intelligence, training, and special operations support. The EU contributed training missions and budget support. MINUSMA provided a UN peacekeeping framework. The interventionist consensus assumed that external actors could strengthen Sahelian states sufficiently to take over security responsibilities, and that this would lead to stability. This consensus was reinforced by the post-9/11 counterterrorism paradigm, which framed jihadist groups as global threats requiring military responses, and by the R2P doctrine, which provided a normative framework for intervention.

The failure and its mechanisms. The failure of Western intervention is now widely acknowledged, though its causes are debated. The mechanisms of failure include: the mismatch between military capacity and political legitimacy; the inability to address root causes (poverty, governance, ethnic tensions); the alienation of local populations through civilian casualties and heavy-handed tactics; the corruption and ineffectiveness of partner forces; and the strategic overextension of French forces across a vast territory. ACLED data showing that state forces (often trained and equipped by Western partners) were responsible for significant civilian harm has been particularly damaging to the Western narrative. The Western perspective has had to confront the possibility that its interventions made things worse by strengthening predatory states, fueling recruitment, and delegitimizing moderate political alternatives. The French military's own assessments, including the 2022 withdrawal from Mali, acknowledged that the security situation had deteriorated despite years of effort.

Self-critique and the lessons debate. Western policy communities have engaged in extensive self-critique, producing reports, hearings, and academic analyses. The debate centers on several questions: Was the intervention too military and not enough political? Was the timeline too short? Were partner forces adequately vetted? Did Western actors ignore local knowledge and priorities? Should the West have engaged with jihadist groups politically rather than purely militarily? The "lessons learned" literature is substantial, but it often remains within a technocratic frame—improving strategy, tactics, and coordination—rather than questioning the fundamental premise of external intervention. Critics within the Western tradition, including some Africanist scholars based in Western institutions, argue that the problem was not execution but conception: the Sahel cannot be stabilized by external military force because the crisis is rooted in political and economic structures that external actors cannot transform. The tension between these positions—reform vs. rejection of intervention—defines the current Western debate.

Human rights monitoring and accountability. A genuine contribution of the Western perspective is its investment in documentation and accountability. Western-funded research organizations, human rights groups, and media have produced detailed accounts of civilian harm by all parties, including Western-trained forces and Russian PMCs. This documentation is essential for understanding the conflict and for any future accountability process. The Western perspective also maintains a normative commitment to civilian protection, democracy, and human rights that, however inconsistently applied, provides a standard against which to measure all actors. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the International Crisis Group have produced influential analyses that shape both policy and public understanding.

What the Western perspective contributes. It offers the most extensive empirical documentation of the conflict, a tradition of self-critique that is rare in great-power discourse, and normative frameworks (human rights, civilian protection, democratic governance) that remain relevant. Its policy-learning processes, however imperfect, have produced genuine insights about the limits of military solutions. Its academic and policy research communities have generated sophisticated analyses of conflict dynamics, governance, and political economy.

What it occludes. It can overfit to measurable violence and underweight local political legitimacy. It

may treat African agency as a variable to be managed rather than a force to be respected. Its self-critique often stops short of questioning the structural conditions—global inequality, historical extraction, arms proliferation—that produce Sahelian instability. And it can be slow to acknowledge that its interventions, however well-intentioned, were experienced by many Sahelians as neo-colonial. The Western perspective can also be self-referential, debating its own failures without adequately centering Sahelian voices in the analysis.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on the Sahel is shaped by the organization's dual role as a peacekeeping and humanitarian actor and its dependence on member-state consent. The UN's experience in the Sahel—particularly MINUSMA (2013-2023)—provides a rich, if painful, case study in the limits of peacekeeping in active conflict zones and the tension between protection mandates and political realities.

MINUSMA as the central case. MINUSMA was established in 2013 following the French intervention in Mali, with a mandate that included stabilization, protection of civilians, and support for political transition. It became the UN's deadliest mission, with over 300 peacekeepers killed, and was ultimately expelled by the Malian junta in 2023. The UN perspective treats MINUSMA as a lesson in the limits of peacekeeping without a viable peace to keep. The mission operated in an environment where there was no ceasefire, no political settlement, and no consent from all parties. Its mandate was ambitious—protecting civilians across a vast territory with limited resources—and its performance was mixed. The UN's own assessments acknowledge that MINUSMA struggled to protect civilians, was constrained by host-state restrictions, and became a target for insurgent attacks. The mission's withdrawal in 2023 was orderly but marked the end of the UN's largest peacekeeping presence in the Sahel.

Protection of civilians as normative framework. The UN perspective is anchored in the protection of civilians (PoC) doctrine, which has evolved from a humanitarian principle to a mandated task for peacekeeping operations. In the Sahel, PoC has meant documenting violations, establishing protection sites, and in some cases physically protecting civilians. The UN's systematic documentation of civilian harm—through MINUSMA's human rights division and OHCHR—provides an evidence base that is essential for accountability and policy. The UN perspective insists that civilian harm must be measured, attributed, and addressed, and that all parties—including state forces and their partners—must be held to international humanitarian law standards. This normative commitment is a genuine contribution, but its enforcement depends on the cooperation of member states and the willingness of the Security Council to act.

Humanitarian access and the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. The UN's humanitarian agencies (OCHA, UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF) have been central to the Sahel response, providing food, shelter, and protection to millions of displaced persons. The UN perspective emphasizes that humanitarian access is increasingly constrained by insecurity, bureaucratic impediments, and the politicization of aid. The "humanitarian-development-peace nexus" (HDPN) framework, which the UN has promoted in the Sahel, seeks to integrate humanitarian relief, development investment, and peacebuilding. In practice, this integration has been difficult: humanitarian actors resist being instrumentalized for political objectives, while development and peacebuilding require stable environments that do not exist. The UN perspective acknowledges these tensions but maintains that integrated approaches are necessary for sustainable solutions. The displacement crisis in the Sahel—with millions internally displaced and hundreds of thousands as refugees—has tested the UN's humanitarian capacity to its limits.

Lessons from MINUSMA. The UN has produced extensive lessons-learned analyses from MINUSMA,

identifying several key insights: peacekeeping missions require realistic mandates matched to resources; host-state consent is essential but can be withdrawn; protection of civilians requires more than military presence; and political solutions must precede or accompany military ones. These lessons have informed subsequent UN thinking about peace operations, including the "New Agenda for Peace" and discussions about the future of peacekeeping. The UN perspective is self-critical but also defensive: it argues that MINUSMA was asked to do too much with too little, and that its failures reflect systemic underfunding and unrealistic expectations rather than organizational incompetence. The mission's experience has also raised questions about whether traditional peacekeeping is viable in environments of active insurgency and great-power competition.

What the UN perspective contributes. It provides the most systematic documentation of civilian harm and displacement, a normative framework (PoC, IHL, human rights) that applies to all actors, and a humanitarian response that has saved lives. Its lessons-learned processes contribute to institutional learning. Its convening power brings together diverse actors and maintains a focus on civilian welfare. The UN's data on displacement, civilian casualties, and humanitarian needs is indispensable for policy and research.

What it occludes. It is constrained by host-state consent, which limits its ability to operate in areas controlled by juntas or insurgents. It can be slow to adapt to rapidly changing political environments. Its data, while systematic, may not capture the full picture due to access constraints. And its institutional interests—maintaining missions, protecting staff, preserving relevance—can conflict with honest assessment of failure. The gap between UN data and UN access is a persistent problem: the organization documents civilian harm it cannot prevent. The UN perspective can also be overly procedural, treating the Sahel crisis as a series of technical challenges to be managed rather than a political crisis requiring fundamental change.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers sovereignty, junta agency, and the failure of external intervention; reveals that Western actors misunderstood local political dynamics and treated the Sahel as a security problem to be managed rather than a political crisis requiring fundamental change	May understate the genuine security threat posed by jihadist expansion; risks romanticizing junta legitimacy and underplaying civilian harm perpetrated by state forces and their new partners	Sovereignty and self-determination; external intervention is illegitimate without genuine, ongoing consent; the right of peoples to choose their own security partners	Expulsion of French troops from Mali (2022), Burkina Faso (2023), and Niger (2023); formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES); sustained popular mobilization against French presence	**Western:** Withdrawal of external forces worsened civilian harm and accelerated jihadist territorial expansion; the juntas have not delivered security
Chinese	Non-interference principle avoids the sovereignty violations of Western intervention; security partnership without political conditionality; economic engagement as stabilizing force	Avoids addressing governance failures and authoritarian consolidation; economic interests may not align with security needs; limited security footprint means China benefits from stability without bearing costs of provision	Sovereignty, non-interference, mutual benefit; development as the foundation of security	Continued Chinese engagement in Sahel infrastructure and mining despite Western withdrawal; absence of Chinese military bases or combat troops in the region	**African:** Non-interference can become complicity with authoritarianism; economic extraction without security provision replicates colonial patterns

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Anti-Western framing resonates with popular sovereignty claims; PMC model provides security assistance without political conditionality or institutional reform demands; positions Russia as alternative to failed Western order	Wagner/Africa Corps documented civilian harm; extractive economic interests (gold, mining concessions); does not address root causes of insurgency; PMC model lacks accountability mechanisms	Sovereign equality; anti-imperialism; multipolarity; the right of states to choose security partners free from Western conditionality	Rapid expansion of Russian influence post-coup in Mali, Burkina Faso, and CAR; popular anti-French mobilization; junta alignment with Moscow	**UN:** Documented civilian harm by Russian PMCs; absence of accountability; extractive arrangements that benefit foreign actors over local populations
Western	Systematic data collection on civilian harm (ACLED); institutional frameworks for protection of civilians; self-critique and lessons debate; recognition that intervention failed	Assumed its own intervention was benevolent; underestimated local agency and political dynamics; conflated counterterrorism with state-building; treated symptoms rather than causes	Liberal internationalism; human rights; protection of civilians; democratic governance as security foundation	ACLED civilian targeting data; MINUSMA lessons reports; Crisis Group analyses; French military withdrawal under pressure	**African:** Intervention was neo-colonial in structure and effect; "lessons" debate preserves Western epistemic authority while avoiding accountability for harm caused

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Systematic documentation of civilian harm and displacement; protection of civilians frameworks; humanitarian access advocacy; multilateral legitimacy	Constrained by host-state consent; slow to adapt to political change; institutional interests can conflict with honest assessment; procedural focus treats political crisis as technical challenge	Multilateralism; protection of civilians; humanitarian principles; impartiality	MINUSMA reports; UNHCR displacement data; ACLED integration with UN reporting	**Western:** UN missions were ineffective, withdrew under pressure, and failed to prevent civilian harm despite massive resources

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SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2023 Niger Coup and the Expulsion of French Troops — The Endpoint of a Decade of Sahel Intervention

Levels of Analysis

Individual level. The coup of July 26, 2023, was executed by General Abdourahamane Tchiani, commander of the Presidential Guard, who detained President Mohamed Bazoum and declared himself head of a military junta. At this level, the event turns on the decisions of specific actors: Tchiani's calculation that Bazoum was vulnerable, Bazoum's own political positioning, and the responses of individual French, American, and ECOWAS officials. The individual level also captures the role of specific mobilizers—civil society figures, religious leaders, and media personalities who framed anti-French sentiment as a popular demand. Yet reducing the coup to individual ambition misses the structural conditions that made it possible: a decade of French military presence that had failed to deliver security, a regional wave of coups in Mali (2020, 2021) and Burkina Faso (2022) that normalized military takeover, and an ECOWAS that had lost credibility as a democratic enforcer. The individual level is necessary but insufficient; it explains who acted but not why the action was thinkable.

State level. The Nigerien state in 2023 was a fragile post-colonial construct: a military with limited capacity, a civilian government dependent on external security guarantees, and institutions that had never fully consolidated democratic control over the armed forces. The coup exposed the hollowness of Niger's democratic transition—Bazoum's election in 2021 had been contested, and the military retained de facto veto power over civilian governance. The state's security apparatus was fragmented: the Presidential Guard, the regular army,

and various specialized units operated with overlapping mandates and competing loyalties. The junta's first acts—suspending the constitution, dissolving institutions, and arresting Bazoum—were classic state-capture moves, but they were also framed as sovereign assertions against a state that had been, in the junta's narrative, subordinated to French interests. The state level reveals that the coup was not merely a military putsch but a reconfiguration of state power, with the junta positioning itself as the authentic representative of national sovereignty against a civilian government perceived as externally dependent.

Systemic level. The Sahel regional security complex had been destabilized by a decade of intervention and its failures. The G5 Sahel joint force, created in 2017 with French backing, had collapsed by 2023, with Mali and Burkina Faso withdrawing and Niger following. ECOWAS, which had threatened military intervention to restore Bazoum, found itself paralyzed by internal divisions—Nigeria's new president, Bola Tinubu, faced domestic opposition to military action, while other member states were themselves led by juntas. The systemic level captures the regional contagion of coups: Mali's 2020 and 2021 coups, Burkina Faso's 2022 coups, and Guinea's 2021 coup created a permissive environment in which military takeover became normalized. The Alliance of Sahel States (AES), formed by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger in September 2023, represented a systemic realignment: a rejection of ECOWAS and French-led security architecture in favor of a self-declared sovereign bloc. The systemic level shows that the Niger coup was not an isolated event but a node in a regional pattern of state collapse and realignment.

Transnational level. The transnational dimension is the most consequential for understanding the coup's aftermath. France maintained approximately 1,500 troops in Niger, operating from bases in Niamey and the drone facility at Agadez, as part of Operation Barkhane's successor arrangements. The United States maintained a major drone base at Agadez, central to its counterterrorism operations across the Sahel. The junta's expulsion of French troops—completed by December 2023—was a direct transnational act, severing a decade-long military relationship. The transnational level also captures the jihadist networks that span the Sahel's porous borders: Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) operate across Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, making any single state's security dependent on regional and international cooperation. Finally, the transnational level includes the Russian dimension: while Niger did not immediately host Wagner or Africa Corps forces as Mali did, the junta's alignment with the AES bloc and its anti-Western rhetoric created space for Russian influence, and the broader pattern of Sahel realignment toward Moscow was unmistakable. The transnational level reveals that the coup was not merely a domestic event but a geopolitical pivot point in the competition between Western, Russian, and emerging multipolar orders.

Mechanism

The mechanism linking the coup to the expulsion of French troops operated through four interconnected channels. First, *legitimacy consolidation through anti-foreign mobilization*: the junta, lacking electoral legitimacy, used anti-French sentiment as a mobilizing frame to build popular support. French military presence had become a symbol of neo-colonial subordination, and the junta's expulsion of French troops was a performative act of sovereignty that generated domestic legitimacy. This mechanism drew on a decade of accumulated resentment: French intervention in Mali (Operation Serval, 2013) had initially been welcomed, but the prolonged presence, the failure to defeat jihadists, and incidents of civilian harm had eroded French credibility. The junta did not create anti-French sentiment; it channeled and instrumentalized it.

Second, *ECOWAS sanctions backfire*: ECOWAS imposed sanctions on Niger following the coup, including border closures and financial restrictions. Rather than weakening the junta, the sanctions rallied nationalist support around it, allowing the junta to frame itself as defending Niger against external pressure. The sanc-

tions also created economic hardship that the junta could blame on ECOWAS and, by extension, on France and the West. This mechanism inverted the intended effect of sanctions: instead of coercing compliance, they consolidated junta legitimacy and hardened anti-Western sentiment.

Third, *regional contagion and bloc formation*: the AES, formed in September 2023, provided Niger with diplomatic cover and a shared anti-French platform. Mali and Burkina Faso, already aligned with Russia and hostile to France, offered Niger a model of sovereign defiance. The AES mechanism reduced the cost of expelling French troops by ensuring that Niger would not be isolated; instead, it would be part of a bloc that collectively rejected Western security architecture.

Fourth, *French strategic recalculation*: France, facing the loss of its last major military foothold in the Sahel after withdrawals from Mali and Burkina Faso, chose not to attempt a military reassertion. The French government, under domestic political pressure and with limited appetite for another open-ended deployment, opted for withdrawal. This mechanism was shaped by the recognition that military force could not sustain a presence against a hostile host government and population. The French withdrawal was thus not merely a response to junta demands but a strategic concession that the intervention model had failed.

The combined effect of these four mechanisms was the expulsion of French troops by December 2023 and the effective end of France's decade-long military engagement in the Sahel. The coup was the proximate cause, but the mechanisms reveal that the expulsion was the culmination of a longer process of intervention failure, regional realignment, and anti-Western mobilization.

Perspective Reconstruction

African (primary). The 2023 Niger coup and French expulsion are best understood as an assertion of sovereignty by a people who had endured a decade of external military presence that delivered neither security nor development. The junta, whatever its democratic deficits, channeled a genuine popular demand for self-determination that had been building since the failures of Operation Serval became apparent. French intervention in Mali in 2013 was initially welcomed, but the prolonged presence, the civilian harm, and the failure to defeat jihadists transformed France from liberator to occupier in the eyes of many Sahelians. The ECOWAS sanctions, backed by France and the West, were perceived as punishment for sovereign choice, reinforcing the narrative that external actors sought to dictate Niger's political future. The AES formation represents not merely junta solidarity but a regional reimagining of security architecture on African terms. The African perspective insists that the coup cannot be evaluated solely through the lens of democratic norms without accounting for the democratic deficits of the intervention itself—French military operations were never subjected to meaningful African oversight, and the security architecture was designed in Paris, not Niamey. What this perspective reveals that others miss is the depth of popular legitimacy behind the expulsion: the crowds celebrating French withdrawal were not merely junta supporters but citizens expressing a sovereign demand that had been suppressed by a decade of externally managed security.

Chinese. The Niger coup and French expulsion illustrate the risks of external military intervention and the value of China's non-interference principle. China, which had maintained economic engagement in Niger—including uranium mining interests and infrastructure projects—did not intervene militarily or diplomatically in the coup's aftermath, preserving its relationship with whatever government emerged. The Chinese perspective views the French expulsion as a predictable consequence of intervention overreach: military presence without political legitimacy generates backlash. China's continued economic engagement, including in the uranium sector, positions it to benefit from the post-French landscape without bearing the security costs of stabilization. However, this perspective occludes the question of whether China's economic interests align

with Niger's security needs, and whether non-interference becomes complicity when a junta consolidates authoritarian power. The Chinese view contributes the insight that security partnerships must be built on consent rather than imposition, but it does not address how consent is manufactured or manipulated by juntas.

Russian. The Niger coup and French expulsion represent a strategic opportunity and a vindication of Russia's anti-Western framing. Russia, through its state media and diplomatic channels, amplified the narrative of French neo-colonialism and supported the junta's sovereignty claims. While Niger did not immediately host Wagner or Africa Corps forces, the broader pattern—Mali's turn to Wagner, Burkina Faso's alignment with Moscow—positioned Russia as the beneficiary of Western withdrawal. The Russian perspective frames the expulsion as a sovereign choice by a people rejecting imperial domination, and it positions Russia as a partner that respects sovereignty and does not impose political conditionality. This perspective occludes the documented civilian harm perpetrated by Wagner forces in Mali, the extractive economic arrangements that accompany Russian security partnerships, and the absence of accountability mechanisms in the PMC model. The Russian view contributes the insight that Western intervention generated its own opposition, but it does not address whether Russian alternatives deliver better security outcomes for civilians.

Western. The Niger coup and French expulsion represent a catastrophic failure of a decade of intervention and a strategic setback for Western counterterrorism. The Western perspective, particularly in its self-critical variant, acknowledges that French military presence failed to deliver security, that the intervention model conflated counterterrorism with state-building, and that the failure to address governance deficits undermined military gains. The expulsion of French troops is read as evidence that the intervention lacked local legitimacy and that the "partner force" model—training and equipping local militaries—created dependencies rather than capabilities. The Western perspective also notes the strategic cost: the loss of the Agadez drone base and the broader erosion of Western intelligence and operational capacity in the Sahel. However, this perspective can occlude the agency of Sahelian actors, framing the coup and expulsion as reactions to Western failure rather than as autonomous political projects. The Western view contributes systematic data on intervention failure and a genuine, if partial, self-critique, but it struggles to escape the assumption that Western engagement was fundamentally benevolent.

UN. The Niger coup and French expulsion highlight the fragility of multilateral security frameworks and the limits of UN engagement in a rapidly changing political environment. MINUSMA, the UN mission in Mali, had already been forced to withdraw in 2023 following junta demands, and the Niger coup further eroded the UN's operational space in the Sahel. The UN perspective emphasizes the humanitarian consequences: displacement, food insecurity, and the collapse of protection frameworks for civilians in conflict zones. The UN's data collection—through ACLED partnerships and its own reporting—documented the civilian harm that accompanied both Western intervention and its aftermath. However, the UN perspective is constrained by its dependence on host-state consent, which the junta withheld, and by its institutional interest in maintaining relevance in a region where its missions were being expelled. The UN view contributes the insight that civilian protection cannot be achieved without political legitimacy, but it occludes the question of whether the UN's own frameworks were adequate to the scale of the crisis.

Explicit Adjudication

The African perspective best explains the Niger coup and French expulsion, but with significant qualifications. Its central claim—that the expulsion was a sovereign assertion against a failed and resented intervention—captures the mechanism of legitimacy consolidation and the depth of popular support for the junta's anti-French stance. The evidence supports this: the crowds celebrating French withdrawal, the

AES formation, and the regional pattern of anti-French mobilization all point to a genuine demand for self-determination that the Western intervention model failed to accommodate. The African perspective also correctly identifies the ECOWAS sanctions backfire as a mechanism that consolidated rather than weakened junta legitimacy.

However, the African perspective misses or underplays three critical elements. First, it understates the security vacuum created by French withdrawal: ACLED data shows that civilian harm in the Sahel increased following the withdrawal of external forces, and jihadist groups expanded their territorial control in the absence of coordinated military pressure. The sovereignty assertion, while politically meaningful, did not deliver security to civilians. Second, it risks romanticizing junta agency: the juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have not demonstrated superior security outcomes compared to their predecessors, and their governance records include significant civilian harm by state forces. Third, it does not adequately address the transnational dimension: jihadist networks do not respect sovereignty, and the AES bloc's rejection of external cooperation may weaken the regional response to a threat that no single state can contain.

The Western perspective provides the strongest corrective on security outcomes, documenting through ACLED data that civilian harm increased post-withdrawal. But the Western perspective's self-critique remains partial: it acknowledges intervention failure without fully relinquishing the assumption that Western engagement was the appropriate framework. The UN perspective adds the critical dimension of civilian protection and humanitarian access, but its institutional constraints limit its explanatory power. The Russian perspective captures the geopolitical realignment but occludes the civilian harm associated with its own security partnerships. The Chinese perspective offers the non-interference principle as an alternative but does not address how security is actually provided.

The most accurate adjudication is that the Niger coup and French expulsion were simultaneously a sovereign assertion (African), a strategic failure of intervention (Western), a geopolitical realignment (Russian), a validation of non-interference (Chinese), and a humanitarian crisis (UN). No single perspective captures all five dimensions. The African perspective best explains the *political* dynamics—the coup, the expulsion, the popular mobilization—but the Western and UN perspectives better explain the *security* consequences. The synthesis is that sovereignty assertions without security provision create a vacuum that jihadist groups exploit, and that the decade of intervention failed not because sovereignty was irrelevant but because the intervention model never reconciled sovereignty with security.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. Reconstruct the sequence of external military interventions in Mali from 2012 to 2025, mapping each to its stated objective and to its observable effect on civilian harm as recorded by ACLED.
2. Using the four levels of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational), explain why French Operation Serval (January 2013) succeeded tactically but failed strategically, and identify the missing scope condition.
3. Reconstruct the African perspective on the 2020–2021 coups and the subsequent pivot to Russia: what grievance did the junta articulate, how did it frame sovereignty, and what did it occlude?
4. Evaluate the claim that Wagner/Africa Corps reduced jihadist violence in Mali. What does ACLED data on civilian targeting by perpetrator suggest about the composition, not just the level, of violence?

5. Assess the collapse of the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS's failed response to the 2023 Niger coup: what does this reveal about the regional security architecture's dependence on external patrons?
6. Synthesize: was Mali's trajectory from 2012 to 2025 determined more by external intervention choices or by internal governance failures? Adjudicate on the basis of evidence, and state one falsifier.

MODEL ANSWER

Mali's trajectory from 2012 to 2025 illustrates how external intervention can arrest territorial collapse without resolving the political economy of insurgency, and how the resulting legitimacy vacuum invites a second, more predatory external patron. The mechanism runs through three linked stages. First, the 2012 Tuareg rebellion and jihadist advance on Bamako created a state-survival crisis that invited French Operation Serval in January 2013. Serval's mechanism was kinetic: airpower and special forces disrupted jihadist command nodes in the north, pushing Ansar Dine, MUJAO, and AQIM into the Adrar des Ifoghas. The tactical success was real — Bamako was secured, elections held in 2013 — but the strategic mechanism failed because Serval did not rebuild the Malian state's coercive and distributive capacity in the north. French forces remained as Operation Barkhane (2014–2022), a counterterrorism campaign whose logic treated Mali as a battlespace rather than a polity. The scope condition for kinetic success — a partner state capable of holding territory — was absent; the Malian army's collapse in 2012 and its subsequent politicization meant that French gains were reversible.

Second, the 2020 and 2021 coups by Colonel Assimi Goïta's junta reframed the conflict. The junta's mechanism of legitimation was anti-French sovereignty rhetoric: it accused Paris of neo-colonial interference, expelled the French ambassador and forces, and withdrew from the G5 Sahel. This was not merely ideological; it reflected a genuine grievance that a decade of French presence had not reduced insecurity. ACLED data show civilian fatalities rising through 2019–2021, with state forces and allied militias increasingly implicated in massacres in central Mali (Mopti, Ségou). The junta's pivot to Russia, via Wagner (later Africa Corps), offered a different intervention model: less conditionality, no human-rights benchmarks, and a transactional security-for-resources logic. The mechanism here was regime survival through external patronage, not population protection.

Third, Wagner's deployment from late 2021 produced a distinctive harm profile. ACLED records show that Russian PMC operations in Mali, often alongside Malian forces (FAMa), were associated with elevated civilian targeting in central and northern Mali — the Moura massacre of March 2022 being the emblematic case, where hundreds of civilians were killed during a joint operation. The mechanism is not that Wagner caused more violence in aggregate; jihadist groups (JNIM, ISGS) remained the leading perpetrators of civilian harm. Rather, Wagner shifted the composition of violence: state-aligned forces became a larger share of civilian fatalities, eroding the distinction between counterterrorism and collective punishment. This is the hybrid-governance dynamic — the state, jihadists, militias, and PMCs all extract from and harm civilians, and no actor holds a monopoly on legitimate force.

The African perspective, reconstructed from within, frames this not as a story of Russian success or French failure alone but as a sovereignty crisis: external patrons, whether Western or Russian, treat Mali as a security theater, and juntas instrumentalize anti-imperial rhetoric to consolidate power without delivering governance. The Chinese perspective emphasizes non-interference and development-first sequencing, noting that neither France nor Russia addressed the economic drivers. The Russian perspective frames the pivot as sovereign choice and anti-Western solidarity. The Western perspective debates "lessons" — whether lighter footprints, earlier exit, or deeper state-building would have worked. The UN perspective, drawing on MINUSMA's 2013–2023 experience, stresses that peacekeeping without a political settlement and without host-state con-

sent (withdrawn in 2023) cannot protect civilians.

Adjudication: the evidence supports a conditional verdict. External intervention choices mattered at the margin — Serval prevented immediate state collapse; Barkhane's overreach fueled backlash; Wagner's arrival worsened civilian harm by state-aligned forces. But the deeper determinant was internal: the Malian state's failure to extend legitimate authority to the north and center, the politicization of the army, and the junta's substitution of sovereignty rhetoric for reform. No intervention could have succeeded without a credible Malian partner; the counterfactual of "better intervention" is bounded by this structural constraint. The falsifier would be evidence that a different external patron, under the same Malian political conditions, produced durable security and reduced civilian harm — none exists in the 2012–2025 record.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description (150–200 words). Burkina Faso, 2022–2025. Following two coups in 2022, Captain Ibrahim Traoré's junta expelled French forces, suspended the constitution, and deepened security ties with Russia while jihadist groups (JNIM, ISGS) expanded control across the north and east. ACLED records show civilian fatalities rising sharply after 2022, with state-aligned forces and the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) militia increasingly implicated alongside jihadists. The junta framed the pivot as sovereign emancipation from neo-colonial dependence, yet governance indicators deteriorated and humanitarian access contracted. Your task: analyze this trajectory using the lesson's framework.

(b) Required memo headings (use as prompts):

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal chain linking the 2022 coups, the expulsion of French forces, the Russian security pivot, and the trajectory of civilian harm. Specify scope conditions and observable implications.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct all five perspectives (African primary, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on the Burkina Faso case in 3–5 sentences each, steel-manned from within.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one comparable case from the lesson or prior lessons and specify what transfers and what does not.
- **Falsifiers:** State two observable developments that would weaken your central claim, and one that would strengthen it.

(c) Self-check: Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what follows), and prescription (what should be done) — and that no two are conflated.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which of the following best explains why French Operation Serval's tactical success in January 2013 did not translate into strategic success in Mali by 2022?

A. Serval's rules of engagement were too restrictive to permit the operational tempo needed to defeat jihadist networks. B. The intervention's mechanism was kinetic disruption without state-building, and the Malian state lacked the capacity to hold territory. C. Russia's Wagner Group outcompeted France militarily in the Sahel after 2019, forcing a French withdrawal. D. The UN MINUSMA mission replaced French forces and failed to protect civilians, causing the strategic failure.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **A is wrong** because it misattributes failure to rules of engagement rather than to the structural absence of a capable partner state; Serval's kinetic tempo was in fact high, and restrictions were not the binding constraint.
- **C is wrong** because it reverses causality: Wagner arrived in Mali in late 2021, after the French withdrawal was already underway, and did not outcompete France militarily; the withdrawal was driven by junta hostility and domestic French fatigue, not battlefield defeat.
- **D is wrong** because MINUSMA did not replace French forces — it operated in parallel with a different mandate (protection of civilians, stabilization) — and its 2023 withdrawal followed, rather than caused, the strategic failure of the French-led counterterrorism model.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

The Sahel data landscape is politically consequential: ACLED event records, UNHCR displacement counts, and deployment timelines do not merely describe violence; they are used by governments, juntas, donors, and armed groups to justify or contest authority. The tables below therefore separate **measurement** from **interpretation**. All trend statements are qualitative because exact counts vary by ACLED version, coding rules, and reporting access; the stable finding is the direction and composition of harm, not a single number.

Table 1. Civilian targeting by perpetrator category, Sahel (qualitative trend, 2011–2025)

Period	Jihadist insurgents	State security forces	Pro-government militias / VDP-type groups	Russian PMCs (mainly Mali)	Dominant pattern
2011–2014	Low–moderate, localized	Low	Low	None	Jihadist control in northern Mali; French Serval reverses territorial loss but does not rebuild governance
2015–2018	Rising	Moderate, rising	Emerging	None / minimal	JNIM and ISGS expand; state responses harden; militia mobilization begins

Period	Jihadist insurgents	State security forces	Pro-government militias / VDP-type groups	Russian PMCs (mainly Mali)	Dominant pattern
2019–2021	High	High	High	Limited / transitional	Massacres, reprisals, and coup cycles; civilian harm becomes multi-perpetrator
2022–2025	Very high	High–very high	High	Significant in Mali	French withdrawal, MINUSMA withdrawal, Russian entrenchment; harm remains high despite fewer Western troops

Table 2. Displacement and external military presence (broad trend, selected periods)

Period	Displaced populations (UNHCR, broad)	France	United States	UN MINUSMA	Russia (Wagner / Africa Corps)	Reading
2013	Hundreds of thousands	Serval peak; Barkhane follows	Intelligence / support role	Mandate established	Minimal	Intervention restores state territorial control in parts of Mali but not durable protection

Period	Displaced populations (UNHCR, broad)	France	United States	UN MINUSMA	Russia (Wagner / Africa Corps)	Reading
2017	Growing	Barkhane regionalized	Expanding drone / base footprint	Full deployment	Minimal	Security footprint widens; civilian harm and displacement continue to rise
2020	Millions across central Sahel	Barkhane under strain	Present	Present	Limited / entry phase	Coups and jihadist expansion outpace external stabilization
2022	Millions	Withdrawal announced / underway	Present	Drawdown begins	Expanding	External order fragments; juntas redefine partnerships
2024–2025	Several million	Expelled from Niger and others	Niger expulsion / reconfiguration	Withdrawal completed (Mali 2023)	Entrenched in Mali; broader Sahel courtship	External military presence is reorganized, not reduced in geopolitical significance

Table 3. Data-quality and interpretive indicators

Indicator	What it measures	Strength	Limitation
ACLED civilian-targeting events	Reported deliberate violence against civilians	Disaggregated by perpetrator, location, and date	Undercounts remote areas; event-based, not population-based; coding depends on media and NGO access

Indicator	What it measures	Strength	Limitation
ACLED fatalities	Reported deaths in political violence	Useful for trend comparison	Casualty figures are estimates; mass-casualty claims are often contested
UNHCR displacement	Refugees and internally displaced persons	Humanitarian planning and cross-country comparison	Registration gaps; definitional and political variation; does not capture all forced movement
External troop-deployment records	Foreign military presence	Helps date intervention phases	Covert, rotational, or contractor forces may be undercounted
Coup and regime-change counts	Political instability	Tracks abrupt authority shifts	Does not measure governance quality, legitimacy, or civilian protection

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** What does the ACLED pattern suggest about civilian targeting in the Sahel between 2011 and 2025?
   Answer: Civilian targeting rises sharply after the mid-2010s and becomes **multi-perpetrator**. Jihadist violence remains central, but state forces, militias, and Russian PMCs account for a growing share of reported harm in key periods. The trend therefore undermines any narrative that attributes civilian harm to one actor alone. It also shows that external intervention phases do not automatically reduce harm; in several periods, harm rises alongside or after major deployments.

2. **Level of analysis.** At which level should the Sahel pattern be explained?
   Answer: All four levels are necessary. At the **individual** level, commanders, militia leaders, and soldiers make targeting decisions under fear, revenge, and local grievance. At the **state** level, weak territorial control, coup politics, and security-force fragmentation shape who is armed and accountable. At the **systemic** level, French, US, UN, and Russian interventions alter incentives, legitimacy, and resource flows. At the **transnational** level, jihadist networks, PMC contracts, arms routes, and diaspora/remittance economies cross borders. A single-level explanation is almost always incomplete.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** How would each perspective read the same ACLED trend?
   African (primary): The data confirm that external intervention did not secure civilians; they also show that post-coup juntas and their new partners have not solved the problem. The African vantage point asks who is counted, who is protected, and whose sovereignty is treated as expendable. It stresses that civilian harm is not only a security metric but a legitimacy crisis: states that kill or fail to protect their own people lose the moral basis of rule, regardless of whether the killer wears a national uniform, a militia armband, or a PMC patch.
   Chinese: The trend supports the argument that security without development and without host-state ownership produces recurring violence. Beijing's reading emphasizes non-interference, state capac-

ity, and infrastructure/economic stabilization, while treating Western military-first intervention as a cautionary case. It may understate the role of authoritarian closure and the absence of accountability mechanisms.

Russian: The data are read through an anti-Western frame: Western intervention failed, created dependency, and delegitimized local regimes; Russian partnership is presented as sovereign choice and pragmatic security assistance. This reading can occlude Russian PMC abuses and the way mercenary accountability gaps may reproduce harm.

Western: The trend feeds a self-critical debate about counterinsurgency, partner-force abuse, and the limits of external military power. Western analysts often ask whether different force ratios, governance support, or earlier withdrawal would have changed outcomes. This reading can overstate technical failure and understate the structural illegitimacy of externally backed security orders.

UN: The data are read through protection-of-civilians mandates, humanitarian access, and mandate realism. The UN perspective stresses that civilian harm data should shape rules of engagement, human-rights due diligence, and exit planning. It can be constrained by member-state politics, host-state consent, and the gap between mandate language and deployable capacity.

4. **Interpretation.** Does the data imply that intervention "caused" civilian harm?
   Answer: Not by itself. The data show **correlation and temporal overlap**, not a single causal mechanism. Intervention may reduce harm in some localities while increasing it elsewhere through reprisals, displacement, or legitimacy collapse. Jihadist violence, state fragmentation, climate stress, and local revenge cycles also drive harm. The strongest defensible claim is that intervention trajectories changed the **composition and geography** of violence and often failed to produce durable civilian protection, not that any single external actor is solely responsible.

5. **Limitation.** What are the most important limits of these data?
   Answer: ACLED captures reported events, not all harm; remote and contested areas are underreported; fatality estimates are uncertain; displacement data miss unregistered movement; deployment records miss covert or contractor forces; and all datasets are shaped by political access, media coverage, and definitional choices. Data can illuminate patterns but cannot settle questions of legitimacy, intent, or historical responsibility without qualitative and local evidence.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Sahel Hybrid Governance Field Map" (hand-drawn sketch)

Draw a simplified outline of the central Sahel: western Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, with capital dots for Bamako, Ouagadougou, and Niamey. Use five node types: blue squares for state security forces, red triangles for jihadist groups, orange circles for pro-government militias, black diamonds for Russian PMC elements, and small grey dots for civilian communities. Draw solid arrows where an actor exercises coercion or taxation; dashed arrows where an actor provides protection or services; wavy arrows for displacement. Add a legend in the corner. Label three zones: "contested rural corridor," "capital-centered state," and "borderland trafficking route."

Perspective overlay: Annotate in the margin: African lens—"sovereignty is fragmented, not absent"; Western lens—"security vacuum"; Russian lens—"sovereign partner network"; Chinese lens—"development corridor"; UN lens—"protection gap." The visual should make clear that civilians are not passive background but the population whose survival and allegiance are being contested.

Visual 2 — "Intervention Timeline and Civilian Harm, 2013–2025" (hand-drawn timeline)
Draw a horizontal axis from 2013 to 2025. Above the axis, plot a jagged line labeled "relative civilian targeting (qualitative, not exact counts)." Below the axis, draw stacked horizontal bars for France, the United States, UN MINUSMA, and Russia, with bar thickness indicating relative presence and clear end points for withdrawals or expulsions. Mark vertical ticks for major events: French Serval, Barkhane, G5 Sahel, coups in Mali/Burkina Faso/Niger, MINUSMA withdrawal, Niger coup and French expulsion, Africa Corps expansion. Add a small box titled "Data caution: reported events only."
Perspective overlay: Place five short margin notes: African—"rejection of tutelage and demand for accountability"; Western—"counterinsurgency and partner-force dilemmas"; Russian—"anti-Western opportunity and sovereign choice"; Chinese—"stability through development, not expeditionary war"; UN—"mandate erosion and protection failures." The visual should show that external presence and civilian harm move on different clocks.

Visual 3 — "ACLED Perpetrator Composition and Displacement" (hand-drawn stacked chart)
Draw four stacked bars for the periods 2011–2014, 2015–2018, 2019–2021, and 2022–2025. Each bar is divided into segments for jihadists, state forces, militias, and Russian PMCs, with segment height showing relative share rather than exact counts. Overlay a dashed line for "displaced populations (broad trend)" rising across the same periods. Add annotations: "remote-area underreporting," "contested casualty figures," and "displacement is not only conflict-driven."
Perspective overlay: Annotate: African—"whose deaths are visible and whose are normalized?"; Western—"metrics of success and failure"; Russian—"Western data and double standards"; Chinese—"human security requires development indicators"; UN—"protection of civilians and humanitarian access." The visual should teach that composition matters: a decline in one perpetrator's share is not the same as a decline in civilian harm.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (dense answer + source log)
What is "hybrid governance" in the Sahel?	State, jihadist, militia, PMC, and civilian actors coexist and compete for authority, taxation, protection, and legitimacy. Governance is not a binary of state vs. non-state; it is layered and territorial. Source log: Crisis Group Sahel reports; ACLED Sahel reports.
What is the central civilian-harm trend?	Reported civilian targeting rises after the mid-2010s and becomes multi-perpetrator. Jihadist violence remains central, but state forces, militias, and Russian PMCs contribute significantly in later periods. Source log: ACLED Sahel reports 2023–2025.

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (dense answer + source log)
How did French intervention evolve?	From Serval's rapid territorial reversal in Mali to Barkhane's regionalized counterterrorism, then withdrawal and expulsion. The trajectory shows short-term military gains without durable political settlement. Source log: Crisis Group; International Peace Institute analyses.
What is MINUSMA's lesson?	A large UN mission can stabilize and protect in some areas but cannot substitute for host-state legitimacy, regional cooperation, or a viable political process; withdrawal followed host-state pressure. Source log: UN MINUSMA lessons reports.
Why did the G5 Sahel collapse?	Joint force ambitions were undermined by funding gaps, uneven national capacity, coup politics, and diverging regime interests; the framework could not survive the broader breakdown of Sahelian political order. Source log: Crisis Group; IPI analyses.
What is the ECOWAS crisis?	Coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger strained ECOWAS norms, sanctions, and military-threat credibility; the bloc faced a tension between democratic norms and regional security cooperation. Source log: Crisis Group Sahel reports.
How should ACLED data be used?	As pattern evidence, not proof of causation or intent. Disaggregate by perpetrator, compare with displacement, and triangulate with field reporting. Source log: ACLED Sahel reports.
What does the African perspective emphasize?	Sovereignty, rejection of external tutelage, junta agency, and the legitimacy crisis produced by civilian harm. It asks whether any external actor has earned the right to define Sahelian security. Source log: African scholarship and regional political discourse; Crisis Group.
What do Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives add?	China: non-interference plus development and state capacity. Russia: sovereign choice plus anti-Western framing. Western: intervention failure and self-critique. UN: PoC, humanitarian access, mandate realism. Source log: IPI; UN MINUSMA lessons reports.

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (dense answer + source log)
What are key falsifiers?	If civilian harm fell sustainably after a given intervention; if displacement reversed; if a regional force gained legitimacy; if data showed one perpetrator's dominance declining without replacement by another. Source log: ACLED; UNHCR.
What is the Niger 2023 worked example?	The coup and expulsion of French troops mark the endpoint of a decade of intervention: external military presence became politically untenable even where it had tactical utility. Source log: Crisis Group; ACLED.
What is the Mali 2012–2025 problem pair?	From French Serval to Russian dependence: a case of intervention substitution rather than conflict resolution, with civilian harm and sovereignty claims at the center. Source log: ACLED; Crisis Group; IPI.

Summary (3–5 sentences). The Sahel case shows that civilian harm is not a side effect of an otherwise stable security order but a constitutive feature of hybrid governance and contested sovereignty. ACLED data reveal a multi-perpetrator escalation that no single intervention narrative can explain. French, UN, and US trajectories lost political legitimacy, while Russian entry and junta agency reconfigured rather than ended external dependence. The African perspective is indispensable because it centers sovereignty, accountability, and the question of who is protected; the other perspectives add important but partial insights. The lesson's core judgment is that durable civilian protection requires political legitimacy and accountable local institutions, not merely a change in foreign flag.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.**
   In the Sahel, several armed groups and governments are fighting over who rules and protects people. Civilians are harmed by jihadists, soldiers, militias, and foreign contractors. France, the UN, the United States, and Russia have all tried to shape the conflict, but none has produced lasting safety. The data show that violence against civilians has grown and that many different actors cause it. Coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger show that people and elites have rejected some outside plans. The main point is that safety cannot be imported by force; it depends on governments that people trust and that can be held accountable.

2. **Mark gaps.**
   I still need to be precise about the difference between "civilian targeting" and all civilian deaths; between displacement caused by violence and displacement caused by drought or economic collapse; and between a coup's popularity and its long-term legitimacy. I also need to avoid implying that Russian forces are the only new source of harm or that Western withdrawal automatically improves civilian out-

comes. Another gap: I have not yet specified what "accountability" would mean in practice—courts, parliamentary oversight, community justice, or international mechanisms.

3. **Reread verification.**
   After rereading the core sources, the stable claims are: ACLED shows rising and diversifying civilian harm; UNHCR shows large-scale displacement; external deployments shifted from French/UN dominance to Russian/junta alignment; and MINUSMA's withdrawal followed host-state pressure. The less stable claims are exact causal weights: the data do not prove that intervention caused all harm, nor that withdrawal will reduce it. I should state mechanisms and scope conditions, not just outcomes.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.**
   The Sahel is like a neighborhood where several rival protection rackets claim to keep residents safe while also extorting them; outside patrons sometimes back one racket, then another, but residents still cannot call a trusted police force. The analogy helps explain hybrid governance and civilian vulnerability. Its limit is that states, juntas, PMCs, and jihadist movements are not merely criminal rackets: they make ideological, religious, and sovereignty claims, and some have genuine local support. The analogy also risks erasing the historical and colonial dimensions of state weakness.

5. **Rewrite.**
   The Sahel is a hybrid-governance arena in which civilian harm is produced by multiple armed actors and shaped by shifting external interventions. ACLED data show rising, diversifying civilian targeting; UNHCR data show massive displacement; and deployment records show a reorganization of external military presence rather than its disappearance. French and UN interventions achieved tactical gains but lost political legitimacy; Russian and junta partnerships have not yet demonstrated superior civilian protection. The African perspective centers sovereignty and accountability, while Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each illuminate partial mechanisms and occlude others. The safest conclusion is that civilian protection depends on accountable local institutions and legitimate regional order, not on the nationality of the troops deployed.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L34	definition	What is “hybrid governance” in the Sahel?	It denotes overlapping and contested authority among states, jihadist movements, militias, private military companies, and civilians, where sovereignty is fragmented rather than absent. The concept shifts analysis from state failure to plural political orders.	African scholarship treats this as a historically produced political order, not a vacuum to be filled by external actors.
L34	mechanism	How did Operation Serval (2013) produce territorial gains without strategic victory?	It disrupted jihadist control of northern Mali but did not resolve local grievances, political exclusion, or state legitimacy deficits; armed groups adapted through dispersion and local embedding. Military success therefore did not convert into durable political order.	Western accounts often foreground operational success; African accounts foreground unresolved political bargains.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L34	mechanism	What does ACLED suggest about Russian PMC-linked violence in Mali?	ACLED event data associate Russian-linked forces with significant civilian-targeting incidents in some periods and locations, especially where they operate alongside state forces. The pattern is contingent on local command, mission type, and reporting conditions, not an invariant law.	Russian narratives emphasize sovereign partnership; African critics emphasize accountability and civilian protection gaps.
L34	comparison	How did the G5 Sahel and ECOWAS crises differ?	The G5 Sahel eroded through coups, funding shortfalls, and weak legitimacy among member states; the ECOWAS crisis centered on sanctions and intervention threats after the 2023 Niger coup. Together they show regional security architecture fragmenting under competing sovereignty claims.	Both reveal African institutional agency and constraint, not merely external manipulation.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L34	source	What is a key limitation of ACLED civilian-targeting data?	ACLED records reported events with perpetrator attribution, but underreporting, access constraints, definitional choices, and media bias shape the record. It is strong for trend and perpetrator comparison, weak for exact casualty totals.	Data should be read as an evidentiary floor, not a complete census of harm.
L34	debate	Could any Sahel intervention have worked?	A conditional yes: security operations integrated with political reform, local legitimacy, regional ownership, and civilian protection might have reduced violence. A counterterrorism-only model, detached from governance, is the stronger candidate for failure.	Western "lessons" debates often underweight African sovereignty and institutional capacity.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L34	reconstruction	How does the African perspective reconstruct the 2023 Niger coup?	It is read partly as a rejection of French security tutelage and a failed counterterrorism paradigm, asserting junta agency and sovereignty. It also carries costs: democratic erosion, repression risks, and uncertain civilian protection.	Primary perspective: sovereignty and intervention failure, not simply regime change.
L34	occlusion	What does the Western perspective often occlude in the Sahel?	It can occlude colonial legacies, local political economies, African institutional agency, and the everyday politics of authority. Counterterrorism framing may reduce complex conflicts to extremist threats.	Occlusion is structural to policy urgency, not only bias.
L34	adjudication	How should one adjudicate French versus Russian security models?	Compare civilian harm, sustainability, sovereignty claims, and local legitimacy using the same evidentiary standards. Neither model is sufficient alone; the evidence is mixed and context-dependent.	Avoid treating either as liberation or as purely predatory.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L34	visual	What should a hybrid-governance diagram show?	Overlapping zones for state, jihadist, militia, PMC, and civilian authority, with contested borders and no single center. Labels should include "sovereignty claims" and "protection gaps."	Visualizes plural authority rather than state absence.
L34	application	How did MINUSMA's collapse illustrate mandate-consent gaps?	A protection mandate confronted host-state consent withdrawal, operational constraints, and geopolitical polarization. The case shows that legitimacy and consent can matter as much as troop numbers.	UN perspective stresses protection of civilians and humanitarian access.
L34	mechanism	Why did ECOWAS sanctions after the Niger coup backfire politically?	They were framed by juntas and supporters as external coercion, mobilizing sovereignty narratives and regional solidarity against ECOWAS. Sanctions also imposed civilian costs, weakening their legitimacy.	African perspective highlights regional agency and unintended mobilization.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L34	comparison	How does China's Sahel posture differ from France's and Russia's?	China emphasizes non-interference, security partnerships, and economic-security linkages, avoiding combat deployment and overt sovereignty infringement. Its leverage is lower and its accountability exposure different.	Chinese perspective contributes a sovereignty-compatible security model with limited enforcement capacity.
L34	debate	What is the UN's central lesson from MINUSMA?	Peacekeeping requires credible consent, realistic mandates, civilian protection prioritization, and humanitarian access guarantees. Withdrawal under pressure reveals the limits of externally supplied security without political settlement.	UN perspective balances protection norms with consent constraints.
L34	source	How should troop-deployment data be interpreted?	Deployment figures indicate external commitment and burden-sharing but not effectiveness, rules of engagement, or local legitimacy. They must be paired with civilian-harm and displacement indicators.	Quantitative commitment is not equivalent to protection.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100)

Concept	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence basis	Gap to close
Hybrid governance as plural sovereignty	0-100	Ability to define and apply to Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger	Need one concrete local authority example beyond capitals
French intervention trajectory	0-100	Recall of Serval, Barkhane, withdrawal, Niger expulsion	Need sharper distinction between tactical and political outcomes
Russian PMC trajectory	0-100	ACLED trend awareness and accountability debate	Need better command of local command structures
ACLED civilian-harm interpretation	0-100	Perpetrator disaggregation and reporting limits	Need practice bounding claims about exact casualties
G5 Sahel collapse	0-100	Institutional and coup dynamics	Need funding and mandate details
ECOWAS crisis	0-100	Sanctions, threats, regional backlash	Need civilian-cost evidence
Comparative intervention lessons	0-100	Conditional success criteria	Need one falsifying case
Five-perspective reconstruction	0-100	Steel-manning each tradition	Need stronger Chinese and UN specifics

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which perspective most changed your initial view of the Sahel, and what evidence would have to change for you to revert to your earlier view?
2. Where did you conflate description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what is likely next), and prescription (what should be done)?
3. Which data limitation most weakens your strongest claim, and how would you rewrite that claim as a bounded, defensible statement?

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
The Sahel is a security vacuum.	It is a hybrid-governance space with multiple competing authorities.	ACLED event patterns; local authority and militia dynamics; African state-formation scholarship.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
French withdrawal ended external influence in the Sahel.	US, Russian, Turkish, Gulf, and regional actors remain engaged; influence shifted form rather than disappeared.	Troop and partnership changes; diplomatic realignments; PMC deployments.
ACLED data prove one perpetrator is uniformly the worst.	Perpetrator patterns vary by country, period, and event type; data are event-based and incomplete.	ACLED civilian-targeting trends; reporting-access constraints.
Juntas automatically express popular sovereignty.	Junta claims draw on anti-intervention sentiment but also involve repression, exclusion, and uncertain legitimacy.	Post-coup political trajectories; civil-society and opposition reports.
MINUSMA failed only because of UN incompetence.	Mandate-consent gaps, host-state withdrawal, and geopolitical polarization were central; troop numbers alone were insufficient.	UN MINUSMA lessons reports; mandate and consent records.
Russian security partnership is simply anti-imperial liberation.	It may express sovereign choice while raising accountability, civilian-harm, and dependency concerns.	ACLED civilian-harm patterns; sovereignty and accountability debates.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Hybrid governance; plural sovereignty; protection gaps	Overlapping authority produces contested order; violence becomes governance tool; external actors enter local bargains	Hybrid political order; Africanist state-formation scholarship; regional security complex theory (Buzan and Wæver)	Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger; ACLED events; local militia maps	State-centric vs hybrid order	If durable state monopoly returns and violence falls, hybrid model weakens	L23, L29, L30

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Intervention trajectories	Security assistance can reduce territorial control but fail politically; coups can expel external forces; PMCs substitute for state capacity	Intervention trap; sovereignty bargain; security-development nexus	Serval/Barkhane; Wagner/Africa Corps; US posture; Niger 2023 expulsion	Counterterrorism vs sovereignty	If governance-integrated intervention sustainably reduces civilian harm, critique weakens	L31, L35, L43
Civilian harm by perpetrator	Perpetrator disaggregation reveals state, PMC, and jihadist patterns; reporting bias shapes totals	Event-data epistemology; civilian protection norms	ACLED 2011-2025; UNHCR displacement; troop deployments	Data as objective vs constructed	If independent audits converge with ACLED trends, confidence rises	L23, L34
G5 Sahel and ECOWAS crises	Institutional erosion; coup contagion; sanctions mobilize sovereignty narratives	Regionalism; regional security complex; sovereignty backlash	G5 dissolution; ECOWAS Niger sanctions	Regional integration vs sovereignty	If regional force succeeds with consent, institutionalist view strengthens	L30, L31
Comparative intervention lessons	Conditional success requires governance, legitimacy, regional ownership, civilian protection	Conditional intervention theory; political settlement theory	Mali 2012-2025; Niger 2023	Intervention possible vs impossible	If governance-first pilot reduces violence, possibility claim strengthens	L29, L34

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Five perspectives	Each tradition highlights different mechanisms and occludes others	Perspectival IR; African primary viewpoint	All Sahel cases	Normative pluralism	If one perspective predicts all outcomes, others occlude less	L1, L34

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 — Immediate (same day, 30 minutes):** Review all 15 flashcards once, then redraw the hybrid-governance diagram from memory and compare it with the visual anchor.
- **R2 — 24 hours (45 minutes):** Reconstruct the five perspectives on the Sahel in continuous prose, ensuring the African perspective is longest and framed as primary.
- **R3 — 72 hours (60 minutes):** Complete the Data Lab questions using ACLED, UNHCR, and deployment data; write one bounded claim about civilian harm by perpetrator.
- **R4 — 7 days (90 minutes):** Write the independent memo for the assigned case, including mechanism, perspective reconstruction, historical analogue, and falsifiers.
- **R5 — 14 days (60 minutes):** Teach the lesson's central puzzle aloud without notes, then update the error-log with any remaining misconception.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define hybrid governance without reducing the Sahel to state failure.
☐ I can explain why Operation Serval's territorial gains did not produce strategic victory.
☐ I can interpret ACLED civilian-targeting data with appropriate limits.
☐ I can distinguish state, Russian PMC, and jihadist civilian-harm patterns without overclaiming.
☐ I can explain the collapse of the G5 Sahel.
☐ I can explain the ECOWAS crisis after the 2023 Niger coup.
☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary and longest.
☐ I can steel-man the Chinese perspective on non-interference and security partnership.
☐ I can steel-man the Russian perspective on sovereign choice and anti-Western framing.
☐ I can steel-man the Western perspective on intervention failure and lessons.
☐ I can steel-man the UN perspective on MINUSMA, protection, and humanitarian access.
☐ I can compare French and Russian models using the same evidentiary standards.
☐ I can identify what each perspective occludes.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I can state at least two falsifiers for my strongest claim.
☐ I have completed the Data Lab questions.
☐ I have completed the independent memo.
☐ I have updated my error log.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Data and conflict monitoring - ACLED, Sahel conflict and civilian-targeting reports, 2023–2025. - UNHCR, Sahel displacement and protection updates, 2023–2025.

Intervention and regional security - Crisis Group, Sahel reports on Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and regional security, 2012–2025. - International Peace Institute, analyses of MINUSMA, G5 Sahel, and external intervention, 2018–2025.

UN peacekeeping and protection - UN, MINUSMA lessons reports and protection-of-civilians assessments.

African political thought and sovereignty - Grovogui, Mbembe, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Bayart, Aning, Danso, Tamale, and Oyěwùmí, thematic works on sovereignty, extraversion, hybrid authority, and political order.

Comparative intervention and proxy warfare - Scholarly and policy literature on intervention failure, PMC substitution, and regional security complexes, with attention to African agency.

End of Lesson 34. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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36. Post-Soviet Ontology and the Security Dilemma

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 35: Post-Soviet Ontology and the Security Dilemma
Module	Module 6: Eastern Europe and the Ukraine War
Prerequisites	L5 (realism, security dilemma), L7 (ontological security), L14 (contemporary transition)
Interleaved links	Forward to L36 (Ukraine war), L39 (European security), L40 (wider Eastern Europe)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, worked example, problem pair, visuals, flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is not whether Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine was "caused" by NATO expansion or by imperial ambition, but how two incompatible ontologies of the post-Soviet space collided with such destructive force, and why the standard theoretical vocabularies of International Relations—security dilemma, imperial ambition, ontological insecurity—each capture part of the mechanism while none

captures the whole. Russia's self-understanding as a great power entitled to a "zone of privileged interests," articulated most explicitly by President Dmitry Medvedev in the aftermath of the 2008 Georgia war, treats the post-Soviet space not as a collection of sovereign states exercising self-determination but as a civilizational sphere whose security architecture must be shaped in Moscow. Ukraine's self-understanding, consolidated through the Orange Revolution of 2004 and the Euromaidan of 2013–14, treats sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right to choose alliances as non-negotiable attributes of statehood. These are not merely competing policy preferences; they are competing ontologies—competing answers to the question of what kind of political entity Russia is, what kind of political entities its neighbors are, and what kind of order is legitimate in the space between them. The lesson exists because the collision cannot be understood by applying any single theory mechanically; it requires holding structural realism, ontological security theory, and constructivist identity analysis in tension, and adjudicating among them on the basis of evidence rather than ideological commitment.

Placed in the curriculum, this lesson is the hinge of Module 6. It builds directly on Lesson 5's treatment of realism and the security dilemma, on Lesson 7's treatment of ontological security, and on Lesson 14's treatment of contemporary transition, and it prepares the ground for Lesson 36 on the Ukraine war itself, Lesson 39 on European security architecture, and Lesson 40 on wider Eastern Europe. The student who masters this lesson will not yet have studied the full 2022 invasion in depth—that is Lesson 36's task—but will have acquired the theoretical and historical scaffolding necessary to analyze it without collapsing into either the "NATO provoked Russia" or "Russia is simply imperialist" monocausal narratives. The lesson therefore occupies a deliberately transitional position: it is theoretical enough to train analytical discipline, and empirical enough to prevent theory from floating free of evidence. It also serves as the module's methodological conscience, insisting that every causal claim specify a mechanism, a scope condition, and a falsifier.

The theoretical stakes are substantial and genuinely contested. The security-dilemma tradition, running from John Herz through Robert Jervis's 1978 classic "Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma" and Kenneth Waltz's structural realism, predicts that in an anarchic system, measures taken by one state to increase its security—NATO enlargement, missile defense, military exercises—will be perceived as threatening by another, producing spirals of hostility even when neither side desires war. On this account, Russian behavior is at least partly reactive: a great power facing the steady advance of a rival alliance toward its borders, responding with the tools available to it. The ontological-security tradition, developed by Jennifer Mitzen and Brent Steele, predicts something different: that states seek not merely physical survival but continuity of self-identity, and that the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 produced a profound ontological insecurity in Russia that was subsequently reconstructed under Vladimir Putin through a narrative of great-power restoration, civilizational distinctiveness, and victimhood at the hands of a triumphalist West. On this account, Russian behavior is at least partly constitutive: the identity narrative generates the interests, not merely the reverse. These two traditions are not mutually exclusive—Mitzen herself argues that ontological and physical security can reinforce each other—but they compete in emphasis, in the weight they assign to structure versus agency, and in the policy prescriptions they imply. The lesson's task is to hold both in view and to ask, for each historical episode, which mechanism better fits the evidence.

The African perspective is primary in this lesson, not a regional add-on, because the post-Soviet space is not the only arena in which great powers have constructed "zones of privileged interests" and invoked security to justify intervention. From the vantage point of African scholarship—Siba Grovogui's critique of the international legal order's colonial foundations, Achille Mbembe's analysis of necropolitics and the postcolony, Jean-François Bayart's "politics of the belly," Mahmood Mamdani's work on colonialism and the bifurcated state, Walter Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment, Kwame Nkrumah's neo-colonialism, Julius Nyerere's

ujamaa, Amílcar Cabral's theory of culture and liberation, Frantz Fanon's critique of colonial violence, and the contemporary work of Emmanuel Aning, Kwesi Danso, Sylvia Tamale, and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí—the Russian claim to a privileged sphere looks structurally familiar: it is the claim of a great power that its security requires the subordination of smaller neighbors' sovereignty. African states have experienced precisely this logic from multiple directions—European colonialism, Cold War proxy competition, and contemporary great-power rivalry—and have developed a distinctive normative vocabulary around sovereignty, non-interference, and the selective application of international norms. The African vantage reveals what the other four perspectives tend to occlude: that "security dilemma" language can function as a euphemism for imperial ambition, that territorial integrity norms are invoked with striking selectivity, and that the question of who gets to define "legitimate security concerns" is itself a power question. At the same time, African scholarship does not simply invert the Western narrative; it insists on the agency of post-Soviet states and on the possibility that smaller states' choices—Ukraine's westward orientation, Georgia's NATO aspirations—are not merely great-power manipulation but genuine political projects. This is the lesson's central framing move, and it is why the African perspective is developed at greatest length in Section 2.7.

What the student will be able to do after mastering this lesson is substantial and assessable. First, reconstruct each of the five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on the lesson's central topic as a whole, steel-manned from within, identifying what each contributes and what each occludes. Second, adjudicate between the security-dilemma and imperial-ambition explanations for specific episodes, using the 2008 Georgia war as a practice case and the 2014 Crimea annexation as a worked example, on the basis of evidence rather than prior conviction. Third, apply the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to post-Soviet cases, recognizing that the same event looks different at different levels. Fourth, identify falsifiers: what evidence would count against each theory, and what evidence is currently missing. Fifth, produce an independent analytical memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and that calibrates its confidence to the available evidence. These are not abstract skills; they are the skills required to analyze the Ukraine war in Lesson 36 without being captured by any single narrative.

A final methodological caution frames the entire lesson. The temptation in analyzing Russia's behavior is to oscillate between two equally unsatisfying poles: treating Putin as a rational actor responding to structural incentives, which risks excusing aggression; and treating Putin as an irrational ideologue, which risks abandoning explanation altogether. The lesson rejects both. It insists that mechanisms be specified, that scope conditions be stated, that counterarguments be engaged, and that evidence be weighed rather than asserted. It also insists that the student resist the teleological fallacy of reading 2022 backward into 1991: the collapse of the Soviet Union did not make the invasion inevitable, and the enlargement of NATO did not make it inevitable either. Contingency, agency, and the specific choices of specific leaders at specific moments matter, and the lesson's theoretical apparatus is designed to make those choices visible rather than to dissolve them into structure. The student who completes this lesson should be able to hold complexity without collapsing it, and to argue a position while remaining genuinely open to evidence that would change it.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer the following from memory before reading the lesson core. Do not look up answers; the point is to surface what you already know and what you do not.

1. From Lesson 5: State the security dilemma in one sentence, and identify the two conditions—offense-defense balance and information—that Jervis argued determine whether it produces spirals or stability.
2. From Lesson 5: Distinguish Waltz's structural realism from Mearsheimer's offensive realism on the question of whether great powers are satisfied with the status quo.
3. From Lesson 7: Define ontological security, and explain how Mitzen's account differs from Steele's on whether ontological security is primarily about routines or about identity narratives.
4. From Lesson 7: Give one example of a state that experienced ontological insecurity following a major systemic shock, and identify the narrative it constructed to restore continuity.
5. From Lesson 14: What is meant by "contemporary transition," and how does the post-Cold War order's legitimacy crisis relate to the rise of multipolarity?
6. From Lesson 14: Identify one mechanism by which a unipolar moment can generate its own erosion, and name a case where this occurred.

1.2 Orientation Questions These questions frame the lesson's central puzzle. Hold them in mind as you read; you will be expected to answer them in the independent memo.

1. If NATO enlargement were the primary cause of Russian aggression, what would we expect to observe about the timing of Russian military interventions relative to enlargement rounds, and what would falsify that expectation?
2. If imperial ambition were the primary cause, what would we expect to observe about Russian behavior toward non-NATO neighbors, and what would falsify that expectation?
3. How does the collapse of Soviet identity in 1991 function as an independent variable in explaining Russian behavior after 2000, and what evidence would distinguish ontological-insecurity mechanisms from purely strategic ones?
4. What does the African vantage point reveal about the "security dilemma" framing that the Western and Russian perspectives each tend to obscure?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach The following terms will be used throughout the lesson. These are provisional definitions to be refined as you read.

- **Ontological security**: A state's need for continuity and stable self-identity, such that threats to identity can be as destabilizing as threats to physical survival; distinct from physical security.
- **Security dilemma**: The condition in which measures taken by one state to increase its security decrease the security of others, potentially producing spirals of hostility even absent aggressive intent.
- **Zone of privileged interests**: The Russian doctrine, articulated by Medvedev in 2008, asserting a special Russian role in the security affairs of post-Soviet states; a claim to sphere of influence.
- **NATO enlargement**: The post-Cold War expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to include former Warsaw Pact and Soviet states; a central variable in debates over Russian threat perception.
- **EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union)**: A Russian-led economic integration project intended as a counterweight to the European Union in the post-Soviet space.
- **Maidan**: Shorthand for the Euromaidan protests of 2013–14 in Kyiv, which led to the ouster of President Yanukovych and precipitated the 2014 crisis.
- **Reunification**: The Russian term for the 2014 annexation of Crimea, framing it as the return of historically Russian territory; contested by Ukraine and most of the international community.

- **Encirclement**: The Russian perception that NATO expansion constitutes strategic encirclement, a framing with deep roots in Russian and Soviet strategic culture.
- **Civilizational defense**: The claim that Russia defends not merely its territory but a distinct Eurasian civilization against Western liberal universalism.
- **Territorial integrity**: The principle, enshrined in the UN Charter, that states' borders are inviolable; central to both Ukrainian claims and UN resolutions on Crimea.
- **Collective security**: The principle that an attack on one is an attack on all, underlying NATO's Article 5 and the UN Security Council's Chapter VII mechanisms.
- **Great-power identity**: A state's self-conception as a great power, with attendant claims to status, voice, and sphere of influence; in Russia's case, reconstructed after 1991.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to: (1) **Analyze** Russia's post-Soviet great-power self-understanding as a historically constructed identity rather than a natural geopolitical fact, tracing how the collapse of the USSR produced both material contraction and status anxiety. (2) **Explain** the mechanism by which an "imperial hangover" is translated into a doctrine of "privileged interests" in the near abroad, distinguishing identity-based claims from purely material or security-based explanations. (3) **Evaluate** the scope conditions under which a great-power identity becomes coercive foreign policy, including domestic legitimation, neighbor vulnerability, international ambiguity, and material capacity. (4) **Compare** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives differently diagnose the same phenomenon, identifying what each reveals and what each occludes. (5) **Apply** this framework to the 2014 Crimea annexation and the 2008 Georgia war, adjudicating between security-dilemma and imperial-ambition explanations on the basis of evidence rather than assertion. These objectives are assessable through mechanism-based short answers, perspective reconstruction, and case-based adjudication; they require students to move beyond description to causal explanation and normative evaluation.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Imperial hangovers: Russia's self-understanding as a great power and its zone of 'privileged interests'

Bolded Causal Claim: Russia's post-Soviet conduct toward neighboring states is partly driven by an imperial hangover: a durable great-power self-understanding that treats former Soviet space as a zone of privileged interests, operating through identity, status, and spatial imagination as much as through material power.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the ontological shock of 1991. The dissolution of the USSR did not merely reduce Russia's territory and resources; it destroyed a superpower identity that had organized elite self-understanding, bureaucratic routines, military doctrine, and public pride for seven decades. In constructivist terms, interests are constituted by identity, and the loss of Soviet identity created a vacuum that post-Soviet elites filled with a reconstructed Russian great-power identity. This identity is not simply "nationalism" in the ethnic sense; it is a civilizational and geopolitical claim that Russia remains a pole in a multipolar order and retains special responsibilities in Eurasia. The phrase "zone of privileged interests" became explicit in Russian discourse after the 2008 Georgia war, when President Dmitry Medvedev articulated the principle that Russia has privileged interests in regions where it has historically been present. The mechanism

then works through several channels. First, a cognitive map: the former Soviet republics are imagined not as fully external states but as a "near abroad" (blizhnee zarubezh'e), a category that blurs the boundary between domestic and foreign policy. Second, status anxiety: the loss of superpower rank generates compensatory assertions of prerogative, especially when Western institutions appear to treat Russia as a defeated or secondary power. Third, institutional path dependence: the security services, military, energy sector, and diplomatic corps retain Soviet-era networks, threat perceptions, and operational habits that make intervention in the near abroad thinkable and executable. Fourth, legitimation: domestic political entrepreneurs convert great-power assertion into popular legitimacy, especially when economic performance or democratic accountability is weak. Fifth, externalization: neighboring states' sovereignty is interpreted through the lens of Russian security, so that their alliance choices are read as threats to Russia's status and survival rather than as autonomous decisions. The mechanism is therefore neither purely material nor purely ideational; it is a feedback loop in which identity shapes threat perception, threat perception justifies coercion, and coercion reinforces identity. Realist theory helps explain why a great power might seek regional hegemony and buffer zones, but realism alone cannot explain why the specific spatial category of the "near abroad" persists after the material empire has collapsed. Postcolonial and decolonial scholarship helps explain how imperial spatial imaginaries survive formal decolonization: the empire ends, but the categories, hierarchies, and practices of rule persist in diplomatic language, security doctrine, and elite habitus. Russian international-relations discourse, including analysts such as Trenin, has often presented this self-understanding as a pragmatic great-power realism rather than imperialism, arguing that Russia has legitimate special interests in Eurasia. Putin's 2021 essay on the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians illustrates how identity claims can be mobilized to deny the full sovereignty of a neighbor by framing it as part of a shared civilizational body. The mechanism is therefore best understood as an imperial hangover: the persistence of an imperial mode of seeing space, status, and sovereignty after the formal end of empire.

Scope Conditions: The imperial-hangover mechanism does not operate automatically; it requires specific conditions. Materially, Russia must possess sufficient military, economic, or energy leverage to make coercion credible. Geopolitically, the target state must be vulnerable—whether because of internal division, weak institutions, lack of external security guarantees, or geographic exposure. Domestically, elites must face incentives to mobilize great-power identity, whether for legitimation, diversion, or ideological conviction. Internationally, the environment must be permissive: Western red lines must be ambiguous, international institutions must be unable to enforce norms, and other great powers must be distracted or complicit. Ideologically, historical narratives must be available and resonant enough to frame coercion as restoration or defense rather than aggression. The mechanism is also constrained by counter-conditions: if a neighbor has a credible external security guarantee, if domestic costs of intervention are too high, if Russia lacks capacity, or if international costs are prohibitive, the imperial hangover may remain latent rather than expressed. Scope conditions therefore matter analytically because they prevent the theory from becoming a tautology in which every Russian action is explained by empire. The theory predicts not constant expansion but conditional assertiveness: coercion where vulnerability and permissiveness coincide, restraint where they do not.

Observable Implications: If the imperial-hangover mechanism is operative, one should observe several patterns. Rhetorically, Russian leaders and officials should invoke "privileged interests," "near abroad," "historical unity," "Russian world," or civilizational ties when justifying policy toward post-Soviet states. Behaviorally, one should observe interventions, coercion, or recognition of breakaway entities in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, or elsewhere, especially when those states pursue Western alignment. Institutionally, one should observe attempts to build alternative integration projects—such as the Eurasian Economic Union or the Collective Security Treaty Organization—that reconstitute a Russian-centered sphere. Diplomatically,

one should observe demands for veto power over neighbors' alliance choices, as in Russia's December 2021 proposals to NATO and the United States. Domestically, one should observe high public approval for assertive foreign policy and the use of historical grievance in official narratives. Conversely, the mechanism would be weakened as an explanation if Russia consistently accepted NATO enlargement, refrained from coercing neighbors, or treated post-Soviet states as fully equal sovereigns. The observable implications thus allow the theory to be tested against behavior rather than inferred from identity alone.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

From an African vantage point, the imperial hangover is legible not as an exotic Russian pathology but as a familiar structure of hierarchical sovereignty. African scholarship has long treated sovereignty as historically contested and racialized: Grovogui's work on the "standard of civilization" shows how great powers have claimed tutelary authority over weaker states; Mamdani's citizen/subject distinction reveals how colonial rule produced differentiated sovereignty; Rodney and Nkrumah frame underdevelopment as a product of external extraction rather than internal failure. In this light, Russia's "zone of privileged interests" resembles the colonial spheres of influence that African states, from the 1963 OAU Charter to the AU Constitutive Act, have formally rejected. The African perspective therefore insists that any critique of Russian imperialism be historically reflexive: Western powers have also asserted privileged interests in Africa, from Françafrique to Cold War clientelism, and African states experience great-power competition as a threat to hard-won sovereignty. At the same time, African international-relations thought is not simply anti-Western. Scholars such as Aning and Danso, and feminist and decolonial thinkers such as Tamale and Oyěwùmí, stress that non-interference can shield abusive regimes, while the African Union's principle of non-indifference permits intervention against mass atrocities. Thus the African vantage reveals both the hypocrisy of selective norm enforcement and the genuine dilemma of protecting sovereignty without licensing hegemony. It also highlights what Western and Russian frames often miss: for many African states, the relevant question is not whether Russia is an empire but how any great power's claim to a privileged zone constrains the agency of smaller states. Bayart's analysis of extraversion and Mbembe's work on commandement suggest that sovereignty is always negotiated through external relations; the task is not to abolish influence but to subject it to accountable, multilateral rules rather than unilateral "privileged interests."

Chinese perspectives treat the imperial hangover less as an autonomous Russian ideology than as a symptom of an unbalanced post-Cold War order. Chinese official and academic discourse emphasizes "indivisible security," multipolarity, and the illegitimacy of bloc politics; NATO expansion is read as a structural cause of Russian insecurity, while Russia's great-power self-understanding is seen as a predictable reaction to humiliation. Beijing's statements on Ukraine stress "legitimate security concerns" and oppose unilateral sanctions, reflecting a view that sovereignty must be balanced against security. This frame contributes by centering systemic causes and resisting moralized exceptionalism, but it occludes the agency of smaller states and can rationalize hierarchy when China's own regional interests are at stake.

Russian perspectives reconstruct the imperial hangover as civilizational defense and historical restoration. From this vantage, the Soviet collapse was not merely geopolitical loss but ontological rupture; the "near abroad" is not a zone of conquest but a space of shared history, cultural ties, and strategic depth. Trenin's analysis of Russia as a great power with special responsibilities in Eurasia, and Putin's 2021 essay on the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians, frame "privileged interests" as protective rather than predatory. This perspective explains the emotional and identity-laden quality of Russian policy, but it occludes Ukrainian agency and risks conflating security with domination.

Western perspectives are divided between an imperial-aggression thesis and a security-dilemma self-critique.

The first, common in policy discourse, treats Russia's great-power self-understanding as revanchist and its zone of privileged interests as incompatible with sovereign equality. The second, articulated by Mearsheimer (2014), Kennan (1997), and Sarotte (2021), argues that NATO expansion and Western triumphalism helped produce the very insecurity they now condemn. Kotkin (2022) adds that Putin's ideological construction of Russian identity matters independently of NATO. This debate is valuable because it distinguishes structure from agency, but it often centers Euro-Atlantic concerns and under-theorizes how Russian imperial narratives are received by post-Soviet societies.

The UN perspective is legal-normative and institutionally constrained. It foregrounds Charter principles—sovereign equality, territorial integrity, and the prohibition of force—and records collective condemnation of annexation, as in General Assembly Resolution 68/262 (2014). Yet the Security Council's veto structure means enforcement depends on great-power consensus, producing a gap between norm and practice. The UN frame thus clarifies what is at stake in "privileged interests"—the erosion of equal sovereignty—but its occlusion is procedural: it struggles to adjudicate competing security claims without a functioning collective security mechanism.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — NATO enlargement: decision-making history and Russian perceptions

Bolded Causal Claim: NATO enlargement after the Cold War was a historically contingent reordering of European security that Russian elites interpreted as strategic encirclement and status demotion; it therefore converted a potentially cooperative post-Soviet moment into a competitive security dilemma by extending Article 5 guarantees into spaces Russia regarded as its "privileged interests."

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three linked channels: institutional expansion, perceptual asymmetry, and strategic countermeasures. First, NATO's open-door policy and successive enlargement rounds—1999 (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic), 2004 (Baltics and others), and the 2008 Bucharest declaration that Ukraine and Georgia "will become members"—physically and legally moved the alliance's frontier eastward. The NATO-Russia Founding Act (1997) created consultation mechanisms but did not give Russia a veto over enlargement; the Permanent Joint Council and later NATO-Russia Council (2002) offered dialogue without parity. Second, perceptual asymmetry: for Central and Eastern European states, enlargement was defensive insurance against Russian resurgence; for Russian elites, the same process signaled exclusion from the European security order and the erosion of strategic depth. Sarotte (2021) shows how informal assurances during German unification diplomacy—often summarized in Russian memory as a promise that NATO would not move "one inch eastward"—were never codified, yet became a durable grievance because Moscow experienced the later expansion as a broken political understanding rather than a legal technicality. Third, strategic countermeasures: Russia's military modernization, snap exercises, A2/AD deployments, and doctrinal emphasis on NATO as a threat were partly responses to enlargement; these measures then reinforced NATO's own threat perception, producing the classic security-dilemma spiral. Mearsheimer (2014) argues that Western policymakers ignored this dynamic by treating enlargement as a neutral administrative process rather than a geopolitical act. Trenin (2011) adds that Russia's post-imperial identity crisis made it especially sensitive to status loss, so enlargement was read not only as military encroachment but as civilizational demotion. Kotkin (2022) cautions, however, that security-dilemma language can obscure agency: Russian leaders chose to interpret enlargement through an imperial lens and to instrumentalize it domestically. The mechanism is therefore interactive: enlargement changed material distributions and symbolic hierarchies; Russian responses changed NATO's risk calculus; neither side's unilateral intent fully explains

the spiral.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism applies where (a) a former hegemon or great power experiences relative decline but retains regional military capacity; (b) a defensive alliance expands into the former hegemon's perceived sphere without its consent; (c) new members have historically grounded fears of the former hegemon; and (d) no inclusive security architecture offers the declining power a meaningful veto or co-management role. It is stronger when enlargement is accompanied by forward military deployments and weaker when it remains largely institutional. It does not apply uniformly: the Baltic states' accession in 2004 did not produce immediate war, suggesting that enlargement alone is insufficient; its escalatory effect depends on the target state's regime type, economic leverage, and willingness to use force. It also weakens where the declining power has alternative integration options or internal constraints on militarization. Thus NATO enlargement is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the post-2014 confrontation; it must be combined with Russian domestic politics, Ukrainian agency, and competing integration projects.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is operative, one should observe: (i) Russian diplomatic protests and doctrinal statements identifying NATO as the primary threat; (ii) increased Russian military spending and modernization after key enlargement milestones, especially post-2008 and post-2014; (iii) declining frequency and substantive content of NATO-Russia Council meetings; (iv) NATO force posture adjustments in Eastern Europe, including enhanced forward presence; (v) shifts in Ukrainian public opinion toward NATO membership after 2014; and (vi) accession of previously neutral states (Finland, Sweden) following Russian aggression, which paradoxically confirms the security-dilemma logic by showing how Russian countermeasures expanded the very alliance they opposed. The data lab's NATO membership timeline and Russian spending series are direct tests: a pure "imperial ambition" account would predict Russian aggression regardless of NATO posture, whereas the security-dilemma account predicts escalation correlated with perceived encirclement and forward deployment.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): From an African vantage, NATO enlargement appears less as a technical Euro-Atlantic adjustment than as another instance of great powers constructing security architectures that distribute protection unequally. African states and scholars—drawing on Grovogui's critique of sovereign hierarchy, Mbembe's analysis of postcolonial violence, and Mamdani's work on bifurcated states—often read NATO expansion through the lens of selective sovereignty: Western powers invoke territorial integrity and self-determination for Ukraine while having historically compromised African sovereignty through intervention, conditional aid, and security partnerships. The African Union's non-interference norms and the legacy of colonial borders make African governments wary of both Russian "privileged interests" and NATO's open-door universalism. Yet African perspectives also recognize that small states, including many African states, seek external guarantees when regional hegemons threaten them; the African contribution is to insist that security guarantees be embedded in inclusive, non-hierarchical frameworks rather than blocs. This perspective is longest because it reframes the debate: the problem is not only Russian encirclement or Western provocation but the absence of a genuinely universal security order in which African and post-Soviet states possess equal agency. Chinese: Chinese official and scholarly discourse treats NATO enlargement as a root cause of Russian insecurity and as evidence of Cold War mentality. Beijing emphasizes "legitimate security concerns" and opposes bloc confrontation, arguing that exclusive alliances undermine indivisible security. This frame contributes a multipolar critique of Euro-Atlantic institutional dominance, but it often occludes Russian agency and the sovereign choices of Central and Eastern European states. Russian: The Russian perspective centers encirclement, humiliation, and civilizational defense. NATO enlargement is read as the strategic manifestation of a unipolar order that denied Russia equal status after 1991. The NATO-Russia Founding Act is invoked as a moral-political benchmark, and

enlargement is framed as a violation of the spirit of post-Cold War reconciliation. This perspective captures status anxiety but occludes Ukrainian and Eastern European agency. Western: Western perspectives are divided. One strand defends enlargement as a sovereign, defensive response to Russian unpredictability and emphasizes that NATO is not an offensive alliance. Another strand, represented by Mearsheimer (2014), offers a security-dilemma self-critique: Western expansion ignored Russian red lines and helped provoke confrontation. Kotkin (2022) counters that this self-critique risks understating Putin's imperial ambition. The Western frame's strength is institutional history; its occlusion is occasional blindness to how "defensive" measures appear from Moscow. UN: The UN perspective is legal-normative. It foregrounds Charter principles—sovereign equality, territorial integrity, and non-use of force—and records collective positions on enlargement only indirectly, since NATO expansion is not itself a UN matter. Its contribution is to remind that alliance politics cannot override Charter norms; its occlusion is procedural, because the Security Council's veto structure prevents collective adjudication of competing security claims.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Competing integration projects: EU vs EAEU, and the 2013-14 crisis

Bolded Causal Claim: The 2013-14 Ukrainian crisis resulted from a structural collision between two incompatible integration projects—the EU's association model and Russia's Eurasian project—each of which encoded geopolitical alignment as well as economic rules, making Ukraine's attempt to balance both unsustainable and converting an economic choice into a contest over sovereignty and civilizational orientation.

Mechanism: The mechanism is "competitive regionalism": integration projects function as security communities with exclusive membership norms, and overlapping claims create zero-sum dilemmas for pivot states. The EU's Eastern Partnership (2009) offered Ukraine an Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, conditioned on reforms in governance, rule of law, and market regulation. These conditions were not merely technical; they implied alignment with EU regulatory and political norms. Russia's Customs Union (2010), later the Eurasian Economic Union (2015), offered an alternative economic space premised on post-Soviet interdependence and Russian leadership. For Ukraine, the two projects were structurally incompatible because each required exclusive tariff and regulatory commitments. Russian pressure—trade restrictions, gas pricing, and financial incentives—raised the cost of EU association, while EU conditionality raised the cost of Eurasian alignment. The November 2013 suspension of the Association Agreement by President Yanukovych triggered the Euromaidan protests; his February 2014 removal created a power vacuum that Russia exploited through the annexation of Crimea and support for separatism in Donbas. Putin's 2021 essay on Ukraine frames this not as a security dilemma alone but as a historical restoration: it presents Ukraine as an inseparable part of Russian civilizational space, implying that EU integration is an artificial geopolitical severing. Trenin (2011) situates this in Russia's unresolved post-imperial identity: having failed to become a "normal" European power, Russia constructed Eurasian integration as both an economic and an ontological project. Mearsheimer (2014) reads the crisis as Western overreach: EU and NATO expansion provoked a predictable Russian response. Kotkin (2022) counters that such explanations risk treating Russian imperialism as a reflex rather than a chosen strategy; the EAEU, on this view, was less a defensive reaction than an instrument for reconstructing a sphere of influence. The mechanism therefore includes both structural collision and agential choice: competing integration projects created the dilemma, but Russian leaders chose coercion and force to resolve it.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism applies where (a) a state occupies a geographic and economic position between two integration blocs; (b) the blocs have exclusive or incompatible membership rules; (c) domestic elites and regions are divided over orientation; (d) at least one bloc possesses coercive economic or military

leverage; and (e) the pivot state's sovereignty is contested by a neighboring great power. It is strongest in post-imperial spaces where borders and identities remain unsettled, and weaker where integration is purely commercial or where the state has a clear, consolidated alignment. It also depends on timing: the 2013-14 crisis required the specific conjuncture of Yanukovych's vulnerability, EU insistence on conditionality, and Russian willingness to use force. It does not imply that all economic integration is geopolitical; rather, it identifies conditions under which economic projects become vehicles for competing security orders.

Observable Implications: If competitive regionalism drove the crisis, one should observe: (i) explicit incompatibility between EU and Eurasian tariff/regulatory commitments; (ii) Russian economic pressure preceding political crisis; (iii) mass mobilization framed in civilizational terms (Euromaidan as "European choice"); (iv) Russian annexation and proxy war following the collapse of a pro-Russian government; (v) subsequent reorientation of Ukrainian trade and institutional ties toward the EU; and (vi) EAEU consolidation among other post-Soviet states under Russian pressure. The data lab's public-opinion series on NATO in Ukraine is relevant because the crisis transformed not only economic alignment but security preferences: support for NATO membership rose sharply after 2014, indicating that competing integration projects spilled over into security alignment. A purely domestic-politics account would predict crisis without external structural collision; a purely Russian-imperial account would predict coercion regardless of EU policy. The competitive-regionalism account predicts that the crisis's timing and form were shaped by the incompatibility of the two projects.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): African scholarship and diplomacy read competing integration projects through the history of external powers shaping African economies. Rodney (1972) and Nkrumah (1965) frame economic integration imposed from outside as a continuation of unequal exchange; Bayart's work on extraversion and Mamdani's analysis of state bifurcation suggest that postcolonial states often face "choices" structured by external actors. From this vantage, the EU-EAEU collision resembles a scramble in which Ukraine's agency is constrained by great-power conditionality and coercion. African states, many of which participate in overlapping regional economic communities, recognize the dilemma of exclusive blocs: the African Union's principle of variable geometry and the reality of multiple memberships reflect an attempt to avoid zero-sum alignment. The African perspective's distinctive contribution is to foreground economic sovereignty and the right of states to pursue non-exclusive, multi-vector integration; its occlusion, shared with other non-great-power perspectives, is limited leverage over the terms of great-power competition. Chinese: China views competing integration projects through the lens of multipolarity and connectivity. Beijing generally opposes exclusive blocs and sanctions, presenting the Belt and Road Initiative and Eurasian connectivity as alternatives to zero-sum regionalism. In the 2013-14 crisis, Chinese discourse emphasized non-interference and a political settlement, while treating NATO/EU expansion as part of a broader Western encroachment. This perspective contributes a critique of bloc politics but often occludes the coercive dimensions of Russian integration and the democratic aspirations expressed during Euromaidan. Russian: The Russian perspective frames the EAEU as legitimate post-Soviet economic integration and the EU's Eastern Partnership as geopolitical encroachment. Putin's 2021 essay supplies the civilizational narrative: Ukraine's westward turn is portrayed as an artificial rupture of a shared historical space. This frame treats Russian pressure as defensive protection of legitimate interests, occluding Ukrainian sovereignty and the coercive nature of trade and energy leverage. Western: Western perspectives generally frame the EU as a voluntary, rules-based project and the EAEU as a geopolitical instrument. Euromaidan is read as a democratic aspiration for European norms; Russian coercion is seen as the cause of crisis. Mearsheimer (2014) offers a self-critical variant, arguing that Western expansion ignored Russian red lines. Kotkin (2022) counters that this understates Putin's imperial agency. The Western frame's

strength is its attention to institutional conditionality and popular mobilization; its occlusion is occasional underestimation of how EU norms function as geopolitical alignment. UN: The UN perspective centers economic sovereignty, self-determination, and the prohibition of coercion. It records the General Assembly's condemnation of the use of force and annexation, while struggling to address economic pressure short of force. Its contribution is to affirm that integration choices must be free; its occlusion is procedural, because the UN lacks mechanisms to regulate competing regional projects or to protect pivot states from coercive leverage.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Security dilemma vs imperial ambition: competing explanations for Russian behavior

Bolded Causal Claim: Russian coercive behavior toward its near abroad since 1991 is overdetermined by two mechanisms that are analytically distinct but empirically entangled: a security-dilemma spiral in which NATO enlargement and Western institutional expansion are perceived in Moscow as existential encirclement, and an imperial-ambition dynamic in which Russian elites, and Putin in particular, have pursued the restoration of great-power status and a zone of privileged influence through deliberate agency; the scholarly task is not to choose one but to specify the conditions under which each mechanism dominates and the evidence that would discriminate between them.

Mechanism: The security-dilemma mechanism, classically formulated by Jervis (1978) and embedded in Waltzian structural realism, operates through the offense-defense balance and the spiral model. When a state takes measures to increase its own security—here, NATO's eastward enlargement and the EU's association agreements—those measures are read by the other side as reducing its security, prompting countermeasures that in turn confirm the first side's fears. The mechanism runs on imperfect information, on the difficulty of distinguishing defensive from offensive capabilities, and on the absence of a central authority to certify intentions. In the post-Soviet case, the mechanism is fed by three structural features: the geographic openness of the East European plain, which makes Russia's western frontier historically vulnerable; the institutional asymmetry between a consolidated NATO and a disintegrating Russian sphere; and the absence of a post-Cold War settlement that both sides accepted as legitimate. The imperial-ambition mechanism, by contrast, is agential and ideational. It runs through elite belief systems that define Russia as a great power entitled to a sphere of influence, through domestic political incentives to mobilize nationalist sentiment, and through the instrumental use of force to prevent the consolidation of independent, Western-aligned states on Russia's borders. Kotkin (2022) emphasizes this agential dimension, arguing that Putin's choices are not mechanically determined by NATO expansion but reflect a deliberate project of imperial restoration. Mearsheimer (2014) offers the most prominent structuralist counter, arguing that Western policymakers ignored Russian red lines and that the crisis was predictable from the logic of great-power politics. The two mechanisms interact: a genuine security dilemma can be exploited by imperial ambition, and imperial ambition can be legitimated by invoking security fears.

Scope Conditions: The security-dilemma explanation has greatest purchase when three conditions hold: the initiating state's actions are plausibly defensive in intent; the responding state's threat perception is sincere rather than instrumental; and de-escalation is possible if the initiating state modifies its behavior. It struggles to explain annexation of territory, the installation of puppet regimes, or the denial of a neighbor's right to exist as a sovereign state, all of which suggest offensive rather than defensive aims. The imperial-ambition explanation has greatest purchase when leadership rhetoric and documents explicitly claim a sphere of influence,

when force is used to alter borders rather than merely to deter, and when behavior persists or escalates regardless of Western restraint. It struggles to explain why Russian threat perception is so widely shared across the Russian elite, including among figures not aligned with Putin, and why specific Western actions—such as the 2008 Bucharest summit promise of eventual NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia—precede escalations. The two explanations are best treated as competing hypotheses with overlapping predictions, requiring case-level adjudication rather than a priori commitment.

Observable Implications: If the security-dilemma mechanism dominates, Russian behavior should be sensitive to Western restraint: pauses in NATO enlargement, neutrality guarantees, or arms-control agreements should produce de-escalation, and Russian rhetoric should emphasize defensive vulnerability. If the imperial-ambition mechanism dominates, behavior should be insensitive to such concessions, rhetoric should emphasize historical entitlement and civilizational mission, and force should be used to expand or consolidate control regardless of Western posture. The 2008 Georgia war and the 2014 Crimea annexation provide test cases: in both, Western actions (the Bucharest promise; the EU association agreement with Ukraine) preceded Russian force, consistent with the security dilemma, but the scale and character of Russian response—recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, annexation of Crimea—exceeded what pure defense would require, consistent with imperial ambition. The 2022 full-scale invasion, occurring after years of no NATO enlargement to Ukraine, weighs heavily toward the imperial-ambition reading, though security-dilemma theorists argue that the cumulative effect of Western policy created the conditions.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African: African scholars and diplomats tend to read the debate through the lens of sovereignty and non-interference, noting that both superpowers have historically invoked security to justify intervention in weaker states' affairs; the African vantage point stresses that the security dilemma and imperial ambition are not mutually exclusive and that weaker states pay the price of great-power competition, a pattern visible in Cold War proxy conflicts on the continent. Chinese: Chinese analysts, drawing on a civilizational-state framework, tend to emphasize NATO expansion as the root cause and treat Russian security concerns as legitimate, while also noting that great-power competition is structurally inevitable; the Chinese reading leans toward the security-dilemma explanation but does not absolve Russia of agency. Russian: Russian official and scholarly discourse overwhelmingly favors the security-dilemma and encirclement narrative, framing NATO expansion as an existential threat and Russian actions as defensive; imperial ambition is acknowledged by some Russian liberals but rejected by the state as Western propaganda. Western: Western scholarship is divided between realist critics (Mearsheimer) who emphasize the security dilemma and liberal-internationalist and constructivist scholars who emphasize imperial ambition, domestic authoritarianism, and identity; the Western frame's self-critique acknowledges that NATO enlargement may have contributed to Russian insecurity without excusing aggression. UN: The UN perspective avoids adjudicating between the two explanations, instead recording violations of the Charter's prohibition on the use of force and affirming territorial integrity; its contribution is to insist that neither security fears nor historical claims justify annexation, while its occlusion is the inability to address the structural grievances that fuel both mechanisms.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Ontological insecurity after 1991: the collapse of Soviet identity and the reconstruction of Russian identity under Putin

Bolded Causal Claim: The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 produced not merely a geopolitical contraction but an ontological rupture: the collapse of a biographical narrative that had organized Russian and Soviet identity for seven decades, and the subsequent reconstruction of Russian identity under Putin has

been driven by the need to restore ontological security—continuity, self-esteem, and a coherent narrative of the self—through great-power assertion, civilizational distinctiveness, and opposition to the West, with foreign policy serving as identity performance rather than purely instrumental calculation.

Mechanism: Ontological security, as developed by Mitzen (2006) and Steele (2008) in International Relations, refers to the need of states and their publics for a stable sense of self, maintained through routines, biographical narratives, and recognition by others. When a state's identity is disrupted—through defeat, collapse, or territorial loss—the resulting anxiety can drive foreign policy that appears irrational from a purely materialist standpoint but is intelligible as identity repair. The Soviet collapse was precisely such a rupture: it dissolved the ideological, institutional, and territorial framework within which Russian elites and publics had understood themselves, producing what some scholars describe as a period of anomie in the 1990s. The mechanism of reconstruction under Putin has operated through several channels. First, narrative: the construction of a story in which Russia is a great civilization with a special mission, victimized by Western betrayal after 1991, and now recovering its rightful place. Putin's 2021 essay on Ukraine exemplifies this, framing Ukraine as an artificial construct and Russia as the legitimate heir of a shared civilizational space. Second, routine and ritual: the reassertion of state control over media, education, and commemoration, producing a stabilized public narrative. Third, recognition-seeking: demands that the West acknowledge Russia's great-power status, with slights and humiliations—real or perceived—treated as ontological wounds. Fourth, opposition: the construction of the West as the constitutive Other against which Russian identity is defined, making conflict with the West not merely strategic but identity-constituting. The mechanism implies that concessions on material interests may not resolve conflict if they are read as further humiliation, and that identity repair may require not just security but recognition.

Scope Conditions: The ontological-security explanation applies most strongly to states that have experienced sudden identity rupture—imperial collapse, defeat, or regime change—and that possess the resources to pursue identity reconstruction through foreign policy. It is less applicable to states with stable identity narratives or to conflicts driven by straightforward resource competition. It also has limits: it risks overpsychologizing state behavior, treating elite narratives as mass beliefs, and underestimating material interests. Ontological security is not a substitute for structural analysis but a complement that explains why states sometimes pursue costly policies that materialist logic would predict against. The scope condition of recognition is important: the mechanism predicts that states seeking ontological security will be sensitive to symbolic gestures of respect or disrespect, not merely to material distributions.

Observable Implications: If ontological insecurity drives Russian behavior, we should observe: intensified identity rhetoric during periods of perceived humiliation or loss; foreign policy actions that serve symbolic rather than material goals, such as the annexation of Crimea, which carried economic costs but enormous symbolic weight; domestic legitimation of the regime through foreign-policy success; and resistance to settlements that are materially favorable but symbolically humiliating. We should also observe a generational and elite divide, with those socialized in the Soviet period more attached to the imperial narrative. The 2014 Crimea annexation, framed as "reunification" and accompanied by a surge in Putin's approval ratings, is a strong case. The mechanism also predicts that Western offers of integration without recognition of great-power status would be rejected, as in the 2000s, when Putin's early overtures to the West were rebuffed or treated as supplication.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African: African scholarship, from Fanon's analysis of colonial identity to Mbembe's work on necropolitics and Bayart's "politics of the belly," provides a rich vocabulary for understanding identity rupture and reconstruction; African perspectives emphasize that ontological inse-

curity is not unique to Russia but is a feature of post-colonial and post-imperial states generally, and that the search for recognition can drive both emancipatory and destructive politics. The African vantage point also cautions against treating Russian identity claims as sui generis, noting parallels with post-colonial identity projects across the Global South. Chinese: Chinese analysts, drawing on a civilizational-state framework that emphasizes historical continuity and cultural distinctiveness, tend to be sympathetic to Russian identity claims while also noting that China's own identity reconstruction after the "century of humiliation" offers a parallel; the Chinese reading treats ontological security as a legitimate concern but warns against its instrumentalization to justify aggression. Russian: Russian discourse, both official and scholarly, treats identity reconstruction as a natural and necessary response to the trauma of 1991; the state narrative frames Putin's project as restoring dignity and historical truth, while critics within Russia warn of the costs of identity-driven foreign policy. Western: Western scholarship on ontological security has been applied to Russia by constructivist and critical scholars who emphasize the role of narrative, recognition, and humiliation; the Western frame's contribution is analytical precision, while its occlusion is a tendency to pathologize Russian identity claims without examining Western identity projects. UN: The UN perspective is largely silent on ontological security as such, but its emphasis on human dignity, self-determination, and the prohibition of discrimination provides a normative framework within which identity claims can be evaluated; its contribution is to insist that identity reconstruction cannot justify violations of others' rights, while its occlusion is the lack of institutional mechanisms to address identity-based grievances.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on the post-Soviet security dilemma and the reconstruction of Russian identity after 1991 begins from a position that is neither neutral nor disinterested: it is the vantage point of states and peoples who have themselves experienced the collapse of imperial orders, the arbitrary re-drawing of borders, the weaponization of identity, and the selective application of international norms by great powers. To understand what this perspective contributes, one must first grasp that African international-relations scholarship does not treat the post-Soviet crisis as a distant European problem. It treats it as a variation on a pattern that African states have lived through repeatedly: the disintegration of a multi-ethnic imperial state, the scramble by external powers to shape the successor order, the instrumentalization of ethnicity and religion by both local and foreign actors, and the subordination of African (or, in this case, post-Soviet) agency to great-power competition. The African perspective is therefore not a "regional add-on" to Western or Russian analyses; it is a theoretically generative standpoint that reveals dimensions of the post-Soviet crisis that the other four perspectives systematically obscure.

The foundational theoretical resource is the African critique of sovereignty itself. Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui's *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) demonstrates that the international system's treatment of sovereignty has never been universal. Grovogui argues that the Westphalian model of equal, territorial sovereignty was always a fiction applied selectively: European states were recognized as fully sovereign, while African and other non-European entities were granted "quasi-sovereign" status, subject to intervention, tutelage, and conditional recognition. This framework is directly applicable to the post-Soviet space. When NATO expanded eastward, it did so on the premise that the sovereignty of new member states was inviolable and that their security choices were their own. Yet the same powers that championed this principle in Eastern Europe had, in Africa, repeatedly overridden sovereignty through military intervention, structural adjustment,

and the selective application of the responsibility to protect. The African perspective thus sees in the post-Soviet crisis a confirmation of Grovogui's thesis: sovereignty is not a neutral legal principle but a political resource distributed according to power. The question is not whether Russia's "privileged interests" are legitimate, but whether any great power's claim to a sphere of influence is compatible with the sovereign equality that the UN Charter proclaims. From the African standpoint, the answer is that neither Russia's zone of privileged interests nor NATO's eastward expansion is fully compatible with genuine sovereign equality; both represent the assertion of hierarchical power over nominally equal states.

Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) and his later work on the politics of naming and belonging provide a second theoretical lens. Mamdani's analysis of how colonial powers constructed "native" and "settler" identities, and how these constructions outlived formal decolonization, illuminates the post-Soviet identity crisis. The Soviet Union, like the colonial empires Mamdani studies, was a multi-ethnic state in which identity was politically constructed and hierarchically ordered. The collapse of the USSR in 1991 did not simply create fifteen new states; it created a crisis of categorization in which millions of people found themselves on the "wrong" side of new borders, their identities suddenly reclassified. The Russian-speaking populations of Ukraine, the Baltic states, and Central Asia experienced a version of what Mamdani calls "the bifurcated state": a condition in which formal citizenship and substantive belonging are misaligned. The African perspective, drawing on Mamdani, insists that this misalignment is not a natural fact but a political construction, and that its resolution requires not great-power management but democratic processes of inclusion and recognition. The Western tendency to treat Russian-speaking minorities as a "problem" to be managed by NATO expansion, and the Russian tendency to treat them as a justification for intervention, are both, from the African standpoint, instances of external powers instrumentalizing identities that should be resolved by the peoples concerned.

Achille Mbembe's work, particularly *On the Postcolony* (2001) and *Necropolitics* (2019), adds a dimension that the other perspectives largely miss: the analysis of how power operates through the control of life and death, and how post-colonial (and post-imperial) states are characterized by a "commandement" that is simultaneously arbitrary and theatrical. Mbembe's concept of the "postcolony" as a space in which sovereignty is performed rather than exercised, and in which the state's claim to authority is constantly undermined by its own violence, resonates with the Russian state's behavior in the post-Soviet period. The Putin regime's reconstruction of Russian identity has involved what Mbembe would recognize as a "politics of the spectacle": the theatrical assertion of great-power status through military intervention, the cultivation of a siege mentality, and the conflation of the leader's body with the nation's body. Mbembe's framework also illuminates the way in which the post-Soviet space has been subjected to what he calls "necropolitics": the subordination of populations to conditions of death and precarity through proxy wars, frozen conflicts, and the militarization of borders. The African perspective, drawing on Mbembe, sees in the Donbas, in Crimea, and in the frozen conflicts of Georgia and Moldova not merely security dilemmas but instances of a broader pattern in which great powers and their proxies exercise power over life and death in spaces they do not fully control.

Jean-François Bayart's *The State in Africa* (1993) and his concept of "extraversion" provide another critical tool. Bayart argues that African states have historically been shaped by their external relations—that is, by the ways in which African elites have leveraged external resources (colonial, Cold War, post-Cold War) to maintain domestic power. The concept of extraversion is directly applicable to the post-Soviet space. Russian elites, like African elites in Bayart's framework, have used external confrontation (with the West, with NATO, with the "near abroad") to consolidate domestic power. The security dilemma, from this perspective, is not merely an objective structural condition but a political resource: it provides the justification for authoritarian consolidation, military spending, and the suppression of dissent. Bayart's framework also illuminates the

role of Western actors: just as Cold War powers instrumentalized African states, NATO and the EU have instrumentalized post-Soviet states in their competition with Russia. The African perspective thus sees in the post-Soviet crisis a triangular dynamic of extraversion in which all three parties—Russia, the West, and the post-Soviet states themselves—use external confrontation to manage internal politics.

Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) and Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) provide the historical-materialist dimension. Rodney's analysis of how European capitalism systematically underdeveloped Africa—extracting resources, destroying indigenous industries, and creating dependent economies—has a direct analogue in the post-Soviet experience. The "shock therapy" of the 1990s, the privatization of state assets, and the integration of post-Soviet economies into global capitalism on unfavorable terms created the conditions for oligarchic capitalism and political instability. Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism—the continuation of imperial control through economic and political means rather than formal colonialism—is applicable to both Russian and Western behavior in the post-Soviet space. Russia's use of energy exports as a political tool, and the West's use of financial institutions and conditionality, are both, from this perspective, forms of neo-colonialism. The African perspective thus insists that the post-Soviet crisis cannot be understood purely in security terms; it must be understood as a crisis of political economy in which great powers compete for resources and markets while local populations bear the costs.

Amílcar Cabral's *Return to the Source* (1973) and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) provide the dimension of liberation and recognition. Cabral's insistence that liberation must be rooted in the cultural and historical specificity of the people, and Fanon's analysis of how colonialism dehumanizes both colonizer and colonized, are directly relevant to the ontological dimension of the post-Soviet crisis. Fanon's observation that the colonized subject's identity is defined by the colonizer's gaze—that the colonized internalizes the colonizer's contempt—has a parallel in the Russian experience of the 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied by a narrative of Western triumphalism that humiliated Russia and treated its collapse as a vindication of Western superiority. From the African perspective, this humiliation is not merely a psychological fact but a political one: it shapes the identity reconstruction that Putin has undertaken, and it explains, in part, the appeal of a narrative that restores Russian dignity through defiance of the West. Cabral's insistence on "return to the source"—on grounding identity in authentic historical and cultural roots rather than in imposed categories—also resonates with Putin's 2021 essay on Ukraine, which appeals to a shared historical and cultural heritage. The African perspective does not endorse Putin's claims, but it recognizes the political logic of identity reconstruction after humiliation, because it has seen this logic operate in post-colonial Africa.

Julius Nyerere's philosophy of ujamaa and his insistence on African unity provide a further dimension. Nyerere argued that African states could not achieve genuine sovereignty in isolation; they needed to cooperate regionally to resist external domination. This insight is applicable to the post-Soviet space: the failure of post-Soviet states to develop effective regional security institutions—beyond the weak Collective Security Treaty Organization and the competing integration projects of the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union—has left them vulnerable to great-power manipulation. The African perspective thus sees in the post-Soviet crisis a failure of regionalism: the inability of post-Soviet states to construct a security architecture that would reduce their dependence on either Russia or the West.

Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) and Sylvia Tamale's work on gender and African feminisms add a dimension that is almost entirely absent from the other four perspectives. Oyěwùmí's analysis of how Western categories of gender were imposed on African societies, and Tamale's insistence

on the intersection of gender, sexuality, and power in African politics, reveal that the post-Soviet security dilemma is not gender-neutral. The militarization of the post-Soviet space, the use of sexual violence in conflict, and the gendered dimensions of identity reconstruction (the cult of masculine strength in Putin's Russia, the gendered narratives of victimhood and protection) are all amenable to analysis through African feminist frameworks. The African perspective thus contributes a gendered analysis that the Western, Russian, Chinese, and UN perspectives largely lack.

Kwesi Aning and Kwaku Danso's work on African security governance provides a final dimension. Aning and Danso have analyzed how African states navigate between competing external powers, and how the African Union's peace and security architecture attempts to manage conflicts that are often proxy wars. Their analysis of "African solutions to African problems" is applicable to the post-Soviet space: the insistence that external powers should not dictate the terms of regional security, and that local actors must have agency in shaping their own futures. The African perspective thus contributes a norm of local ownership that challenges both Russian and Western claims to manage the post-Soviet space.

What does the African perspective occlude? It risks understating the specificities of the European security architecture and the genuine security concerns that drove NATO enlargement. It may overemphasize the parallels between colonialism and post-Soviet politics, thereby flattening important differences in historical context, institutional development, and agency. It may also understate the role of domestic political dynamics within Russia itself—the way in which Putin's identity reconstruction was driven not only by external humiliation but by internal political calculations. And it may, by focusing on great-power hypocrisy, understate the genuine normative commitments of some Western actors to democratic values and human rights. The African perspective is strongest when it is used not as a replacement for other analyses but as a corrective: a reminder that the international system's treatment of sovereignty, identity, and security is always shaped by power, and that the claims of all great powers—including those that present themselves as defenders of the rules-based order—must be subjected to critical scrutiny.

The African perspective's deepest contribution is to reframe the central question. The other four perspectives ask, in various ways, whether Russia's behavior is driven by security concerns or imperial ambition. The African perspective asks a prior question: who gets to define what counts as a security concern, what counts as imperial ambition, and what counts as legitimate sovereignty? It reveals that these definitions are not neutral but are shaped by the power of those who make them. In this sense, the African perspective does not resolve the debate between the security dilemma and imperial ambition; it exposes the terms of the debate as themselves products of power. This is the contribution that only the African vantage point, with its long experience of living under definitions imposed by others, can make.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on the post-Soviet security dilemma is shaped by a distinctive combination of historical experience, strategic interest, and normative commitment. China's position is not merely a reflexive alignment with Russia; it is rooted in a specific reading of international history that emphasizes the dangers of unilateral expansion by great powers and the importance of respecting "legitimate security concerns." The Chinese perspective contributes a structural analysis of NATO expansion as a root cause of the post-Soviet crisis, while its occlusion is a tendency to understate Russian agency and to treat the post-Soviet states as objects of great-power competition rather than as actors with their own interests.

The core of the Chinese position is articulated in the concept of "legitimate security concerns." This concept, which appears repeatedly in Chinese diplomatic statements and in the joint declarations of China and

Russia, holds that every state has the right to security, and that the security of one state cannot be achieved at the expense of another's. The Chinese perspective thus frames NATO expansion not merely as a policy choice but as a violation of this principle: by expanding toward Russia's borders, NATO has created a security environment in which Russia's legitimate concerns are ignored. This framing draws on China's own experience of what it perceives as encirclement—by US alliances in the Asia-Pacific, by the "Quad," and by the AUKUS pact. The Chinese perspective thus sees in the post-Soviet crisis a mirror of its own strategic situation, and it interprets Russian behavior through the lens of defensive realism: Russia is reacting to a threatening security environment, not pursuing imperial ambitions.

The Chinese perspective also draws on a specific reading of the end of the Cold War. Chinese scholars and officials have emphasized that the West made implicit promises to Russia about NATO expansion—promises that were subsequently broken. This reading aligns with Sarotte's (2021) documentation of the "not one inch" discussions, though the Chinese interpretation tends to treat these discussions as firmer commitments than the documentary record supports. The Chinese perspective thus contributes a historical narrative that emphasizes Western betrayal and Russian victimization, while its occlusion is a tendency to treat diplomatic ambiguity as deliberate deception and to understate the agency of the post-Soviet states that sought NATO membership.

China's own strategic interests shape its perspective in ways that are not always acknowledged. China benefits from a Russia that is distracted by confrontation with the West, as this reduces pressure on China in the Asia-Pacific. China also benefits from the weakening of the US-led alliance system, which NATO expansion represents. The Chinese perspective thus has a strategic interest in framing NATO expansion as the root cause of the crisis, and this interest should be recognized as shaping its analysis. At the same time, China's position is not merely cynical: it reflects a genuine normative commitment to sovereignty and non-interference, principles that China has consistently invoked in international forums. The Chinese perspective thus contributes a principled defense of state sovereignty that is, in some respects, more consistent than the Western position, which has itself violated sovereignty in numerous cases.

The Chinese perspective's contribution to the debate between security dilemma and imperial ambition is to emphasize the security dilemma dimension. By framing NATO expansion as the root cause, the Chinese perspective provides a structural explanation for Russian behavior that does not require attributing imperial ambitions to Moscow. This is a valuable corrective to Western analyses that may overemphasize Russian agency and underemphasize structural factors. However, the Chinese perspective's occlusion is significant: it tends to understate the role of Russian domestic politics, the specificities of Putin's identity reconstruction, and the agency of post-Soviet states that chose to align with the West. It also tends to treat "legitimate security concerns" as a self-evident category rather than a contested one, and it does not adequately address the question of how to reconcile competing security concerns when they conflict.

The Chinese perspective also contributes an important insight about the relationship between economic integration and security. China's own experience of economic development through integration into the global economy, combined with its insistence on strategic autonomy, provides a model that it implicitly offers to the post-Soviet space: economic cooperation without military alignment. The Chinese perspective thus sees the competition between the EU and the EAEU not merely as a geopolitical contest but as a choice between different models of development, and it tends to favor the EAEU model as more respectful of state sovereignty. This is a contribution that the Western perspective, with its emphasis on democratic conditionality, tends to occlude.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on the post-Soviet security dilemma is the most directly invested in the outcome, and it is shaped by a combination of historical memory, geopolitical anxiety, and identity reconstruction. It is not a single perspective but a contested field in which official narratives, scholarly analyses, and popular sentiments interact. The Russian perspective's contribution is to articulate the lived experience of post-Soviet decline and the genuine security concerns that NATO expansion generates; its occlusion is a tendency to externalize responsibility for Russia's problems and to conflate legitimate security concerns with imperial ambitions.

The core of the Russian perspective is the concept of encirclement. Russian officials and scholars have consistently argued that NATO expansion represents a strategic threat to Russia, not merely because of the military capabilities it brings to Russia's borders, but because of the political and psychological message it sends: that Russia is being excluded from the European security order and treated as a potential adversary. This framing draws on a deep historical memory of invasion—from the Mongols to Napoleon to Hitler—and on the specific experience of the 1990s, when Russia was weak and the West was strong. The Russian perspective thus sees in NATO expansion not merely a policy choice but a continuation of a historical pattern in which Russia is surrounded and contained by hostile powers.

The concept of humiliation is central to the Russian perspective. The collapse of the Soviet Union was experienced not merely as a geopolitical defeat but as an ontological rupture: the loss of a superpower identity, the disintegration of a multi-ethnic state, and the subordination of Russia to Western norms and institutions. Putin's 2021 essay on Ukraine explicitly invokes this experience, arguing that the West has consistently humiliated Russia and that the post-Soviet states have been used as instruments of Western containment. The Russian perspective thus contributes an analysis of the emotional and identity dimensions of the security dilemma that the Western perspective, with its emphasis on material interests and institutional design, tends to understate.

The Russian perspective also draws on the concept of civilizational defense. Trenin (2011), in *Post-Imperium*, argues that Russia is not merely a state but a civilization, and that its security cannot be reduced to territorial defense. The Russian perspective thus frames the post-Soviet crisis as a civilizational conflict: the defense of Russian (or Eurasian) civilization against Western (Atlanticist) civilization. This framing is not merely rhetorical; it shapes Russian policy by justifying the creation of alternative institutions (the EAEU, the CSTO, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and by legitimizing intervention in the "near abroad" as a defense of civilizational space. The Russian perspective's contribution is to insist that security is not merely military but cultural and civilizational; its occlusion is a tendency to treat civilizational claims as natural and self-evident, rather than as politically constructed and contested.

The Russian perspective on the 2013-14 crisis and the annexation of Crimea is particularly revealing. Official Russian narratives frame the annexation as a "reunification" driven by the will of the Crimean people, and they emphasize the threat posed by the Maidan revolution to Russian-speaking populations. This framing draws on the concept of "privileged interests": Russia claims a special responsibility for the security and well-being of Russian-speaking populations in the post-Soviet space, and it treats their protection as a legitimate security concern. The Russian perspective thus contributes an analysis of how identity and diaspora politics shape security behavior; its occlusion is a tendency to treat Russian-speaking populations as objects of Russian policy rather than as agents with their own interests, and to understate the coercive dimensions of Russian intervention.

The Russian perspective also contributes to the debate between security dilemma and imperial ambition by insisting that the two are not mutually exclusive. Russian scholars and officials have argued that Russia's behavior can be simultaneously defensive (responding to NATO expansion) and assertive (reclaiming great-power status). This is a more sophisticated position than either pure security-dilemma or pure imperial-ambition explanations, and it reflects the complexity of Russian motivations. The Russian perspective's occlusion, however, is a tendency to emphasize the defensive dimension and to understate the imperial one, and to treat Russian great-power ambitions as natural and legitimate while treating Western great-power ambitions as aggressive and illegitimate.

The Russian perspective's deepest contribution is to articulate the experience of ontological insecurity: the loss of identity, status, and recognition that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. This experience is not merely a psychological fact but a political one: it shapes Russian foreign policy, domestic politics, and the relationship between the state and society. The Russian perspective insists that any analysis of the post-Soviet crisis that ignores this dimension is incomplete. Its occlusion is a tendency to treat ontological insecurity as a justification for behavior that violates the sovereignty of others, and to understate the ways in which Russian identity reconstruction has been used to legitimize authoritarianism and aggression.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on the post-Soviet security dilemma is the most institutionally powerful and the most theoretically developed, but it is also the most contested from within. It is not a monolith: it encompasses realist, liberal, and constructivist strands, and it has been subject to significant self-critique. The Western perspective's contribution is analytical precision and institutional innovation; its occlusion is a tendency to universalize Western experience and to understate the ways in which Western actions have contributed to the crisis.

The realist strand of the Western perspective is most clearly articulated by Mearsheimer (2014), who argues that the West is primarily responsible for the Ukraine crisis. Mearsheimer's argument is that NATO expansion and EU expansion into Ukraine provoked Russia, and that the West ignored Russia's legitimate security concerns. This is a significant self-critique within the Western perspective: it acknowledges that Western actions contributed to the crisis and that the security dilemma is not merely a Russian problem. Mearsheimer's analysis draws on classical realist theory, which emphasizes the anarchic structure of the international system and the security dilemma that it generates. The realist strand's contribution is to provide a structural explanation for Russian behavior that does not require attributing irrationality or evil to Moscow; its occlusion is a tendency to treat great powers as the only relevant actors and to understate the agency of smaller states.

The liberal strand of the Western perspective emphasizes the role of institutions, democracy, and human rights. It argues that NATO and EU expansion were not aggressive acts but responses to the demands of post-Soviet states for security and prosperity. The liberal strand sees the post-Soviet crisis as a conflict between a rules-based international order and a revisionist power that seeks to overturn it. It emphasizes the agency of post-Soviet states, which chose to align with the West, and it treats Russian opposition as an illegitimate attempt to deny these states their sovereign choices. The liberal strand's contribution is to center the agency of smaller states and to provide a normative framework for evaluating Russian behavior; its occlusion is a tendency to treat Western institutions as neutral and benevolent, and to understate the ways in which they serve Western interests.

The constructivist strand of the Western perspective focuses on identity, norms, and discourse. It has been applied to Russia by scholars who emphasize the role of narrative, recognition, and humiliation in shap-

ing Russian behavior. The constructivist strand contributes an analysis of how Russian identity has been reconstructed under Putin and how this reconstruction has shaped foreign policy. It also provides a framework for understanding the competition between Russian and Western narratives about the post-Soviet space. The constructivist strand's occlusion is a tendency to pathologize Russian identity claims—to treat them as irrational or pathological—without examining Western identity projects with the same critical lens.

Sarotte (2021), in *Not One Inch*, provides a detailed historical account of the NATO expansion debate that is essential to the Western perspective. Sarotte documents the discussions about NATO expansion in the 1990s, including the "not one inch" conversations between Western and Russian officials. Her work shows that the expansion was not a simple act of aggression but a complex process involving multiple actors, competing interests, and genuine uncertainty. The Western perspective's contribution, through Sarotte, is to provide an empirically grounded history of the decision-making process; its occlusion is a tendency to focus on Western decision-making and to understate the role of Russian and post-Soviet actors.

Kotkin (2022) provides a different Western perspective, one that emphasizes Russian domestic politics and the agency of the Russian state. Kotkin argues that the post-Soviet crisis is driven not by NATO expansion or by the security dilemma but by the internal dynamics of the Russian state: the need to maintain power, the use of external confrontation to consolidate domestic support, and the ideological project of restoring Russian greatness. Kotkin's analysis draws on a long tradition of Western scholarship that emphasizes the authoritarian and imperial dimensions of Russian politics. The Western perspective's contribution, through Kotkin, is to center domestic politics and to provide a counterweight to structural explanations; its occlusion is a tendency to treat Russian politics as uniquely pathological and to understate the role of Western actions in shaping the context.

The Western perspective also includes a significant self-critical strand that has emerged in response to the Ukraine war. Scholars and policymakers have acknowledged that the West's approach to Russia in the 1990s and 2000s was flawed: that it failed to take Russian security concerns seriously, that it treated Russia as a defeated power rather than a partner, and that it pursued NATO expansion without adequate consideration of its consequences. This self-critique is a genuine contribution: it demonstrates the capacity of the Western perspective to reflect on its own limitations. Its occlusion, however, is a tendency to treat self-critique as sufficient, without fundamentally rethinking the assumptions that shaped Western policy.

The Western perspective's deepest contribution is to provide a normative framework for evaluating the post-Soviet crisis. By insisting on the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination, the Western perspective provides standards against which Russian behavior can be judged. Its occlusion is a tendency to apply these standards selectively, to treat Western violations of sovereignty as exceptions and Russian violations as the rule, and to understate the ways in which Western power shapes the international order that it claims to defend.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on the post-Soviet security dilemma is shaped by the tension between the organization's foundational principles and its institutional limitations. The UN is not a single actor but a forum in which competing perspectives interact, and its perspective on the post-Soviet crisis reflects this multiplicity. The UN perspective's contribution is to provide a normative framework based on the Charter; its occlusion is the lack of institutional mechanisms to enforce that framework.

The foundational principle of the UN perspective is territorial integrity. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter

prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. This principle is directly applicable to the post-Soviet crisis: the annexation of Crimea, the intervention in Georgia, and the support for separatist movements in the Donbas are all violations of this principle. The UN perspective thus provides a clear normative standard against which Russian behavior can be judged, and it has been invoked by the General Assembly in resolutions condemning the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine.

The principle of self-determination is the other foundational principle of the UN perspective, and it creates a tension with territorial integrity. The UN Charter recognizes the right of peoples to self-determination, and this right has been invoked by both sides in the post-Soviet crisis: by Russia, to justify the annexation of Crimea and the support for separatist movements; and by Ukraine and Georgia, to assert their right to choose their own security alignments. The UN perspective's contribution is to insist that these principles must be balanced, and that neither can be invoked to override the other. Its occlusion is the lack of clear criteria for determining when self-determination overrides territorial integrity, and the tendency of UN bodies to apply these principles selectively.

The UN perspective also emphasizes the prohibition of the use of force and the principle of non-intervention. These principles are directly relevant to the post-Soviet crisis: Russia's interventions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova are violations of these principles, and NATO's expansion, while not a use of force, can be seen as a form of intervention in the security affairs of the post-Soviet space. The UN perspective's contribution is to provide a framework in which all uses of force and intervention can be evaluated; its occlusion is the tendency of UN bodies to focus on Russian violations while understating Western ones.

The UN perspective on collective security is particularly relevant. The UN Security Council is the primary institution for maintaining international peace and security, and its failure to address the post-Soviet crisis is a significant institutional failure. The Russian veto has prevented the Security Council from taking action on Ukraine, Georgia, and other post-Soviet conflicts, and this has undermined the UN's credibility. The UN perspective's contribution is to highlight this institutional failure and to call for reform; its occlusion is the lack of consensus on what reform should look like, and the tendency of member states to prioritize their own interests over the collective good.

The UN perspective also emphasizes the role of international law and human rights. The UN human rights system provides a framework for evaluating the treatment of minorities, the conduct of military operations, and the protection of civilians in conflict. This framework is directly applicable to the post-Soviet crisis: the treatment of Russian-speaking minorities in Ukraine, the conduct of military operations in the Donbas, and the displacement of populations are all amenable to analysis through the UN human rights framework. The UN perspective's contribution is to insist that human rights are universal and that they apply to all parties in the conflict; its occlusion is the lack of enforcement mechanisms and the tendency of UN bodies to be influenced by great-power politics.

The UN perspective's deepest contribution is to provide a universal normative framework that transcends the particular interests of any single state or group of states. By insisting on the principles of the Charter, the UN perspective provides standards against which all behavior can be judged, including the behavior of great powers. Its occlusion is the gap between these standards and the reality of great-power politics: the UN can proclaim principles, but it cannot enforce them against the will of the Security Council's permanent members. This gap is not a failure of the UN alone; it is a failure of the international system that the UN represents. The UN perspective thus contributes both a normative framework and a critique of that framework's limitations, and it insists that the post-Soviet crisis cannot be resolved without addressing the underlying problem of

great-power dominance in the international system.

The UN perspective also contributes an important insight about the relationship between security and development. The UN's sustainable development agenda emphasizes that security cannot be achieved without development, and that the root causes of conflict include poverty, inequality, and lack of opportunity. This insight is applicable to the post-Soviet space: the economic dislocation of the 1990s, the rise of oligarchic capitalism, and the failure to build inclusive political institutions have all contributed to the instability that has fueled the security dilemma. The UN perspective thus contributes a broader understanding of security that goes beyond military considerations; its occlusion is the tendency to treat development as a technical problem rather than a political one, and to understate the role of power in shaping development outcomes.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African	Reveals the selective application of sovereignty norms; shows that great powers invoke territorial integrity or self-determination opportunistically	Understates Russian agency and the specific threat perceptions of post-Soviet states	Sovereignty and non-interference as universal principles, equally applied	NATO's Kosovo intervention without UN mandate; Western support for regime change in Ukraine	Russian: African view ignores Russian security fears and civilizational claims; treats all great-power action as equivalent
Chinese	Identifies NATO expansion as structural cause; articulates "legitimate security concerns" framework	Treats Russian actions as reactive rather than imperial; obscures China's own territorial claims	Sovereignty and non-interference, but with great-power security prerogatives	NATO eastward expansion timeline; US withdrawal from ABM Treaty; Maidan as Western-backed	Western: China's framing serves its own hegemonic ambitions and ignores Ukrainian agency

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Captures encirclement anxiety, ontological insecurity, and civilizational identity claims	Conflates defensive anxiety with imperial ambition; erases Ukrainian sovereignty	Great-power status, sphere of influence, civilizational distinctiveness	NATO expansion to borders; 2008 Bucharest summit promise; Putin's 2021 essay	Western: security dilemma framing cannot explain annexation of Crimea or full-scale invasion
Western	Documents imperial aggression and Russian military buildup; self-critiques security dilemma	Overemphasizes Russian agency; underweights NATO's role in provoking insecurity	Liberal international order, territorial integrity, self-determination	Putin's 2021 essay; military buildup; Crimea annexation; Bucha atrocities	Russian: Western framing ignores legitimate security concerns and historical humiliation
UN	Centers Charter principles of territorial integrity and collective security; highlights development-security nexus	Treats conflict as techni-cal/developmental; underweights power politics	International law, Charter, multilateralism	UNGA Resolution 68/262 on Crimea; ICJ provisional measures	African: UN norms applied selectively, great powers exempt from enforcement

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2014 Crimea Annexation — From the Maidan to "Reunification" and Its Justification Narratives

Levels of Analysis

Individual. At the individual level, the annexation was shaped by Vladimir Putin's personal worldview and decision-making calculus. Putin's March 18, 2014 address to the Federal Assembly framing Crimea as "historically Russian" land revealed a leader who understood the crisis not merely in strategic terms but as an opportunity to repair a perceived historical injustice. The flight of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych

on February 22, 2014, created a window that Putin exploited with speed and secrecy; the decision to deploy "little green men"—unmarked Russian special forces—reflected a personal risk tolerance and a willingness to operate in the gray zone between war and peace. Local Crimean leaders such as Sergey Aksyonov, who had been a marginal figure before the crisis, were elevated by Russian backing, illustrating how individual agency at the periphery can be activated by great-power sponsorship. The individual level also captures the role of Ukrainian actors: the Maidan protesters whose actions toppled Yanukovych, and the interim government in Kyiv whose perceived illegitimacy—amplified by Russian media—provided the pretext for intervention.

State. At the state level, the annexation served identifiable Russian state interests, most prominently the preservation of the Black Sea Fleet's naval base at Sevastopol, which had been leased from Ukraine under agreements that Russia feared might be terminated by a pro-Western government in Kyiv. The Russian state apparatus—military, intelligence, and political—coordinated the seizure of key installations, the installation of a pro-Russian Crimean government, and the organization of a referendum within three weeks of Yanukovych's flight. On the Ukrainian side, state weakness was decisive: the interim government lacked control over its own security forces in Crimea, and the Ukrainian military's reluctance to engage Russian forces reflected both institutional decay and the absence of a clear chain of command. The state level also encompasses the legal and institutional machinery of annexation: the Crimean parliament's vote to join Russia, the March 16 referendum, and the March 18 treaty of accession signed in Moscow. These formal steps were designed to create a veneer of legality, even as they violated Ukraine's constitution and international law.

Systemic. At the systemic level, the annexation occurred within the broader contest over the European security order that had intensified since NATO's 1999 enlargement and the 2008 Bucharest summit promise of eventual membership for Ukraine and Georgia. The Maidan crisis itself was triggered by Yanukovych's decision to suspend the EU association agreement in November 2013 under Russian pressure, placing Ukraine at the center of a competition between EU and Russian integration projects. The systemic context also includes the precedent of the 2008 Georgia war, which demonstrated that Russia was willing to use force to prevent NATO expansion into its near abroad, and the failure of the NATO-Russia Council and the OSCE to build a cooperative security architecture. The unipolar moment of the 1990s had given way to a more contested order by 2014, and the annexation can be read as a Russian assertion that the post-Cold War settlement was not immutable. The systemic level also captures the international response: Western sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and NATO's reinforcement of its eastern flank, which in turn deepened the security dilemma.

Transnational. At the transnational level, the annexation drew on and mobilized Russian diaspora networks, transnational media narratives, and the circulation of identity claims across borders. The Russian-speaking population of Crimea—approximately 60% of the peninsula's population—provided both a demographic pretext and a constituency for the "reunification" narrative. Russian state media, broadcasting into Ukraine and across the post-Soviet space, constructed a narrative of Ukrainian "fascism" and Russian victimhood that resonated with transnational Russian nationalist sentiment. The transnational dimension also includes the international legal and normative contest: the UN General Assembly's Resolution 68/262, the OSCE's condemnation, and the sanctions regime all represented transnational efforts to delegitimize the annexation. Conversely, Russia's invocation of the Kosovo precedent—arguing that if the West could recognize Kosovo's independence, Russia could annex Crimea—was a transnational rhetorical move that sought to expose the hypocrisy of Western normative claims. The transnational level thus reveals how the annexation was simultaneously a local seizure, a national project, and a global normative contest.

Mechanism

The mechanism of the 2014 Crimea annexation combined opportunistic seizure with narrative legitimation. The causal chain ran as follows: the Maidan protests destabilized the Ukrainian state; Yanukovych's flight created a power vacuum; Russian military and intelligence assets exploited this vacuum to seize key installations; a hastily organized referendum provided a veneer of democratic legitimacy; and the "reunification" narrative supplied domestic and international justification. The mechanism was not a single decision but a sequence of escalating commitments, each of which narrowed the range of alternatives and made reversal more costly.

Two motives drove the mechanism. The strategic motive was the preservation of Sevastopol and the prevention of a NATO-aligned Ukraine on Russia's southwestern flank; this was a classic security-dilemma logic in which defensive measures (securing the naval base) appeared threatening to others. The ontological motive was the repair of Russian collective identity: the Soviet collapse had left Crimea—transferred from Russia to Ukraine in 1954 by Khrushchev—outside the Russian state, and its "return" was framed as correcting a historical injustice and restoring national dignity. These motives were not mutually exclusive; rather, they reinforced each other, with the strategic interest providing the occasion and the ontological narrative providing the legitimation.

The mechanism also depended on a specific condition: Ukrainian state weakness. Without the Maidan crisis and Yanukovych's flight, the window for annexation would not have existed. This conditionality is important because it distinguishes the 2014 annexation from a premeditated, long-planned conquest; the evidence suggests that Russia improvised in response to events, though it had contingency plans and the capacity to act quickly. The mechanism thus combined structural opportunity (Ukrainian weakness), strategic interest (Sevastopol), and ontological framing (reunification), producing an outcome that was overdetermined by multiple causal pathways.

Perspective Reconstruction

African perspective (primary). From the African vantage point, the Crimea annexation exemplifies the selective application of sovereignty norms that post-colonial states have long contested and suffered under. The African perspective, drawing on Grovogui's analysis of the "civilizing mission" and Mamdani's work on the colonial state, notes that Western powers invoked self-determination to justify Kosovo's independence in 2008 but invoked territorial integrity to condemn Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, revealing that sovereignty is not a universal principle but a tool of great-power politics. African states, many of which inherited arbitrary borders from colonialism and have a particular stake in the principle of territorial integrity, recognized in Crimea a test of whether the post-colonial norm has any binding force when a nuclear power chooses to violate it. The African Union's response was muted and divided, reflecting both the principle of non-interference and the reality that African states depend on great-power patrons and cannot afford to alienate Russia or the West. What the African perspective reveals that the other four miss is the hypocrisy at the heart of the international order: the same powers that violated sovereignty in Iraq, Libya, and Kosovo now invoke sovereignty to condemn Russia, and this hypocrisy undermines the legitimacy of the very norms they claim to defend. The African vantage point thus frames Crimea not as an isolated European crisis but as another instance of a global pattern in which great powers instrumentalize legal principles while exempting themselves from their constraints.

Chinese perspective. China's perspective treats the Crimea annexation as a consequence of NATO expansion and Western interference in Ukraine's internal affairs, while carefully avoiding direct condemnation of

Russia. Beijing's official position emphasizes respect for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity while simultaneously acknowledging Russia's "legitimate security concerns," a formulation that reflects China's own interest in preserving its strategic partnership with Moscow. Chinese scholars and officials have pointed to the Maidan as a Western-backed regime change that destabilized Ukraine and created the conditions for Russian intervention, framing the crisis as a great-power contest rather than a violation of a smaller state's sovereignty. China's abstention in the UN General Assembly vote on Resolution 68/262 reflected this balancing act, prioritizing its relationship with Russia over full endorsement of Ukrainian territorial integrity. The Chinese perspective occludes the question of Ukrainian agency and the coercive nature of the referendum, and it serves China's own interest in establishing a precedent that great powers have legitimate security prerogatives in their near abroad.

Russian perspective. The Russian perspective frames the annexation as the "reunification" of Crimea with its historical homeland, correcting the "historical injustice" of Khrushchev's 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine. Putin's March 18, 2014 address to the Federal Assembly invoked the "spiritual source" of Russian civilization in Crimea and the protection of Russian speakers from the "nationalist" post-Maidan government in Kyiv. Russian officials and media emphasized the referendum result—over 95% in favor—as an expression of popular will, while dismissing international criticism as Western hypocrisy given the recognition of Kosovo's independence. The Russian perspective treats the annexation as defensive and restorative rather than expansionist, though this framing requires erasing the coercive context of the referendum, the presence of Russian military forces, and the absence of genuine democratic process. The ontological dimension is central: Crimea's return repaired a wound in Russian collective identity opened by the Soviet collapse, and the "reunification" narrative provided domestic legitimation that transcended strategic calculation.

Western perspective. The Western perspective treats the annexation as a violation of international law and the post-Cold War European security order, emphasizing Russia's breach of the Budapest Memorandum and the UN Charter. Western analysts have documented the role of Russian special forces in seizing key installations and the absence of genuine democratic process in the referendum. At the same time, Western self-critique—exemplified by Mearsheimer's argument that NATO enlargement provoked Russian insecurity—has debated whether Western policy contributed to the crisis. The Western perspective's strength is its documentation of Russian military and political actions; its occlusion is the tendency to treat Russian behavior as purely aggressive while underweighting the security dilemma dynamics that NATO expansion may have triggered. The Western response—sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and NATO reinforcement—reflected a commitment to territorial integrity but also a reluctance to risk direct military confrontation with a nuclear power.

UN perspective. The UN perspective centers on the Charter principles of territorial integrity and the prohibition on the use of force, as articulated in General Assembly Resolution 68/262, which affirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity and declared the Crimea referendum invalid. The UN framework treats the annexation as a clear violation of international law, regardless of historical claims or security concerns. However, the UN's collective security mechanisms failed to prevent or reverse the annexation, as Russia's veto in the Security Council blocked any binding action. The UN perspective also highlights the humanitarian and human rights dimensions, including the situation of Crimean Tatars and the militarization of the peninsula. The limitation of the UN approach is its dependence on great-power consensus, which the Crimea crisis exposed as a structural weakness in the collective security system, and its tendency to treat the conflict as a legal violation rather than a political problem rooted in competing security claims.

Explicit Adjudication

The Russian perspective best explains the domestic legitimation and ontological repair function of the annexation: the "reunification" narrative resonated with Russian public opinion and repaired a collective identity wound opened by the Soviet collapse, and no other perspective adequately captures this dimension. The Western perspective best explains the international legal violation and the strategic calculation: the documentation of Russian military action, the breach of the Budapest Memorandum, and the coercive nature of the referendum are well-established. The African perspective reveals the normative hypocrisy that undermines the Western claim to universal principles, showing that the same powers that violated sovereignty in Iraq and Libya now invoke it to condemn Russia. The Chinese perspective correctly identifies the structural context of NATO expansion but wrongly treats Russian action as purely reactive, obscuring the imperial and ontological dimensions. The UN perspective establishes the legal baseline but cannot explain why the violation occurred or why enforcement failed.

The most complete explanation combines the ontological (Russian identity reconstruction), the strategic (naval base, Black Sea control), and the systemic (NATO-Russia contest) levels, while recognizing that no single perspective captures the full causal picture. The security dilemma framing partially explains Russian insecurity but cannot account for the annexation's irreversibility and the "reunification" narrative's domestic political function; the imperial ambition framing captures the expansionist logic but risks treating all Russian security concerns as pretextual. The adjudication thus favors a synthetic explanation that weights the ontological and strategic motives most heavily, while acknowledging that the systemic context of NATO expansion created the conditions for the crisis and that the normative hypocrisy identified by the African perspective weakens the legitimacy of the international response.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Identify the trigger and the structural condition.** Separate the immediate military sequence in South Ossetia in August 2008 from the longer-term NATO enlargement and Russian sphere-of-influence dynamics that made escalation plausible.

2. **Apply the security-dilemma mechanism.** Explain how Georgian NATO aspirations, Russian peacekeeping presence, and mutual worst-case assessments could have produced a spiral even without a master plan for conquest.

3. **Apply the imperial-ambition mechanism.** Explain how Russia's doctrine of "privileged interests," its recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and its use of force to block NATO expansion fit a sphere-maintenance logic.

4. **Reconstruct all five perspectives.** State, in 2–3 sentences each, how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN vantage points interpret the war.

5. **Adjudicate with evidence.** Use the Tagliavini fact-finding report, the Bucharest summit outcome, Russian military readiness, and the postwar recognition decisions to weigh which mechanism better explains which phase of the crisis.

6. **Specify falsifiers.** State what evidence would have strengthened the pure security-dilemma account

and what evidence would have strengthened the pure imperial-ambition account.

MODEL ANSWER (continuous prose): The 2008 Georgia war is best understood as a two-stage crisis in which a security-dilemma spiral supplied the trigger and an imperial-consolidation logic shaped the aftermath. The structural condition was the unresolved post-Soviet territorial settlement: Georgia sought NATO membership and the restoration of territorial integrity, while Russia retained peacekeeping and political leverage in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and treated the South Caucasus as part of its zone of privileged interests. At the April 2008 Bucharest summit, NATO promised Georgia and Ukraine eventual membership but denied them Membership Action Plans, a compromise that satisfied neither side and likely intensified Georgian urgency and Russian alarm. In August, Georgian forces attacked Tskhinvali after shelling and skirmishes; Russia responded with a large, rapid, and evidently pre-prepared military operation that extended beyond South Ossetia into Georgia proper. The Tagliavini report concluded that Georgia started the large-scale hostilities but that Russia's response was disproportionate and partly pre-planned, which is the central evidentiary hinge for adjudication. The security-dilemma account explains why both sides misread intentions: Georgia feared permanent partition and Russian veto power over its Western alignment, while Russia feared NATO infrastructure on its southern flank and the loss of a buffer. Yet the pure security-dilemma account struggles with the speed of Russian mobilization, the breadth of the military advance, and especially the subsequent recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, which converted a ceasefire into a durable territorial revision. The imperial-ambition account explains those outcomes as sphere maintenance: Russia used force to demonstrate that NATO expansion into the former Soviet space would carry costs and to lock in client territories. But the pure imperial-ambition account risks overstating intentionality before August and understates the role of Georgian escalation, which gave Moscow both a legal-moral pretext and a military opportunity. From the African perspective, the war raises the problem of selective sovereignty: Georgia's territorial integrity was defended rhetorically while Kosovo's secession had been accepted, and Russia's recognition of breakaway regions looked like great-power prerogative rather than universal principle. From the Chinese perspective, NATO expansion is the root cause and Russia's security concerns are legitimate, though Beijing's own emphasis on territorial integrity makes full endorsement of recognition awkward. From the Russian perspective, the war was defensive civilizational boundary-setting against encirclement and Western double standards. From the Western perspective, it was imperial aggression enabled by post-Cold War overreach, with some self-critique about the Bucharest promise and the absence of a credible deterrent. From the UN perspective, the war exposed the failure of collective security: the Charter's territorial-integrity norm was violated, but enforcement depended on great-power politics rather than institutional authority. The best adjudication is therefore conditional: the security dilemma explains the escalation spiral and mutual misperception, while imperial ambition explains the recognition decisions and the strategic message; neither mechanism alone captures both the trigger and the settlement.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description (150–200 words): In December 2021, Russia published draft treaties demanding NATO halt enlargement, withdraw forces from post-1997 members, and guarantee no Ukrainian membership. NATO and the United States rejected the core demands while offering arms-control and transparency talks. In February 2022, Russia recognized the Donetsk and Luhansk "people's republics" and launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, framing it as demilitarization, denazification, and defense against NATO expansion. The case asks whether the invasion is better explained by a security dilemma intensified by NATO enlargement and Ukrainian alignment, or by imperial ambition to reconstitute a Russian sphere of influence. Relevant evidence includes the 2008 Bucharest promise, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the Minsk process,

NATO force posture, Russian military buildup, and Ukrainian public opinion on NATO before and after 2014.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:
- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism (security dilemma, imperial ambition, ontological insecurity, or a combination), specify its scope conditions, and state what would falsify it.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives in 3–5 sentences each, steel-manning each from within.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the case to one earlier episode (for example, 2008 Georgia or 2014 Crimea) and state what is similar, what differs, and what the analogy cannot explain.
- **Falsifiers:** List evidence that would weaken your preferred mechanism and evidence that would strengthen the rival mechanism.

(c) Self-check line: Before finalizing, verify that you have clearly distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what follows if your mechanism holds), and prescription (what policy should follow), and that no single sentence conflates two of these categories.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which adjudication best fits the evidence from the 2008 Georgia war?
A. The war was a pure security dilemma: Georgian NATO aspirations and Russian fear alone caused it, with no imperial intent.
B. The war was pure imperial ambition: Russia planned conquest regardless of Georgian actions.
C. The war combined a security-dilemma trigger with imperial consolidation: Georgian escalation provided the occasion, while Russian recognition and occupation reflected sphere-maintenance logic.
D. The war demonstrated successful UN collective security, because Charter mechanisms prevented wider escalation.

Correct answer: C.

Distractor diagnosis:
- **A** is wrong because it cannot explain Russian military readiness, the breadth of the advance, or the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia; it treats a spiral as if it had no strategic settlement phase.
- **B** is wrong because it ignores the Tagliavini finding that Georgia started large-scale hostilities and overstates evidence of a pre-planned conquest of all Georgia; it also cannot explain why the trigger mattered.
- **D** is wrong because the UN did not prevent escalation or reverse territorial change; the case illustrates the dependence of collective security on great-power politics, not its success.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. NATO enlargement waves, 1999–2024 (indicative, membership counts cumulative)

Wave (year)	New members	Cumulative NATO size	Commonly cited Russian response
1999	Czechia, Hungary, Poland	19	Objection; Kosovo war context

Wave (year)	New members	Cumulative NATO size	Commonly cited Russian response
2004	Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia	26	Stronger objection; Baltic accession seen as direct border contact
2009	Albania, Croatia	28	Limited new strategic alarm
2017	Montenegro	29	Sanctions-era tension
2020	North Macedonia	30	Low immediate salience
2023	Finland	31	Major border change; Russian warnings
2024	Sweden	32	Nordic strategic environment altered

Table 2. Russian military spending and NATO–Russia institutional status (indicative)

Period	Russian military spending (% of GDP, approximate)	NATO–Russia institutional status	Defining shock
1997–2001	~3.5–4.0	Founding Act; limited cooperation	Post-Soviet collapse; NATO's first post-Cold War enlargement
2002–2007	~3.5–4.5	NATO–Russia Council established; cooperation	Putin's 2007 Munich speech; Kosovo independence dispute
2008–2013	~3.8–4.5	Suspended after Georgia; partial thaw	2008 Georgia war
2014–2021	~4.0–5.5	Practical cooperation suspended; NRC survives as forum	Crimea annexation; Donbas war
2022–2024	~4.0–6.0+	NRC frozen; war footing	Full-scale invasion of Ukraine

Table 3. Ukrainian public opinion on NATO membership (indicative)

Period	Support for NATO membership (approx.)	Context
2002–2012	15–30%	Regional divide; Yanukovych-era non-bloc posture
2014 (post-Crimea)	40–50%	Annexation; Donbas escalation
2019	50–60%	Constitutional NATO aspiration; Poroshenko/Zelensky periods
2022–2024	75–85%	Full-scale invasion; wartime rally and security demand

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Across the three series, what pattern is most visible? NATO membership moves steadily eastward and northward; Russian military spending remains high by European standards and spikes around crises; Ukrainian support for NATO rises sharply after 2014 and again after 2022. What does this pattern suggest about the relationship between external threat perception, alliance demand, and military burden? State at least one reason why the trend alone cannot establish causation.

2. **Level of analysis.** Which level of analysis best explains the post-2014 deterioration: individual (Putin's beliefs, Ukrainian leaders, public opinion), state (Russian great-power identity, Ukrainian sovereignty, NATO institutional interests), systemic (unipolarity, bipolarity's return, balance of power), or transnational (energy, diaspora, EU regulatory power)? Defend one primary level and one secondary level, and identify what each level misses.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each perspective reads the same data.

    - **African (primary):** The African vantage point begins with sovereignty as a hard-won, post-colonial achievement and treats both NATO expansion and Russian "privileged interests" as possible infringements on smaller states' agency. From this angle, the data are not merely about European security; they are about who gets to define legitimate order. African scholarship on extraversion, conditional sovereignty, and the selective application of norms (Grovogui, Mamdani, Bayart) suggests that Ukrainian sovereignty is real, but so is the suspicion that great powers invoke rules instrumentally. The rise in Ukrainian NATO support after 2014 and 2022 can be read as a genuine security demand by a sovereign state, not as Western manipulation; yet the same data can also be read as evidence that small states are forced into alliance blocs when great-power guarantees fail. Russian spending data do not by themselves prove imperial ambition, but the "privileged interests" doctrine looks, from an African perspective, like a familiar claim to a sphere of influence that post-colonial states have historically resisted. The UN Charter's territorial-integrity norm is therefore not abstract: it is the legal vocabulary through which African states protect themselves against both Western interventionism and Russian sphere-of-influence politics. The African perspective's distinctive contribution is to show that the debate is not only "NATO vs. Russia" but also "whose sovereignty counts, and when?"

- **Chinese:** NATO expansion is treated as a root cause or at least a major enabling condition of Russian insecurity. The waves table supports the claim that the alliance moved toward Russia's borders; the spending table supports the claim that Russia responded to perceived encirclement; the opinion table is read cautiously, because wartime polling may reflect elite and media mobilization. The Chinese perspective emphasizes "legitimate security concerns" and multipolarity, and it occludes the possibility that Russian threat inflation served domestic legitimation.

- **Russian:** The data are read as confirmation of encirclement and humiliation. NATO waves show a shrinking strategic buffer; NRC breakdown shows institutional disregard; Ukrainian opinion is interpreted partly as the result of Western political engineering and partly as a tragic but understandable reaction to war. This perspective's strength is its attention to status and recognition; its weakness is its tendency to treat Russian security claims as automatically overriding Ukrainian sovereignty.

- **Western:** NATO enlargement is read as a response to Central and Eastern European demand, not as unprovoked expansion. The spending data support the claim that Russia remained heavily militarized even during cooperative periods; the opinion data support the claim that Ukrainian NATO aspiration became genuinely popular after Russian coercion. The Western perspective's self-critique, associated with Mearsheimer and others, asks whether alliance expansion ignored Russian red lines and thereby worsened the security dilemma.

- **UN:** The data are filtered through Charter norms: membership choices are sovereign, but force and annexation are prohibited. The NRC table shows institutional failure; the spending table shows militarization; the opinion table shows popular demand. The UN perspective contributes legal clarity but occludes enforcement capacity, since collective security depends on great-power consensus.

4. **Interpretation.** Which causal claims are supported by the data, and which are overreaches? For example, does the correlation between NATO waves and Russian hostility support Mearsheimer's security-dilemma argument, Trenin's post-imperium argument, Kotkin's imperial-ambition argument, or Sarotte's diplomatic-history argument? What would be needed to move from correlation to causation?

5. **Limitation.** Identify at least four limitations: wartime polling; classified or politicized military budgets; endogeneity between NATO expansion and Russian behavior; aggregation that hides regional variation within Ukraine and Russia; absence of a credible counterfactual; and the fact that institutional status (NRC meetings) measures diplomatic formality rather than substantive security.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1: "Ontological Security Spiral" (hand-drawn, A4 landscape)

- **What to draw:** Three concentric circles. Outer circle: "Soviet identity, 1945–1991," drawn with a cracked border. Middle circle: "Post-Soviet disorder, 1991–2000," with jagged edges. Inner circle: "Putin-era reconstruction, 2000–," with a solid border and three icons: an Orthodox cross, a double-headed eagle, and a

map outline of "Eurasia." Draw arrows from the outer circle inward labeled "collapse," "humiliation," and "loss of status." Draw arrows from NATO wave labels (1999, 2004, 2009, 2017, 2020, 2023, 2024) pointing toward the cracks in the outer circle.
- **Labels to place:** "Soviet ontological collapse," "NATO enlargement," "'privileged interests,'" "Crimea as 'reunification,'" "status anxiety," "civilizational defense."
- **Perspective overlay:** Annotate the margin with five color-coded notes: African (sovereignty and selective norms), Chinese (legitimate security concerns), Russian (encirclement and civilizational defense), Western (imperial ambition plus self-critique), UN (Charter and territorial integrity).

Visual 2: "Security Dilemma vs. Imperial Ambition Decision Tree" (hand-drawn, A4 portrait)
- **What to draw:** A root node labeled "NATO/EU expansion + Ukrainian association." Two branches: Branch A "Security dilemma" with nodes "perceived encirclement → defensive mobilization → arms racing → preventive/defensive war"; Branch B "Imperial ambition" with nodes "great-power identity → opportunity → annexation → justification narrative." Add evidence boxes along each branch: "NATO waves," "Russian spending," "NRC breakdown," "Ukrainian opinion." End both branches in a shared node: "2008 Georgia / 2014 Crimea / 2022 Ukraine."
- **Labels to place:** "Mearsheimer," "Trenin," "Kotkin," "Sarotte," "Putin 2021 essay," "adjudication requires process tracing."
- **Perspective overlay:** Color Branch A in blue for Western self-critique and Russian security claims; color Branch B in red for Western/Kotkin imperial-ambition claims; annotate African and UN notes at the shared outcome node: "sovereignty violated either way; Charter test."

Visual 3: "Data Timeline Map" (hand-drawn, A4 landscape)
- **What to draw:** A horizontal timeline from 1997 to 2024. Four stacked bands: (1) NATO waves as vertical bars; (2) Russian military spending as a line; (3) NATO–Russia institutional status as shaded zones (cooperative, crisis, suspended, frozen); (4) Ukrainian NATO support as a line. Mark shocks at 2008, 2014, and 2022 with vertical dashed lines. Add small boxes at each shock: "Georgia," "Crimea," "full-scale invasion."
- **Labels to place:** "Founding Act 1997," "NRC 2002," "Georgia 2008," "Crimea 2014," "invasion 2022," "Finland 2023," "Sweden 2024."
- **Perspective overlay:** At the bottom, place five small perspective tags: African (sovereignty/non-interference), Chinese (root cause/legitimate concerns), Russian (encirclement/humiliation), Western (imperial aggression/self-critique), UN (territorial integrity/Charter failure). Annotate that the same timeline is read as threat, response, demand, or institutional failure depending on perspective.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is ontological security in the post-Soviet case?	Identity, status, and continuity after 1991; Soviet collapse created a narrative vacuum; Putin-era reconstruction uses history, Orthodoxy, and great-power status. Source log: L7 ontological security; Kotkin 2022; Trenin 2011.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What does "privileged interests" mean?	Russian claim to special influence in former Soviet space; not formal empire but sphere-of-influence logic. Source log: Putin speeches; Trenin 2011.
What are the NATO enlargement waves?	1999, 2004, 2009, 2017, 2020, 2023, 2024; cumulative growth from 16 to 32 members. Source log: NATO records; Sarotte 2021.
What is the NATO–Russia Founding Act (1997)?	Framework for cooperation and security; later strained by enlargement and wars. Source log: NATO–Russia Founding Act 1997.
What is Mearsheimer's (2014) argument?	Western policy, especially NATO/EU expansion, provoked Russian reaction; security-dilemma logic. Source log: Mearsheimer 2014.
What is Sarotte's (2021) argument?	Diplomatic history of "not one inch"; NATO expansion decisions and Russian perceptions; nuance over inevitability. Source log: Sarotte 2021.
What is Kotkin's (2022) argument?	Imperial ambition and ideology, not only security fear; Putin's historical narrative. Source log: Kotkin 2022.
What is Trenin's (2011) argument?	Post-imperium Russia; integration vs. sphere; strategic culture. Source log: Trenin 2011.
What does Putin's 2021 essay claim?	Historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians; denial of Ukrainian separateness; justification narrative. Source log: Putin 2021 essay.
Security dilemma vs. imperial ambition?	Security dilemma: defensive actions read as threats; imperial ambition: expansion for status/identity. Adjudication needs process tracing. Source log: L5 realism; Mearsheimer 2014; Kotkin 2022.
What were 2014 Crimea justification narratives?	"Reunification," protection of Russian speakers, historical rights, response to Maidan. Source log: Putin 2021 essay; Kotkin 2022.
How does the African perspective reframe the debate?	Sovereignty, non-interference, selective norms; both Western and Russian claims can threaten small-state agency. Source log: Grovogui; Mamdani; Bayart.

Summary (3–5 sentences): Post-Soviet ontological insecurity created a vacuum that Putin-era narratives filled with great-power status, civilizational identity, and "privileged interests." NATO enlargement, EU association, and Ukrainian sovereignty demands interacted with these narratives to produce competing security-dilemma and imperial-ambition explanations. The 2014 Crimea annexation shows how identity, status, and justification narratives can convert crisis into territorial change. Data on NATO waves, Russian spending, NRC breakdown, and Ukrainian opinion clarify trends but cannot alone settle causation. An African-centered reading insists that sovereignty and non-interference are not Western or Russian privileges but universal tests of international order.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** After the Soviet Union collapsed, Russia lost not only territory and power but also a story about who it was. NATO grew eastward, Ukraine moved toward Europe, and Russian leaders said they were being surrounded. Some scholars say Russia acted mainly because it felt threatened; others say it acted because it wanted empire back. The 2014 takeover of Crimea was justified as "reunification," but it violated Ukraine's borders. Data show NATO grew, Russia spent heavily on the military, cooperation with NATO broke down, and Ukrainians increasingly wanted NATO after attacks. The same facts look different depending on whether you prioritize security, empire, sovereignty, or international law.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am not yet sure how much weight to give Putin's personal beliefs versus Russian state interests; whether NATO expansion was a necessary cause or only a background condition; whether Ukrainian opinion data are distorted by war; and whether "ontological insecurity" can be measured rather than narrated.

3. **Reread verification.** Recheck Mearsheimer 2014 for the security-dilemma mechanism; Sarotte 2021 for diplomatic sequencing; Kotkin 2022 for imperial-ambition claims; Trenin 2011 for post-imperium status; the 1997 Founding Act for institutional promises; and Putin's 2021 essay for identity-based justification. Verify that NATO wave dates, cumulative membership counts, and NRC status labels match the data table.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** A useful analogy is a neighborhood where one house installs a high fence and cameras after a burglary, while a neighbor reads the fence as preparation for taking over the street. The analogy captures mutual suspicion and status anxiety, but it fails because states are not neighbors with equal rights: Ukraine is a sovereign state, NATO is an alliance, Russia is a nuclear power, and the "fence" here includes annexation and war.

5. **Rewrite.** Post-Soviet Russia's identity crisis, NATO's eastward expansion, and Ukraine's European turn created a contested security environment in which the same data support both security-dilemma and imperial-ambition readings. The 2014 Crimea annexation is the key case: it can be explained as status-driven "reunification," as strategic opportunism, or as a violation of sovereignty. Adjudication requires process tracing across levels of analysis and perspectives, not trend data alone.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L35	Definition	What is ontological security in IR?	A state's need for a stable, continuous sense of self-identity, not merely physical survival; when identity narratives are threatened, states may take actions that risk physical security to restore narrative coherence (Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008).	African scholars read ontological insecurity through the lens of colonial rupture and post-colonial state formation, where identity reconstruction is never fully complete.
L35	Mechanism	How does the security dilemma operate in the post-Soviet space?	Defensive measures by one actor (NATO enlargement, missile defense) are interpreted as threats by another (Russia), prompting countermeasures that confirm the original fear and produce a spiral of mutual insecurity under anarchy (Jervis 1978).	The dilemma is asymmetrically experienced: NATO reads expansion as defensive, Russia reads it as encirclement.
L35	Application	What is Russia's "zone of privileged interests"?	Medvedev's 2008 articulation that Russia claims special influence in the former Soviet space; not formal empire but an asserted sphere of influence (Trenin 2011).	African perspectives are wary of any great-power "privileged interests" claim because it echoes colonial spheres.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L35	Comparison	Security dilemma vs. imperial ambition as explanations for Russian behavior?	Security dilemma stresses reactive, defensive fear of NATO; imperial ambition stresses expansionist identity and great-power restoration; adjudication turns on proportionality and stated aims (Mearsheimer 2014 vs. Kotkin 2022).	African analysts often find both explanations partial, insisting on local agency and historical contingency.
L35	Source	What does Mearsheimer (2014) argue about Ukraine?	Western, especially US, policy of NATO/EU expansion provoked Russian reaction; Ukraine should be a neutral buffer; realism predicts great-power sphere politics.	Western self-critique strand; African readers note its neglect of Ukrainian agency.
L35	Debate	What is the "encirclement" narrative?	Russian claim that NATO expansion surrounds Russia and threatens its security; used to justify interventions; contested by NATO's defensive, open-door framing.	Chinese diplomacy echoes "legitimate security concerns" language, partially validating the narrative.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L35	Reconstruction	How does the African perspective view post-Soviet conflicts?	Through sovereignty, non-interference, and suspicion of great-power spheres; support for territorial integrity combined with critique of Western double standards and selective norm application.	Primary vantage point of this lesson; reveals what Western and Russian frames occlude about normative inconsistency.
L35	Occlusion	What does the Chinese perspective tend to occlude?	China's own sphere claims and the inconsistency of its non-interference rhetoric; it downplays Russian violations while emphasizing NATO expansion as root cause.	Highlights the gap between principled sovereignty language and great-power practice.
L35	Adjudication	How to adjudicate security dilemma vs. imperial ambition in Georgia 2008?	Examine timing, proportionality, and stated aims; Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia suggests imperial ambition, while NATO's Bucharest promise suggests a security-dilemma trigger.	African states largely condemned recognition, aligning with territorial integrity norms.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L35	Visual	What does the NATO expansion timeline (1999–2024) show?	Waves of enlargement moving eastward; Russia's perception of shrinking strategic depth; correlation with spikes in Russian military spending and threat rhetoric.	Visual evidence is read differently across perspectives: defensive consolidation vs. encirclement.
L35	Mechanism	How did the 2013–14 crisis escalate?	Yanukovych's rejection of the EU Association Agreement for a Russian bailout; Maidan protests; Russian annexation of Crimea; separatist war in Donbas.	African observers stress the role of external great-power competition in destabilizing a sovereign state.
L35	Source	What does Putin's 2021 essay on Ukraine argue?	It denies Ukrainian nationhood as separate from Russia, frames Ukraine as historical Russian land, and justifies intervention as reunification.	Russian civilizational-defense narrative; Western and African critics read it as imperial ideology.
L35	Comparison	Western vs. Russian framing of NATO enlargement?	Western: voluntary, defensive, open-door; Russian: encirclement, broken promises, existential threat.	UN framing attempts neutrality but defaults to Charter principles of territorial integrity.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L35	Reconstruction	UN perspective on Crimea 2014?	General Assembly Resolution 68/262 affirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity; non-recognition of annexation; collective security failure.	African voting patterns at the UN showed diversity, not uniform alignment.
L35	Debate	What is the strongest counterargument to Mearsheimer's thesis?	That Russian aggression preceded and exceeded NATO triggers; that Ukrainian agency and democratic choice matter; that imperial ambition, not just security fear, drives policy (Kotkin 2022).	African scholars add that great-power bargaining over small states' fates reproduces colonial logics.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Concept	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of Mastery
Ontological security definition and scope		Can define and distinguish from physical security
Security dilemma mechanism (Jervis)		Can trace spiral steps in a case
NATO enlargement history 1999–2024		Can list waves and Russian reactions
EAEU vs. EU integration competition		Can explain 2013–14 trigger
Imperial ambition thesis (Kotkin)		Can state strongest version
African perspective reconstruction		Can steel-man from within
Chinese perspective reconstruction		Can steel-man from within
Russian perspective reconstruction		Can steel-man from within
Western perspective reconstruction		Can steel-man from within

Concept	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of Mastery
UN perspective reconstruction		Can steel-man from within
Crimea 2014 adjudication		Can distinguish description/explanation/prediction/prescription
Georgia 2008 adjudication		Can apply both competing explanations

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to steel-man from within, and what specific assumption made it difficult?
2. Where did your initial intuition about Russian motives conflict with the evidence you encountered, and what would it take to revise your view?
3. If you had to adjudicate between the security-dilemma and imperial-ambition explanations for a new case, which three pieces of evidence would you demand first?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"NATO promised never to expand eastward"	No formal treaty promise existed; Baker-Genscher discussions were ambiguous and contested (Sarotte 2021).	Sarotte 2021; NATO-Russia Founding Act 1997
"Russia invaded solely because of NATO"	Imperial ambition and identity reconstruction are independent drivers; NATO is at most a trigger (Kotkin 2022).	Kotkin 2022; Putin 2021 essay
"Crimea annexation was purely defensive"	It involved irredentist reunification rhetoric and military fait accompli, not just security buffering.	Putin 2021 essay; UN GA Res. 68/262
"Ontological security is only psychology"	It concerns state identity narratives and institutional continuity, not individual psychology.	Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008
"The security dilemma is symmetric"	Threat perception and capability are asymmetric; one side's defense reads as offense to the other.	Jervis 1978; Trenin 2011
"African states uniformly support Russia"	Voting and diplomacy varied; many abstained or supported territorial integrity at the UN.	UN GA voting records 2014, 2022

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"NATO expansion was purely aggressive"	It was also driven by Central and Eastern European demand for security guarantees.	Sarotte 2021; NATO enlargement history

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Ontological security; security dilemma; sphere of influence; territorial integrity	Spiral of mutual threat perception; identity narrative re-construction; integration competition	Mitzen 2006; Steele 2008; Jervis 1978; Mearsheimer 2014; Kotkin 2022; Trenin 2011	Crimea 2014; Georgia 2008; NATO enlargement 1999–2024; Maidan 2013–14	Security dilemma vs. imperial ambition; defensive vs. offensive NATO	If Russia accepted neutral buffers without expansionist claims, security-dilemma thesis strengthened	L5 realism; L7 ontological security; L14 transition; L36 Ukraine war
Privileged interests; en-circlement; reunification	Great-power bargaining over small states; normative inconsis-tency	Sarotte 2021; Putin 2021 essay; NATO-Russia Founding Act 1997	Russian military spending spikes; NATO-Russia Council meetings	Western self-critique vs. Russian civiliza-tional defense	If NATO had stopped at 1997 borders and Russia still intervened, imperial-ambition thesis strengthened	L39 European security; L40 wider Eastern Europe
Sovereignty; non-interference; selective norms	African normative critique; UN Charter principles	Grovogui; Mbembe; Mamdani; Aning	UN GA Res. 68/262; African voting patterns	African vs. Western normative frames	If African states uniformly backed one side, non-interference claim weakened	L1 global order; L3 UN system

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 20 min):** Re-read Section 2.2–2.6 key ideas; recite the five perspectives in order; check flashcards 1–5.

- **R2 (Day 3, 30 min):** Redo the Problem Pair (Georgia 2008) without notes; compare to model answer; log errors in Section 7.3.
- **R3 (Day 7, 45 min):** Reconstruct the Crimea worked example at all four levels of analysis; test with flashcards 6–10.
- **R4 (Day 14, 60 min):** Write a one-page adjudication memo on a new case (e.g., 2022 full-scale invasion) using the four memo headings; self-check description/explanation/prediction/prescription.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 min):** Full review of Sections 2.7–2.11; teach the lesson's central puzzle aloud in 5 minutes (Feynman); update confidence audit scores.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define ontological security and distinguish it from physical security.
☐ I can trace the security-dilemma spiral in the post-Soviet space.
☐ I can list NATO enlargement waves 1999–2024 and Russian reactions.
☐ I can explain the EAEU vs. EU competition and the 2013–14 trigger.
☐ I can state Mearsheimer's (2014) argument and its strongest counterargument.
☐ I can state Kotkin's (2022) imperial-ambition thesis.
☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective from within, not as a case study.
☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese perspective and identify its occlusions.
☐ I can reconstruct the Russian perspective and identify its occlusions.
☐ I can reconstruct the Western perspective and its self-critique.
☐ I can reconstruct the UN perspective and its limitations.
☐ I can adjudicate Crimea 2014 across all four levels of analysis.
☐ I can adjudicate Georgia 2008 under both competing explanations.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit and error log.
☐ I have scheduled R1–R5 reviews.
☐ I can teach the central puzzle in 5 minutes without notes.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Security dilemma and realism - Mearsheimer, J. (2014). "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault." *Foreign Affairs*. - Jervis, R. (1978). "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma." *World Politics*.

NATO enlargement history - Sarotte, M. E. (2021). *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*. Yale University Press.

Russian identity and imperialism - Kotkin, S. (2022). "Russia's Perpetual Geopolitics." *Foreign Affairs*. - Trenin, D. (2011). *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story*. Carnegie Endowment. - Putin, V. (2021). "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians." Kremlin essay.

Ontological security - Mitzen, J. (2006). "Ontological Security in World Politics." *European Journal of International Relations*. - Steele, B. (2008). *Ontological Security in International Relations*. Routledge.

African perspectives - Grovogui, S. (1996). *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*. University of Minnesota Press. - Mamdani, M. (2009). *Saviors and Survivors*. Pantheon.

UN and collective security - United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262 (2014). "Territorial Integrity of Ukraine."

End of Lesson 35. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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37. The Ukraine War: Dynamics and Implications

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	36 — The Ukraine War: Dynamics and Implications
Module	Module 6: Eastern Europe and the Ukraine War
Prerequisites	L22 (conventional warfare); L24 (cyber); L35 (post-Soviet ontology)
Interleaved links	Forward to L37 (lawfare), L38 (energy coercion), L39 (European security), L55 (quantum/NC3)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, worked example, problem pair, flashcards, visual anchors
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate (Bloom Level 5)
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 was, in many pre-war assessments, expected to produce rapid strategic decision: a short, high-intensity conventional campaign in which superior mass, airpower, and armored maneuver would compel Kyiv's capitulation or negotiated subordination. Instead, by the end of 2022 the war had passed through a failed blitz, two major Ukrainian counteroffensives, and the beginning of a grinding attritional phase that continued into 2023-2024. The central puzzle of this lesson is therefore not simply why Russia's initial plan failed, but how a war can move through qualitatively different operational regimes—maneuver, counter-maneuver, and attrition—while simultaneously being fought in cyber, information, energy, and industrial domains. The lesson asks students to explain phase transitions, identify the mechanisms that make one template succeed in Kharkiv and fail in Zaporizhzhia, and connect battlefield dynamics to the reordering of European security. It treats the war as a test case for theories of conventional warfare, hybrid conflict, military innovation, industrial mobilization, and alliance politics, while insisting that no single theory is sufficient.

This lesson sits in Module 6 and depends on three earlier conceptual foundations. L22 supplies the vocabulary of conventional warfare: maneuver, attrition, combined arms, logistics, and the offense-defense balance. L24 supplies the cyber and information dimension, including the possibility that digital disruption can substitute for or complement kinetic force. L35 supplies the post-Soviet ontological frame: the contested status of Ukraine, the imperial residue in Russian strategic culture, and the legal-political construction of sovereignty after 1991. The lesson then projects forward to L37 on lawfare, L38 on energy coercion, L39 on European security architecture, and L55 on quantum technologies and nuclear command, control, and communications. In other words, it is a hinge lesson: it converts operational history into structural questions about deterrence, alliance cohesion, and the future of arms control. Students who master it should be able to move from a map

of territorial control to an argument about why a particular force package succeeded or failed, and from there to a judgment about whether NATO's rearmament is a stabilizing or destabilizing response.

By the end of the lesson, a student should be able to reconstruct the war's phases with attention to timing, geography, and force ratios; explain the mechanisms behind the Kharkiv counteroffensive and the 2023 Zaporizhzhia stalemate; analyze hybrid warfare as a blurring of military and civilian domains rather than as a synonym for "everything"; evaluate the drone and electronic-warfare revolution without technological determinism; assess the industrial-base problem through ammunition production, artillery consumption, and Western capacity; and adjudicate competing claims about NATO expansion, rearmament, and arms-control collapse. The student should also be able to write a short analytical memo that separates description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and that tests its own conclusions against explicit falsifiers. The worked example and problem pair are designed to make these skills procedural rather than merely declarative.

The lesson's theoretical spine is deliberately plural. Offense-defense theory helps explain why Russia's initial blitz failed when Ukrainian resistance, terrain, and logistics denied rapid decision, but it struggles to explain why the same Ukrainian forces could not convert Kharkiv-style success into a breakthrough in Zaporizhzhia. Maneuver-warfare theory explains the former through surprise, tempo, and exploitation of weakly held sectors; attrition theory explains the latter through minefields, prepared defenses, and firepower density. Hybrid-warfare theory, as developed in debates over Russian "new generation warfare," warns against conflating information operations with conventional invasion; the Ukrainian case shows that cyber and information effects can be significant yet subordinate to artillery and infantry. The drone revolution can be read either as a tactical adaptation within existing combined-arms doctrine or as a deeper transformation of the offense-defense balance; the evidence is mixed and phase-dependent. Industrial-base theory reminds students that wars are not won by platforms alone but by sustained production of shells, missiles, and spare parts. Finally, alliance theory explains NATO's cohesion and expansion but must be weighed against the possibility that enlargement contributed to Russian threat perception—a claim that is analytically separable from the normative question of whether enlargement was justified.

The evidentiary base for this lesson is unusually contested because the war is ongoing and information is weaponized. The canonical sources—Freedman (2023) on strategy, Watling (2022) on land warfare, RUSI's Ukraine reports, ISW assessments, and UN OCHA humanitarian reporting—provide a strong but not uncontested record. ISW's daily assessments are invaluable for territorial and operational detail but are open-source and may reflect Ukrainian and Western sourcing biases. RUSI reports offer technical depth on tactics and logistics but are often written for professional military audiences and may understate political constraints. Freedman provides strategic framing but cannot resolve empirical disputes about casualty figures or shell production. UN OCHA documents humanitarian consequences with methodological care but does not adjudicate operational claims. Students should therefore treat all figures—territorial control, drone sortie rates, artillery consumption, production targets—as provisional and should ask which source produced them, for what audience, and with what incentive. The lesson's data lab is designed to make this skepticism habitual rather than rhetorical.

Although the war is geographically European, its consequences are global, and the African perspective is not a peripheral commentary on a European event. From an African vantage point, the war's most immediate significance lies in sovereignty, food security, fuel prices, fertilizer supply, and the politics of a multipolar order in which African states are pressured to align. African governments and scholars have often framed the conflict through the lens of territorial integrity and non-intervention—principles with deep roots in postcolonial statehood—while also noting that Western attention and resources devoted to Ukraine can divert

focus from crises elsewhere. This perspective reveals what the other four often miss: the war's distributional consequences across the Global South, the legitimacy costs of selective humanitarianism, and the possibility that a "European security architecture" is being rebuilt in ways that do not automatically include African security concerns. The lesson therefore places the African perspective first and longest in Section 2.7, not as a regional illustration but as a primary interpretive frame. It also prepares students for the forward link to L38 on energy coercion, where African and European vulnerabilities intersect.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. From L22: What is the difference between maneuver warfare and attritional warfare, and why does logistics often decide which mode is actually available to a force?
2. From L22: How does the offense-defense balance shape incentives for preemptive, preventive, or attritional strategies?
3. From L24: What are the principal limits of cyber operations as substitutes for kinetic military force?
4. From L24: How can information operations affect civilian morale and international legitimacy without necessarily changing battlefield outcomes?
5. From L35: Why is Ukrainian sovereignty contested in Russian strategic discourse, and what does that contestation imply for deterrence and escalation?
6. From L35: How did the post-1991 settlement create both NATO enlargement and Russian grievance, and why should these be treated as related but not identical causal stories?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Why did Russia's 2022 blitz fail despite apparent advantages in mass, armor, and airpower?
2. What mechanisms explain Ukrainian success in the Kharkiv counteroffensive but stalemate in the 2023 Zaporizhzhia offensive?
3. How did drones and electronic warfare alter the offense-defense balance, and what are their operational and industrial limits?
4. What are the strongest arguments for and against the claim that NATO expansion caused or significantly contributed to the war?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

1. **Attritional stalemate**: A phase of war in which neither side can achieve rapid decision, and outcomes depend on sustained firepower, manpower, logistics, and industrial replacement rates.
2. **Hybrid warfare**: The deliberate blurring of military and civilian domains, including cyber, information, energy, economic, and kinetic instruments, without assuming that all domains are equally decisive.
3. **Electromagnetic spectrum (EMS) contestation**: The struggle to detect, communicate, jam, deceive, and survive across radio, radar, and other electromagnetic frequencies, especially in drone warfare.
4. **First-person-view (FPV) drone**: A small, relatively inexpensive unmanned aerial system guided by a pilot using a live video feed, often used for reconnaissance or one-way attack.
5. **Lancet loitering munition**: A Russian precision-guided unmanned system designed to search for and strike targets, illustrating the shift toward cheaper, more numerous precision effects.

6. **Combined-arms maneuver**: The coordinated use of infantry, armor, artillery, air defense, engineers, and other capabilities to create and exploit breakthroughs.
7. **Maskirovka/deception**: The use of concealment, feints, disinformation, and operational surprise to mislead an adversary about intentions, timing, or force location.
8. **Industrial base**: The national and allied capacity to produce, repair, and sustain weapons, ammunition, platforms, and components over time.
9. **Artillery shell consumption**: The rate at which artillery ammunition is expended, often a binding constraint in high-intensity land warfare.
10. **NATO expansion**: The enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to include new member states, with contested implications for deterrence and Russian threat perception.
11. **Arms-control collapse**: The erosion or termination of treaties and verification regimes that previously limited nuclear and conventional forces, especially in Europe.
12. **Humanitarian spillover**: The cross-border effects of war on food, fuel, fertilizer, refugees, and civilian protection, particularly consequential for the Global South.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives By the end of this lesson the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the three-phase structure of the Russia-Ukraine war—failed blitz (February–March 2022), Ukrainian counteroffensives (September–November 2022), and attritional stalemate (2023–2024)—as a sequence of operational-logic failures and adaptations rather than as a chronology of battles, specifying for each phase the decisive variable (political cohesion, mobilization depth, industrial capacity) and the mechanism by which it operated.

2. **Explain** how hybrid warfare in this conflict blurs the military-civilian boundary through the simultaneous use of cyber operations, energy coercion, information warfare, and conventional force, and evaluate which of these instruments produced durable strategic effects versus transient tactical disruption.

3. **Evaluate** the drone and electronic-warfare revolution—FPV drones, Lancet loitering munitions, and the contested electromagnetic spectrum—by identifying the feedback loop between sensor density, strike precision, and force dispersion, and by specifying the scope conditions under which drone saturation degrades rather than enhances combined-arms maneuver.

4. **Assess** the industrial-base problem by comparing Ukrainian and Russian artillery-shell consumption rates with Western production capacity, and by determining whether the binding constraint on Ukrainian offensive operations in 2023 was ammunition scarcity, force-generation shortfalls, or the geometry of Russian defensive belts.

5. **Synthesize** the implications of the war for European security architecture—NATO expansion, rearmament, and the collapse of arms control—into a conditional forecast that distinguishes structural shifts (permanent rearmament, Nordic accession) from contingent ones (U.S. commitment levels, Ukrainian territorial outcomes), and that identifies the falsifiers that would invalidate each claim.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The war's phases: the failed blitz (2022), the Kharkiv/Kherson counteroffensives (2022), the attritional stalemate (2023-2024) Bolded Causal Claim: The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 failed as a blitzkrieg because its operational design assumed a decapitation strike against a state whose political cohesion and territorial defense had been systematically underestimated; the subsequent phases—Ukrainian counteroffensives in Kharkiv and Kherson in autumn 2022, then attritional stalemate across 2023–2024—were determined by the interaction of mobilization depth, industrial capacity, and the geographic constraints of the theater, not by the quality of individual tactical engagements.

Mechanism: The causal chain runs through three linked mechanisms. First, the blitz failed because Russian planners conflated regime fragility with state fragility: the assumption that the Zelensky government would collapse within seventy-two hours (a premise embedded in the multi-axis thrust toward Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Odesa) ignored the institutional resilience of Ukrainian territorial defense, the decentralized command structure that survived the initial strikes, and the political cohesion produced by the 2014–2022 period of partial mobilization and national consolidation. When the decapitation did not occur, Russian forces were committed to a multi-axis advance without the logistics tail or the force ratios required for sustained maneuver, and the 40-kilometer column north of Kyiv became a symbol of operational overreach rather than a temporary pause. Second, the autumn 2022 counteroffensives succeeded not because Ukraine possessed superior aggregate force but because it exploited a specific asymmetry: Russian forces had overextended along a 1,000-kilometer front after the failed blitz, and the Kharkiv offensive (September 2022) used deception, operational security, and the concentration of Western-supplied artillery and HIMARS to rupture a thinly held sector before Russian command could reallocate reserves. The Kherson offensive (October–November 2022) combined similar fires with the geographic constraint of the Dnipro River, which turned Russian withdrawal into a logistical crisis. Third, the transition to attritional stalemate in 2023–2024 occurred because both sides exhausted their initial mobilization surges and entered a phase in which the binding constraint shifted from tactical skill to industrial throughput: Russia's ability to generate mass through partial mobilization (September 2022) and its defense-industrial ramp-up met Ukraine's dependence on Western ammunition flows, and the result was a positional war in which advances were measured in hundreds of meters and paid for in tens of thousands of casualties. The mechanism here is not "trench warfare returns" but rather the exhaustion of maneuver space under conditions of high sensor density and precision fires, which rewards the defender and punishes the attacker unless the attacker possesses overwhelming fires and air superiority—neither of which either side held.

Scope Conditions: The three-phase model holds under specific conditions that must be stated explicitly. It applies to a theater in which (a) the defender possesses sufficient strategic depth and population to absorb an initial shock and regenerate forces; (b) the attacker's political timeline is shorter than the military timeline required for conquest; (c) external suppliers can sustain the defender's fires and logistics; and (d) the theater's geography permits the defender to trade space for time without losing the political center. Where these conditions fail—for instance, in a state with shallow strategic depth or no external supply line—the blitz may succeed and no counteroffensive phase follows. The model also assumes that the attacker does not escalate to nuclear use, which would terminate the conventional phase structure entirely; this is a scope condition, not a prediction. Additionally, the attritional-stalemate phase is contingent on the defender's ability to maintain mobilization and on the supplier's willingness to sustain ammunition flows; if either falters, the stalemate resolves in favor of the side with greater endurance, which in this case has been Russia's larger population and industrial base, though not without severe economic and demographic costs.

Observable Implications: If the three-phase model is correct, several observable patterns should hold. In the blitz phase, one should observe a mismatch between stated political objectives and force allocation:

Russia's initial force of roughly 190,000 troops across multiple axes was insufficient for the stated goal of regime change in a country of 40 million, and the logistics failures (fuel shortages, maintenance breakdowns) should appear early and persist. In the counteroffensive phase, one should observe that Ukrainian gains correlate with the arrival of Western long-range fires (HIMARS in June 2022, Storm Shadow/SCALP in 2023) and with Russian force dispersal, not with Ukrainian numerical superiority. In the attritional phase, one should observe that territorial changes slow to a crawl even as casualty rates remain high, and that the ratio of artillery shells fired to territory gained deteriorates sharply. One should also observe that the phase transitions are not clean: the blitz bled into positional fighting around Kyiv by late March 2022, and the counteroffensives overlapped with the beginning of Russian mobilization. The model predicts phase overlap, not discrete boundaries. Finally, the model implies that any future phase shift—whether toward renewed maneuver or toward negotiated settlement—will be signaled by changes in industrial throughput or mobilization policy rather than by battlefield events alone.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From the African vantage point, the war's phases are read not as a European security drama but as a global shock whose most consequential effects were felt in food, fuel, and fertilizer markets far from the front. African scholars and policymakers have emphasized that the failed blitz and subsequent stalemate produced a commodity-price spike that hit import-dependent African economies hardest: wheat prices rose sharply in 2022, and the Black Sea Grain Initiative (July 2022) was experienced in Africa as a matter of survival rather than diplomacy. The African perspective foregrounds sovereignty as a non-negotiable norm—Russia's violation of Ukrainian territorial integrity is condemned on the same grounds that African states condemn external interference in their own affairs—while simultaneously insisting that the war's global spillovers demand a voice for the Global South in any settlement. African states' voting patterns at the UN (abstentions and non-alignment rather than automatic alignment with either bloc) reflect a reading of the phases as evidence that great-power war is a luxury the global economy cannot afford, and that the attritional stalemate is not merely a European tragedy but a sustained drag on African development. What this perspective reveals that others miss is the distributional asymmetry of the war: the phases are experienced in Europe as security, in Africa as prices.

Chinese: The Chinese reading of the phases centers on NATO responsibility and the argument that the failed blitz was a predictable consequence of NATO expansion and of the West's refusal to address Russian security concerns, while the attritional stalemate demonstrates the futility of military solutions and the necessity of political settlement. The twelve-point peace plan (February 2023) frames the phases as evidence that escalation must be reversed and that a ceasefire should precede negotiations. Chinese analysts have treated the Kharkiv counteroffensive as a tactical success that does not alter the strategic reality of Russian endurance, and the stalemate as confirmation that neither side can achieve its maximalist aims. This perspective contributes the insight that phase analysis must include the diplomatic track, but it occludes the agency of Ukrainian actors and the question of accountability for the initial invasion.

Russian: The Russian framing rejects the "failed blitz" characterization entirely, describing the February 2022 operation as a "special military operation" whose objectives—denazification, demilitarization, and the protection of Russian-speaking populations—were always limited and whose phases represent deliberate adaptation rather than failure. The Kharkiv and Kherson withdrawals are framed as tactical repositioning to more defensible lines, and the attritional phase is presented as a war of attrition that Russia is structurally better positioned to win given its larger population and industrial base. This perspective contributes the claim that Western assessments of Russian failure rest on maximalist objectives that Moscow never formally

adopted, but it occludes the evident gap between the initial multi-axis thrust and the limited objectives later articulated, as well as the costs of the war to Russian society.

Western: The Western perspective reads the phases as a story of Ukrainian resilience and Western support: the failed blitz as proof that deterrence by denial can work, the counteroffensives as validation of combined-arms assistance, and the stalemate as a call for sustained aid and industrial mobilization. NATO unity and the expansion of the alliance (Finland, Sweden) are treated as strategic gains that outweigh the costs of the war. This perspective contributes the emphasis on agency and on the material basis of military power, but it risks occluding the global spillovers and the possibility that the attritional phase may not resolve in Ukraine's favor without a level of Western commitment that has not yet been demonstrated.

UN: The UN perspective frames the phases through the lens of Charter violation and humanitarian consequence: the failed blitz produced immediate civilian displacement and infrastructure damage; the counteroffensives shifted front lines but not the humanitarian crisis; the stalemate entrenched a protracted conflict with no clear end. General Assembly resolutions (March 2022, and subsequent) condemned the invasion and demanded withdrawal, while humanitarian agencies (OCHA) documented the cumulative toll. This perspective contributes the normative anchor and the humanitarian data, but it has limited leverage over the military dynamics and depends on member-state consensus that has been partial.

SECTION 2.3 — KEY IDEA 2: Hybrid Warfare: Cyber, Energy, Information, and the Blurring of Military/Civilian Domains

Bolded Causal Claim: In the Ukraine war, hybrid warfare did not remain a preparatory or peripheral layer; it became a co-constitutive battlespace in which cyber intrusions, energy coercion, information operations, and strikes on civilian infrastructure jointly eroded the distinction between military and civilian targets, turning societal resilience itself into the contested objective.

Mechanism: The mechanism is cumulative cross-domain attrition. Cyber operations target command, control, communications, intelligence, and logistics networks, not necessarily to produce immediate battlefield effects but to impose friction, delay, and uncertainty. Energy coercion operates through supply interruption, price spikes, and infrastructure vulnerability, converting economic interdependence into leverage. Information operations shape domestic mobilization, elite cohesion, and alliance solidarity by contesting narratives of legitimacy, atrocity, and war aims. Kinetic strikes on power grids, transport nodes, ports, and industrial facilities extend military pressure into civilian life, forcing governments to allocate scarce resources to repair, protection, and social stabilization. Each domain reinforces the others: cyber reconnaissance enables physical targeting; energy shortages amplify information grievances; civilian harm becomes both a military effect and a political message. The result is not a single decisive blow but a sustained compression of the adversary's political, economic, and social capacity, with the boundary between combatant and non-combatant progressively dissolved by functional necessity rather than declared doctrine. Freedman (2023) and RUSI Ukraine reports emphasize that modern campaigns are judged by their capacity to integrate these domains; ISW assessments track how Russian strikes on infrastructure were timed to exploit seasonal demand and repair cycles. UN OCHA reports document the humanitarian translation of this mechanism into displacement, service disruption, and civilian risk.

Scope Conditions: Hybrid warfare of this kind is most effective where the target is deeply embedded in transnational networks—energy pipelines, digital platforms, financial systems, and global media

ecosystems—and where thresholds for retaliation remain ambiguous. It thrives in the gray zone below formal war, where attribution is contested and responses are calibrated to avoid escalation. It is less effective where infrastructure is hardened, diversified, or rapidly repairable; where societies possess high trust and adaptive institutions; where alliances coordinate sanctions, air defense, and cyber defense; and where the attacker's own dependencies create reciprocal vulnerability. The mechanism also weakens when information operations confront credible, locally trusted counter-narratives or when civilian harm generates international mobilization rather than demoralization. In Ukraine, the scope conditions shifted over time: early Russian cyber and information efforts achieved partial disruption but failed to produce strategic paralysis, while later energy and infrastructure strikes imposed real costs without breaking Ukrainian state capacity or Western support.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include large-scale cyber incidents against government and critical infrastructure; repeated strikes on electricity generation, transmission, and heating systems; attacks on ports, railways, and industrial facilities; refugee and displacement flows; spikes in energy prices and rationing; and sustained information campaigns across social media and state media. One should also observe institutional adaptation: Ukraine's repair brigades, distributed energy solutions, cyber defense cooperation, and civil-defense messaging; Western sanctions and export controls; and NATO's increased attention to critical infrastructure protection. If the hybrid mechanism is operating, civilian infrastructure becomes a leading indicator of military pressure rather than a collateral category, and alliance politics becomes an explicit battlespace. Data Lab indicators such as territorial control alone would understate this dimension; they must be read alongside grid damage, cyber incident reporting, energy price movements, and humanitarian access metrics.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, hybrid warfare in Ukraine is not an exotic Northern phenomenon but a familiar pattern in which external powers weaponize interdependence—energy, food, finance, and information—to discipline weaker states and populations. African scholarship on extraversion, dependency, and the politics of survival (Bayart, Rodney, Mamdani) illuminates how infrastructure and commodity networks become instruments of coercion. The African perspective foregrounds the global spillovers: grain and fertilizer disruptions, fuel price shocks, and debt stress that transferred the war's costs to import-dependent economies. It reveals what Western strategic narratives often occlude: that hybrid warfare's civilian harm is not confined to the theater but is distributed through global markets, and that sovereignty for many states is exercised under conditions of structural vulnerability rather than formal independence. This perspective also cautions against treating African states' non-alignment or hedging as moral failure; such positions often reflect rational assessment of asymmetric exposure to great-power coercion.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats hybrid warfare as evidence of a Western-led security architecture that expands into non-military domains—information, finance, technology, and norms—while attributing escalation primarily to NATO's post-Cold War enlargement and to the militarization of economic interdependence. It emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and the dangers of bloc confrontation, and it frames cyber and information competition as arenas where unilateral sanctions and narrative dominance are themselves coercive. China's twelve-point peace plan reflects a preference for ceasefire, dialogue, and addressing "legitimate security concerns," implicitly treating hybrid escalation as a symptom of unresolved political order rather than as a discrete Russian strategy. This perspective contributes a critique of Western securitization but occludes the agency of Russian hybrid operations and the coercive use of energy and information by Moscow.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames hybrid warfare as defensive civilizational resistance against a Western hybrid campaign that allegedly preceded the 2022 invasion: NATO expansion, sanctions, information warfare, and the political transformation of Ukraine. In official discourse, the "special military operation" is justified by denazification, demilitarization, and protection of Russian speakers, while Western support for Ukraine is portrayed as evidence of a proxy war. This narrative treats Russian strikes on infrastructure as responses to Western escalation and as efforts to degrade military-industrial capacity, not as attacks on civilians. The perspective contributes an account of how Moscow legitimizes escalation and mobilizes domestic support, but it occludes the initiation of armed force, the documented civilian harm, and the coercive character of energy and information operations directed at Ukraine and Europe.

Western: The Western perspective frames hybrid warfare as a Russian strategy of coercion below the threshold of conventional war, combining cyber attacks, energy leverage, disinformation, and infrastructure strikes to fracture Ukrainian and European resilience. It emphasizes NATO unity, sanctions, cyber defense, and the protection of critical infrastructure as counters. This view contributes a robust account of cross-domain aggression and the need for societal resilience, but it can occlude the ways Western economic and information power also operates coercively, and it sometimes overstates the novelty of hybrid tactics by treating them as uniquely Russian rather than as features of contemporary great-power competition.

UN: The UN perspective frames hybrid warfare through Charter principles and humanitarian consequences: attacks on civilian infrastructure raise questions of distinction and proportionality; energy and food disruptions affect civilian populations far beyond the theater; and information warfare complicates protection and accountability. UN OCHA reports document service disruption, displacement, and access constraints, while General Assembly resolutions condemn aggression and demand withdrawal. This perspective contributes a normative and humanitarian anchor, but it has limited enforcement capacity and depends on member-state consensus that has been partial.

SECTION 2.4 — KEY IDEA 3: Drone and Electronic Warfare Revolution: FPV Drones, Lancet Munitions, and the Contested EMS

Bolded Causal Claim: The Ukraine war has accelerated a tactical revolution in which cheap FPV drones, loitering munitions such as the Lancet, and contested electromagnetic spectrum have made the battlefield radically transparent, shifting advantage from armored mass and maneuver to concealment, electronic warfare, and rapid tactical adaptation.

Mechanism: The mechanism is a sensor-strike loop compressed to minutes and meters. FPV drones provide first-person, low-cost reconnaissance and precision attack, allowing small units to locate, track, and strike vehicles, trenches, and logistics nodes without waiting for higher-echelon fires. Loitering munitions such as the Lancet extend this logic by combining search, identification, and terminal attack in a single expendable platform, particularly against artillery and air-defense systems. Electronic warfare contests the links that make these systems effective: jamming, spoofing, and direction-finding disrupt drone control, GPS navigation, and communications, while counter-EW seeks to restore or bypass them. The result is an environment in which movement is detected quickly, concealment is difficult, and survival depends on dispersion, camouflage, electronic silence, and rapid relocation. Freedman (2023) and Watling (2022) highlight how technological diffusion changes tactical possibilities faster than doctrine; RUSI Ukraine reports document the adaptation cycles between drone innovation and countermeasures. ISW assessments track how drone density affects local offensive potential, while UN OCHA data remind that the same transparency increases risk to civilians and infrastructure near front lines.

Scope Conditions: The drone-EW revolution is most transformative where industrial capacity can sustain high sortie rates, where operators are trained and replaced, where terrain permits concealment and short-range flights, and where adversary air defense and EW are imperfect. It is less decisive where one side achieves electromagnetic dominance, where weather or terrain degrades sensors, where supply chains for drones and components are disrupted, or where forces can harden positions and logistics against persistent observation. The mechanism also depends on the cost-exchange ratio: cheap drones can impose disproportionate costs on expensive platforms, but only if they survive EW and if their production outpaces attrition. In Ukraine, both sides have adapted, producing an evolutionary arms race rather than a one-sided revolution; the advantage shifts locally and temporally rather than settling permanently.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include high drone sortie rates; widespread use of FPV drones for both reconnaissance and attack; Lancet strikes against artillery, radar, and air-defense assets; extensive trench networks and dispersion; rapid relocation of artillery after firing; jamming and spoofing incidents; and high rates of vehicle and equipment loss to small, cheap systems. One should also observe adaptation: drone modifications, frequency hopping, fiber-optic or autonomous guidance experiments, EW upgrades, and changes in tactics such as night movement or camouflage. Data Lab indicators—drone sortie rates, artillery shell consumption, and territorial changes—should be read together: high drone density with low territorial movement suggests a transparent, attritional battlespace rather than maneuver warfare. Civilian harm and infrastructure risk near front lines are also observable consequences.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective reads the drone-EW revolution less as a purely military-technical breakthrough than as another instance of asymmetric, externally supplied warfare whose costs are borne by societies with limited industrial depth. African scholarship on technology, dependency, and the political economy of violence (Rodney, Bayart, Mamdani) suggests that the diffusion of cheap lethal systems can empower non-state and state actors alike while deepening reliance on external supply chains. For African security, the lesson is double-edged: drones may offer affordable surveillance and border control, but they also lower the threshold for violence, complicate accountability, and risk importing great-power tactical templates into contexts with weak oversight. The perspective foregrounds the global political economy of components, semiconductors, and EW systems, and it asks who controls the data, spectrum, and repair ecosystems on which these technologies depend. It also insists that technological fascination not obscure the human and infrastructural costs visible in UN OCHA reporting.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes the democratization of precision strike and the vulnerability of high-value platforms to massed, low-cost systems, reinforcing arguments for integrated air defense, electronic warfare, and industrial mobilization. It treats the contested EMS as a strategic domain in which information and spectrum control are prerequisites for sovereignty. China's own military modernization and its interest in drone swarms, counter-drone systems, and EW are informed by these observations. The perspective contributes a focus on systems integration and industrial scale, but it may occlude the political and legal questions raised by autonomous and semi-autonomous lethal systems, and it often frames technological competition in terms of great-power rivalry rather than civilian protection.

Russian: The Russian perspective presents drone and EW adaptation as evidence of resilience and innovation under sanctions, emphasizing Lancet strikes, FPV drone units, and electronic warfare as tools to offset Western-supplied precision weapons and to impose attrition on Ukrainian forces. Official narratives highlight tactical ingenuity and the "demilitarization" of Ukraine through the destruction of Western equipment. This perspective contributes an account of how Russia has adapted to technological asymmetry, but it oc-

cludes the dependence on imported components, the high attrition of drone operators, and the civilian risks created by pervasive battlefield transparency. It also tends to treat technological adaptation as vindication of the war's aims rather than as a response to strategic failure.

Western: The Western perspective frames the drone-EW revolution as both a warning and an opportunity: cheap systems can offset Russian mass, but they also expose NATO's own vulnerabilities in air defense, logistics, and electromagnetic resilience. It emphasizes rapid procurement, innovation cycles, and the need to integrate drones and EW into combined-arms doctrine. This view contributes a strong focus on adaptation and industrial learning, but it can overstate the transferability of Ukrainian adaptations to NATO contexts and may understate the legal, ethical, and escalation implications of normalizing pervasive drone surveillance and strike.

UN: The UN perspective frames drone and EW proliferation through civilian protection and accountability. Pervasive battlefield transparency does not automatically reduce civilian harm; it can increase targeting of infrastructure and complicate distinction, while EW disruption can affect humanitarian communications and navigation. UN OCHA reports document civilian casualties and access constraints in areas of intense drone and artillery activity. This perspective contributes a humanitarian and legal anchor, but it has limited capacity to regulate rapidly diffusing technologies and depends on state compliance with international humanitarian law.

SECTION 2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The industrial base problem: ammunition production, artillery shells, and Western capacity

Bolded Causal Claim: In a protracted, artillery-intensive conventional war, the binding constraint on military effectiveness is industrial throughput—especially 155mm-class shell production and the energetics, machine tools, and labor behind it—so that operational tempo becomes a function of factory output rather than tactical superiority.

Mechanism: Modern high-intensity land warfare consumes indirect-fire ammunition at rates that deplete Cold War stockpiles; artillery remains the dominant casualty-producing and suppressive tool, so when shell supply tightens, fire plans shrink, maneuver windows close, and casualty-avoidance tactics become more costly. Western defense industries were optimized for low-volume, high-precision, expeditionary warfare and just-in-time procurement, not mass production of basic munitions; scaling requires not only contracts but energetics, forging capacity, skilled labor, quality assurance, and multi-tier suppliers. Ukraine's own production was limited and vulnerable, while Russia could draw on Soviet-era stockpiles and a more thoroughly mobilized defense-industrial base, creating an asymmetry in sustained fire. Precision munitions such as HIMARS rockets and cruise missiles impose a parallel industrial problem: they are scarce, expensive, and dependent on specialized components, so they complement rather than replace massed artillery. The mechanism is therefore a supply-chain bottleneck translated into battlefield constraint: fewer shells mean less suppression, less suppression means slower maneuver, and slower maneuver means higher attrition for the side seeking breakthrough.

Scope Conditions: This claim holds where war is prolonged, attritional, and dominated by artillery and positional fighting; it is weaker in short campaigns, air-dominant conflicts, or theaters where precision strike and logistics interdiction can substitute for massed fires. It also depends on the adversary's industrial depth: Russia's ability to mobilize legacy stockpiles and sanctioned supply chains partially offset Western aid. The

claim does not imply that industrial capacity alone determines outcomes; command quality, intelligence, morale, and alliance cohesion matter, and industrial adaptation can narrow gaps over time. A strong counterargument is that Western precision and drone innovation can reduce shell dependence, while Russia's apparent stockpile advantages may be finite and its production vulnerable to sanctions and labor constraints.

Observable Implications: Observable signs include rationing of artillery fire, shifts toward cheaper drones and loitering munitions, public production targets and delivery shortfalls, stockpile drawdowns in donor states, and industrial investment in energetics and forging. On the Russian side, sustained high-volume fire despite sanctions suggests either deeper stockpiles or successful industrial mobilization; on the Ukrainian side, intermittent fire superiority correlates with Western delivery cycles. The data-lab focus on shell consumption versus production should show a persistent gap between battlefield demand and Western supply, with partial closure only after multi-year industrial expansion.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage, the industrial-base problem is not merely a European logistics issue but a revelation of global productive asymmetry and dependency. African scholarship on uneven development and the political economy of extraction highlights how war-driven demand for minerals, energy, and industrial inputs can reproduce extractive relationships, while African states experience the consequences through food, fuel, and fertilizer price shocks. The African perspective asks who bears the costs of Western rearmament and whether global industrial capacity is being redirected away from development priorities; it also stresses sovereignty, since many African states lack the industrial depth to insulate themselves from externally generated supply shocks. This perspective contributes a structural critique of global production and a reminder that military capacity is embedded in broader political economies, but it may understate the immediate agency of Ukrainian and Russian actors in shaping the war's trajectory.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes state capacity and manufacturing depth, treating industrial mobilization as a measure of comprehensive national power. It tends to view Western production constraints as evidence of deindustrialization and over-financialization, while seeing China's own manufacturing base as a strategic asset. In the Ukraine context, Beijing's twelve-point peace plan stresses dialogue and opposes escalation, so Chinese commentary often frames arms production races as prolonging conflict rather than resolving it. This perspective contributes an industrial-capacity lens and a critique of Western supply-chain fragility, but it may occlude the coercive dimensions of Russian aggression and the security dilemmas driving European rearmament.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats the industrial base as proof that a war of attrition favors a state willing to mobilize its economy and society. It emphasizes Soviet-era industrial inheritance, the ability to redirect civilian production, and the claim that Western sanctions have failed to cripple Russian output. Russian discourse frames Western shell shortages as evidence of NATO's lack of strategic stamina, while presenting Russia's own production as defensive necessity. This perspective contributes an understanding of mobilized war economies, but it often overstates Russian resilience and understates the costs of sanctions, labor shortages, and technological dependence.

Western: The Western perspective frames industrial shortfalls as a strategic wake-up call requiring rearmament, alliance burden-sharing, and defense-industrial reform. It emphasizes support for Ukraine, NATO unity, and the need to rebuild capacity after decades of underinvestment. Western analysis often treats shell production as a measurable indicator of commitment and deterrence credibility. This perspective contributes policy urgency and institutional learning, but it may normalize an arms-production race and understate the

global spillovers that African and UN perspectives highlight.

UN: The UN perspective connects industrial capacity to civilian protection and humanitarian access. Higher artillery output and sustained bombardment increase civilian harm, infrastructure destruction, and displacement, while arms transfers raise questions of accountability and end-use monitoring. UN OCHA reports document the humanitarian consequences of intense fighting, including access constraints in areas affected by artillery and drone activity. This perspective contributes a legal and humanitarian anchor, but it has limited leverage over state production decisions and depends on compliance with international humanitarian law.

SECTION 2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Implications for European security architecture — NATO expansion, rearmament, and the collapse of arms control

Bolded Causal Claim: The Ukraine war has replaced the post-Cold War European security order—built on cooperative security, arms control, and economic interdependence—with a deterrence-centered order in which NATO enlargement, rearmament, and conventional force posture have become the primary mechanisms of stability.

Mechanism: Russia's full-scale invasion destroyed the assumption that economic integration and institutional dialogue could manage European security; the resulting threat perception drove Finland and Sweden into NATO, increased forward deployments in Eastern Europe, and pushed defense spending upward across the alliance. Arms control eroded because treaties require verification, reciprocity, and political trust, all of which collapse during active war; the suspension or expiry of key agreements removed constraints on intermediate-range and strategic systems, while nuclear rhetoric raised escalation risks. The mechanism is a security dilemma feedback loop: Russian aggression prompts NATO consolidation, NATO consolidation is interpreted in Moscow as encirclement and threat, and both sides invest in capabilities that make future restraint harder. European rearmament is further shaped by industrial constraints, so the new order may be rhetorically ambitious but materially uneven. Ukraine's own security status—whether through NATO membership, bilateral guarantees, or a frozen conflict—becomes the hinge on which the architecture turns.

Scope Conditions: This claim applies most directly to the Euro-Atlantic theater and the Russia-NATO relationship; it is less predictive for global security orders or for regions where US commitment is thinner. It is contingent on the war's duration, the durability of US support, European political cohesion, and Russia's capacity to sustain military pressure. If a stable ceasefire emerges, some arms-control and confidence-building measures could revive, though trust deficits would persist. The strongest counterargument is that NATO expansion and rearmament are responses to Russian aggression rather than independent causes of disorder; another is that European defense spending may plateau once the immediate shock fades, leaving the architecture rhetorically militarized but materially constrained.

Observable Implications: Observable indicators include NATO membership changes, defense-budget increases, forward troop deployments, munitions and air-defense procurement, treaty suspensions or withdrawals, nuclear signaling, and European defense-industrial initiatives. A durable shift would be visible in multi-year procurement contracts and infrastructure for rapid reinforcement; a temporary shift would appear as emergency aid without sustained force-structure change. The collapse of arms control is visible in the absence of active verification regimes and in the prominence of nuclear deterrence in public strategy.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African perspective, the restructuring of European security is part of a broader

global power realignment with direct consequences for African states. African scholarship on sovereignty, nonalignment, and multipolarity highlights how a re-militarized Europe may redirect diplomatic attention, development finance, and arms flows, while food, fuel, and fertilizer shocks from the war have already strained African economies. African governments have often resisted binary alignment, insisting that security architectures should respect territorial integrity without reproducing bloc politics. This perspective contributes a global-South insistence on the costs of great-power confrontation and a critique of Eurocentric security ordering, but it may understate the immediate security imperatives driving European states.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames NATO expansion as a Cold War legacy and a source of instability, while presenting China's twelve-point peace plan as an alternative to military escalation. Beijing emphasizes multipolarity, opposes bloc confrontation, and treats arms-control collapse as a failure of US-Russia relations that should be repaired through dialogue. Chinese commentary often links European rearmament to US hegemony and warns against extending NATO-like structures to Asia. This perspective contributes a critique of alliance-centric security and a diplomatic vocabulary for de-escalation, but it may occlude Russia's responsibility for the invasion and the agency of European states seeking protection.

Russian: The Russian perspective presents the war as a defensive response to NATO expansion, Ukrainian "denazification," and the collapse of post-Soviet security arrangements. It frames rearmament and NATO enlargement as confirmation of a long-standing threat, while treating arms-control breakdown as Western refusal to accommodate Russian security interests. Russian discourse emphasizes civilizational defense and a multipolar order. This perspective contributes an account of how Moscow perceives encirclement, but it relies on contested premises about NATO intentions and often obscures the coercive nature of the invasion.

Western: The Western perspective treats the war as an assault on the rules-based order and frames NATO expansion, rearmament, and support for Ukraine as necessary defensive responses. It emphasizes alliance unity, deterrence, and the global stakes of resisting aggression, while acknowledging spillovers such as food and energy insecurity. Western analysis often presents arms-control collapse as a consequence of Russian noncompliance and aggression. This perspective contributes institutional cohesion and a normative defense of sovereignty, but it may understate the risks of prolonged militarization and the concerns of states that prefer nonalignment.

UN: The UN perspective centers on the Charter principles of territorial integrity and peaceful dispute settlement, while documenting humanitarian consequences and Security Council paralysis. It treats arms control and disarmament norms as essential to international stability, even as great-power rivalry weakens enforcement. UN OCHA reports highlight civilian suffering and access constraints, providing an evidence base for humanitarian action. This perspective contributes legal legitimacy and a humanitarian floor, but it depends on member-state compliance and has limited capacity to compel de-escalation or rebuild arms-control regimes.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on the Ukraine war begins from a position that the other four perspectives systematically underweight: the war is not primarily a European security crisis that happens to have global side effects, but a global event whose most severe and immediate human costs fall on populations that had no agency in its causation. This is not a rhetorical move. It is a structural claim about the location of vulnerabil-

ity in the contemporary international system, and it draws on a theoretical tradition that treats sovereignty, development, and racialized hierarchy as inseparable problems.

The foundational premise is that African states enter the Ukraine crisis already positioned as price-takers in global commodity markets, dependent on imported wheat, fertilizer, and fuel, and lacking the fiscal space to absorb price shocks. Egypt imports roughly sixty percent of its wheat, much of it from Russia and Ukraine; Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Sudan are similarly exposed. When Black Sea grain exports were disrupted in 2022, the immediate effect was not a diplomatic abstraction but a food-security emergency across the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, compounding drought and conflict. The African perspective therefore treats the war's "spillovers" not as externalities of a European conflict but as constitutive features of a global order in which African populations bear the costs of great-power decisions made elsewhere. This is the insight that Grovogui (1996) develops in *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*: the international system has historically allocated sovereignty unevenly, and the formal equality of states masks a substantive inequality in whose suffering counts as a security problem and whose counts as a humanitarian footnote.

The second premise concerns sovereignty itself. African states are, in the main, strong defenders of territorial integrity as a norm, because the alternative—redrawing borders by force—threatens a continent whose boundaries were imposed by colonial powers and whose stability depends on the inviolability of those boundaries. The African Union's Constitutive Act (2000) and the OAU's 1964 Cairo Resolution on Border Disputes both enshrine this principle. This is why a majority of African states voted in favor of UN General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1 (March 2022) condemning Russia's aggression, even as many abstained on subsequent resolutions and several—South Africa, Senegal, Mali, Eritrea—either abstained or voted against. The vote pattern is not incoherence; it reflects a genuine tension between two commitments: the defense of sovereignty as a universal norm (which condemns Russia's invasion) and the defense of nonalignment and multipolarity (which resists being conscripted into a Western-led coalition). Nkrumah's (1965) *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* remains the theoretical touchstone here: the fear is not only Russian aggression but the reconstitution of a unipolar order in which African states are expected to align without consultation, their interests treated as derivative.

Mbembe's (2001) *On the Postcolony* and his later work on necropolitics provide a further analytical layer. Mbembe argues that the postcolonial state operates through a logic of "commandement"—a mode of power that combines sovereignty and governmentality in ways that make certain populations expendable. Applied to the Ukraine war, this framework suggests that the differential global response to Ukrainian suffering versus, say, Yemeni or Congolese suffering is not accidental but structural: some lives are rendered grievable and others are not, and this rendering is tied to racialized hierarchies of humanity that the international system reproduces. The African perspective thus asks not only "who violated sovereignty?" but "whose sovereignty violation triggers global mobilization and whose does not?" This is a question the Western perspective, with its focus on the rules-based order, tends to deflect, and the UN perspective, with its universalist legalism, tends to flatten.

The economic mechanism is equally important. Rodney's (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* provides the historical frame: Africa's integration into the global economy as a supplier of raw materials and a consumer of manufactured goods means that commodity price shocks transmit asymmetrically. When wheat prices spike, African consumers pay more; when fertilizer prices spike, African farmers plant less; when fuel prices spike, African transport and electricity costs rise. The Black Sea Grain Initiative (July 2022–July 2023), brokered by Turkey and the UN, partially restored grain flows, but its collapse in 2023 renewed pressure. Russia's subsequent offers of free grain to select African states (notably at the July 2023

Russia-Africa Summit in St. Petersburg) were interpreted by many African analysts as a diplomatic instrument designed to cultivate influence, not merely humanitarian relief. The African perspective thus treats food and fertilizer not as humanitarian side issues but as strategic domains in which great-power competition is waged on African terrain.

Bayart's (1993) *The State in Africa* adds a crucial nuance: African states are not passive victims but strategic actors navigating a multipolar environment. South Africa's "non-aligned" positioning, Senegal's AU chairmanship diplomacy (Macky Sall's June 2022 visit to Moscow), and the broader BRICS alignment of several African states reflect deliberate calculations about diversifying partnerships and resisting Western conditionality. The African perspective therefore includes a realist strand: states that depend on Russian arms (Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia), Russian nuclear technology (Egypt's El Dabaa), or Russian diplomatic support in multilateral forums have material reasons to avoid full alignment with the Western coalition. This is not moral failure; it is the rational behavior of states operating in an anarchic system with limited options.

Fanon's (1961) *The Wretched of the Earth* and Cabral's (1973) *Return to the Source* contribute a liberation-theoretic dimension. For Fanon, colonialism is not merely political domination but a totalizing system that dehumanizes the colonized; for Cabral, the struggle for liberation requires both political and cultural emancipation. Applied to Ukraine, this tradition is ambivalent: on one hand, it recognizes Ukrainian resistance to Russian invasion as a legitimate anti-imperial struggle; on the other, it warns against the instrumentalization of that struggle by Western powers whose own imperial histories are unexamined. The African perspective thus refuses the binary of "defender of freedom" versus "aggressor" when both parties have complex histories, and it insists that solidarity with Ukraine not be purchased at the price of silence about Palestine, Western Sahara, or the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Oyěwùmí's (1997) *The Invention of Women* and Tamale's (2020) *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* introduce a gendered dimension that the other perspectives largely miss. Oyěwùmí's argument that gender as a category was imposed on African societies through colonial epistemology suggests that the "women and children" framing of humanitarian crises is itself a colonial inheritance. Tamale extends this to argue that African feminist perspectives must center the material conditions of women's lives—access to food, land, and water—rather than abstract rights discourses. In the Ukraine context, this means that the gendered impacts of the war (displacement, food insecurity, energy poverty) are felt most acutely by women in the Global South, and that an African feminist lens would prioritize these material impacts over the geopolitical framing that dominates Western and UN discourse.

Aning and Danso (2019) and related African security scholarship emphasize that the continent's security architecture—the African Union, regional economic communities, and the African Standby Force—has been systematically underfunded and marginalized in global security governance. The Ukraine war has accelerated this marginalization by diverting Western attention and resources from African conflicts (Sahel, Horn of Africa, Great Lakes). The African perspective thus includes a claim about opportunity costs: every dollar spent on Ukraine is a dollar not spent on African security, and the "global" security agenda is in practice a European security agenda with African consequences.

What the African perspective contributes that the others cannot: (1) a structural analysis of how global commodity markets transmit war costs to the most vulnerable; (2) a historical memory of Western double standards that explains nonalignment without reducing it to cynicism or Russian influence; (3) a critique of the racialized hierarchy of grievability that shapes global responses; (4) a feminist-materialist lens on the gendered impacts of the war; and (5) a realist account of African state agency in a multipolar system. What it occludes: it may understate the agency of Ukrainians in their own defense, treating the war primarily as

a great-power event; it may overstate the coherence of "African" positions when the continent's fifty-four states hold diverse views; and it may insufficiently engage with the specific military-technical dynamics of the war (drone warfare, electronic warfare, industrial base) that determine outcomes on the ground. The African perspective is strongest on the political economy and normative dimensions of the war and weakest on its operational military dimensions.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on the Ukraine war is structured by a foundational tension: China's formal commitment to sovereignty and territorial integrity (a principle it invokes regarding Taiwan) sits uneasily with its strategic partnership with Russia and its interest in a multipolar order that weakens Western hegemony. This tension is not resolved in Chinese discourse; it is managed through a set of rhetorical and diplomatic moves that shift emphasis depending on audience.

The core Chinese claim, articulated in the February 2022 joint statement between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin and reiterated in subsequent official communications, is that NATO expansion is the "root cause" of the Ukraine crisis. The argument runs: NATO's eastward enlargement after the Cold War violated implicit understandings (the "not one inch" debate), encircled Russia, and created a security dilemma that made conflict inevitable. This is a structural-realist argument dressed in historical grievance, and it draws on a Chinese strategic tradition that treats great-power spheres of influence as legitimate and views Western universalism as a mask for hegemony. The twelve-point peace plan released by China's Foreign Ministry in February 2023 reflects this framing: it calls for respecting sovereignty and territorial integrity (a nod to Ukraine's position) but also for abandoning "Cold War mentality" and addressing "legitimate security concerns of all countries" (a nod to Russia's position). The plan notably does not call for Russian withdrawal or condemn the invasion, and it was widely criticized in the West as vague and as serving Russian interests.

China's position on the war's spillovers is more complex. Beijing has expressed concern about food and energy security, and it has positioned itself as a mediator (the Xi-Zelensky phone call of April 2023, the appointment of a special envoy). But China has also benefited economically from the war: discounted Russian oil and gas, expanded trade with Russia (reaching record levels in 2023), and a strengthened position in the Global South as a champion of multipolarity. The Chinese perspective thus treats the war as an opportunity to advance a "community of shared future for mankind" narrative that contrasts Chinese "win-win" cooperation with Western "zero-sum" confrontation.

What the Chinese perspective contributes: a reminder that the post-Cold War European security order was not universally accepted; a diplomatic channel to Moscow that Western states lack; and a framework (the twelve-point plan) that, however imperfect, keeps negotiation on the agenda. What it occludes: it systematically understates Russian agency and the reality of Ukrainian sovereignty; it treats NATO expansion as a sufficient cause of war, ignoring the role of Russian imperial ideology and domestic politics; and it avoids any acknowledgment of war crimes or civilian suffering that would implicate its strategic partner. The Chinese perspective is strongest on the structural critique of unipolarity and weakest on the normative defense of Ukrainian self-determination.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on the Ukraine war is anchored in a narrative that frames the conflict not as an invasion but as a "special military operation" (специальная военная операция) launched on February 24,

2022, in response to an existential threat. This narrative has several interlocking components, each with distinct theoretical and historical roots.

The first component is the claim of denazification. Russian official discourse, from Putin's February 21, 2022 address through subsequent statements, asserts that Ukraine is governed by a "neo-Nazi" regime that threatens Russian-speaking populations in Donbas and that the operation aims to "demilitarize and denazify" Ukraine. This claim draws on the genuine historical trauma of the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) and on the presence of far-right elements in Ukrainian politics (notably the Azov regiment, which has documented neo-Nazi affiliations among some members). However, the claim is widely rejected by scholars of Ukrainian politics and by the Ukrainian government, which is led by a Jewish president (Volodymyr Zelensky) and which has no Nazi ideology in its state doctrine. The Russian perspective here functions as an ideological justification that mobilizes historical memory to legitimize military action.

The second component is the civilizational defense argument. Putin's July 2021 essay "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" asserts that Russians and Ukrainians are "one people" and that Ukraine's independent statehood is an artificial construct of Soviet and post-Soviet politics. This is a primordialist theory of nationhood that treats ethnic and linguistic ties as determinative of political boundaries, and it is directly contradicted by the Ukrainian national movement's long history and by the principle of self-determination enshrined in the UN Charter. The civilizational framing also positions Russia as the defender of "traditional values" against Western liberalism, a narrative that has gained traction in parts of the Global South and the Western far right.

The third component is the NATO encirclement thesis. Russian discourse treats NATO expansion as a broken promise and a strategic threat, and it frames the 2014 Maidan revolution as a Western-backed coup that installed an anti-Russian government. The Minsk agreements (2014–2015) are cited as evidence that Russia sought a diplomatic solution and that Ukraine and the West failed to implement them. This narrative has some factual basis—NATO did expand eastward, and the Minsk process did stall—but it systematically omits Russian violations of Ukrainian sovereignty (the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the arming of separatists in Donbas) and treats Ukrainian agency as derivative of Western manipulation.

What the Russian perspective contributes: it forces attention to the legitimate security concerns that NATO expansion raised for Russia; it highlights the failure of the Minsk process and the West's role in that failure; and it surfaces the real presence of far-right elements in Ukrainian politics that Western discourse tends to minimize. What it occludes: it denies Ukrainian sovereignty and agency; it obscures the reality of Russian war crimes and civilian targeting; it treats the invasion as defensive when it was an offensive operation of choice; and it relies on a primordialist nationalism that is incompatible with the modern international order. The Russian perspective is strongest as a critique of post-Cold War European security architecture and weakest as a justification for the use of force.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on the Ukraine war is organized around three commitments: the defense of Ukrainian sovereignty, the preservation of NATO unity, and the maintenance of a "rules-based international order." These commitments are not identical, and their tensions become visible when the war's global spillovers are examined.

The first commitment—defense of Ukraine—rests on the principle that territorial integrity is non-negotiable and that aggression must not be rewarded. This is the position articulated in the Biden administration's

National Security Strategy (2022), in EU statements, and in NATO summit declarations. The mechanism is deterrence by denial: by providing Ukraine with weapons, intelligence, and financial support, the West aims to make Russian conquest impossible and to demonstrate that aggression carries costs. The Western perspective treats Ukrainian resistance as a defense of the international order itself, not merely of one state's borders.

The second commitment—NATO unity—has been remarkably durable. The alliance has expanded (Finland and Sweden joined in 2023–2024), increased defense spending (the 2% GDP target is now met by most members), and deployed additional forces to the eastern flank. The Western perspective treats this as evidence that the war has strengthened, not weakened, the transatlantic alliance. However, this unity has required significant compromises: the US has borne the largest share of military aid, European states have absorbed energy costs and refugee flows, and there are growing divisions over the war's duration and endgame.

The third commitment—the rules-based order—faces its most serious challenge in the global spillovers debate. The Western perspective acknowledges that the war has caused food, fuel, and fertilizer crises, but it attributes these primarily to Russian actions (the blockade of Ukrainian ports, the weaponization of energy) rather than to Western sanctions. The Black Sea Grain Initiative is cited as evidence of Western commitment to mitigating spillovers. However, the Western perspective struggles to reconcile its defense of Ukraine with the concerns of Global South states that see Western sanctions as contributing to their economic distress. The "global spillovers debate" is thus an internal tension within the Western perspective: it wants to be both the defender of Ukraine and the champion of global food security, and these roles sometimes conflict.

What the Western perspective contributes: a coherent normative framework (sovereignty, territorial integrity, self-determination); a material commitment to Ukrainian defense that has been decisive in preventing Russian victory; and a diplomatic effort to maintain alliance unity. What it occludes: it tends to minimize the role of NATO expansion in creating the security dilemma that preceded the war; it applies the rules-based order selectively (the 2003 Iraq invasion, the 2011 Libya intervention); and it struggles to address the legitimate concerns of non-Western states about double standards. The Western perspective is strongest on the normative defense of Ukrainian sovereignty and weakest on the historical and structural causes of the conflict.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on the Ukraine war is defined by a paradox: the organization's Charter principles—sovereignty, territorial integrity, peaceful dispute settlement—are directly violated by Russia's invasion, yet the Security Council, the body charged with maintaining international peace and security, is paralyzed by the veto power of the aggressor state (Russia) and its allies. This paradox shapes everything the UN can and cannot do.

The legal position is clear. UN General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1 (March 2, 2022) condemned Russia's aggression and demanded withdrawal, passing with 141 votes in favor, 5 against, and 35 abstentions. Subsequent resolutions (ES-11/2 through ES-11/6) addressed humanitarian consequences, territorial integrity, and reparations. The International Court of Justice ordered provisional measures in March 2022, calling on Russia to suspend military operations. The UN Human Rights Council established a Commission of Inquiry. These actions reflect the UN's normative commitment to the Charter and to international humanitarian law.

The humanitarian dimension is where the UN perspective is most active and most constrained. UN OCHA reports document civilian casualties, displacement (over 6 million refugees and 5 million internally displaced

persons at peak), and access constraints in occupied territories. The UN's humanitarian coordination, including the Black Sea Grain Initiative (which the UN brokered alongside Turkey), represents a practical effort to mitigate spillovers. But the UN's humanitarian role depends on member-state funding and on the consent of parties to the conflict, and it cannot compel compliance.

The arms-control dimension is where the UN perspective is most alarmed. The collapse of the INF Treaty (2019), the suspension of New START (2023), and the broader erosion of the arms-control architecture are treated by the UN as existential threats to international stability. The UN's disarmament machinery (the Conference on Disarmament, the First Committee) has been unable to advance new agreements, and the nuclear rhetoric surrounding the Ukraine war (Putin's February 2022 nuclear alert, subsequent statements) has raised the specter of nuclear escalation. The UN perspective thus treats the Ukraine war not only as a regional conflict but as a stress test for the entire post-1945 security order.

What the UN perspective contributes: legal legitimacy and a universal normative framework; a humanitarian evidence base; and a forum for multilateral diplomacy. What it occludes: it cannot enforce its own resolutions; it depends on great-power consensus that does not exist; and its universalism can flatten the power asymmetries that shape whose suffering gets attention. The UN perspective is strongest on legal and humanitarian documentation and weakest on enforcement and great-power politics.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers sovereignty and the global spillovers of food, fuel, and fertilizer; highlights uneven distribution of war costs and selective great-power attention	Can understate operational military dynamics and Russian strategic aims; may flatten Ukrainian agency into a great-power contest	Anti-colonial sovereignty plus global justice and non-alignment	African Union statements, food-price and fertilizer data, UN voting patterns	Western: spillovers are caused by Russian aggression, not Western policy, and African states benefit from a rules-based order

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Emphasizes NATO expansion as a structural cause; offers a twelve-point peace plan; warns against escalation and economic disruption	Underweights Ukrainian agency and the Charter violation; treats the war as a proxy contest between major powers	Sovereignty, non-intervention, and multipolarity	Chinese diplomatic statements and the twelve-point peace plan	Western: NATO is defensive, and a ceasefire without withdrawal rewards aggression
Russian	Frames the war as civilizational defense, denazification, and resistance to NATO encirclement; explains willingness to absorb high costs	Mischaracterizes Ukrainian statehood and agency; obscures documented war crimes and Charter violations	Civilizational sovereignty and anti-hegemony	Putin speeches, official doctrine, state media narratives	UN/Western: no evidence of genocide in Donbas justifying invasion; the invasion violates Article 2(4)
Western	Defends Ukrainian sovereignty, NATO unity, and military support; documents Russian operational failures; frames global spillovers as Russian-caused	Can overstate liberal-order coherence; may understate African and Global South costs; sometimes moralizes the conflict	Rules-based order, collective security, human rights	NATO statements, military aid data, ISW assessments	African/Chinese: selective application of international law and escalation risks are underweighted

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Provides legal legitimacy, humanitarian documentation, and a multilateral forum; universalizes Charter norms	Cannot enforce resolutions; depends on great-power consensus; universalism can flatten power asymmetries	Charter, human rights, international humanitarian law	UNGA resolutions, UN OCHA humanitarian reports	Russian/Chinese: the framework is politicized, Western-dominated, and cannot resolve the war without P5 consensus

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2022 Kharkiv Counteroffensive

The 2022 Kharkiv counteroffensive is the clearest case of successful Ukrainian maneuver warfare in the first year of the full-scale invasion. In early September 2022, Ukrainian forces broke through Russian lines in the Kharkiv region, advanced rapidly through Balakliya, Kupiansk, and Izyum, and forced a Russian withdrawal that exposed the fragility of Russian defensive preparation. The case matters because it shows how a weaker force can convert intelligence, deception, and operational tempo into territorial recovery, while also revealing the limits of Russian command, logistics, and force generation. It is not merely a battlefield episode; it is a test of how different levels of analysis and different international perspectives explain the same event.

Levels of analysis

At the individual level, the counteroffensive depended on Ukrainian command decisions, especially the willingness to accept risk, concentrate forces, and exploit a narrow window of Russian vulnerability. Commanders had to coordinate armor, artillery, infantry, and special operations while maintaining operational secrecy. Russian commanders, by contrast, appear to have misread Ukrainian intentions and failed to reposition reserves in time. Individual morale and unit cohesion mattered on both sides: Ukrainian units advanced with confidence generated by prior Western support and by the visible collapse of Russian positions, while Russian units in the sector were often undermanned, poorly supplied, and uncertain about their mission. The individual level therefore explains tempo and initiative, but it cannot by itself explain why Ukrainian forces had the equipment, intelligence, and logistical backing to sustain rapid movement.

At the state level, Ukraine's capacity to mobilize, train, and integrate Western-supplied equipment was decisive. The state had to maintain command-and-control under wartime conditions, protect mobilization infrastructure, and coordinate with external suppliers. Russia's state-level failures were equally important: its force-generation model relied on contract soldiers and mobilization that had not yet been fully activated, its logistics were stretched across a long front, and its political system had incentives to report success rather than vulnerability. The state level explains why Ukraine could convert a tactical breakthrough into an operational advance, while Russia could not quickly reconstitute a coherent defense.

At the systemic level, the war was embedded in a NATO-Russia confrontation and a broader competition

over European security. Western intelligence sharing, satellite reconnaissance, and precision-strike support shaped Ukrainian targeting and situational awareness. Sanctions and export controls constrained Russian replacement of equipment and components. The systemic level also includes the alliance politics that made sustained Western support possible: NATO unity, U.S. leadership, and European rearmament debates. Without this systemic backing, Ukrainian maneuver warfare would have lacked the precision fires and logistics that made exploitation possible. The systemic level therefore explains the enabling environment, though it risks overstating Western agency if it ignores Ukrainian operational skill.

At the transnational level, the counteroffensive was shaped by cross-border flows of weapons, intelligence, commercial technology, and information. Western artillery, armored vehicles, and precision munitions moved into Ukraine through transnational supply chains. Open-source intelligence and commercial satellite imagery circulated globally, affecting both battlefield awareness and public narratives. Energy markets, grain exports, and sanctions also linked the war to economies far beyond Europe. The transnational level is essential for understanding how a regional counteroffensive became a global event, but it can obscure the local tactical conditions that actually produced the breakthrough.

Mechanism

The mechanism of the Kharkiv counteroffensive was operational deception followed by rapid exploitation. Ukrainian planners created the impression that the main effort would be in the south, particularly around Kherson, while secretly concentrating forces for an attack in the northeast. This deception exploited Russian assumptions about Ukrainian priorities and stretched Russian reserves across a wide front. When Ukrainian forces attacked, they targeted weakly held sectors, used artillery and precision strikes to suppress Russian command nodes, and advanced quickly enough to prevent Russian forces from establishing new defensive lines. The mechanism was not simply superior numbers; it was the combination of surprise, concentration, tempo, and Russian defensive overextension.

Russian defensive preparation failed because it was thin, fragmented, and politically constrained. Russian forces had occupied a large area with insufficient manpower, relying on a mix of regular units, separatist formations, and mobilized personnel. Fortifications were often incomplete or poorly sited, and logistics depended on vulnerable rail and road networks. Command structures were layered and sometimes competing, which slowed decision-making. When the breakthrough occurred, Russian units lacked the reserves and mobility to seal the gap. The withdrawal that followed was partly a tactical retreat to avoid encirclement, but it also revealed that Russian defensive depth was more apparent than real.

Western support contributed to the mechanism by improving Ukrainian targeting, situational awareness, and fire support. Precision systems and intelligence allowed Ukrainian forces to disrupt Russian command and logistics at the moment of breakthrough. However, the decisive factor was not Western equipment alone; it was Ukrainian ability to integrate that equipment into a coherent operational plan. The counteroffensive therefore illustrates a combined-arms mechanism in which technology, intelligence, deception, and Russian institutional weakness interacted.

Perspective reconstruction

The African perspective, which is primary in this lesson, reads the Kharkiv counteroffensive through the lens of sovereignty and global spillover. From this vantage point, Ukraine's recovery of territory is a legitimate exercise of self-determination, but the war's costs are distributed far beyond the battlefield. African states experienced food-price shocks, fertilizer shortages, and fuel volatility that were intensified by the invasion and by the global response to it. African scholarship and diplomacy therefore tend to insist that the war

be understood not only as a European security crisis but as a global economic shock with disproportionate effects on import-dependent economies. This perspective also questions the selectivity of international attention: it asks why some violations of sovereignty mobilize massive Western support while others receive less sustained engagement. In the Kharkiv case, African observers could acknowledge Ukrainian military success while still emphasizing that the war's humanitarian and economic consequences are borne unevenly across the Global South. The African perspective thus contributes a distributional and anti-colonial corrective to narratives that treat the war as a purely Euro-Atlantic security problem. It occludes some operational detail, but it reveals whose suffering is rendered peripheral when the war is framed only through NATO and Russian strategy.

The Chinese perspective interprets the counteroffensive as evidence that the war is a prolonged great-power contest rather than a simple morality play. It acknowledges Ukrainian territorial recovery but situates it within a broader argument that NATO expansion created the structural conditions for conflict and that escalation must be avoided. Chinese diplomacy emphasizes sovereignty and territorial integrity in principle, while also stressing negotiation, ceasefire, and the costs of prolonged war. In this reading, Kharkiv demonstrates that neither side can achieve a quick decisive victory, which strengthens the case for a negotiated settlement. The Chinese perspective contributes a caution against escalation and a reminder that global economic stability depends on ending the war. It occludes Ukrainian agency by framing the conflict primarily as a NATO-Russia confrontation.

The Russian perspective treats the Kharkiv withdrawal as a tactical adjustment within a longer "special military operation," not as a strategic defeat. Russian official narratives emphasize denazification, demilitarization, and civilizational defense, arguing that NATO encroachment left Moscow no choice. From this vantage point, the loss of Kharkiv territory is explained by temporary overextension, Ukrainian use of Western intelligence, and the need to avoid encirclement. The Russian perspective contributes an account of how Moscow rationalizes costs and frames the war as existential. It occludes the Charter violation and the documented suffering of Ukrainian civilians, and it mischaracterizes Ukrainian statehood by denying its independent agency.

The Western perspective sees the counteroffensive as validation of Ukrainian resilience and of Western support. It emphasizes defense of sovereignty, NATO unity, and the effectiveness of combined arms when backed by intelligence and precision fires. Western analysts highlight Russian command failures, logistical fragility, and the limits of Russian defensive preparation. This perspective contributes a strong operational and alliance-based explanation of why Ukraine could recover territory. It occludes some of the global distributional costs and can understate the risks of escalation or the possibility that military success does not automatically produce political settlement.

The UN perspective frames the counteroffensive within a legal and humanitarian order. It treats the invasion as a violation of the Charter and emphasizes civilian protection, accountability, and the humanitarian consequences of shifting front lines. UN agencies document displacement, damage to infrastructure, and risks to civilians as territory changes hands. This perspective contributes legitimacy and a universal normative framework, as well as an evidence base for humanitarian response. It occludes enforcement, because the UN cannot compel Russian withdrawal, and it depends on great-power consensus that does not exist.

Adjudication

The Western perspective best explains the Kharkiv counteroffensive at the operational level, because it captures the interaction of Ukrainian command, Western intelligence and precision support, Russian defensive

weakness, and alliance-enabled logistics. It accounts for the mechanism of deception, concentration, and rapid exploitation better than perspectives that treat the war primarily as a legal, civilizational, or global economic event. However, it misses what the African perspective reveals: that military success in Kharkiv did not resolve the war's uneven global costs, and that the same alliance system that enabled Ukrainian maneuver warfare also shaped whose suffering received sustained attention. It also underweights the Chinese and Russian insistence that the conflict has structural roots in European security order, even if those claims do not justify invasion. The most defensible conclusion is therefore layered: the Western perspective explains the case best, but only when supplemented by the African perspective's distributional critique and by the systemic-level insight that the war is not only about Ukrainian territory but about the contested future of European and global order.

2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. Reconstruct the September 2022 Kharkiv template as an operational problem: identify the conditions that made rapid exploitation possible, distinguishing operational surprise from a repeatable combined-arms method.
2. List the Zaporizhzhia defensive system and the attacker's force-generation constraints, including minefields, dragon's teeth, trench networks, pre-registered fires, Russian air and drone reconnaissance, electronic warfare, Ukrainian lack of air superiority, and ammunition limits.
3. Specify the causal mechanism linking these differences to the outcome: explain why a template that exploited collapse could not by itself breach a prepared defense.
4. Reconstruct all five perspectives on the 2023 counteroffensive, stating what each emphasizes and what it tends to obscure.
5. Identify falsifiers: state what battlefield or industrial evidence would weaken your preferred explanation.
6. Use the data-lab variables—territorial change, HIMARS and Storm Shadow target sets, drone sortie rates, and shell consumption versus production—to test whether the failure was primarily tactical, operational, or industrial.

Model Answer

The 2023 Zaporizhzhia counteroffensive did not fail because Ukrainian forces forgot the Kharkiv method; it failed because Kharkiv was not a method for breaching a prepared defense. In September 2022, Ukrainian forces exploited a Russian force that was overextended, poorly commanded, and thinly held across a broad front. The Kharkiv operation combined deception, operational surprise, and rapid exploitation of Russian confusion; it was an attack against a collapsing defense, not a deliberate penetration of a defense in depth. Freedman's emphasis on operational art and Watling's emphasis on attrition are both relevant here: Kharkiv showed that surprise and tempo can convert local success into operational gain when the defender lacks reserves and coherence, but it did not demonstrate that the same tempo can be imposed on a defender that has prepared positions, pre-registered fires, and air denial.

By June 2023, Russian forces in Zaporizhzhia had constructed a layered defensive system associated with the Surovikin line: minefields, dragon's teeth, trench networks, pre-registered artillery, and reserve positions. Ukrainian brigades trained in Western combined-arms methods attempted to breach this system without air

superiority, without the mass that NATO doctrine assumes, and with artillery ammunition consumption that exceeded Western production capacity. The mechanism of failure was therefore interactive rather than singular. Prepared defenses gave Russia time to detect and channel Ukrainian assaults; drones and electronic warfare compressed Ukrainian decision cycles; Russian aviation and Lancet-type munitions punished exposed breaching forces; and ammunition shortages limited the suppressive fires needed to keep breaches open. The same template failed because its Kharkiv precondition—Russian disorganization—was absent, while its Zaporizhzhia requirements—suppression of the defender's air and drone systems, sufficient mass, and sustained shell supply—were not met.

This explanation must be distinguished from two tempting but weaker accounts. The first blames Ukrainian tactical incompetence. That account ignores that Ukrainian forces did achieve local penetrations and that Russian defenses were specifically designed to absorb and channel them. The second blames Western support alone. That account is incomplete because even abundant shells would not have removed Russian air denial or the depth of the defensive belt; conversely, even perfect tactics could not compensate indefinitely for industrial shortfalls. The better explanation is that operational art, air control, and industrial capacity are complementary inputs, and the 2023 offensive lacked enough of the latter two to make the first decisive.

The five perspectives frame the same events differently. The African perspective begins with sovereignty and global spillovers: Ukraine's right to self-defense is clear, but the war's effects on food, fuel, and fertilizer prices make the conflict a global security problem, not only a European one. The Chinese perspective stresses NATO responsibility and the need for a negotiated settlement, often treating the offensive as evidence that military escalation cannot produce a stable order; its twelve-point peace plan privileges sovereignty and territorial integrity rhetorically while emphasizing dialogue and opposition to unilateral sanctions. The Russian perspective interprets the failed counteroffensive as validation of a defensive war of attrition and civilizational resistance, emphasizing denazification and NATO encroachment. The Western perspective treats the offensive as a necessary test of Ukrainian capacity and Western support, while debating whether the failure reflected insufficient aid, excessive caution, or unrealistic expectations. The UN perspective centers Charter violation, General Assembly resolutions condemning aggression, and humanitarian consequences documented by UN OCHA, without endorsing any single military theory of victory.

Falsifiers would include evidence that Ukrainian forces broke the main defensive belt but were stopped only by a discrete tactical error; evidence that Russian air denial was ineffective during the breach; or evidence that shell production and delivery matched or exceeded consumption during the offensive. Conversely, if post-offensive assessments show that Ukrainian units repeatedly reached the first trench line but could not sustain exploitation because of drone and artillery exposure, the interactive explanation is strengthened. The data-lab variables support this reading: territorial gains were limited relative to the force committed; HIMARS and Storm Shadow strikes disrupted Russian logistics but did not collapse the defensive system; drone sortie rates rose on both sides; and artillery consumption remained above Western production. The conclusion is not that combined arms is obsolete, but that its success is conditional on suppression of the defender's air and drone systems, sufficient mass, and an industrial base capable of sustaining high-intensity operations.

2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description

In 2024, Ukraine intensified long-range strikes against Russian airfields, logistics nodes, and energy infrastructure using Storm Shadow/SCALP, ATACMS, and domestically produced drones, while Russia responded with dispersal, hardened shelters, electronic warfare, and denser air defenses. Along the front, both sides ex-

panded FPV drone and Lancet-type munition use, creating a contested electromagnetic spectrum and raising attrition rates. Western artillery shell production increased but remained below peak Ukrainian consumption; Russia, despite sanctions, expanded drone and artillery output through industrial mobilization and sanctions evasion. The case asks whether long-range precision strike and drone warfare can substitute for massed ground maneuver, or whether they redistribute attrition across domains without resolving the underlying industrial and air-denial constraints. It also asks how each of the five perspectives interprets the shift from a 2023 breakthrough attempt to a 2024-2025 war of strikes, drones, and positional attrition. Students should evaluate whether observed territorial stability reflects a genuine operational equilibrium or merely a pause imposed by ammunition, weather, and force-generation cycles.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts

Mechanism: Explain the causal chain through which long-range strikes, drone proliferation, and electronic warfare alter—or fail to alter—the balance between maneuver and attrition, specifying scope conditions and observable implications.

Perspective reconstruction: Reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives interpret the 2024-2025 shift, including what each emphasizes and what it occludes.

Historical analogue: Identify one prior case of precision-strike or air-power optimism confronting industrial and defensive adaptation, and state the limits of the analogy.

Falsifiers: List battlefield, industrial, or diplomatic evidence that would weaken your mechanism, and distinguish description from explanation, prediction, and prescription.

(c) Self-check line

Self-check: Did you separate what happened (description), why it happened (explanation), what is likely next (prediction), and what should be done (prescription), and did you avoid treating any perspective as self-evidently correct?

2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which explanation best accounts for the failure of Ukraine's 2023 Zaporizhzhia counteroffensive to replicate the Kharkiv breakthrough, while remaining consistent with the industrial and air-domain constraints documented in the lesson?

A. Ukrainian commanders abandoned combined-arms doctrine and relied solely on infantry assaults.
B. Russian defenses were unprepared and collapsed once Ukrainian forces crossed the first trench line.
C. The offensive confronted a prepared defense in depth under Russian air and drone denial, while Ukraine lacked the mass, air superiority, and shell stocks needed to convert local gains into operational breakthrough.
D. Western sanctions had already destroyed Russia's defense industry, making the failure inexplicable except by Ukrainian incompetence.

Correct answer: C.

Distractor diagnoses

- **A** is wrong because it mistakes tactical adaptation under constraint for abandonment of combined arms; Ukrainian forces used combined-arms methods, but those methods could not by themselves overcome prepared defenses, air denial, and ammunition shortages.

- **B** is wrong because it contradicts the evidence of a prepared layered defense—minefields, dragon's teeth, trench networks, pre-registered fires, and reserve positions—and falsely assumes that crossing an initial line equals systemic collapse.

- **D** is wrong because it overstates the effect of sanctions on Russian industrial capacity and replaces a multi-causal operational explanation with an unsupported blame attribution; Russian drone, artillery, and air-defense production adapted rather than collapsed.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. Territorial control and phase changes, 2022–2025 (approximate, source-dependent)

Period	Approximate territorial situation	Key operational events	Interpretive caution
Feb–Mar 2022	Rapid Russian advance toward Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv, and the south; subsequent withdrawal from northern axes	Failed blitz; Ukrainian defense of Kyiv; Russian repositioning toward Donbas	Early maps conflate raiding, occupation, and control; "liberated" claims often preceded consolidation
Apr–Aug 2022	Russian consolidation in Donbas and south; Kherson occupied; Severodonetsk/Lysychansk captured	Attritional fighting in Donbas; Ukrainian HIMARS-enabled strikes on logistics	Territorial percentages obscure population, infrastructure, and legal status
Sep–Nov 2022	Ukrainian recapture of large areas in Kharkiv oblast; Russian withdrawal from west bank Kherson	Kharkiv counteroffensive; Kherson withdrawal; front stabilizes east of Dnipro	Gains were enabled by Russian overextension and thin defenses, not only Ukrainian superiority
2023	Largely static front with localized attrition; Bakhmut and Avdiivka as focal points; limited Ukrainian gains in Zaporizhzhia	June–Dec counteroffensive; Russian defensive belts; heavy minefields and EW	"Stalemate" can hide high daily losses and constant small adjustments
2024	Russian incremental advances in Donbas; Avdiivka captured; pressure toward Pokrovsk; Ukrainian cross-border incursion into Kursk	Drone-saturated front; artillery and glide-bomb dominance; manpower strain	Control changes are often measured in kilometers, not strategic effect

Period	Approximate territorial situation	Key operational events	Interpretive caution
2025	High-intensity attrition with no decisive breakthrough; localized gains and losses; long front under drone observation	Sustained deep strikes; industrial competition; alliance support debates	Estimates vary by source, definition of control, and whether occupied/annexed areas are counted

Table 2. Strike systems and target sets

System	Approximate range	Primary target set	Operational effect	Principal limitation
HIMARS with GMLRS	~80 km	Logistics nodes, bridges, ammunition depots, command posts	Disrupted Russian rear-area sustainment and forced dispersion	Precision-munition scarcity; target-cycle dependence on ISR
Storm Shadow / SCALP	~250 km	High-value nodes, bridges, naval and air assets, strategic infrastructure	Extended Ukrainian deep-strike reach	Limited stockpiles; platform availability; political restrictions on use
FPV drones	Tactical, usually short-range	Vehicles, trenches, EW nodes, small logistics elements	Cheap mass; constant pressure; tactical transparency	Weather, short endurance, operator skill, electronic warfare
Lancet-type loitering munitions	Tactical to operational	Artillery, air defense, radar, vehicles	Precision harassment of high-value systems	Cost, availability, interception, and target acquisition limits
Russian cruise/ballistic and glide munitions	Variable, including long-range	Cities, energy infrastructure, military and industrial targets	Coercion, infrastructure degradation, air-defense saturation	Interception, stockpile constraints, and diminishing strategic surprise

Table 3. Industrial base, drone activity, and consumption patterns (order of magnitude; source-dependent)

Indicator	Observed pattern	Source caveat
Artillery consumption	Thousands of rounds per day on both sides at peak; sustained rates exceed many pre-war national stockpiles	Exact figures are classified or politically mediated; reporting often mixes expenditure, delivery, and stockpile
Western artillery production	Ramp-up from lower Cold War-era baselines toward annual targets in the high hundreds of thousands to low millions	Production is constrained by explosives, machine tools, skilled labor, and multi-year contracts
Drone production and use	Publicly reported targets in the millions annually across both sides; daily sortie counts in the tens of thousands in active sectors	"Drone" aggregates reconnaissance, FPV, loitering, and decoy systems; quality varies sharply
Air-defense interceptor consumption	High expenditure during mass missile/drone attacks; stockpile anxiety recurring	Interceptor production is slower and more specialized than artillery-shell production
Industrial bottlenecks	Shell casings, explosives, ball bearings, machine tools, energetics, and skilled labor	Bottlenecks are national and transnational; sanctions and third-country sourcing matter

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** The territorial record shows rapid, large-scale changes in 2022 followed by progressively smaller, costlier adjustments in 2023–2025. What does this pattern suggest about the transition from maneuver warfare to positional, drone-saturated attrition, and which indicators would you use to distinguish a temporary pause from a genuine strategic stalemate?

2. **Level of analysis.** Is the stalemate best explained at the individual level (command decisions, tactical adaptation), the state level (industrial base, manpower, mobilization), the systemic level (alliance support, sanctions, global markets), or the transnational level (technology diffusion, diaspora networks, private defense firms)? Construct an answer that assigns causal weight to at least two levels and explains why no single level is sufficient.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each perspective reads the same data:

    - **African (primary):** The data are not only a European territorial contest; they are a global spillover event affecting food, fuel, fertilizer, shipping insurance, and fiscal space in import-dependent states. Sovereignty norms matter, but so does the unequal distribution of war costs.
    - **Chinese:** The data show the consequences of NATO expansion and bloc confrontation; stabilization requires a negotiated settlement, ceasefire, and attention to "indivisible security," as framed in the twelve-point peace plan.
    - **Russian:** The data are read through the "special military operation" frame: denazification, demilitarization, civilizational defense, and the claim that Western arms prolong an avoidable conflict.
    - **Western:** The data support defense of Ukrainian sovereignty, NATO unity, and the proposition that Russian defeat or containment is necessary for European security; spillovers are acknowl-

edged but treated as manageable or secondary.
- **UN:** The data are read through Charter violation, General Assembly resolutions, humanitarian consequences, civilian protection, and the need for accountability and humanitarian access.

4. **Interpretation.** HIMARS and Storm Shadow target sets shifted Russian logistics and forced dispersion, but did they change the war's political outcome? Distinguish (a) operational disruption, (b) strategic coercion, and (c) escalation management. Which of these three is best supported by the data, and what would falsify each?

5. **Limitation.** The data are incomplete, classified, propagandized, and definitionally inconsistent. Identify three specific limitations—such as "control" versus "influence," sortie counts versus effective strikes, and production targets versus delivered munitions—and explain how each limitation could reverse or weaken a common conclusion about who is winning.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1: Phase and Territorial Control Timeline, 2022–2025

- **What to draw:** A horizontal timeline from February 2022 to 2025, divided into six phase bands. Above the line, draw simple front-line icons: an arrow for the initial Russian advance, a broken arrow for the failed blitz, a curved arrow for the Kharkiv counteroffensive, a leftward arrow for the Kherson withdrawal, a jagged line for the 2023 attritional front, and small zig-zag marks for 2024–2025 incremental changes. Below the line, place shaded rectangles labeled "Kyiv axis," "Kharkiv," "Donbas," "Kherson," "Zaporizhzhia," and "Kursk incursion."
- **Labels to place:** "Feb 2022 blitz," "Apr 2022 repositioning," "Sep 2022 Kharkiv," "Nov 2022 Kherson," "2023 counteroffensive," "2024 Avdiivka/Pokrovsk," "2025 attrition," "front length," "drone-saturated kill zone."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** In the left margin, write "Western: defense of sovereignty"; in the right margin, write "Russian: SMO and civilizational defense"; along the bottom margin, write "African: food, fuel, fertilizer, and fiscal spillovers"; in a small box, write "UN: Charter violation and humanitarian access"; in another small box, write "Chinese: negotiation and indivisible security."

Visual 2: Contested Electromagnetic and Drone Kill Chain

- **What to draw:** A layered diagram with four horizontal bands. Top band: "Sensors and ISR" with icons for satellites, reconnaissance drones, and human observers. Second band: "Strike and effects" with FPV drones, Lancet-type munitions, artillery, and glide bombs. Third band: "Electronic warfare" with jamming towers, decoys, and spoofing arrows crossing the other bands. Bottom band: "Logistics and sustainment" with trucks, depots, bridges, and repair nodes. Draw arrows from sensors to strikes, from EW to both sensors and strikes, and from logistics to all upper bands.
- **Labels to place:** "FPV," "Lancet," "EW jamming," "decoys," "GMLRS," "Storm Shadow," "target cycle," "dispersion," "civilian infrastructure risk," "operator training."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** At the top, write "Western: precision and adaptation"; on the left, write "Russian: mass and EW depth"; on the right, write "Chinese: escalation control and negotiation"; at the bottom, write "UN: civilian harm and proportionality"; in a central circle, write "African: technology diffusion and global military learning."

Visual 3: Industrial Base Funnel—Consumption Versus Production

- **What to draw:** A funnel. At the wide top, draw icons for daily artillery fire, drone sorties, air-defense interceptors, and damaged equipment. In the middle, draw narrowing sections labeled "explosives," "casings," "machine tools," "skilled labor," and "energetics." At the narrow bottom, draw "delivered munitions," "repaired systems," and "stockpile." Add a side arrow labeled "third-country sourcing and sanctions evasion."
- **Labels to place:** "consumption rate," "production target," "lead time," "bottleneck," "stockpile anxiety," "rearmament," "mobilization," "fiscal cost."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** On the left, write "Western: rearmament and alliance burden-sharing"; on the right, write "Russian: mobilization and war economy"; at the top, write "African: food, fuel, fertilizer, and import-price spillovers"; at the bottom, write "UN: humanitarian funding and civilian protection"; in a small box, write "Chinese: industrial capacity and strategic patience."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue	Notes (with source log)
What are the war's phases?	Failed 2022 blitz; Kharkiv/Kherson counteroffensives; 2023–2024 attritional stalemate; localized 2024–2025 adjustments. Source log: Freedman (2023); Watling (2022); ISW assessments.
What is hybrid warfare here?	Cyber, energy, information, and military/civilian blurring; not a separate domain but an integrated pressure system. Source log: RUSI Ukraine reports; ISW assessments.
What changed in drone/EW warfare?	FPV mass, Lancet harassment, contested EMS, shorter target cycles, tactical transparency. Source log: Watling (2022); RUSI Ukraine reports.
What is the industrial base problem?	Consumption exceeds sustainable production; bottlenecks in explosives, tools, labor, and energetics. Source log: RUSI Ukraine reports; ISW assessments.
What are European security implications?	NATO expansion, rearmament, arms-control collapse, deterrence redesign. Source log: Freedman (2023); ISW assessments.
How do the five perspectives differ?	African: sovereignty plus global spillovers; Chinese: NATO responsibility plus twelve-point plan; Russian: SMO and civilizational defense; Western: defense of Ukraine and NATO unity; UN: Charter violation and humanitarian consequences. Source log: UN OCHA Ukraine humanitarian reports.
What data are most uncertain?	Territorial control definitions, sortie counts, production targets, classified losses, propaganda. Source log: ISW assessments; UN OCHA Ukraine humanitarian reports.

Cue	Notes (with source log)
What does Kharkiv 2022 show?	Maneuver, deception, thin Russian defenses, and limits of Russian preparation. Source log: Freedman (2023); Watling (2022).
Why did Zaporizhzhia 2023 differ?	Prepared defenses, minefields, EW, airpower, and insufficient force ratios for breakthrough. Source log: RUSI Ukraine reports; ISW assessments.
What falsifies "Ukraine is winning"?	Static lines, ammunition shortages, manpower strain, Russian adaptation, and political fatigue. Source log: ISW assessments; RUSI Ukraine reports.
What falsifies "Russia is winning"?	Failed blitz, Kharkiv/Kherson losses, sanctions costs, and inability to achieve maximalist aims. Source log: Freedman (2023); ISW assessments.
What is the African primary lens?	Sovereignty is necessary but insufficient; food, fuel, fertilizer, and fiscal spillovers reshape how the war is judged globally. Source log: UN OCHA Ukraine humanitarian reports; African scholarship on global inequality.

Summary: The Ukraine war moved from a failed Russian blitz to counteroffensives and then to a drone-saturated, industrial attritional stalemate. Its military dynamics cannot be separated from hybrid pressure, electromagnetic contestation, ammunition production, and alliance politics. The same data are read differently by African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives, especially on sovereignty, NATO responsibility, civilizational defense, and humanitarian cost. The most defensible conclusion is that the war is a multi-level contest in which territorial change is only one indicator among industrial capacity, alliance cohesion, and global spillover.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Russia tried to win quickly in 2022, failed, lost ground in Kharkiv and Kherson, and then the war became a slow, grinding contest. Drones, jamming, artillery, and factories now matter as much as tanks. Europe is rearming, arms control is weaker, and the war's costs spread far beyond Ukraine, including food and fuel prices.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure of exact drone sortie rates, shell consumption figures, and current territorial percentages; these are classified, politicized, or inconsistently defined. I also need to keep separate what each perspective assumes from what the data actually show.

3. **Reread verification.** Recheck Freedman (2023), Watling (2022), RUSI Ukraine reports, ISW assessments, and UN OCHA Ukraine humanitarian reports for phase labels, target-set descriptions, and humanitarian data. Verify that claims about HIMARS, Storm Shadow, FPV drones, and industrial bottlenecks are stated as mechanisms, not as unsupported certainties.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** The war resembles a marathon in which factories, logistics, and alliances matter more than a single sprint; but the analogy is limited because wars also involve political

will, adaptation, deception, and escalation thresholds that a marathon does not capture.

5. **Rewrite.** The Ukraine war is best understood as a sequence of failed blitz, successful counteroffensive, and industrial attrition, shaped by hybrid pressure, drone and electronic warfare, and ammunition scarcity. Its meaning differs across African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives, so analysis must separate territorial data from normative claims and from global spillover effects.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Definition	What defined the failed blitz phase (Feb–Mar 2022)?	Russia launched a multi-axis invasion expecting rapid political change, but Ukrainian resistance, logistics failures, and air-defense denial stalled the advance; by late March 2022 the war shifted toward attrition and positional fighting. The phase is best understood as a mismatch between political aims and military means. Freedman (2023) emphasizes that gap.	Western and Ukrainian accounts stress agency and resistance; Russian accounts frame aims as limited and defensive.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Mechanism	How did Ukraine create conditions for the Kharkiv counteroffensive?	Ukrainian forces used operational security, feints, and targeting of logistics to exploit Russian overextension and thin defenses; success depended on surprise and on Russia's inability to reconstitute reserves. The mechanism is cumulative disruption rather than a single breakthrough. Watling (2022) highlights combined-arms synchronization under uncertainty.	Western military analysis focuses on maneuver; Russian accounts emphasize force ratios and intelligence failures.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Application	Why did the 2023 Zaporizhzhia counteroffensive stall?	Ukrainian units encountered deep, prepared Russian defenses—minefields, obstacles, artillery, and aviation—without assured air superiority or sufficient breaching capacity; the same combined-arms template faced a different force ratio and terrain. The result was attritional fighting rather than rapid maneuver. RUSI Ukraine reports stress adaptation and logistics.	Western debate centers on training and doctrine; Ukrainian accounts stress resource constraints.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Comparison	What distinguishes Kharkiv (2022) from Zaporizhzhia (2023)?	Kharkiv featured overextended defenders, surprise, and open exploitation; Zaporizhzhia featured echeloned defenses, dense obstacles, and Russian adaptation. The difference is less a change in Ukrainian competence than a change in Russian defensive preparation and battlespace conditions. ISW assessments document control changes and force posture.	Russian sources claim learning; Western sources debate expectations.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Source	What do ISW assessments contribute—and what do they not prove?	ISW assessments provide daily, geolocated tracking of territorial control and force posture, useful for trend analysis; they are not a substitute for verified casualty data or classified operational assessments. Their strength is transparency and speed; their limit is dependence on open sources. They should be read with methodological caution.	All perspectives use ISW data, but interpret control changes politically.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Debate	Is NATO expansion a cause of the war?	Western and Ukrainian accounts treat Russian aggression as the cause and NATO as reactive; Russian and Chinese accounts treat NATO enlargement as a structural provocation. The evidence supports multiple causal weights: NATO expansion shaped threat perceptions, but it does not by itself explain the decision to invade. Freedman (2023) frames the debate as competing narratives of order.	African and Global South voices often stress non-alignment and spillovers over bloc narratives.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Reconstruction	How does the African perspective frame the war?	It centers Ukrainian sovereignty while foregrounding global spillovers—food, fuel, and fertilizer prices—and the costs borne by import-dependent states; it often resists binary alignment and asks whose security is prioritized. This vantage reveals distributional consequences that bloc-centric accounts can occlude. African scholarship on sovereignty and dependency informs the analysis.	Primary lens; not a regional add-on.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Occlusion	What does the Western perspective tend to occlude?	Western framing can foreground NATO unity and Ukrainian defense while underweighting Global South costs, African agency, and the uneven distribution of sanctions and price shocks. It may also treat liberal order as universal rather than contested. The occlusion is analytical, not necessarily intentional.	Western; counterbalanced by African and UN humanitarian data.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Adjudication	How does hybrid warfare blur military and civilian domains?	Cyber operations, energy coercion, and information campaigns target civilian infrastructure and publics, making the boundary between combatant and non-combatant less stable; the mechanism is cross-domain coercion rather than conventional territorial seizure. This complicates legal categories and response thresholds. Watling (2022) and RUSI reports examine operational integration.	UN law and African sovereignty concerns highlight civilian protection.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Visual	What does the contested electromagnetic spectrum imply tactically?	FPV drones, Lancet munitions, and electronic warfare create a rapidly adaptive kill chain in which detection, jamming, and counter-jamming determine effectiveness; dominance is temporary and local. The mechanism is an action-reaction cycle, not a stable technological edge. RUSI Ukraine reports document tactical adaptation.	Russian and Ukrainian practitioners both emphasize EW; Western procurement often lags.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Definition	What is the industrial base problem?	High-intensity artillery and drone warfare consume shells and components faster than Western production can surge, creating a bottleneck in sustained support; the issue is capacity, skilled labor, and supply chains, not only funding. The mechanism links battlefield consumption to political timelines. RUSI Ukraine reports and Watling (2022) stress production constraints.	Western rearmament debates; African states face procurement competition.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Mechanism	How did arms control collapse shape European security?	The erosion of INF-era constraints and the suspension of New START, alongside NATO expansion and rearmament, removed stabilizing predictability; the mechanism is reciprocal uncertainty and force-posture signaling. This raises escalation risks even without direct NATO-Russia war. Freedman (2023) situates the war in a broader order crisis.	Russian civilizational framing; Western deterrence framing; UN disarmament concerns.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Application	What does the UN perspective emphasize?	It centers Charter violations, General Assembly resolutions, humanitarian consequences, and civilian protection; its strength is normative universality and data collection, while its limit is enforcement without Security Council consensus. UN OCHA Ukraine humanitarian reports document needs and access constraints. The perspective is legal-humanitarian rather than strategic.	UN; complements African spillover concerns.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Comparison	How does China's twelve-point plan differ from Western approaches?	China's plan emphasizes ceasefire, dialogue, and opposition to nuclear escalation while avoiding condemnation of Russia and stressing NATO responsibility; Western approaches emphasize Ukrainian territorial integrity and security guarantees. The contrast is between process-first and justice-first diplomacy. Freedman (2023) and UN debates frame the divide.	Chinese; African states often seek mediation space.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L36	Adjudication	Did drones make maneuver warfare obsolete?	Drones and EW have made open maneuver costlier and increased the value of dispersion, deception, and combined arms, but they have not eliminated maneuver; the mechanism is changed risk calculus, not technological determinism. Evidence from Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia shows context-dependent outcomes. Watling (2022) and RUSI reports caution against single-technology explanations.	Western tech optimism; Russian and Ukrainian practitioner realism.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100).

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence I can produce	Gap to close
Phase dynamics: blitz to attrition		Timeline with mechanisms	Distinguish outcomes from causes
Kharkiv maneuver and deception		Levels-of-analysis explanation	Add force-ratio evidence
Zaporizhzhia failure modes		Comparison with Kharkiv	Specify minefield/breaching constraints
Hybrid warfare cross-domain coercion		Civilian/military boundary analysis	Add legal threshold discussion

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence I can produce	Gap to close
Drone/EW action-reaction cycle		Tactical visual reconstruction	Avoid tech determinism
Industrial base and shell production		Consumption vs production comparison	Add supply-chain specifics
European security and arms control		Order-crisis explanation	Distinguish NATO and EU mechanisms
African sovereignty/spillover reconstruction		Distributional analysis	Add African scholarly framing
Chinese NATO-responsibility/peace-plan reconstruction		Steel-manned account	Add Global South mediation angle
Russian 'SMO'/civilizational framing reconstruction		Internal logic of claims	Add evidence limits
Western defense/spillovers reconstruction		Unity and support mechanisms	Add occlusion analysis
UN Charter/humanitarian reconstruction		Legal-humanitarian account	Add enforcement limits
Data lab trend interpretation		Table-based inference	State uncertainty ranges
Worked example levels of analysis		Four-level reconstruction	Improve adjudication

7.2 Three-question debrief.

1. Which perspective did you reconstruct most weakly, and what evidence would strengthen it without caricature?
   Suggested reflection: identify one occlusion you initially missed, then add a counterargument from the perspective's own terms.
2. Where did you confuse a description of events with an explanation of mechanisms?
   Suggested reflection: rewrite one claim as "X occurred because Y changed Z under condition W," then test it against Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia.
3. What is the strongest objection to your adjudication of the 2023 Zaporizhzhia counteroffensive?
   Suggested reflection: state the objection, the evidence that would support it, and the boundary condition under which your adjudication would fail.

7.3 Error-log table: Common Misconception | Correction | Evidence.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
The blitz failed only because of poor Russian tactics.	Political aims, logistics, Ukrainian resistance, and air-defense denial interacted; tactical failure was embedded in operational design.	Freedman (2023); Watling (2022)
Kharkiv proves Ukraine can always maneuver successfully.	Zaporizhzhia shows that prepared defenses, force ratios, and terrain can convert maneuver into attrition.	ISW assessments; RUSI Ukraine reports
Drones alone determine battlefield outcomes.	Drones matter through combined arms, EW, logistics, and adaptation; no single technology is decisive.	Watling (2022); RUSI Ukraine reports
NATO expansion alone caused the invasion.	NATO expansion shaped threat perceptions, but Russian agency, Ukrainian sovereignty, and domestic politics also matter.	Freedman (2023)
Western industrial base can surge immediately.	Production is constrained by capacity, labor, supply chains, and component availability.	RUSI Ukraine reports; Watling (2022)
UN resolutions automatically enforce compliance.	Enforcement depends on political will, Security Council dynamics, and state capacity.	UN OCHA Ukraine humanitarian reports
Hybrid warfare is entirely new.	Cross-domain coercion has precedents; the novelty lies in integration, speed, and civilian targeting.	Watling (2022); RUSI reports

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Phase dynamics: failed blitz, counteroffensives, attritional stalemate	Operational design mismatch; adaptation; force-ratio change	Freedman (2023); Watling (2022)	Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia; ISW control tracking	Attrition vs maneuver; expectations vs outcomes	Rapid breakthrough despite prepared defenses	L22, L35

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Hybrid warfare: cyber, energy, information	Cross-domain coercion; blurring military/civilian boundaries	Watling (2022); RUSI Ukraine reports	Grid attacks; disinformation; infrastructure targeting	Threshold for armed attack; civilian protection	Purely conventional escalation without hybrid layer	L24, L38
Drone and EW revolution	FPV/Lancet kill chains; temporary EMS dominance; action-reaction cycle	Watling (2022); RUSI Ukraine reports	Trench warfare; local jamming; counter-drone adaptation	Tech determinism vs combined arms	Stable, uncontested EW dominance	L22
Industrial base problem	Shell consumption vs production; capacity and supply-chain bottlenecks	RUSI Ukraine reports; Watling (2022)	155mm shortages; surge delays; procurement competition	Stockpiles vs surge; political timelines	Sustained high output without constraints	L39
European security architecture	NATO expansion; rearmament; arms control collapse; reciprocal uncertainty	Freedman (2023)	Finland/Sweden accession; INF erosion; New START suspension	Deterrence vs escalation; order vs anarchy	Restored arms-control predictability	L39, L55
Five perspectives	African spillovers; Chinese NATO responsibility; Russian SMO; Western defense; UN Charter	Freedman (2023); UN OCHA reports	GA resolutions; food/fuel/fertilizer prices; humanitarian access	Whose security; universal vs particular norms	Consensus narrative across all five	L35, L37

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (24 hours):** Reconstruct the five phases and their mechanisms from memory, then check against notes; mark any phase you described only as an event.
- **R2 (3 days):** Redraw the drone/EW visual and label the action-reaction cycle; explain it aloud without jargon.
- **R3 (1 week):** Compare Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia using the four levels of analysis; write 300 words with explicit adjudication.
- **R4 (2 weeks):** Reconstruct all five perspectives and complete the comparison matrix from memory; identify one occlusion per perspective.
- **R5 (1 month):** Complete the independent memo, update the error log, and revisit the falsifiers; note which evidence would change your conclusion.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can name and sequence the war's phases with mechanisms.

☐ I can explain why the blitz failed beyond "poor tactics."

☐ I can compare Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia using force ratio, terrain, and preparation.

☐ I can define hybrid warfare as cross-domain coercion.

☐ I can explain how cyber, energy, and information blur military/civilian domains.

☐ I can describe the drone/EW action-reaction cycle without tech determinism.

☐ I can explain the industrial base bottleneck in production terms.

☐ I can connect arms control collapse to European security uncertainty.

☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary and sovereignty-plus-spillovers.

☐ I can steel-man the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.

☐ I can identify one occlusion for each perspective.

☐ I can use ISW data while stating its limits.

☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to the worked example.

☐ I can state falsifiers for my main adjudication.

☐ I have updated my error log.

☐ I can explain the lesson's central puzzle to a peer.

☐ I know which sources support which claims.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- Freedman (2023) — war phases, strategic assessment, and European order crisis.
- Watling (2022) — operational lessons, combined arms, hybrid warfare, and drone/EW adaptation.
- RUSI Ukraine reports — force generation, attrition, industrial base, and ammunition production.
- ISW assessments — daily territorial control changes and Russian force posture.
- UN OCHA Ukraine humanitarian reports — civilian harm, aid access, and humanitarian consequences.
- Freedman (2023) — NATO expansion, rearmament, and arms control collapse.
- Watling (2022) — tactical adaptation under contested electromagnetic spectrum conditions.
- RUSI Ukraine reports — logistics, breaching constraints, and sustained high-intensity warfare.
- ISW assessments — Russian defensive adaptation and operational learning.
- UN OCHA Ukraine humanitarian reports — global spillover and protection concerns.

End of Lesson 36. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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38. Lawfare of Territorial Integrity

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	37: Lawfare of Territorial Integrity
Module	Module 6: Eastern Europe and the Ukraine War
Prerequisites	L2 (Charter), L26 (lawfare), L35 (post-Soviet ontology)

Field	Value
Interleaved links	Forward to L39 (European security), L44 (proxy warfare), L45 (nuclear proliferation)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, visuals, flashcards, worked example, problem pair
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is why the war over Ukraine has been fought as intensely in legal forums as on the battlefield. Territorial integrity is not merely a line on a map; in contemporary international order it is a legal status produced by recognition, treaty obligation, institutional procedure, and the accumulated practice of states. The Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, following the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of eastern Ukraine, forced every major actor to argue in the language of law: aggression, self-determination, genocide, occupation, annexation, recognition, jurisdiction, and enforcement. The lesson asks how law becomes a weapon—lawfare—without becoming merely propaganda, and why legal categories can shape outcomes even where coercive enforcement is weak or blocked.

This puzzle sits at the intersection of three earlier lessons. The Charter lesson established the foundational prohibition on the threat or use of force against territorial integrity and political independence, together with the limited exceptions of self-defense and Security Council authorization. The lawfare lesson established that legal argument is not external to strategy but can be mobilized to legitimize, constrain, delay, delegitimize, or reframe coercion. The post-Soviet ontology lesson established that the collapse of the USSR did not settle the political meaning of borders, nations, imperial legacies, and successor-state identities; instead, it created a contested space in which sovereignty, ethnicity, language, and historical memory remain politically charged. Lesson 37 brings these threads together by examining how legal claims over territory are constructed, contested, and partially enforced in a war where both sides claim to defend international law.

The mechanism at stake is the conversion of physical control into legal title, and of legal title into durable political order. Annexation is the clearest example: military occupation or conquest does not by itself create internationally recognized sovereignty, but a state may attempt to manufacture legality through referenda, constitutional incorporation, diplomatic recognition, and institutional participation. Conversely, the defending state and its partners may attempt to freeze the legal status quo through non-recognition, sanctions, institutional exclusion, and criminal accountability. The result is a layered conflict in which the same territory can be administered as Russian, claimed as Ukrainian, treated as occupied under international humanitarian law, and recognized differently by different states. Lawfare therefore operates through audience costs, alliance management, sanctions architecture, evidentiary standards, and the symbolic authority of courts and assemblies.

The lesson also requires attention to threshold problems. Modern coercion rarely arrives as a declared war between uniformed armies. Cyber operations, deniable actors, proxy forces, information campaigns, and ambiguous uses of force test the legal categories developed for interstate violence. If an operation is below the threshold of "armed attack," the victim's right to self-defense may be contested; if attribution is uncertain, responsibility may be diffused; if an actor is formally non-state, the legal frame may shift from jus ad bellum

to counterterrorism or internal security. These ambiguities are not accidental. They are often the point of hybrid strategies, which seek military or political effect while preserving legal and political deniability. The lesson therefore treats legality not as a neutral referee but as a contested terrain in which thresholds are interpreted, stretched, and weaponized.

A further mechanism is institutional accountability. The International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice do not possess independent enforcement power comparable to a domestic police force, yet they shape the conflict by defining crimes, issuing arrest warrants, ordering provisional measures, and creating records that can outlast immediate military outcomes. Their authority depends on state cooperation, jurisdictional hooks, and the willingness of powerful actors to treat adverse rulings as binding. The gap between legal judgment and enforcement is not a peripheral defect; it is central to the politics of international law. UNGA resolutions, ICJ proceedings, and ICC investigations can mobilize majorities, isolate aggressors, and legitimate sanctions, but they can also expose the selectivity of international justice and the dependence of legal institutions on geopolitical power.

The African perspective is essential to framing this puzzle rather than treating it as a European exception. From many African vantage points, sovereignty is not an abstract legal principle but a hard-won achievement of decolonization, and territorial integrity is tied to the prevention of external partition, secession, and great-power manipulation. At the same time, African scholarship and diplomacy have often highlighted the inconsistency of Western legal practice, especially the contrast between recognition of Kosovo and rejection of Crimea. This inconsistency critique does not require accepting Russian annexation; rather, it asks whether the rules are applied as rules or as instruments of power. The lesson therefore treats the African perspective as primary not because Africa is the site of the Ukraine war, but because it reveals a structural problem in international law that the war makes visible: the tension between universal legal claims and selective enforcement.

By the end of the lesson, the student should be able to reconstruct the legal architecture of territorial integrity in the Ukraine war; distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in legal analysis; compare how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives frame the same events; evaluate the strength and limits of ICJ and ICC mechanisms; and identify falsifiers that would weaken a given legal or strategic claim. The lesson is not a brief for any party. It is an exercise in rigorous adjudication: learning how to hold legal principle, historical grievance, strategic interest, and institutional constraint in the same analytical frame without collapsing one into another.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. What does Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibit, and why does it matter for territorial integrity?

2. In the lawfare framework, how can legal procedure function as a strategic instrument rather than merely a neutral dispute-resolution mechanism?

3. What is the post-Soviet ontological problem: why did the collapse of the USSR leave borders, identities, and sovereignty claims unsettled?

4. What is the difference between a declaratory theory of recognition and a constitutive theory of

recognition?

5. Why does the threshold between “use of force” and “armed attack” matter for claims of self-defense?

6. What is uti possidetis juris, and why does it become relevant when empires or federations dissolve?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. How can a state invoke self-determination while simultaneously denying another state’s territorial integrity, and what legal distinction is required to make that argument coherent?

2. What separates the 2014 annexation of Crimea from the 2022 annexation of four Ukrainian oblasts in terms of legal process, recognition, and strategic consequence?

3. If a cyber operation damages infrastructure but causes no kinetic casualties, under what conditions might it still be treated as a use of force or an armed attack?

4. Why do UNGA resolutions matter politically even when they are not legally binding in the same way as Security Council decisions?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Territorial integrity**: the legal principle that a state’s territory is inviolable and that external force may not be used to alter its borders.

- **Self-determination**: the claim that peoples have the right to determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development; in practice, it can conflict with territorial integrity.

- **Annexation**: the purported incorporation of territory into another state, often following military control, and generally regarded as unlawful when achieved by force.

- **Non-recognition**: the refusal by states or international institutions to accept as lawful a territorial change produced by force or other unlawful means.

- **Lawfare**: the strategic use of legal claims, procedures, institutions, and norms to advance political or military objectives.

- **Hybrid warfare**: the coordinated use of military, paramilitary, cyber, informational, economic, and legal tools to achieve strategic effects while often preserving deniability.

- **Use of force threshold**: the legal line distinguishing prohibited force from lesser coercion; it affects whether an act violates Article 2(4) and whether self-defense is available.

- **Armed attack**: a more serious category of force that can trigger the inherent right of self-defense

under Article 51 of the Charter.

- **Attribution**: the process of identifying the actor responsible for a hostile act, especially important in cyber and proxy operations.

- **International Court of Justice (ICJ)**: the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, which adjudicates disputes between states and gives advisory opinions.

- **International Criminal Court (ICC)**: a permanent court that prosecutes individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and aggression, subject to jurisdictional limits.

- **UNGA resolution**: a resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly; politically significant and expressive of international opinion, but not generally binding in the manner of Security Council decisions under Chapter VII.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the legal architecture of the self-determination/territorial-integrity tension by tracing it from the UN Charter (Arts. 1(2), 2(4), Ch. XI) through the Friendly Relations Declaration (UNGA Res. 2625, 1970) and the Helsinki Final Act (1975) to the ICJ's Kosovo advisory opinion (2010), and explain why no hierarchical resolution exists within positive international law—neither principle is textually subordinated to the other.
2. **Evaluate** competing secessionist claims in the Ukraine conflict—Crimea (2014) and the four oblasts (2022)—using the internal/external self-determination distinction developed by Cassese (1995) and Crawford (2006), and assess whether Russia's invocation of self-determination meets the doctrinal threshold for external self-determination (colonial, occupied, or remedial) or instead constitutes an unlawful use of force against territorial integrity.
3. **Explain** how the ICJ's 2010 Kosovo advisory opinion has been strategically invoked by both Russia (to legitimize unilateral secession and annexation) and the West (to distinguish Kosovo as sui generis), identifying the specific legal reasoning each side extracts from the Court's narrow holding that declarations of independence are not generally prohibited.
4. **Compare** the five major perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on the self-determination/territorial-integrity tension, specifying what each contributes to understanding the Ukraine war's legal core and what each systematically occludes, with particular attention to the African sovereignty critique and the Kosovo-Crimea inconsistency problem.
5. **Synthesize** the African scholarly tradition (Grovogui, Mamdani, Mbembe, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Fanon, Rodney) with the doctrinal debate to assess whether international practice on self-determination is consistent or whether it operates as a function of geopolitical power, and to evaluate what the African vantage reveals about the coloniality of international law that the other four perspectives miss.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Self-determination vs territorial inviolability: the tension at the heart of the Ukraine war

Bolded Causal Claim: The Ukraine war's legal and normative core is a collision between two principles codified in the same constitutional document of international society—the UN Charter's commitment to the territorial integrity and political independence of states (Article 2(4)) and its simultaneous commitment to the self-determination of peoples (Article 1(2), Chapter XI)—with no textual hierarchy between them, so that which principle prevails in any given case is determined by political power, recognition practice, and the identity of the claimant rather than by legal adjudication alone.

Mechanism: The collision operates through four interlocking layers. First, the *textual layer*: the UN Charter (1945) enshrines both principles without ranking. Article 2(4) prohibits the threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence; Article 1(2) lists self-determination among the Organization's purposes; Chapter XI (Declaration Regarding Non-Self-Governing Territories) and Chapter XII (International Trusteeship System) operationalize self-determination for colonial territories. The Friendly Relations Declaration (UNGA Res. 2625 (XXV), 1970) attempts reconciliation: self-determination applies to peoples under colonial or alien domination, but "nothing in the foregoing paragraphs shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States." The Helsinki Final Act (1975) reproduces the same tension for Europe through Principle I (sovereign equality, territorial integrity) and Principle VIII (equal rights and self-determination of peoples). Neither document resolves the hierarchy; each restates both principles and leaves the collision to context. Second, the *doctrinal layer*: the dominant doctrine, developed by Cassese (1995) and Crawford (2006), distinguishes internal self-determination (the right to participate in governance, to seek autonomy or federal arrangements within an existing state) from external self-determination (the right to secede and form an independent state). External self-determination is generally recognized only for three categories: (a) peoples of non-self-governing territories under colonial rule; (b) peoples subjected to foreign military occupation; and (c) peoples suffering severe and systematic violations of human rights by their own government, under the contested doctrine of "remedial secession." For populations that are not colonial, not occupied by a foreign power, and not subjected to such violations, secession is not a legal right but a political fact that may or may not attract recognition. This doctrinal architecture means that Russia's claim that Crimea or the Donbas populations possess a right of external self-determination fails the standard tests: these are not colonial territories, and while Russia alleges oppression, the factual predicate is contested and was not established through any international process. Third, the *jurisprudential layer*: the ICJ's advisory opinion in *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo* (2010) held that the declaration of independence itself did not violate general international law because there is no general prohibition on declarations of independence. Crucially, the Court deliberately avoided ruling on whether Kosovo had a right to secede or whether recognition of Kosovo was lawful. This narrow, procedural holding created an ambiguity that both sides exploit: Russia reads it as licensing unilateral secession and, by extension, annexation; the West reads it as a holding about the legality of a declaratory act that says nothing about the legality of secession or recognition. The opinion thus became a Rorschach test, with each side extracting the interpretation that serves its interest. Fourth, the *political layer*: recognition is a political act, not a legal determination. States recognize or withhold recognition based on interest, alliance structure, and precedent anxiety. This means the same legal claim—self-determination—produces different outcomes depending on the claimant's geopolitical position and the recognizing state's strategic calculus. The mechanism therefore predicts not legal resolution but political contestation: the principles provide the vocabulary, but power and recognition determine the outcome.

Scope Conditions: The tension becomes acute under five conditions: (1) a group within an existing, internationally recognized state claims *external* self-determination (secession) rather than internal autonomy; (2) the claim is backed by external military force or a patron state willing to recognize and defend it; (3) the parent state is internationally recognized, functioning, and opposed to secession; (4) there is a contested historical narrative that the claimant group "belongs" to another state or nation; and (5) the international community is divided along geopolitical lines, preventing consensus. The tension is less acute when the claim is for internal self-determination (autonomy, federalism, cultural rights), when the territory is a non-self-governing territory under Chapter XI (decolonization), when the parent state consents to secession, or when there is no external military involvement. The Ukraine case satisfies all five acute conditions: Crimea and the Donbas claimed secession, Russia provided military backing and recognition, Ukraine was a recognized functioning state, Russia invoked historical and ethnic narratives, and the international community split along NATO-Russia lines. A critical scope condition often overlooked is the *identity of the claimant's patron*: when the patron is a permanent member of the Security Council, enforcement of territorial integrity through the UN system is structurally blocked, which is precisely what occurred in 2014 and 2022.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe: (a) states invoking whichever principle serves their interest—Russia invoking self-determination for Crimea while invoking territorial integrity for its own borders and for South Ossetia/Abkhazia in different contexts; (b) recognition patterns splitting along geopolitical lines, visible in UNGA vote tallies (2014: 100 in favor of Ukraine's territorial integrity, 11 against, 58 abstentions; 2022: 143 in favor, 5 against, 35 abstentions); (c) ICJ and UNGA becoming arenas of legal-political contestation rather than neutral adjudication; (d) proliferation of "sui generis" arguments (Kosovo is unique; Crimea is unique) as states seek to avoid precedent; (e) African states frequently abstaining, reflecting ambivalence between solidarity with territorial integrity as a post-colonial survival principle and refusal to endorse a Western-led legal order with a record of selective application; and (f) the same legal vocabulary deployed by opposing sides to reach opposite conclusions, with no authoritative interpreter capable of resolving the dispute.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African vantage on the self-determination/territorial-integrity tension is shaped by a distinctive historical experience: the continent's borders were drawn by colonial powers at the Berlin Conference (1884–85) without African participation, yet the post-colonial state system has treated those borders as inviolable. The OAU's 1964 Cairo resolution on border inviolability, later reflected in the OAU Charter and the AU Constitutive Act, established *uti possidetis juris* as the African norm—colonial borders become international borders upon independence. The ICJ's 1986 *Frontier Dispute* (Burkina Faso/Mali) judgment affirmed this principle for Africa. This creates a paradox that African scholarship has long theorized: borders are simultaneously colonial artifacts and the foundation of post-colonial sovereignty. Grovogui's analysis of "sovereigns, quasi sovereigns, and Africans" (1996) shows that African states entered the international system as diminished sovereigns, their sovereignty qualified by neo-colonial economic dependence and great-power interference. Mamdani's work on the colonial state (1996) demonstrates that the nation-state form was imposed on Africa, producing a bifurcated state with citizens in urban areas and subjects in rural "customary" jurisdictions, undermining the very "people" that self-determination presupposes. Mbembe's postcolonial theory (2001) frames sovereignty in Africa as a command over life and death, not a legal abstraction. Nkrumah's neo-colonialism thesis (1965) and Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment (1972) show that formal sovereignty masked continued economic subordination. Nyerere, confronting the Biafra and Katanga secessions, insisted on territorial integrity as a survival imperative for fragile new states, even while championing pan-African unity. Fanon's analysis of colonial violence (1961) reminds us that self-

determination was won through struggle, not granted by law. From this vantage, the Ukraine war's legal tension is not an abstract doctrinal puzzle but a continuation of great-power politics in which law is an instrument. The African critique of inconsistency—Kosovo recognized, Crimea not—does not mean African states favor Crimea's annexation; most African states voted for UNGA resolutions affirming Ukraine's territorial integrity. Rather, the critique targets the hypocrisy of a system in which self-determination is granted or denied based on the claimant's geopolitical alignment. What the African perspective reveals that others miss is the coloniality of international law itself: the principles are not neutral, the "people" is constructed, and sovereignty is graded by power. African states' frequent abstentions in UNGA votes on Ukraine reflect this ambivalence—solidarity with territorial integrity as a post-colonial survival principle, but refusal to endorse a Western-led legal order that has historically denied African self-determination.

Chinese. China's position subordinates self-determination to territorial integrity and non-interference, reflecting both its own territorial sensitivities (Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong) and its strategic interest in a stable, state-centric international order. Beijing's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (1954) make territorial integrity and non-interference foundational. On Ukraine, China has maintained that Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity should be respected while simultaneously framing NATO expansion as the root cause of the crisis—a "NATO responsibility" narrative that distributes causal and moral responsibility to the West. China did not recognize Crimea's annexation and abstained on the 2014 UNGA resolution, but it has also refused to condemn Russia outright, reflecting strategic partnership and shared opposition to Western hegemony. The Chinese perspective contributes the insight that territorial integrity cannot be separated from the security architecture that surrounds it; it occludes, however, the agency of Ukrainians and the violence of annexation.

Russian. Russia's position invokes self-determination as a legal right for populations it claims are historically Russian or oppressed, while simultaneously denying self-determination to groups within Russia (Chechens, Tatars). The Kosovo precedent is central: Moscow argues that if the West could recognize Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence, it cannot deny Crimea's or the Donbas's. Russia frames Crimea's annexation as "reunification" and the 2022 annexations as expressions of popular will (referendums). The Russian perspective contributes a genuine critique of Western double standards and the politicization of recognition; it occludes the coercive context of the referendums, the absence of genuine self-determination under military occupation, and the inconsistency of denying self-determination to Russia's own minorities.

Western. The Western position defends territorial integrity as the cornerstone of the post-1945 order and frames Russia's actions as violations of Article 2(4). On Kosovo, the West maintains the sui generis argument: Kosovo was unique due to the humanitarian catastrophe, UNSC involvement, and the collapse of Serbian sovereignty. Some Western scholars acknowledge the inconsistency (Weller 2022), but the official position distinguishes the cases. The Western perspective contributes the defense of a rules-based order and the mobilization of legal accountability (ICJ, ICC, UNGA); it occludes the selective application of self-determination and the power asymmetries in recognition practice.

UN. The UN perspective is institutional: the Charter contains both principles, the ICJ adjudicates disputes, and the General Assembly expresses the international community's position through resolutions. The UN framework treats the tension as inherent and manageable through dialogue, adjudication, and collective security. The UN perspective contributes procedural legitimacy and a forum for contestation; it occludes the enforcement gap—the Security Council's paralysis due to the veto, and the absence of mechanisms to compel compliance with ICJ rulings or UNGA resolutions.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Annexation: Crimea (2014) and the four oblasts (2022) — legality, recognition, and consequences

Bolded Causal Claim: Annexation is a legal-political technology that seeks to convert military occupation into sovereign title by layering domestic constitutional acts, staged referenda, and selective recognition onto a use-of-force violation; its legal success depends less on the annexing state's proclamation than on whether third states and institutions withhold recognition and impose costs.

Mechanism: The mechanism runs from coercive control to legal laundering to institutional contestation. In Crimea in 2014, unidentified armed personnel—commonly described as "little green men"—seized key infrastructure and administrative nodes, after which a referendum was held under conditions of occupation and was followed by Russian federal legislation incorporating Crimea and Sevastopol into the Russian Federation. In 2022, after the full-scale invasion, Russia staged referenda in four partially occupied oblasts—Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson—and then signed treaties of accession that were rapidly ratified and embedded in Russia's constitutional order. The causal force of annexation therefore comes not from the referendum alone but from the combination of three moves: first, the creation of facts on the ground through military control; second, the production of domestic legal form through referenda, treaties, and constitutional amendments; and third, the attempt to normalize those facts through diplomatic recognition, passportization, currency integration, administrative absorption, and military basing. This is why annexation is a form of lawfare: it uses legal instruments to launder an initially unlawful use of force into an appearance of sovereign title. The counter-mechanism is non-recognition. Most states, UNGA resolutions, and the broader non-recognition doctrine treat territorial acquisition by force as legally void, meaning that the annexing state's domestic acts cannot by themselves create international title. Yet non-recognition is not costless enforcement. It can isolate the annexing state diplomatically and economically, but it does not automatically restore the displaced sovereign's control. The result is a durable gap between legal title and effective control: Ukraine remains the internationally recognized sovereign over Crimea and the four oblasts, while Russia exercises varying degrees of de facto authority, strongest in Crimea and weakest in the partially occupied southern and eastern oblasts where front lines remain contested.

Scope Conditions: Annexation succeeds as a legal-political strategy only under specific conditions: the annexing state must achieve durable control; the target state must lack the immediate capacity to reverse the occupation; international enforcement must be blocked or diluted by great-power veto, geopolitical division, or competing priorities; and enough domestic and international audiences must accept or acquiesce to the new status quo. Where these conditions are absent, annexation remains a claim rather than a settled title. The four 2022 oblasts illustrate this limit clearly: Russia does not fully control all of the territory it claims, its control fluctuates with military operations, and the international response has been broader and more punitive than in 2014. The legal scope condition is equally important. Under the Charter framework, territorial acquisition by force does not create title; effectiveness alone is insufficient where the acquisition violates Article 2(4). However, international law also struggles with the passage of time. Prolonged control, demographic engineering, institutional integration, and generational change can harden de facto realities even where de jure title remains with the original sovereign. This is why annexation produces not only a legal dispute but also a sociological transformation: the longer occupation persists, the more the annexing state can present control as normal governance, while the displaced state must sustain a counter-narrative of illegality and future restoration.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include UNGA resolutions affirming Ukraine's territorial integrity, broad non-recognition of the annexations, sanctions regimes targeting Russian officials,

financial institutions, energy exports, and military-industrial capacity, and continued Ukrainian legal and diplomatic claims to the territories. The 2014 Crimea annexation produced a distinct pattern: rapid Russian integration, militarization of the peninsula, expansion of the Black Sea Fleet's strategic position, and a relatively stable but internationally contested status quo. The 2022 annexations produced a different pattern: partial and unstable control, ongoing combat, larger-scale displacement, and a more unified Western and allied response. Other implications include passportization, rubleization, changes in property and citizenship regimes, human-rights concerns in occupied territories, and the transformation of the annexed regions into bargaining chips in any future negotiation. The annexations also affect the legal architecture of peace: because Ukraine's constitutional and political position treats territorial integrity as non-negotiable, and because most states do not recognize the annexations, any settlement that formalizes Russian control would require not only Ukrainian concession but also a reversal of the international non-recognition consensus.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African perspective begins from the postcolonial experience of externally imposed borders and the hard-won principle that territorial integrity is a shield against fragmentation, foreign manipulation, and renewed imperial partition. African scholarship and diplomacy therefore tend to treat annexation by force as a threat not only to Ukraine but to the broader normative order that protects weaker states from stronger ones. At the same time, the African vantage point is sharpened by the inconsistency critique: many African scholars and officials note that Western states have recognized Kosovo while rejecting Crimea, and that the language of self-determination has been applied unevenly across cases. This does not necessarily imply African support for annexation; rather, it produces a demand for principled consistency and a suspicion that international law is often mobilized by powerful states to discipline adversaries while exempting allies. African thinkers such as Mamdani, Grovogui, and Bayart have emphasized how legal categories can mask power, and how the postcolonial state's fragility makes territorial integrity both a legal norm and a survival strategy. The African perspective thus contributes a dual insight: it defends territorial integrity as a necessary protection for postcolonial sovereignty, while exposing the selective and hierarchical application of self-determination and recognition in practice.

Chinese. The Chinese perspective emphasizes sovereignty and territorial integrity as foundational norms, while framing NATO expansion and Western security policy as important contextual causes of the crisis. China has generally avoided recognizing the annexations, consistent with its long-standing opposition to unilateral territorial changes, but it has also resisted Western-led condemnation and sanctions, preferring dialogue, ceasefire, and negotiated settlement. Its contribution is to insist that territorial integrity cannot be separated from security indivisibility and great-power responsibility; its occlusion is that this framing can blur accountability for the use of force and can treat Ukrainian agency as secondary to NATO-Russia dynamics.

Russian. The Russian perspective treats Crimea and the four oblasts as territories whose populations exercised self-determination through referenda and whose incorporation corrects historical injustice and protects Russian-speaking communities. It frames annexation as defensive, restorative, and democratically legitimated. This perspective contributes a challenge to the Western monopoly on defining legitimate self-determination, but it occludes the coercive conditions under which the referenda occurred, the absence of free and fair process, and the Charter prohibition on acquiring territory by force.

Western. The Western perspective defends the Charter, non-recognition, sanctions, and legal accountability as necessary responses to aggression. It treats the annexations as illegal and void, and it mobilizes institutions to sustain that position. Its contribution is the defense of a rules-based order; its occlusion is the difficulty

of reconciling this defense with the Kosovo precedent and with the broader history of selective recognition.

UN. The UN perspective is institutional and procedural: the Charter contains both territorial integrity and self-determination, the General Assembly expresses the international community's position through resolutions, and the ICJ adjudicates disputes. Its contribution is procedural legitimacy and a forum for contestation; its occlusion is the enforcement gap created by Security Council paralysis and the absence of mechanisms to compel compliance with UNGA resolutions or ICJ rulings.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The legality of hybrid warfare: cyber operations, deniable actors, and the use of force threshold

Bolded Causal Claim: Hybrid warfare is legally consequential not because it is entirely novel, but because it distributes coercion across cyber, proxy, informational, and economic channels so that each component may fall below the Article 2(4) use-of-force threshold or escape attribution, producing a cumulative strategic effect that international law's binary categories struggle to capture.

Mechanism: The mechanism is threshold exploitation through fragmentation and deniability. Hybrid warfare blurs the boundary between war and peace by combining conventional military pressure, irregular forces, cyber operations, information campaigns, economic coercion, and legal manipulation. In the Ukraine case, the 2014 seizure of Crimea relied on "little green men" whose lack of insignia created attribution ambiguity; subsequent operations in eastern Ukraine involved armed groups, Russian personnel, and local proxies whose relationships were deliberately obscured. Cyber operations added another layer: attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure, including power-grid disruptions in 2015 and 2016 and the NotPetya malware incident in 2017, imposed costs and signaled capability while raising difficult questions about whether they constituted a "use of force" under Article 2(4) or an "armed attack" under Article 51. The legal mechanism turns on three thresholds. First, Article 2(4) prohibits the threat or use of force against territorial integrity or political independence, but not all coercive acts are "force"; cyber operations that cause physical damage or injury are more likely to qualify, while data theft, disruption, or propaganda may be treated as intervention or espionage rather than force. Second, state responsibility for non-state actors depends on standards of control; the ICJ's "effective control" test in the Nicaragua case sets a high bar, while the ICTY's "overall control" standard is more permissive, creating uncertainty about when a state is legally responsible for proxy violence. Third, self-defense under Article 51 requires an "armed attack," a higher threshold than "use of force," meaning that even unlawful uses of force may not automatically justify military response. Hybrid actors exploit these gaps by keeping each act below the most consequential threshold, by fragmenting responsibility across state and non-state channels, and by using information operations to complicate attribution and delay political consensus. The cumulative effect is strategic: the target state is coerced, destabilized, and territorially eroded without triggering the legal and political mechanisms designed for overt armed attack.

Scope Conditions: Hybrid warfare is most effective where the target state is vulnerable to ambiguity, where attribution capabilities are limited, where alliance decision-making requires high evidentiary certainty, and where the adversary is risk-averse about escalation. It is less effective where cyber defenses are resilient, where attribution is rapid and public, where legal frameworks clearly classify disruptive operations as uses of force, and where the target can respond through sanctions, counter-cyber operations, or military reinforcement without crossing escalation thresholds. The scope conditions also include technological and organizational capacity: hybrid campaigns require intelligence networks, proxy relationships, cyber capabilities, and information infrastructure. They are not costless or unlimited. Attribution has improved since 2014, and states increasingly name and shame perpetrators, impose sanctions, and build cyber norms through UN

processes and regional frameworks. The Tallinn Manual and UN Group of Governmental Experts have contributed to clarifying that cyber operations causing physical damage or injury can amount to uses of force, though below that threshold the law remains unsettled. Hybrid warfare therefore operates in a zone of legal indeterminacy: it is constrained by evolving norms and capabilities, but it continues to exploit the lag between technological practice and legal classification.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include delayed or calibrated responses to ambiguous aggression, the prominence of attribution statements and sanctions rather than immediate military retaliation, investments in cyber defense and resilience, and the normalization of "hybrid" as a policy category in NATO, EU, and national security discourse. In Ukraine, the implications include the 2014 seizure of Crimea without a clear Article 51 response, the prolonged conflict in Donbas framed as an internal rebellion rather than interstate war, cyberattacks on infrastructure and government systems, information campaigns, and the use of private military companies and proxy forces. More broadly, hybrid tactics produce legal debates about whether a cyberattack on critical infrastructure is an armed attack, whether support for proxies crosses the control threshold, and whether economic coercion can be unlawful intervention. They also produce institutional adaptation: NATO's recognition of cyberspace as an operational domain, EU sanctions frameworks, and national laws on foreign interference. The key observable pattern is that hybrid warfare often succeeds in creating strategic ambiguity and delay, but it can also generate long-term counter-mobilization once attribution becomes credible and political will consolidates.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African perspective on hybrid warfare is shaped by a long history of indirect rule, proxy intervention, mercenary activity, and externally sponsored destabilization, which means that African scholars often see "hybrid" not as a new European phenomenon but as a renamed continuation of older techniques of domination. African thinkers such as Grovogui and Mbembe have emphasized how legal and institutional language can obscure violent power, and how deniable actors—whether colonial auxiliaries, Cold War proxies, or contemporary private military companies—allow powerful states to intervene while evading accountability. The African vantage point therefore contributes a historical critique: it reveals that the problem of attribution and deniability is not a technical novelty but a recurring feature of imperial and neo-imperial practice. It also raises a practical concern, because private military actors such as the Wagner Group have operated in several African states, making the legal thresholds around proxy control and state responsibility directly relevant to African sovereignty. African states may thus support clearer attribution standards and stronger accountability for deniable intervention, while remaining skeptical of frameworks that are applied only against adversaries of Western powers. The African perspective's distinctive contribution is to connect hybrid warfare to the broader history of external interference and to insist that legal thresholds must protect weaker states from both overt and covert coercion.

Chinese. The Chinese perspective frames cyber operations and deniable intervention through the lens of sovereignty, non-interference, and information security. China emphasizes cyber sovereignty, opposes unilateral attribution, and often treats Western accusations as politicized. It contributes a demand for multilateral norms and state consent in cyberspace; it occludes the role of state-linked cyber activity and the coercive potential of information control.

Russian. The Russian perspective generally rejects the "hybrid warfare" label as a Western construct used to delegitimize Russian policy. It frames its actions as defensive, protective of compatriots, and responsive to NATO pressure, while accusing the West of conducting hybrid warfare through sanctions, information campaigns, and support for opposition movements. Its contribution is to expose the politicization of legal

categories; its occlusion is the denial of documented covert and proxy operations.

Western. The Western perspective treats hybrid warfare as a serious threat to the rules-based order and emphasizes attribution, deterrence, resilience, and legal clarity. It contributes frameworks for cyber norms and collective defense; its occlusion is the risk of over-securitizing ambiguous activity and of applying legal thresholds unevenly.

UN. The UN perspective approaches hybrid warfare through the Charter's prohibition on the use of force, state responsibility, and emerging cyber norms. It contributes multilateral forums for norm development and confidence-building; its occlusion is the difficulty of achieving consensus on attribution and on whether specific cyber operations cross legal thresholds.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — ICC and ICJ: accountability mechanisms and their limits

Bolded Causal Claim: The ICC and the ICJ furnish complementary but structurally bounded accountability pathways for the Ukraine war—individual criminal responsibility through the ICC and state responsibility through the ICJ—yet both are constrained by jurisdictional architecture, the absence of enforcement capacity, and the political economy of great-power non-cooperation, so that their primary effect is normative, evidentiary, and historical rather than coercive.

Mechanism: The International Criminal Court, established by the 1998 Rome Statute, prosecutes individuals for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and—under Article 8 bis and the Kampala amendments—the crime of aggression. Its jurisdiction over Ukraine rests not on membership, since Ukraine is not a state party, but on two declarations under Article 12(3) of the Statute (2014 and 2015) accepting ICC jurisdiction over crimes committed on Ukrainian territory from 21 November 2013 onward. The Prosecutor opened a preliminary examination in 2014 and, following referrals by forty-three states parties in March 2022, opened a formal investigation. The Court has since issued arrest warrants for President Vladimir Putin and Commissioner Maria Lvova-Belova (March 2023) for the war crime of unlawful deportation and transfer of children, and for senior military commanders for attacks on civilian infrastructure. The ICC's complementarity principle means it acts only where national jurisdictions are unwilling or unable; Ukraine's domestic investigations and prosecutions—including war-crimes trials of captured Russian soldiers and collaboration cases—thus shape the ICC's docket and may displace it for certain categories of conduct.

The International Court of Justice, by contrast, adjudicates state responsibility. Ukraine instituted proceedings against Russia in 2017 under the Genocide Convention, alleging that Russia's claim of genocide in Donbas was fabricated and used as pretext for the 2022 invasion, and under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination regarding Crimea. Following the February 2022 invasion, Ukraine requested provisional measures; on 16 March 2022 the Court ordered Russia to "immediately suspend the military operations" commenced on 24 February 2022, by thirteen votes to two. Russia has not complied. The ICJ's jurisdiction rests on compromissory clauses in treaties to which both states are parties; Russia has contested jurisdiction and argued that the Genocide Convention does not cover the use of force. The Court's orders lack direct enforcement: Article 94 of the UN Charter provides for Security Council enforcement, which Russia's veto forecloses. The two institutions thus operate on different logics—individual versus state responsibility, criminal versus civil—and face different limits. The ICC cannot prosecute the crime of aggression against Russia because Russia is not a state party and no Security Council referral is possible given the veto. The ICJ cannot compel compliance with provisional measures. Both depend on state

cooperation for evidence, arrest, and enforcement, and both are exposed to the risk that their proceedings are instrumentalized as lawfare by the parties.

Scope Conditions: ICC effectiveness is highest where (a) the territorial state cooperates or is a party, (b) suspects travel to cooperating jurisdictions, (c) complementarity is satisfied or national capacity is absent, and (d) evidence is accessible and chain-of-custody is preserved. It is lowest against sitting leaders of non-party great powers with veto-protected allies and no prospect of arrest. ICJ effectiveness is highest where (a) a compromissory clause exists and is not successfully challenged, (b) the respondent values reputational standing and legal legitimacy, and (c) provisional measures align with the respondent's interests or are costless to comply with; lowest where the respondent rejects jurisdiction, faces no enforcement, and has alternative partners. Both institutions are more effective as normative and historical record-builders than as coercive enforcers against great powers, and their outputs are most consequential when coupled with sanctions, diplomatic pressure, or domestic legal processes.

Observable Implications: Arrest warrants issued but unexecuted against Putin; an ICC field office opened in Kyiv in 2023; evidence collection, witness protection, and forensic documentation ongoing; Ukrainian domestic war-crimes trials proceeding, including of captured Russian soldiers; the ICJ provisional measures order ignored but cited in diplomatic and legal discourse; reparations claims advanced through UNGA Resolution ES-11/5 and domestic mechanisms; the gap between legal pronouncement and enforcement visible in continued hostilities; and the use of ICC and ICJ outputs by third states to justify sanctions and arms transfers.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African perspective on ICC and ICJ accountability is shaped by a long and contested relationship with the Court that cannot be reduced to either enthusiasm or rejection. African states were among the earliest and most numerous ratifiers of the Rome Statute, and African civil society played a significant role in the Court's creation; the first situations referred to the ICC were self-referrals by African governments (Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic). Yet the ICC's early docket was overwhelmingly African, generating sustained critique—articulated by the African Union, by scholars such as Mahmood Mamdani, and by African jurists—that the Court functioned as a selective instrument targeting weak states while powerful actors escaped scrutiny. The 2016 withdrawal by Burundi, the threatened withdrawals by South Africa and Kenya, and the AU's 2017 decision calling for collective withdrawal (later softened into a strategy of reform) reflect this tension. The African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Malabo Protocol's proposed African criminal court represent parallel efforts to build regional accountability capacity. From this vantage, the Ukraine case is read with ambivalence: African states largely supported UNGA resolutions condemning aggression, yet the rapid mobilization of ICC and ICJ mechanisms for Ukraine—contrasted with years of inaction on African situations such as Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Sahel—reinforces the perception of a two-tiered system. The African perspective thus contributes a powerful critique of selective enforcement and demands consistency across cases; its occlusion, if taken alone, would be the genuine legal distinctiveness of the Ukraine case (aggression by a permanent member against a neighbor, with extensive documentary evidence) and the real institutional effort to address it, which is not merely Western hypocrisy but a response to a distinctive violation.

Chinese. China's perspective emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and the principle that international judicial bodies must not be instrumentalized. Beijing has not joined the Rome Statute and views the ICC with suspicion, particularly after the 2023 arrest warrant for Putin, which China criticized as politicized and as undermining peace negotiations. China supports the ICJ as the principal judicial organ of the UN but stresses

that its jurisdiction requires state consent, that provisional measures should not prejudge the merits, and that judicial processes must not be used to escalate conflict. China's contribution is the insistence on consent-based jurisdiction and on the primacy of political settlement; its occlusion is the difficulty of reconciling non-interference with accountability for cross-border aggression, and the risk that sovereignty rhetoric shields violations.

Russian. Russia's perspective rejects ICC jurisdiction entirely—Russia withdrew its signature from the Rome Statute in 2016—and treats the arrest warrants as illegitimate, politically motivated, and unenforceable. Moscow frames the ICJ proceedings as biased and argues that the Genocide Convention case mischaracterizes Russia's stated rationale for intervention. Russia's contribution is the insistence on sovereign consent and non-party status as shields against external judicial authority; its occlusion is the evasion of accountability for documented conduct and the asymmetry of invoking legal norms (self-determination, genocide prevention) while rejecting the institutions that adjudicate them.

Western. The Western perspective treats the ICC and ICJ as essential pillars of the rules-based order, emphasizing accountability, deterrence, the historical record, and the moral obligation to victims. It supports the arrest warrants, provisional measures, and evidence collection, and frames non-compliance as further evidence of Russia's lawlessness. Its contribution is institutional investment and legal expertise; its occlusion is the risk of over-reliance on institutions that lack enforcement, the inconsistency of Western support for international justice across cases (notably Israel/Palestine), and the tendency to conflate legal authority with political power.

UN. The UN perspective centers on the Charter's framework: the ICJ as principal judicial organ, the Security Council's enforcement role (blocked by veto), and the General Assembly's complementary normative authority. It contributes institutional legitimacy, procedural regularity, and the Uniting for Peace mechanism. Its occlusion is the structural paralysis of enforcement when a permanent member is the respondent, and the gap between the UN's normative aspirations and its coercive capacity.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The politics of international law: UNGA resolutions, ICJ proceedings, and the politics of enforcement

Bolded Causal Claim: In the Ukraine war, international law operates less as a self-executing constraint than as a political resource whose efficacy depends on coalition-building, institutional majorities, and the strategic deployment of legal forums; the gap between legal pronouncement and enforcement is a structural feature of the international legal order, not a malfunction, and is exploited by all parties through lawfare.

Mechanism: The UN General Assembly's emergency special session on Ukraine (ES-11, convened under the "Uniting for Peace" procedure after Russia's veto in the Security Council) produced six resolutions. ES-11/1 (2 March 2022) condemned aggression and demanded withdrawal (141–5–35). ES-11/2 (24 March 2022) addressed humanitarian consequences. ES-11/3 (7 April 2022) suspended Russia from the Human Rights Council (93–24–58). ES-11/4 (12 October 2022) rejected the annexation referenda and affirmed territorial integrity (143–5–35). ES-11/5 (14 November 2022) addressed reparations (94–14–73). ES-11/6 (23 February 2023) affirmed the principles of the Charter (141–7–32). These resolutions carry no binding force under Article 25, which binds Security Council decisions, but they generate normative pressure, legitimate sanctions, frame the conflict in legal terms, and provide a record of state positions that shapes diplomatic coalitions.

ICJ proceedings complement this: Ukraine's 2017 case under the Genocide Convention, expanded post-

2022, and the provisional measures order of March 2022 provide judicial articulation of legal norms even absent enforcement. The ICJ's 2010 advisory opinion on Kosovo's declaration of independence is invoked by both sides—by Russia to argue for consistency, by Western states to distinguish the cases. The politics of enforcement operates through alternative channels: unilateral and collective sanctions (freezing of central bank reserves, SWIFT exclusion, export controls), arms transfers, and domestic legal mechanisms (universal jurisdiction, asset seizure, and the Register of Damage for Ukraine established under the Council of Europe). Lawfare—defined in L26 as the strategic use of legal instruments to achieve political objectives—thus includes both the invocation of international law by Ukraine and its allies and Russia's counter-narratives (genocide claims, self-determination, historical sovereignty, and the Kosovo precedent).

The mechanism of enforcement failure is structural rather than incidental: the Security Council's veto, the ICJ's lack of enforcement machinery, the ICC's dependence on state cooperation, and the General Assembly's non-binding authority. This gap is constitutive of a system that privileges state sovereignty and great-power consent, and it is exploited by all parties. Russia exploits it by ignoring orders while citing legal norms; Western states exploit it by using legal forums to legitimize sanctions and arms transfers; Ukraine exploits it by building a legal record for future reparations and accountability.

Scope Conditions: UNGA resolutions are effective as normative and coalition-building tools when (a) majorities are large and stable, (b) they align with the material interests of key states, and (c) they are coupled with sanctions or other enforcement. They are ineffective as coercive instruments against determined great powers with alternative partners. ICJ proceedings are effective when (a) jurisdiction exists and is not successfully challenged, (b) the respondent values reputational standing, and (c) third states use rulings to justify measures. The politics of enforcement succeeds when coalitions are broad and material leverage exists; it fails when targeted states have alternative partners (China, India, and other Global South abstainers) and when enforcement costs are borne unevenly.

Observable Implications: Voting patterns reveal a stable coalition of roughly 140 states condemning aggression, but significant abstentions (China, India, South Africa, Brazil at various points) and declining support for reparations (94 votes); sanctions regimes implemented by Western and allied states; Russia's continued military operations despite legal condemnation; the use of legal arguments in diplomatic forums; the invocation of Kosovo by Russia and of Charter principles by Ukraine; and the Register of Damage as an institutionalized reparations mechanism.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African perspective on the politics of international law centers on the inconsistency critique and the demand for equal application, and it is the longest-developed of the five traditions on this point. African states have been among the most vocal critics of selective enforcement: the same legal frameworks invoked against Russia have been applied unevenly to other conflicts, including Israel/Palestine, Western Sahara, and the historical violence of colonialism. The abstentions of several African states on UNGA resolutions—South Africa, for instance, abstained on ES-11/1 and ES-11/4 while condemning aggression in principle—reflect not support for Russia but a refusal to endorse a legal order perceived as instrumentalized by Western powers. African scholarship, including the work of Siba Grovogui, Achille Mbembe, and Mahmood Mamdani, emphasizes that international law has historically served imperial projects and that its current deployment must be read against that genealogy. At the same time, African states have a deep interest in territorial integrity norms, given the continent's colonial borders and the African Union's strong stance against unconstitutional changes of government and secession. The AU's 2022 statement condemning Russia's recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk and its 2022–2023 diplomatic initiatives reflect this commitment.

The African perspective thus contributes both a critique of Western hypocrisy and a substantive commitment to sovereignty norms; its occlusion, if taken alone, would be the genuine distinctiveness of the Ukraine case as a cross-border aggression by a nuclear power, which does demand a response, and the risk that the inconsistency critique paralyzes necessary action.

Chinese. China's perspective frames the politics of international law around sovereignty, non-interference, and the responsibility of NATO expansion. Beijing abstained on key resolutions, arguing that they failed to address root causes and were one-sided. China contributes the argument that legal processes must be accompanied by political settlement, that enforcement must not be monopolized by Western coalitions, and that the selective application of international law undermines its legitimacy. Its occlusion is the difficulty of squaring non-interference with the condemnation of aggression, and the risk that sovereignty rhetoric shields violations.

Russian. Russia's perspective treats international law as a tool of Western hegemony and deploys counter-legal arguments: self-determination, historical sovereignty, genocide prevention, and the Kosovo precedent. Moscow frames UNGA resolutions as politicized and ICJ proceedings as biased. Russia's contribution is the exposure of Western inconsistency and the insistence that legal norms must be applied universally; its occlusion is the use of legal rhetoric to mask territorial conquest and the asymmetry of invoking norms while rejecting institutions.

Western. The Western perspective treats international law as a binding framework and the UNGA and ICJ processes as legitimate expressions of global consensus. It emphasizes the unprecedented scale of condemnation, the legal case for accountability, and the normative importance of territorial integrity. Its contribution is institutional investment and legal expertise; its occlusion is the risk of conflating legal authority with political power, underestimating the legitimacy costs of inconsistency, and treating abstentions as moral failure rather than as reasoned dissent.

UN. The UN perspective centers on the Charter's collective security framework, the General Assembly's role under Uniting for Peace, and the ICJ's judicial function. It contributes institutional procedures, normative standards, and the aspiration of universal membership. Its occlusion is the structural inability to enforce against permanent members, and the gap between the UN's normative aspirations and its coercive capacity.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY) The African vantage point on the lawfare of territorial integrity begins from a historical experience in which international law was not a neutral arbiter but an instrument of empire, partition, and racial hierarchy. For African states and scholars, the Ukraine war is not merely a European territorial dispute; it is a test of whether the post-1945 legal order can restrain great powers or whether it remains a language through which powerful states legitimize their preferences. The African perspective is therefore simultaneously legalist and skeptical: legalist because post-colonial sovereignty depends on the inviolability of borders, skeptical because the enforcement of that principle has been profoundly uneven. This duality is the perspective's distinctive contribution. It refuses both the Western tendency to treat international law as self-executing morality and the Russian tendency to treat law as mere rhetoric. Instead, it asks who has the power to name aggression, who bears the costs of enforcement, and whose territorial anxieties are recognized as security concerns.

At the level of the first key idea, the tension between self-determination and territorial inviolability is read

through the lens of decolonization rather than through the Euro-Atlantic vocabulary of minority rights. African political thought, from Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism to Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and Cabral's insistence that liberation must be rooted in the people's culture, treats self-determination primarily as the right of colonized peoples to sovereign statehood, not as a license for sub-state secession. Rodney's account of underdevelopment and Mamdani's analysis of the colonial state reinforce the point: African borders, however arbitrary, became the containers of post-colonial citizenship, and their disruption risks not liberation but fragmentation, warlordism, and external manipulation. Nyerere's defense of inherited colonial boundaries, later codified in the OAU's commitment to territorial integrity, reflects a pragmatic judgment that the alternative to *uti possidetis* is not justice but endless conflict. From this standpoint, Russia's invocation of self-determination for Crimea or the Donbas appears not as an emancipatory claim but as a great-power re-bordering exercise. Yet the African perspective also retains a critical memory of Western interventions justified by self-determination or human rights, from Libya to Kosovo, and therefore resists any simple alignment with NATO's legal narrative. The result is a position that defends territorial integrity as a shield for weak states while insisting that the principle's credibility depends on its universal application.

This is why the second key idea, annexation, carries particular weight. African states have direct experience of territorial seizure, settler colonialism, and externally engineered partition. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and of four Ukrainian oblasts in 2022 is condemned not only because it violates Article 2(4) of the UN Charter but because it revives a colonial logic of territorial acquisition by force. The African Union's Constitutive Act and the broader post-colonial legal consensus treat territorial integrity as a condition of sovereign equality. At the same time, the African perspective cannot ignore the Kosovo precedent. Western recognition of Kosovo's independence in 2008, after NATO's 1999 intervention, is frequently cited by African governments and scholars as evidence that the West applies self-determination selectively. The inconsistency is not a minor diplomatic embarrassment; it is a structural problem for the normative order. If territorial integrity is absolute when Russia violates it but negotiable when Western powers or their allies are involved, then the norm becomes an instrument of geopolitical alignment rather than a rule of law. African scholarship on global governance, including work by Grovogui on the racialized foundations of international order and by Mbembe on the necropolitics of sovereignty, helps explain why this inconsistency is read not as hypocrisy alone but as a feature of an international system in which some states are treated as subjects of law and others as objects of management. The African perspective thus contributes a historical sociology of legal inconsistency: it shows that the Ukraine war's legal framing is inseparable from longer patterns of imperial and post-imperial power.

The third key idea, the legality of hybrid warfare, is approached from a position of vulnerability rather than abstraction. African states are not the primary theater of the Russia-Ukraine cyber and information war, but they are deeply affected by the broader ecology of deniable force: private military companies, disinformation campaigns, cyber intrusions, and proxy interventions. The Wagner Group's activities in parts of Africa, the manipulation of electoral information environments, and the use of economic coercion all illustrate that hybrid warfare is not a novel Euro-Atlantic problem but a familiar mode of external domination. From an African perspective, the legal debate over whether a cyber operation crosses the use-of-force threshold is not merely technical; it is a question of who gets to define the threshold and whose suffering counts as an armed attack. The Tallinn Manual-style frameworks, developed largely by Western experts, may be analytically useful, but they risk universalizing Euro-Atlantic strategic assumptions. African states often lack the forensic capacity to attribute attacks, the institutional capacity to respond, and the diplomatic leverage to have their attributions accepted. Deniable actors therefore exploit a legal gray zone that is especially dangerous for weaker states. The African contribution here is to insist that lawfare must be evaluated not

only by its doctrinal coherence but by its distributive consequences: a legal regime that permits powerful states to act through proxies while demanding restraint from weaker states reproduces hierarchy under the guise of rules.

The fourth key idea, accountability through the ICC and ICJ, exposes one of the sharpest tensions in the African perspective. On one hand, African states and scholars have been among the most vocal critics of the International Criminal Court, arguing that its docket has disproportionately targeted African situations and that it functions as a tool of Western political pressure. This critique is not a rejection of accountability; it is a demand for impartiality. The ICC's arrest warrants in the Ukraine context, including those against Russian officials, are therefore viewed with a complex mixture of support and suspicion. Support, because the principle that leaders can be held individually accountable for aggression and war crimes is essential to any credible legal order; suspicion, because the same institutions that now pursue Russian officials have been slow or unwilling to pursue accountability for Western or allied conduct in other theaters. The ICJ, by contrast, is often seen as more legitimate because it is a state-to-state forum rooted in the UN Charter and because African states have used it in territorial and maritime disputes. The ICJ case *Ukraine v. Russia*, brought under the Genocide Convention, is significant for African observers not only because of its legal arguments but because it tests whether a great power can be subjected to judicial process at all. The African perspective contributes a demand for consistency: accountability must not be a privilege of the powerful. At the same time, it recognizes the limits of judicialization. Courts cannot enforce their judgments against states that reject their jurisdiction or possess nuclear and conventional deterrents. The lesson is not that law is useless, but that law without political power is fragile, and law with political power risks becoming an instrument of domination.

The fifth key idea, the politics of international law, is where the African perspective is most distinctive and most uncomfortable for Western audiences. UNGA resolutions on Ukraine, from ES-11/1 through ES-11/6, are often cited as evidence of global consensus. The African perspective complicates this reading. Many African states voted in favor of resolutions condemning aggression and affirming territorial integrity, reflecting genuine commitment to the Charter. Yet a significant number abstained on later resolutions, particularly those perceived as escalating, punitive, or disconnected from African priorities. These abstentions are frequently misread in Western commentary as moral failure or Russian influence. The African perspective reframes them as acts of strategic autonomy and as protests against the selective application of international law. African governments ask why the UN system can mobilize emergency sessions, sanctions, and legal accountability for Ukraine but not for conflicts in Africa, Palestine, or other regions. They ask why the Security Council's permanent members can block enforcement when their interests are at stake. They ask why the same states that invoke the Charter in Ukraine have historically undermined it elsewhere. This is not whataboutism in the crude sense; it is a structural critique of the international legal order's legitimacy deficit. Oyěwùmí's critique of epistemic colonialism and Tamale's decolonial legal scholarship remind us that the categories of international law—sovereignty, aggression, self-defense—are not culturally neutral; they are produced within power-laden institutions. The African perspective therefore contributes a demand that lawfare be judged by its capacity to protect the weak, not merely to discipline the adversary of the moment.

What does this perspective occlude? It can understate the agency and suffering of Ukrainians by subordinating their experience to a global critique of Western power. It can risk false equivalence between Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territory and Western interventions that, however flawed, were not always territorially acquisitive in the same way. It can also obscure internal African divisions: African states are not unified, and their votes reflect diverse interests, dependencies, and security calculations. Moreover, by emphasizing

inconsistency, the perspective may inadvertently weaken the very norm of territorial integrity that protects African states. If every invocation of international law is met with a charge of hypocrisy, the normative force of the law erodes for everyone, including those who need it most. The African perspective's strongest counterargument, therefore, is that inconsistency should be a reason to strengthen and universalize the law, not to abandon it. Its enduring contribution is to show that the lawfare of territorial integrity cannot be separated from the politics of global inequality: the same legal principles that protect Ukraine also protect Africa, but only if they are applied without the hierarchies that have historically defined the international order.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective The Chinese perspective on the lawfare of territorial integrity is anchored in a doctrine of sovereignty that is both principled and strategically calibrated. At its core is the insistence that territorial integrity and non-interference are foundational norms of the UN Charter, not optional constraints that can be waived when powerful states deem it necessary. From Beijing's standpoint, the Ukraine war is not simply a story of Russian aggression; it is also a story of a European security architecture that failed to accommodate legitimate security concerns and of a Western bloc that expanded its military alliance to Russia's borders while invoking international law selectively. This framing does not require endorsing annexation. China has repeatedly stated that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states should be respected, including Ukraine's, and it has not formally recognized Russia's annexation of Crimea or the four oblasts. Yet China's abstentions in key UNGA votes, including ES-11/1, and its opposition to sanctions reflect a judgment that the legal and political response to the war has been shaped by NATO's strategic interests rather than by neutral legal principle.

On the first key idea, China treats self-determination as subordinate to territorial integrity in the interstate context. Unlike Russia, which instrumentalizes self-determination to justify territorial change, China's own historical experience—Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong—makes it deeply hostile to secessionist claims. It therefore shares with African states a strong interest in the inviolability of borders. But China also insists on the concept of indivisible security: the security of one state cannot be built at the expense of another. This is the mechanism through which Beijing reframes the war's origins. NATO expansion is presented not as a legal violation but as a political cause that made conflict predictable. The Chinese perspective thus contributes a structural critique of the European security order, arguing that lawfare focused on Russian conduct while ignoring the security dilemma is incomplete. Its occlusion is that this critique can blur the distinction between explaining a conflict and justifying aggression, and it risks treating Ukraine's sovereign choices as subordinate to great-power bargaining.

On annexation, China's position is deliberately ambiguous. It avoids explicit recognition of Russian territorial claims, preserving its legal commitment to territorial integrity, but it also avoids condemning Russia with the clarity that Western states demand. This ambiguity is not merely tactical; it reflects a broader Chinese view that territorial questions should be resolved through negotiation rather than through legal adjudication imposed by adversarial blocs. The Kosovo precedent is invoked, though less aggressively than by Russia, to suggest that Western states have themselves weakened the norm they now defend. China's contribution is to highlight the fragility of territorial integrity when great powers treat it as a tool rather than a rule. Its occlusion is that ambiguity in the face of annexation undermines the very norm China claims to uphold, and it signals to smaller states that Chinese support for their territorial integrity may be conditional on Beijing's strategic interests.

On hybrid warfare, China's perspective is shaped by its own cyber capabilities and its skepticism toward Western attribution practices. Beijing generally opposes the militarization of cyberspace and insists that cyber operations should not be used as pretexts for escalation. It is wary of legal frameworks that allow

powerful states to label deniable operations as armed attacks, because such frameworks can be used to justify intervention. At the same time, China recognizes that deniable actors and information operations are features of modern conflict. Its contribution is to emphasize that thresholds for the use of force must be defined multilaterally, not by Western legal experts alone. Its occlusion is that China's own cyber activities and its tolerance for Russian information operations weaken its credibility as a defender of legal restraint.

On accountability, China is not a party to the Rome Statute and has consistently criticized the ICC as politicized. It views the ICJ as more legitimate but remains cautious about cases that it sees as vehicles for Western political pressure. In *Ukraine v. Russia*, China's interest lies in preserving judicial independence and avoiding precedents that could be turned against itself or its partners. The Chinese perspective contributes a reminder that international courts derive their authority from state consent and that overreach can undermine their legitimacy. Its occlusion is that this skepticism can slide into a defense of impunity for powerful states, including Russia, and can weaken the accountability mechanisms that smaller states need.

On the politics of international law, China's position is that the UN Charter must be applied consistently and that enforcement must not be monopolized by a single bloc. It supports UNGA resolutions in principle but resists those it sees as one-sided or as pretexts for sanctions and intervention. The Chinese perspective reveals the extent to which international law is embedded in great-power competition: legal claims are filtered through alliance structures, and enforcement follows geopolitical fault lines. Its contribution is to insist that a multipolar order requires multilateral legal processes. Its occlusion is that multipolarity without accountability can become a license for all great powers, including China, to act with impunity.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective The Russian perspective on the lawfare of territorial integrity is built on a narrative of historical justice, security necessity, and Western hypocrisy. From Moscow's standpoint, the Ukraine war is not an unprovoked aggression but the culmination of a post-Cold War order in which NATO expanded eastward, Russia was marginalized, and the legal norms of sovereignty were applied in a manner that served Western interests. Russia frames its actions as defensive and restorative: Crimea is presented as historically Russian and as having been transferred to Ukraine in 1954 under Soviet administrative arrangements; the Donbas and southern oblasts are presented as territories whose populations exercised self-determination in the face of a Ukrainian state that, in Russia's telling, became hostile to Russian speakers and aligned with NATO. This narrative is not merely propaganda; it draws on real grievances about NATO expansion and on a legal vocabulary—self-determination, humanitarian intervention, remedial secession—that Western states themselves have invoked in other contexts.

On the first key idea, Russia inverts the usual hierarchy between territorial integrity and self-determination. It argues that Ukraine's territorial integrity cannot be absolute when the state allegedly denies the rights of Russian-speaking populations and when the post-2014 government is portrayed as illegitimate. The Kosovo precedent is central here: if the West could recognize Kosovo's independence after NATO's intervention, Russia argues, then it cannot deny the same logic to Crimea or the Donbas. This is a powerful rhetorical move because it exposes genuine inconsistency in Western practice. The Russian perspective contributes the insight that legal norms are not self-interpreting and that their application is shaped by power. Its occlusion is that it instrumentalizes self-determination to justify military intervention and annexation, and it treats the populations of contested territories as objects of geopolitical bargaining rather than as agents of free choice.

On annexation, Russia claims that the 2014 and 2022 annexations were validated by referenda and that they reflect the will of local populations. Legally, this argument fails under international law because annexation by force is prohibited and because referenda conducted under military occupation lack legitimacy. But the

Russian perspective is not primarily legal in the Western sense; it is historical and political. It treats territory as an extension of national identity and security, and it views the post-Soviet borders as contingent and unjust. The contribution of this perspective is to force a confrontation with the fact that many post-Soviet borders were drawn by imperial administrators and that their legitimacy is not self-evident. Its occlusion is that it replaces one form of imperial border-making with another, and that it denies Ukrainians the same right to territorial integrity that Russia claims for itself.

On hybrid warfare, Russia denies responsibility for many cyber and information operations attributed to it, while simultaneously treating information warfare as a legitimate domain of state competition. It frames Western accusations as lawfare designed to delegitimize Russia and to justify sanctions. The Russian perspective contributes a critique of attribution practices, noting that cyber operations are difficult to trace and that accusations often serve political purposes. Its occlusion is that denial and ambiguity are themselves tools of hybrid warfare, and that Russia's use of deniable actors, including private military companies and proxies, erodes the distinction between war and peace in ways that harm weaker states as well as Ukraine.

On accountability, Russia rejects the jurisdiction of the ICC and has withdrawn from or ignored international legal processes it deems politicized. It views the ICJ case *Ukraine v. Russia* as an abuse of the Genocide Convention and as an attempt to use law as a weapon. The Russian perspective contributes a skepticism toward judicialization that is shared, in different forms, by other non-Western states: courts are not neutral when they are embedded in a political order dominated by adversaries. Its occlusion is that this skepticism becomes a shield for impunity, and that rejecting accountability for aggression undermines the legal protections that Russia itself might need in other contexts.

On the politics of international law, Russia argues that the UN system has been captured by the West and that UNGA resolutions on Ukraine are expressions of bloc politics rather than universal law. It points to Western double standards on Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, and other cases. This critique has real force, but its occlusion is that Russia uses the charge of hypocrisy to justify its own violations rather than to demand consistent application of the law. The Russian perspective's contribution is to expose the politicization of international law; its danger is that it reduces law to power, leaving no normative ground for restraining any state, including Russia.

2.7.4 Western Perspective The Western perspective on the lawfare of territorial integrity presents the Ukraine war as a clear case of aggression against a sovereign state and as a test of whether the post-1945 legal order can survive great-power revisionism. From this standpoint, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the four oblasts is an unambiguous violation of Article 2(4) of the UN Charter, and the international community has a duty to defend Ukraine's territorial integrity through legal, diplomatic, and material means. The West's position is not that international law is perfect; it is that the alternative to defending legal norms is a world in which borders are changed by force. This perspective is strongest when it is self-critical, acknowledging that Western practice has not always lived up to its principles, particularly in Kosovo, Iraq, and Libya. But it insists that inconsistency does not invalidate the norm: the proper response to double standards is to correct them, not to abandon the law.

On the first key idea, the West generally prioritizes territorial integrity over self-determination in the interstate context, while maintaining that internal self-determination—minority rights, autonomy, democratic participation—is the appropriate framework for addressing grievances within states. This is the position articulated by scholars such as Weller (2022), who emphasize that self-determination in the post-colonial era has been largely internalized and that external self-determination leading to secession is exceptional and

heavily constrained. The Western perspective thus rejects Russia's claim that Crimea or the Donbas had a right to secede and join Russia. Its contribution is to provide a coherent legal framework that protects state stability. Its occlusion is that this framework can appear rigid when applied to states with contested legitimacy or severe minority grievances, and it can be perceived as protecting the territorial status quo even when that status quo is unjust.

On annexation, the West's position is unequivocal: annexation by force is illegal and will not be recognized. The non-recognition of Crimea and the four oblasts is a central pillar of Western policy, reinforced by sanctions and diplomatic isolation. The Kosovo precedent is the most difficult point for this perspective. Western states recognized Kosovo's independence after a NATO intervention that lacked Security Council authorization, and they justified it on humanitarian grounds. The West's self-critique, increasingly visible in legal scholarship, acknowledges that Kosovo weakened the consistency of the territorial integrity norm. But it distinguishes Kosovo from Crimea on several grounds: Kosovo followed a decade of repression and international administration; Crimea was annexed by a neighboring power through military force; and Kosovo's recognition was not accompanied by territorial absorption into another state. Whether these distinctions are persuasive outside the West is an open question. The Western perspective's contribution is to articulate a principled non-recognition policy; its occlusion is that this policy can appear as geopolitical enforcement rather than legal consistency.

On hybrid warfare, the West has invested heavily in legal and technical frameworks for attributing cyber operations and defining thresholds for the use of force. The Tallinn Manual process and national attribution statements reflect a belief that law can adapt to new domains. The Western perspective contributes expertise and institutional capacity. Its occlusion is that these frameworks are often developed by Western experts and applied to adversaries, while Western cyber operations are treated as lawful or unacknowledged. This asymmetry fuels the charge of lawfare and undermines the legitimacy of the legal order.

On accountability, the West has been the primary supporter of the ICC and ICJ in the Ukraine context. It views these institutions as essential to ending impunity and as mechanisms for documenting atrocities. The ICJ case *Ukraine v. Russia* and the ICC arrest warrants are seen as evidence that international law can reach even powerful states. Hathaway (2023) and other scholars have emphasized the importance of legal accountability for maintaining the normative order. The Western contribution is institutional investment and legal expertise. Its occlusion is the risk of conflating legal authority with political power, underestimating the legitimacy costs of inconsistency, and treating abstentions as moral failure rather than as reasoned dissent.

On the politics of international law, the West relies on UNGA resolutions, sanctions, and legal proceedings to build a global coalition in defense of Ukraine. It interprets high vote counts as evidence of international consensus. The Western perspective contributes a normative defense of the Charter and a commitment to multilateral institutions. Its occlusion is that it can underestimate the extent to which these institutions are perceived as Western-dominated, and it can mistake procedural majorities for genuine legitimacy. The lesson from the African and Chinese perspectives is that enforcement without legitimacy is fragile.

2.7.5 UN Perspective The UN perspective on the lawfare of territorial integrity is institutional rather than partisan. It begins from the Charter's dual commitments to sovereign equality and territorial integrity, and it seeks to manage the tension between self-determination and non-intervention through procedures rather than through the preferences of any single state. The UN system does not have a single voice on Ukraine; it contains the Security Council, where Russia's veto has blocked enforcement, and the General Assembly, where large majorities have condemned aggression and affirmed territorial integrity. The UN perspective is

therefore defined by a gap between normative aspiration and coercive capacity. It contributes the framework within which all other perspectives operate, but it also embodies the structural weaknesses that make lawfare possible.

On the first key idea, the UN Charter provides the legal vocabulary for both sides of the tension. Article 2(4) prohibits the use of force against territorial integrity, while the decolonization resolutions and human rights covenants affirm self-determination. The UN's historical practice has largely internalized self-determination within existing states, but it has not fully resolved the question of when, if ever, secession is permissible. The Ukraine war has exposed this ambiguity. The UN perspective contributes a procedural approach: disputes should be resolved through peaceful means, and unilateral territorial change by force is prohibited. Its occlusion is that procedures cannot resolve conflicts when a permanent member is a party and when the Security Council is paralyzed.

On annexation, the UN's position is clear in principle and weak in practice. The General Assembly has repeatedly affirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity and condemned annexation, most notably in ES-11/4 and related resolutions. But the Security Council cannot act against Russia because of its veto. This creates a situation in which the UN can name violations but cannot enforce its judgments. The UN perspective contributes the normative clarity of the Charter and the institutional forum of the General Assembly. Its occlusion is that without enforcement, resolutions risk becoming symbolic, and the gap between law and power becomes a source of cynicism.

On hybrid warfare, the UN has struggled to develop legal frameworks for cyber operations and deniable actors. The Group of Governmental Experts and the Open-Ended Working Group have produced norms for responsible state behavior in cyberspace, but these are non-binding and lack enforcement mechanisms. The UN perspective contributes a multilateral forum for developing norms. Its occlusion is that the pace of norm development lags behind technological change, and that powerful states can exploit this gap.

On accountability, the UN supports the ICJ and ICC as complementary mechanisms. The ICJ case *Ukraine v. Russia* is a significant test of the Court's ability to adjudicate disputes involving great powers. The UN perspective contributes institutional legitimacy and a commitment to the rule of law. Its occlusion is that the Court's judgments depend on state compliance, and that the UN cannot compel a nuclear-armed permanent member to submit to judicial authority.

On the politics of international law, the UN is both the arena and the victim of lawfare. UNGA resolutions on Ukraine, from ES-11/1 through ES-11/6, demonstrate the Assembly's ability to express global opinion, but they also reveal its limitations. The UN perspective contributes the aspiration of universal membership and the principle that all states are equal before the law. Its occlusion is the structural inability to enforce against permanent members, and the gap between the UN's normative aspirations and its coercive capacity. The lesson of the Ukraine war, from the UN perspective, is that international law requires not only norms and courts but also a political will to enforce them that the current institutional structure cannot generate.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Exposes the Kosovo–Crimea double standard; centers sovereignty as the post-colonial foundational norm; shows that inconsistent application of self-determination delegitimizes the entire rules-based order	May underweight Ukrainian popular agency and the specificity of each case; risks equating all territorial changes regardless of consent or coercion	Sovereignty and non-interference are paramount; self-determination must be applied consistently or it becomes an instrument of power	African states' abstentions in UNGA votes on Ukraine (2014, 2022); AU positions on Western Sahara; the contested reading of the Kosovo ICJ advisory opinion (2010)	Western: Kosovo was a sui generis case of humanitarian emergency and prolonged international administration, not a precedent for forcible annexation
Chinese	Territorial integrity as non-negotiable; NATO expansion as a security-dilemma root cause; "indivisible security" as a systemic principle	Understates Russian agency in choosing war; the NATO-responsibility framing can function as exculpation for aggression	Sovereignty and territorial integrity are foundational; one state's security cannot be purchased at another's expense	China's abstentions in UNGA ES-11 votes; position papers on Ukraine; the Global Security Initiative	Western/Russian: territorial integrity cannot shield aggression; NATO expansion was the sovereign choice of new members, not an imposed threat

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Historical claims to Crimea and the Donbas; self-determination referenda as legal justification; critique of Western double standards	Referenda held under military occupation; ignores Ukrainian sovereignty and the Budapest Memorandum guarantees	Historical justice and self-determination of Russian-speaking populations; multipolar order against Western hegemony	The 2014 Crimea referendum; Putin's addresses; Russia's ICJ arguments on jurisdiction	Western/UN: referenda under occupation violate international law; self-determination does not permit forcible annexation
Western	Defense of the Charter's prohibition on use of force; ICC/ICJ accountability mechanisms; sanctions as enforcement	Kosovo self-critique: the 1999 intervention and 2008 recognition created a precedent Russia exploits; selective application of international law	Rules-based international order; territorial integrity of Ukraine; accountability for aggression	UNGA ES-11/1 (141 votes); ICC arrest warrants for Putin and Lvova-Belova; ICJ provisional measures (March 2022)	African/Russian: the Kosovo precedent undermines claims of consistency; Western powers have themselves violated territorial integrity
UN	Charter framework; ICJ and ICC as accountability mechanisms; UNGA as forum for global opinion	Structural inability to enforce against permanent members; gap between normative aspiration and coercive capacity	Universal membership; equality of states before the law; peaceful settlement of disputes	UNGA resolutions ES-11/1 through ES-11/6; ICJ provisional measures order (March 2022); ICC arrest warrants	All perspectives: the UN cannot enforce its own norms against a permanent member; the Security Council is paralyzed by veto

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: ICJ Ukraine v. Russia (2017–present) — the Genocide Convention case and its implications for territorial integrity

Levels of analysis. At the *individual* level, the case turns on the legal strategies of named litigators and judges, on the claims made by political leaders about genocide in the Donbas, and on the individual victims whose suffering is invoked by both sides as evidentiary grist. At the *state* level, Ukraine and Russia are the litigants: Ukraine seeks to use the Genocide Convention's compromissory clause to bring Russia before the Court and to delegitimize the factual predicate of the invasion, while Russia contests jurisdiction and argues that the Convention does not regulate the use of force. At the *systemic* level, the case is a test of the ICJ as an institution, of the Genocide Convention as a treaty regime, and of whether the post-1945 legal order can adjudicate a dispute between a permanent Security Council member and a state it has invaded. At the *transnational* level, the case is shaped by international civil society, by legal scholars and NGOs that file amicus-style interventions and commentary, by diaspora communities that mobilize around the proceedings, and by the broader community of states whose recognition practices and voting behavior in the UNGA constitute the political environment in which the judgment will land.

Mechanism section. The mechanism at work is lawfare: the strategic use of legal instruments to achieve objectives that are simultaneously legal, political, and military. Ukraine instituted proceedings in January 2017 under Article IX of the Genocide Convention, alleging that Russia had violated the Convention by falsely accusing Ukraine of committing genocide in the Donbas and by using that fabricated claim to justify its 2022 invasion. The legal architecture is deliberately asymmetrical. Ukraine does not need to prove that Russia committed genocide; it needs to establish that Russia's *claim* of genocide was false and that the Convention cannot be invoked to authorize the use of force. Russia's counter-strategy is jurisdictional: it argues that the Court lacks jurisdiction because the dispute is really about the use of force and territorial integrity, matters outside the Convention's scope, and that Ukraine's application is an abuse of process designed to litigate the war by other means. The mechanism therefore operates on two registers. On the legal register, it tests the interpretive boundaries of the Genocide Convention and the compromissory clause. On the political register, it shapes the narrative environment: a provisional measures order in March 2022 directing Russia to suspend military operations gave Ukraine a legal victory that could be cited in diplomatic forums even though it was not enforced. The mechanism is not adjudication in the domestic sense; it is the production of legal authority that can be mobilized in the political arena. The gap between the order and its enforcement is itself part of the mechanism, because it reveals the dependence of international law on state compliance and on the political will of other states to give legal rulings practical effect. Weller (2022) has argued that the Ukraine litigation exemplifies how states use international courts to crystallize legal norms even where coercive enforcement is unavailable, while Hathaway (2023) has emphasized that accountability mechanisms derive their force not from judicial power alone but from the political coalitions that sustain them.

Perspective reconstruction. The African perspective reads the case as a study in the selective activation of international law. From this vantage point, the Genocide Convention is a genuine legal instrument, but its invocation by Ukraine is intelligible only against the backdrop of a system in which powerful states have historically used legal categories to legitimize intervention while exempting their own conduct. The African critique does not deny that Russia's invasion violated the Charter; it insists that the credibility of the legal process depends on whether the same standards would be applied to Western interventions that have also involved contested claims about humanitarian necessity. The Kosovo precedent looms here: if the ICJ can be asked to adjudicate the legality of Russia's use of force, African jurists ask why no comparable judicial

process followed the 1999 NATO bombing or the 2003 Iraq invasion. The African perspective therefore treats the case as both a legitimate legal proceeding and a test of whether the international legal order can overcome its own history of asymmetric enforcement. It is the longest and most developed of the five perspectives because it alone frames the case as a question about the legitimacy of the legal order itself rather than about the conduct of one party.

The Chinese perspective treats the case as a legitimate but limited legal proceeding that should not be conflated with the political question of the war's origins. Beijing's position is that the Genocide Convention is a serious treaty and that the Court has a role in clarifying its scope, but that the case cannot resolve the underlying security dilemma that produced the conflict. China's abstentions in UNGA votes on Ukraine reflect a judgment that legal proceedings against Russia should not be weaponized to foreclose diplomatic settlement. The Chinese perspective contributes the insight that lawfare can harden positions and reduce the space for negotiation, and it occludes the possibility that legal accountability might itself be a precondition for durable peace.

The Russian perspective treats the case as an illegitimate exercise of lawfare by Ukraine and its Western backers. Moscow argues that the Court lacks jurisdiction, that the Genocide Convention does not cover the use of force, and that Ukraine's application is a political maneuver designed to obtain a legal stamp for a narrative that justifies continued Western military support. Russia's strongest argument is procedural: if the Convention's compromissory clause can be stretched to cover any dispute in which genocide is mentioned, then the clause becomes a general jurisdiction clause over the use of force, which the drafters did not intend. The Russian perspective contributes a genuine interpretive caution about treaty overreach, but it occludes the fact that Russia itself invoked genocide as a justification for invasion, thereby making the Convention's meaning directly relevant.

The Western perspective treats the case as a central pillar of the accountability architecture for the Ukraine war. From this vantage point, the ICJ proceedings complement the ICC's criminal investigations and the UNGA's political resolutions, forming a multi-layered legal response to aggression. The Western view emphasizes that the March 2022 provisional measures order, even if unenforced, established a legal record that Russia's military operations lacked a legal basis under the Genocide Convention. The Western perspective contributes the institutionalist conviction that law, even without immediate enforcement, shapes state behavior over time. Its occlusion is the Kosovo self-critique: the same states that now invoke the ICJ's authority declined to submit their own uses of force to comparable judicial scrutiny, and this asymmetry is visible to the rest of the world.

The UN perspective treats the case as an expression of the Charter's aspiration that disputes be settled by peaceful means, including judicial settlement. The Court's role is not to end the war but to clarify the law, and the UN framework assumes that legal clarification contributes to eventual resolution. The UN perspective contributes the normative commitment to universal judicial process and the principle that even permanent members are subject to legal scrutiny. Its occlusion is structural: the Court has no enforcement mechanism of its own, and its provisional measures depend on the Security Council, where Russia holds a veto. The UN perspective therefore reveals the paradox at the heart of the case: the legal order can produce a ruling against a permanent member, but it cannot compel compliance, and the gap between ruling and enforcement is the space in which lawfare operates.

Explicit adjudication. The Western perspective best explains the *institutional* logic of the case: the ICJ proceedings are intelligible as part of a deliberate strategy to build a multi-layered legal record against Russia, combining the Genocide Convention, the ICC, and UNGA resolutions into a cumulative accountability

architecture. The mechanism of lawfare is most clearly visible from this angle, because it shows how legal instruments are deployed in coordination with diplomatic and military strategy. However, the Western perspective misses what the African perspective captures: the case's legitimacy in the eyes of the global majority depends on whether the legal order can demonstrate that it applies the same standards to all states, including those that have historically used force without judicial consequence. The African perspective therefore provides the necessary corrective, not by denying the legal merits of Ukraine's claim, but by insisting that the case be read as a test of the international legal order's own credibility. The Chinese perspective adds a further caution: even a legally sound proceeding can become an obstacle to peace if it is treated as a substitute for diplomacy. The Russian perspective, despite its procedural objections, correctly identifies the risk of treaty overreach, though it undermines its own credibility by having invoked the very Convention it now seeks to exclude. The UN perspective captures the structural constraint: the case can clarify the law but cannot enforce it. The best-supported synthesis is that the ICJ case is simultaneously a genuine legal proceeding and an instrument of lawfare, and that its ultimate significance will be determined not by the judgment alone but by whether the international community can close the enforcement gap that the case has exposed.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks:

1. **Mechanism identification.** State the precise legal mechanism Russia deploys when it argues that Western recognition of Kosovo but rejection of Crimea is inconsistent. Is it an argument about self-determination, about precedent, or about selective enforcement? Specify which, and identify the analogical structure it relies on.

2. **Scope condition.** The Western "sui generis" defense claims Kosovo is unique. Identify the three scope conditions Western lawyers cite (humanitarian emergency, loss of sovereign legitimacy, international administration) and state which of the five key ideas from this lesson each maps onto.

3. **Levels of analysis.** At which level—individual, state, systemic, or transnational—does the inconsistency argument carry the greatest explanatory weight, and why does it weaken at the other levels?

4. **ICJ advisory opinion.** The ICJ's 2010 advisory opinion on Kosovo held that the declaration of independence was not prohibited by international law. Does this ruling support Russia's position on Crimea? Adjudicate with evidence, specifying what the Court explicitly declined to address.

5. **African perspective.** How does the Kosovo/Crimea double standard affect African states' assessment of the international legal order's legitimacy, drawing on the African perspective's emphasis on sovereignty, consistency, and the critique of power-structured norms?

6. **Falsification.** What evidence would falsify the claim that Western policy is driven by geopolitical interest rather than legal principle? Specify one observable implication that, if observed, would weaken the geopolitical-interest hypothesis.

MODEL ANSWER (continuous prose):

The Kosovo-Crimea comparison is the most frequently invoked inconsistency argument in contemporary international law, and it requires careful disaggregation of legal mechanism, scope condition, and level of analysis. Russia's argument is not primarily about self-determination as a substantive right; it is about precedent

and selective enforcement. Moscow contends that the West established a precedent in 2008—recognizing a unilateral declaration of independence from a sovereign state without that state's consent—and cannot now invoke territorial integrity to deny the same outcome to Crimea. The mechanism is analogical: if Kosovo's secession was lawful or at least tolerated, then Crimea's must be too, absent a principled distinction. This is a legal-formal argument dressed in political rhetoric, and its force depends on whether the cases are genuinely comparable.

The Western "sui generis" defense rests on three scope conditions. First, Kosovo followed a humanitarian emergency: Serbian forces had engaged in ethnic cleansing, and NATO's 1999 intervention—however contested its legality—was framed as protecting a population from atrocities. Crimea in 2014 involved no comparable humanitarian crisis; the Russian-speaking population was not under threat of mass violence. Second, Serbia had forfeited sovereign legitimacy through systematic abuse, whereas Ukraine in 2014 was a functioning democracy with an elected government, however contested its legitimacy after the Maidan transition. Third, Kosovo was administered by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) for nearly a decade before independence, embedding the process in an international legal framework; Crimea's referendum occurred under Russian military occupation, without international administration or meaningful observation. These scope conditions map onto the lesson's key ideas: the first onto the self-determination versus territorial inviolability tension; the second onto annexation's legality; the third onto the politics of enforcement.

At the level of analysis, the inconsistency argument carries greatest weight at the systemic level. Systemically, the international order's legitimacy depends on consistent application of rules; when powerful states apply self-determination selectively, weaker states perceive hypocrisy, eroding the normative foundation of territorial integrity. At the state level, the argument weakens because Ukraine and Serbia are not equivalent actors—Ukraine did not commit atrocities against its Russian-speaking population, and its territorial integrity was not forfeited. At the individual level, the argument is weakest: the lived experience of Kosovars under Serbian repression differs fundamentally from that of Crimeans under Ukrainian governance. The transnational level introduces complexity: diaspora communities and international civil society have contested both cases, but their influence has been asymmetric.

The ICJ's 2010 advisory opinion on Kosovo does not support Russia's position. The Court held narrowly that the declaration of independence itself was not prohibited by international law; it explicitly declined to address whether secession was lawful, whether recognition was required, or whether Kosovo's independence violated Serbia's territorial integrity. The opinion was procedural, not substantive. Russia's extrapolation—that the ICJ blessed Kosovo's secession and therefore must bless Crimea's—overreads the ruling. The Court's caution was deliberate: it avoided creating a general right of secession. Hathaway's analysis of the politics of international law underscores that advisory opinions are not binding and that their interpretive scope is contested; the Kosovo opinion has been invoked by both sides, but its actual holding favors neither a general right of secession nor a blanket prohibition.

From the African perspective, the Kosovo-Crimea double standard is not merely a legal puzzle but a legitimacy crisis. African states, many of which face secessionist pressures and whose borders were drawn by colonial powers, depend on the principle of territorial integrity for survival. When Western powers recognize Kosovo but condemn Crimea, African observers see not legal principle but geopolitical interest: the West supports self-determination when it serves its strategic goals and territorial integrity when it does not. This inconsistency reinforces the African critique—articulated by scholars such as Grovogui and Mamdani—that international law is not neutral but structured by power. The African vantage point reveals what Western

legalism occludes: the selective application of norms undermines the very order the West claims to defend. African states' abstentions and divided votes in UNGA resolutions on Ukraine partly reflect this skepticism, not sympathy for Russia's aggression.

Falsifying the geopolitical-interest thesis would require evidence that Western recognition decisions track legal criteria rather than strategic alignment. One observable implication: if a Western ally sought secession under conditions identical to Kosovo's (humanitarian emergency, international administration, loss of sovereign legitimacy), Western states would recognize it even at strategic cost; conversely, if a Russian adversary sought secession under Crimea-like conditions, Western states would refuse recognition even when strategically convenient. The absence of such counter-examples—no Western recognition of secession in a strategically costly case, no refusal in a strategically convenient one—would strengthen the geopolitical-interest hypothesis. The available record, including Western support for South Sudan's independence (strategically aligned) and opposition to Somaliland's (strategically inconvenient despite democratic governance), suggests the hypothesis is not easily falsified.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description (150–200 words):

In 2023, a non-recognized entity in the South Caucasus—governed by a local administration with de facto control since a 1990s war, home to a population that shares ethnicity and language with a neighboring great power—holds a referendum on accession to that great power. The great power's military forces are present in the territory, officially designated as "peacekeepers" under a 2020 ceasefire agreement. The local administration cites the Kosovo precedent and the principle of self-determination; the parent state, internationally recognized, condemns the referendum as illegal and demands territorial integrity. Western states denounce the move as annexation and threaten sanctions; the great power defends it as an exercise of popular will. The ICJ has been requested to issue an advisory opinion. Your memo must determine whether this case is legally closer to Kosovo or to Crimea, and what follows for recognition policy.

(b) Required memo headings (respond to each as a prompt):

- **Mechanism:** Identify the legal mechanism at stake (self-determination vs. territorial integrity) and specify how the presence of foreign military forces affects the threshold analysis for use of force and annexation.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct the positions of African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on this case, steel-manning each from within its own premises.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare this case to Kosovo (2008) and Crimea (2014), specifying which scope conditions match and which diverge, and state whether the analogy to either is legally sound.
- **Falsifiers:** State what evidence would falsify your conclusion about whether this case is closer to Kosovo or Crimea, including one observable implication at the systemic level.

(c) Self-check line: Did you distinguish description (what happened) from explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen), and prescription (what should be done)?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which of the following best captures the legal distinction that Western states invoke to justify recognizing Kosovo but rejecting Crimea?

A. Kosovo's declaration of independence was approved by the UN Security Council, while Crimea's was not.

B. Kosovo followed a humanitarian emergency and international administration, whereas Crimea involved annexation by force without comparable conditions.

C. The ICJ ruled that Kosovo's secession was lawful, but has not ruled on Crimea.

D. Russia consented to Kosovo's independence but not to Crimea's.

Correct answer: B

Distractor diagnoses:

- **A is wrong** because the UN Security Council never approved Kosovo's independence; Russia and China opposed it, and the declaration was made unilaterally. This option confuses Security Council authorization with the absence of a veto, misidentifying the institutional mechanism at stake.
- **C is wrong** because the ICJ's 2010 advisory opinion explicitly declined to rule on whether secession was lawful; it addressed only whether the declaration of independence itself violated international law. Treating the opinion as a substantive endorsement of secession overreads its narrow, procedural holding.
- **D is wrong** because Russia opposed Kosovo's independence and continued to recognize it as part of Serbia; Russian consent is not the operative variable. The distinction Western states draw concerns humanitarian conditions and international administration, not the consent of the annexing power.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — UNGA Resolutions on Ukraine and Territorial Integrity (2014–2023)

Resolution	Adopted	Vote (Yes / No / Abstain)	Core legal claim
68/262 — Territorial integrity of Ukraine	27 Mar 2014	100 / 11 / 58	Affirms Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders; declares the 16 Mar 2014 Crimea referendum invalid
ES-11/1 — Aggression against Ukraine	2 Mar 2022	141 / 5 / 35	Deplores the aggression; demands immediate Russian withdrawal; reaffirms sovereignty and territorial integrity

Resolution	Adopted	Vote (Yes / No / Abstain)	Core legal claim
ES-11/2 — Humanitarian consequences	24 Mar 2022	140 / 5 / 38	Demands protection of civilians; calls for humanitarian corridors
ES-11/3 — Suspension of Russia from the Human Rights Council	7 Apr 2022	93 / 24 / 58	Suspends Russia's membership in the HRC
ES-11/4 — Furtherance of remedy and reparation	14 Nov 2022	94 / 14 / 73	Recognizes the need for an international mechanism for reparations for damage caused by the aggression
ES-11/5 — Principles of the Charter of the United Nations	23 Feb 2023	141 / 7 / 32	Reaffirms the principles of the Charter, including territorial integrity and the prohibition on the use of force

Vote figures are as recorded in the official UNGA records; minor discrepancies across secondary tabulations exist.

Table 2 — ICJ Proceedings Involving Ukraine and Russia

Case (short title)	Filed	Provisional measures	Disposition / status
Ukraine v. Russia (CERD/ICSFT) — *Application of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*	16 Jan 2017	Order, 19 Apr 2017 (partial)	Judgment on the merits, 31 Jan 2024 (claims partially upheld; several dismissed)

Case (short title)	Filed	Provisional measures	Disposition / status
Ukraine v. Russia (Genocide Convention) — *Allegations of Genocide under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*	26 Feb 2022	Order, 16 Mar 2022 (Russia must immediately suspend military operations)	Pending; jurisdiction and admissibility phase; Russia has not complied with the provisional-measures order
Russia v. Ukraine (counter-claim, Genocide Convention)	Filed in response	—	Dismissed / not entertained as a separate case; Russia's allegations of genocide in Donbas rejected by the Court's preliminary findings

Table 3 — ICC Arrest Warrants and Recognition Status of Annexed Territories

Item	Date	Status / count
ICC arrest warrant — Vladimir Putin	17 Mar 2023	Outstanding; alleged responsibility for unlawful deportation of children
ICC arrest warrant — Maria Lvova-Belova	17 Mar 2023	Outstanding; same alleged crimes
States recognizing Crimea as part of Russia	2014–present	A small number (Russia, Syria, North Korea, and a few others); near-universal non-recognition
States recognizing the four annexed oblasts (Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia)	2022–present	Effectively only Russia and a handful of aligned states; near-universal non-recognition
States that voted "no" on ES-11/1 (2 Mar 2022)	—	5 (Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Russia, Syria)

Table 4 — Selected Hybrid-Warfare Incidents (Cyber and Deniable Actors), 2014–2022

Incident	Year	Attribution (public)	Legal characterization contested
NotPetya destructive malware	2017	Attributed to Russian military intelligence (GRU) by multiple states	Whether it constitutes a "use of force" under Article 2(4) UN Charter

Incident	Year	Attribution (public)	Legal characterization contested
Ukraine power-grid cyberattacks	2015, 2016	Attributed to Russian state-linked actors	Whether cyber operations below kinetic threshold trigger self-defense
"Little green men" / unmarked forces in Crimea	2014	Russian special forces (later acknowledged by Putin)	Whether deniable deployment constitutes "armed attack" under Article 51
Pre-invasion cyber operations against Ukrainian government sites	Feb 2022	Attributed to Russian state actors	Whether preparatory cyber operations are part of an armed attack

Analysis Questions

1. **Trend.** The UNGA vote in favor of territorial-integrity resolutions rose from 100 (68/262, 2014) to 141 (ES-11/1, 2022) and held at 141 (ES-11/5, 2023), while "no" votes fell from 11 to 5–7. What does this trajectory suggest about the breadth of the coalition supporting the legal norm of territorial integrity, and what does the persistence of a stable bloc of abstentions (32–58) suggest about the limits of that consensus?

2. **Level of analysis.** The ICJ issued a provisional-measures order on 16 March 2022 requiring Russia to suspend military operations, yet Russia did not comply and the case remains pending. Is this enforcement gap best explained at the state level (Russia's refusal), the systemic level (absence of Security Council enforcement under Chapter VII), or the transnational level (the role of non-state legal advocacy and civil-society documentation)? Justify your answer with evidence from the tables.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives reads the *same* UNGA vote of 141–5–35 on ES-11/1: (a) African — sovereignty plus the inconsistency critique (Kosovo vs. Crimea); (b) Chinese — territorial integrity plus the NATO-responsibility framing; (c) Russian — self-determination plus historical claims; (d) Western — international-law defense plus the Kosovo self-critique; (e) UN — Charter, ICJ, and the failure of enforcement. For each, state what the vote *confirms* and what it *occludes*.

4. **Interpretation.** Does the near-consensus UNGA vote create a binding legal obligation on states to non-recognize the annexed territories, or does it remain a political expression of opinio juris? Distinguish the legal status of UNGA resolutions (recommendatory under Articles 10–14) from the customary-international-law status of the non-recognition principle, citing the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law and the ICJ's *Namibia* advisory opinion as the relevant doctrinal anchors.

5. **Limitation.** The tables capture formal votes, judicial filings, and arrest warrants, but they do not capture: (a) the volume of state practice of non-recognition in bilateral treaties and diplomatic correspondence; (b) the economic and military assistance flows that constitute the material enforcement of the norm; (c) the domestic legal proceedings in third states. What is the most important thing these

data *cannot* tell us about whether the law of territorial integrity is actually being enforced?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Territorial-Integrity Triangle" **What to draw.** A large equilateral triangle on a white-board or page. At each vertex, place a bold label: top vertex — "TERRITORIAL INVIOLABILITY (Art. 2(4))"; bottom-left vertex — "SELF-DETERMINATION (Art. 1(2), ICCPR Art. 1)"; bottom-right vertex — "EFFECTIVE CONTROL / FACTS ON THE GROUND." Draw the three sides as thick lines. Inside the triangle, draw a smaller, shaded triangle labeled "LAWFARE ZONE — where legal claims are deployed to legitimize or contest control." Place a small circle at the centroid labeled "UKRAINE 2014–2024."

How to label it. Along the left side, write "Kosovo 2008 (West: self-determination prevails)"; along the right side, write "Crimea 2014 (Russia: self-determination prevails)"; along the base, write "Donbas 2022 (Russia: historical/ethnic claim)." Add arrows showing which vertex each case pulls toward.

Perspective overlay to annotate. In a margin box labeled "AFRICAN (primary)," write: "The triangle is not neutral — the vertex that 'wins' depends on who controls the Security Council and the recognition practice of former colonial powers. Kosovo and Crimea are structurally identical claims adjudicated by power, not by principle." In smaller margin boxes: "CHINESE: all three vertices must yield to sovereignty and non-interference"; "RUSSIAN: self-determination vertex is underweighted in Western practice"; "WESTERN: effective control must never ripen into title (Stimson Doctrine)"; "UN: the Charter is the triangle's frame; enforcement is the missing side."

Visual 2 — "UNGA Vote Map (ES-11/1, 2 March 2022)" **What to draw.** A simple world map (Mercator or Robinson projection) on a large sheet. Shade countries in three colors: dark green for "Yes" (141), red for "No" (5), and light gray for "Abstain" (35). Use a legend in the bottom-left corner. Draw a small inset box listing the five "No" votes: Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Russia, Syria.

How to label it. Title the map "ES-11/1: Aggression against Ukraine — 141-5-35." Add a subtitle: "The largest UNGA majority on a use-of-force question since the Korean War era." Place a callout over Africa noting the abstention pattern (several African states abstained, reflecting non-alignment and the Kosovo-inconsistency critique). Place a callout over Asia noting China's abstention and its "NATO responsibility" framing.

Perspective overlay to annotate. Draw five small flag-icons or lettered boxes around the map's border: "A — African: the map shows sovereignty consensus but hides the Kosovo double standard"; "C — Chinese: abstention is not neutrality; it is a vote against unilateral sanctions logic"; "R — Russian: the five 'no' votes are the honest minority"; "W — Western: the green majority is the rules-based order speaking"; "U — UN: the map is a snapshot of political will, not a measure of enforceable law." Add a final annotation: "What the map cannot show: the 35 abstentions include states that reject the aggression but refuse to endorse a resolution they read as Western-led."

Visual 3 — "The Lawfare Stack" **What to draw.** A vertical stack of five horizontal bands, bottom to top, each a different color: (1) bottom band — "UN CHARTER (Arts. 2(4), 51, 2(7)) — the constitutional floor"; (2) "CUSTOMARY LAW (non-recognition, *Namibia* advisory opinion, Stimson Doctrine)"; (3) "TREATY LAW (Genocide Convention, CERD, ICSFT, Geneva Conventions)"; (4) "JUDICIAL BODIES (ICJ, ICC)

— adjudication without enforcement"; (5) top band — "POLITICAL BODIES (UNGA, Security Council) — resolutions and vetoes." Draw vertical arrows between bands labeled "claim" (upward) and "enforcement gap" (downward, dashed). On the right side, draw a bracket labeled "WHERE LAWFARE OPERATES" spanning bands 3–5.

How to label it. On the left, annotate each band with the relevant case: Charter → "Russia's Art. 51 self-defense claim (rejected)"; Customary → "Non-recognition of Crimea"; Treaty → "Ukraine v. Russia (Genocide Convention)"; Judicial → "ICC arrest warrants (unexecuted)"; Political → "ES-11/1 through ES-11/6." Add a small "LEAK" icon (dashed circle) at the junction between bands 4 and 5 labeled "Enforcement leak: no Chapter VII resolution possible (veto)."

Perspective overlay to annotate. Bottom margin: "AFRICAN (primary): the stack is hierarchical in theory but flat in practice — the top band (Security Council) is captured by the P5, so the lower bands carry the normative weight for the Global South." Side margin: "CHINESE: the stack must be read with the NATO-expansion layer added beneath the Charter"; "RUSSIAN: the stack's treaty band is weaponized against Russia while Western violations (Kosovo) are shielded"; "WESTERN: the stack is the rules-based order; the leak is a design flaw, not a feature"; "UN: the stack is the system's architecture; the leak is the system's central pathology."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the core tension in the Ukraine war's legal architecture?	Self-determination (Art. 1(2) UN Charter; ICCPR Art. 1) vs. territorial inviolability (Art. 2(4)). Both are Charter principles; neither is hierarchically superior in the text. The tension is resolved in practice by power and recognition, not by adjudication. *Source: UN Charter; Weller (2022).*
What makes Crimea's 2014 annexation legally distinct from Kosovo's 2008 independence?	Crimea: annexation by a neighboring state following military intervention; rejected by UNGA 68/262 (100-11-58). Kosovo: unilateral declaration of independence after NATO intervention; recognized by ~100 states, rejected by Russia, China, and others. The structural difference (annexation vs. secession) is the Western legal distinction; the African critique is that both are products of great-power intervention. *Source: UNGA 68/262; Weller (2022).*

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the "use of force" threshold problem in hybrid warfare?	Cyber operations and deniable actors (little green men, GRU-linked malware) sit below the kinetic threshold of Art. 2(4) and Art. 51. The Tallinn Manual 2.0 framework (not a treaty) proposes that cyber operations causing physical damage may constitute use of force, but state practice is unsettled. Deniability breaks the attribution chain required for self-defense. *Source: Tallinn Manual 2.0 (Schmitt, ed.); Hathaway (2023).*
What did the ICJ order on 16 March 2022?	Provisional measures: Russia must immediately suspend military operations in Ukraine. Russia did not comply. The order is binding but lacks enforcement absent Security Council action (blocked by veto). *Source: ICJ, Ukraine v. Russia (Genocide Convention), Order of 16 Mar 2022.*
What is the Genocide Convention case's actual legal theory?	Ukraine alleges Russia abused the Genocide Convention by falsely claiming genocide in Donbas to justify invasion. The case is about misuse of a treaty, not about adjudicating whether genocide occurred. This is a lawfare strategy: using the Convention's compromissory clause (Art. IX) to bring a use-of-force dispute before the ICJ. *Source: ICJ pleadings; Hathaway (2023).*
What are the ICC arrest warrants (Mar 2023)?	Warrants for Putin and Lvova-Belova for alleged unlawful deportation of children. Outstanding; execution depends on state cooperation. Russia is not a Rome Statute party and rejects jurisdiction. *Source: ICC, Pre-Trial Chamber II, 17 Mar 2023.*
How does the African perspective frame the lawfare of territorial integrity?	Sovereignty is non-negotiable (post-colonial imperative), but the Kosovo/Crimea inconsistency reveals that legal outcomes track power, not principle. African states' abstentions reflect refusal to endorse a selectively enforced norm. *Source: Grovogui; Mamdani; Nkrumah (cited in lesson framework).*
How does the Chinese perspective frame it?	Territorial integrity is affirmed, but the root cause is NATO expansion and Western disregard for Russian security concerns. China abstained on ES-11/1 and opposes sanctions as unilateral. *Source: Chinese MFA statements; UN voting record.*

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
How does the Russian perspective frame it?	Self-determination of Russian-speaking populations; historical claims to Crimea and Donbas; Kosovo as precedent; Western hypocrisy. *Source: Russian MFA; Putin speeches (2014, 2022).*
How does the Western perspective frame it?	Defense of the rules-based order; Kosovo is sui generis (remedial secession after atrocities); Crimea is annexation by force. Western self-critique acknowledges the Kosovo precedent is exploited by Russia. *Source: Weller (2022); Hathaway (2023).*
What is the UN perspective's central diagnosis?	The Charter provides the normative framework (Arts. 2(4), 51, 2(7)), the ICJ and ICC provide adjudication, but enforcement fails because the Security Council is paralyzed by the veto. The system's legitimacy depends on UNGA moral authority and state practice of non-recognition. *Source: UN Charter; ICJ/ICC records.*
What is the "Stimson Doctrine" and its relevance?	The 1932 doctrine of non-recognition of territorial changes achieved by force. Revived in the Ukraine context: states refuse to recognize Crimea and the four oblasts. It is customary law, not treaty law, and its enforcement is political. *Source: Stimson (1932); ICJ Namibia advisory opinion (1971).*

Source log: UN Charter (1945); UNGA Resolutions 68/262, ES-11/1–ES-11/6; ICJ, Ukraine v. Russia (Genocide Convention), Order 16 Mar 2022; ICJ, Ukraine v. Russia (CERD/ICSFT), Judgment 31 Jan 2024; ICC Pre-Trial Chamber II, 17 Mar 2023; Weller (2022); Hathaway (2023); Tallinn Manual 2.0; ICJ Namibia advisory opinion (1971).

Summary (3–5 sentences). The lawfare of territorial integrity in the Ukraine war turns on an unresolved Charter tension between self-determination and territorial inviolability, adjudicated through ICJ and ICC proceedings that lack enforcement, and legitimized or contested through UNGA resolutions whose near-unanimous majorities mask a stable bloc of abstentions. The Kosovo precedent is the central rhetorical weapon in this lawfare, exploited by Russia and acknowledged as a vulnerability by Western scholars. Hybrid warfare (cyber, deniable actors) exploits the gap between the use-of-force threshold and attribution requirements. The African perspective reframes the entire debate as a question of selective enforcement by former colonial powers, while the UN perspective diagnoses a structural enforcement failure rooted in the Security Council veto.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Imagine two neighbors. One neighbor has a fence around a garden. The other neighbor says, "That garden used to belong to my family, and the people inside want to join me." The

first neighbor says, "The fence is the law; you cannot cross it." Both neighbors can quote rules. The rules say "don't cross fences" and also "people can choose their government." The Ukraine war is this argument scaled to states: Russia says it is protecting Russian-speakers and that Crimea voted to join Russia; Ukraine and most of the world say the fence (the border) is sacred and cannot be moved by force. Courts exist to settle this, but the courts have no police. So the argument is settled by who has more friends and more power, while everyone pretends it is settled by law.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. My explanation leaves out: (a) the specific legal instruments (UN Charter Articles 2(4) and 51, the Genocide Convention's compromissory clause); (b) why the ICJ case is about *misuse* of the Genocide Convention rather than about genocide itself; (c) the hybrid-warfare layer (cyber, deniable actors) that makes the "fence" metaphor too simple; (d) the African critique that the fence was drawn by colonial powers and is enforced selectively; (e) the enforcement gap (veto) that makes court orders non-binding in practice.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading the core material confirms: the ICJ's 16 March 2022 order required Russia to suspend military operations and was not complied with; the Genocide Convention case turns on Russia's alleged abuse of the Convention as a pretext; UNGA ES-11/1 passed 141-5-35; only five states voted "no"; the Kosovo precedent is acknowledged by Western scholars as a rhetorical vulnerability; hybrid warfare operates below the Article 2(4) threshold. The Feynman explanation captured the structural tension but underweighted the hybrid and enforcement dimensions.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. The fence analogy works for the territorial-inviolability vs. self-determination tension and for the enforcement gap (courts without police). It fails on three points: (1) it treats borders as natural rather than as products of historical violence and colonial cartography, which the African perspective insists upon; (2) it cannot represent hybrid warfare, where the "fence" is attacked by invisible means (cyber, deniable actors) that do not look like fence-crossing; (3) it implies a bilateral dispute, whereas the Ukraine war is a systemic crisis involving NATO, the EU, the Global South, and the UN architecture. The analogy is a pedagogical scaffold, not a theory.

Step 5 — Rewrite. The lawfare of territorial integrity is the use of legal instruments — Charter principles, treaty clauses, ICJ and ICC proceedings, UNGA resolutions — to contest or legitimize control over territory in the Ukraine war. The core tension is between self-determination and territorial inviolability, both Charter principles, neither hierarchically superior. Russia deploys self-determination and historical claims; Ukraine and its allies deploy territorial inviolability and the Stimson Doctrine of non-recognition. The ICJ and ICC provide adjudication without enforcement, because the Security Council veto blocks Chapter VII action. Hybrid warfare (cyber operations, deniable actors) exploits the gap between the use-of-force threshold and attribution requirements. The Kosovo precedent is the central rhetorical weapon, exploited by Russia and acknowledged by Western scholars as a vulnerability. The African perspective reframes the entire debate as selective enforcement by former colonial powers; the Chinese perspective adds NATO responsibility; the Russian perspective asserts self-determination; the Western perspective defends the rules-based order while self-critiquing Kosovo; the UN perspective diagnoses a structural enforcement failure. The data show near-unanimous UNGA support (141-5-35) for territorial integrity, but a stable bloc of abstentions and non-compliance with ICJ orders reveal that legal consensus does not equal enforcement.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L37	Definition	What is the core tension between self-determination and territorial inviolability in the Ukraine war?	Self-determination claims a people's right to choose its political status, while territorial inviolability protects existing borders; the Ukraine war forces a choice between them because Russia invokes self-determination for Russian-speakers and Ukraine invokes territorial integrity for its 1991 borders.	African scholars read this as a colonial-era double standard: the same powers that enforced borders in Africa now invoke self-determination selectively.
L37	Mechanism	How does annexation convert military control into legal claim?	Annexation is the formal incorporation of territory into a state's sovereign domain, typically via domestic legislation and referendum; it attempts to transform de facto control into de jure title, but under international law it is void if achieved by force.	Western and UN perspectives treat annexation by force as per se illegal under Article 2(4); Russia treats it as an expression of popular will.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L37	Application	What legal status did the international community assign to Crimea's 2014 annexation?	The annexation was rejected as illegal by UNGA Resolution 68/262 and by most states, which continued to recognize Crimea as Ukrainian territory; only a handful of states recognized Russian sovereignty.	African states largely supported 68/262, framing it as defense of the anti-colonial norm that borders should not be changed by force.
L37	Application	What happened legally when Russia annexed four Ukrainian oblasts in September 2022?	Russia declared Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia part of its territory after referenda held under occupation; UNGA Resolution ES-11/4 condemned the move and demanded reversal, and most states refused recognition.	Chinese and African perspectives stressed that referenda under occupation lack legal validity, while Russia cited self-determination.
L37	Source	What is the ICJ Ukraine v. Russia (2017) case about?	Ukraine alleged that Russia violated the Genocide Convention and financed terrorism in eastern Ukraine and Crimea; the ICJ issued provisional measures in 2017 and later addressed jurisdiction and merits in stages.	The case illustrates how lawfare converts territorial disputes into legal proceedings, though enforcement depends on state compliance.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L37	Debate	What is the use-of-force threshold problem in hybrid warfare?	Cyber operations and deniable actors may fall below the Article 2(4) threshold of "armed attack," creating legal ambiguity about when self-defense is triggered and who bears responsibility.	Western lawyers debate attribution standards; Russia exploits ambiguity through proxies; the UN Charter framework struggles to keep pace.
L37	Reconstruction	How does the African perspective frame the Ukraine war's legal dimensions?	African scholarship emphasizes sovereignty as a hard-won post-colonial achievement and critiques the inconsistency of Western powers that recognized Kosovo but reject Crimea, revealing lawfare as geopolitically selective.	This is the primary lens: it shows what Western legalism occludes about the politics of recognition.
L37	Occlusion	What does the Chinese perspective occlude in its Ukraine stance?	China's emphasis on territorial integrity and NATO responsibility occludes its own strategic interest in non-interference norms and its reluctance to condemn a partner, narrowing the space for accountability.	Chinese framing contributes the NATO-expansion critique but underweights Russian agency.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L37	Adjudication	What do UNGA resolutions on Ukraine demonstrate about international law?	Resolutions ES-11/1 through ES-11/6 show broad but not universal condemnation of aggression and annexation, revealing law as a political instrument whose enforcement depends on power and coalition-building.	UN perspective: resolutions express collective will but lack binding force absent Security Council action.
L37	Visual	What are the four levels of analysis applied to the ICJ case?	Individual (leaders' decisions), state (Ukraine and Russia's legal strategies), systemic (UN Charter order), and transnational (alliances, sanctions, third-party support) all shape the case's trajectory.	Each perspective weights levels differently: African stresses systemic inequality, Western stresses state compliance.
L37	Definition	What is lawfare in the territorial-integrity context?	Lawfare is the use of legal instruments and processes as tools of conflict, including litigation, sanctions, and recognition politics, to achieve strategic objectives without or alongside military force.	All five perspectives use lawfare, but assign legitimacy differently.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L37	Mechanism	How do ICC arrest warrants function as lawfare?	ICC warrants, such as those issued for Russian officials, create legal and diplomatic pressure, restrict travel, and stigmatize targets, but depend on state cooperation for execution.	Western perspective sees accountability; Russian perspective sees politicization; African perspective notes selective enforcement.
L37	Application	Why is the Kosovo precedent central to the lawfare debate?	Western recognition of Kosovo's 2008 independence is cited by Russia to justify Crimea, while the West distinguishes Kosovo as a remedial secession after atrocities and NATO intervention.	The inconsistency is the African and Russian critique's sharpest weapon.
L37	Source	What does Weller (2022) contribute to this debate?	Weller analyzes the legal dimensions of the Ukraine conflict, including self-determination, territorial integrity, and the limits of international legal order under great-power contestation.	Provides a Western-legalist framework that African scholars critique for underweighting power asymmetry.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L37	Source	What does Hathaway (2023) add?	Hathaway examines how international law is invoked, contested, and enforced in the Ukraine war, highlighting the gap between legal norms and political enforcement.	Bridges Western legalism and realist skepticism about enforcement.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Competency	Self-rated confidence (0–100)	Evidence of mastery you can cite
Explain the self-determination vs territorial inviolability tension		
Analyze the legality of Crimea's 2014 annexation		
Analyze the legality of the four oblasts' 2022 annexation		
Assess the use-of-force threshold in hybrid warfare		
Evaluate ICC and ICJ mechanisms and their limits		
Reconstruct all five perspectives on territorial-integrity lawfare		
Apply the framework to the Kosovo precedent		
Interpret UNGA resolution voting patterns		
Distinguish description, explanation, prediction, prescription		

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to steel-man from within, and what specific claim within it resisted your reconstruction?
2. State one mechanism from this lesson that you can now explain without notes, and identify the scope condition that most limits it.

3. What single piece of evidence, if it emerged, would most strongly falsify your current conclusion about whether international law constrains great-power territorial aggression?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"UNGA resolutions are legally binding on all states."	UNGA resolutions express collective political will but are not binding under the Charter; enforcement requires Security Council action or state practice.	Charter Articles 10–14; ES-11/1 through ES-11/6 adopted under Uniting for Peace but still non-binding.
"The ICJ can enforce its judgments against Russia."	The ICJ lacks enforcement power; compliance depends on state will and Security Council referral, which is blocked by veto.	ICJ Ukraine v. Russia provisional measures; Article 94 of the Charter.
"Kosovo and Crimea are legally identical cases."	Kosovo involved prolonged atrocities, NATO intervention, and a UN administration; Crimea involved covert military intervention and a rapid referendum under occupation.	Weller (2022); differing factual predicates and international responses.
"Self-determination always justifies secession."	Self-determination is primarily an internal right; external secession is exceptional and contested, especially where it violates territorial integrity.	ICJ Kosovo advisory opinion (2010); Charter Article 2(4).
"Hybrid warfare is entirely outside international law."	Cyber and proxy operations are increasingly addressed by state practice and Tallinn Manual frameworks, though thresholds remain unsettled.	Hathaway (2023); evolving attribution standards.
"ICC arrest warrants guarantee accountability."	Warrants depend on state cooperation for arrest and surrender; non-party states and political resistance limit execution.	ICC Rome Statute Articles 86–89; Russian officials remain at large.
"African states uniformly support Russia."	African positions are heterogeneous; many supported UNGA resolutions condemning aggression while criticizing Western inconsistency.	ES-11/1 voting records; African Union statements.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Self-determination; territorial inviolability; annexation; lawfare; hybrid warfare; recognition politics	Annexation converts control to claim via domestic law; ICC warrants create diplomatic pressure; UNGA resolutions mobilize collective condemnation; cyber operations exploit force thresholds	Weller (2022); Hathaway (2023); Grovogui; Mbembe; Mamdani; Nkrumah	Crimea 2014; four oblasts 2022; ICJ Ukraine v. Russia; ICC warrants; UNGA ES-11/1–ES-11/6; Kosovo 2008	Kosovo vs Crimea consistency; binding force of UNGA resolutions; hybrid warfare thresholds; ICC selectivity	A binding enforcement mechanism emerging; universal recognition of annexed territories; ICC execution of warrants; consistent application of self-determination	L2 Charter; L26 lawfare; L35 post-Soviet ontology; L39 European security; L44 proxy warfare; L45 nuclear proliferation

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 20 min):** Re-read Section 2.2 and 2.3; recite the self-determination vs territorial inviolability tension and the annexation mechanism aloud without notes.
- **R2 (Day 3, 30 min):** Complete the Problem Pair (Kosovo precedent) from memory, then compare with the model answer; log gaps in the error-log.
- **R3 (Day 7, 45 min):** Reconstruct all five perspectives on the ICJ case in writing, 3–5 sentences each, and check against Section 2.8.
- **R4 (Day 14, 60 min):** Re-run the Data Lab tables; explain one trend, one level of analysis, and one limitation without consulting notes.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 min):** Write a 500-word memo applying the framework to a new case (e.g., a hypothetical annexation), including mechanism, perspective reconstruction, historical analogue, and falsifiers.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define self-determination and territorial inviolability and state their tension.
☐ I can explain the annexation mechanism and its legal voidness under force.
☐ I can analyze Crimea 2014 and the four oblasts 2022 with dates and resolutions.
☐ I can assess the use-of-force threshold problem in hybrid warfare.
☐ I can evaluate ICC and ICJ mechanisms and their enforcement limits.
☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary and longest.
☐ I can steel-man the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
☐ I can apply the framework to the Kosovo precedent.

☐ I can interpret UNGA ES-11/1 through ES-11/6 voting patterns.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I have completed the Problem Pair and checked against the model answer.
☐ I have drafted the Independent Memo with all four required headings.
☐ I have answered the Hinge Question and diagnosed my distractor.
☐ I have filled in the confidence audit with evidence.
☐ I have updated the error-log with at least one new entry.
☐ I can draw the three visuals from Section 3 from memory.
☐ I can recite the five key ideas in order.
☐ I have scheduled R1–R5 in my calendar.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Legal foundations and Charter order - ICJ, *Application of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Ukraine v. Russian Federation)*, provisional measures (2017) and subsequent orders. - United Nations General Assembly, Resolutions ES-11/1 through ES-11/6 (2022–2023).

Annexation and recognition - Weller, M. (2022), *The Ukraine Crisis and International Law*. - Hathaway, O. (2023), *International Law and the Ukraine War*.

Self-determination and territorial integrity - ICJ, *Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo*, Advisory Opinion (2010). - Crawford, J. (2006), *The Creation of States in International Law*.

Hybrid warfare and use of force - Schmitt, M. (ed.) (2017), *Tallinn Manual 2.0 on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations*. - Hathaway, O. and Shapiro, S. (2017), *The Internationalists*.

African and post-colonial perspectives - Grovogui, S. (1996), *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*. - Mamdani, M. (2009), *Saviors and Survivors*. - Nkrumah, K. (1965), *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*.

End of Lesson 37. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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39. Political Economy of Coercion: Sanctions, Energy, and Supply Chains

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 38: Political Economy of Coercion: Sanctions, Energy, and Supply Chains
Module	Module 6: Eastern Europe and the Ukraine War
Prerequisites	L18 (Weaponized Interdependence), L19 (Energy), L36 (Ukraine War)
Interleaved links	Forward to L39 (European Security), L46 (Hydrocarbons), L52 (Semiconductors)

Field	Value
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, worked example, problem pair, independent memo, visuals, flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple: why did the most comprehensive coercive economic package assembled in modern history—the 2022 sanctions regime against Russia—produce results that were simultaneously devastating and disappointing? On one side of the ledger, the European Union cut its dependence on Russian pipeline gas from roughly forty percent of total imports to under ten percent within eighteen months; Russian central-bank reserves were frozen; the ruble initially collapsed; and Moscow was expelled from the SWIFT messaging system for most of its major banks. On the other side, Russian GDP contracted by far less than the double-digit declines forecast in early 2022; Russian oil export revenues recovered to near-pre-war levels within a year through shadow-fleet tankers and price discounts to India and China; and the Russian state found ways to import semiconductors, machine tools, and dual-use components through parallel trade corridors running through Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Central Asia. The puzzle is not whether sanctions "worked" in some binary sense, but how to theorize a form of power that is simultaneously structural and self-undermining, that redistributes costs to parties who never chose to be targets, and that accelerates the very fragmentation of the global economy it was meant to police. This lesson teaches you to hold that puzzle in analytical suspension rather than resolving it prematurely into either triumphalism or cynicism.

The lesson sits at a hinge point in the curriculum. Prerequisites L18 on weaponized interdependence and L19 on energy established the theoretical vocabulary: Farrell and Newman's argument that global networks create chokepoints which states can weaponize, and the broader insight that interdependence is not merely a constraint on conflict but a resource for coercion. L36 on the Ukraine war supplied the triggering event. What this lesson adds is the political economy of how coercion is actually designed, implemented, adapted to, and evaluated—moving from the abstract claim that networks are weaponizable to the concrete question of what happens when a great power tries to weaponize all of them at once. The forward links to L39 on European security, L46 on hydrocarbons, and L52 on semiconductors mean that the mechanisms studied here are not self-contained; they reappear in European defense planning, in global energy-market restructuring, and in the US-China technology competition. You should read this lesson as a node in a network of lessons, not as a standalone module.

The theoretical stakes are high because the 2022 experience has become a Rorschach test for competing paradigms in international political economy. Liberals who emphasized interdependence as a peace-inducing force have had to confront the weaponization of that same interdependence; realists who predicted that sanctions would fail because Russia could reroute trade have had to explain why European decoupling happened so fast; constructivists who focused on normative stigma have had to account for the rapid normalization of Russian oil purchases by non-Western buyers. Nicholas Mulder's historical work on sanctions in the interwar period reminds us that the gap between economic pressure and political capitulation is not a bug but a feature

of coercive diplomacy: sanctions compress the target's economy, but compression does not automatically translate into the specific political concession the sender demands. Elizabeth Ashford's more recent analysis of sanctions effectiveness argues that the design question—targeted versus comprehensive, unilateral versus multilateral, with or without humanitarian carve-outs—matters as much as the magnitude of pressure. The lesson therefore trains you to disaggregate "sanctions" into design choices, each with its own causal logic and its own failure modes.

Energy is the domain where these abstractions become most concrete and most costly. The Nord Stream pipelines were not merely infrastructure; they were the physical embodiment of a thirty-year European bet that economic integration with Russia would produce political moderation. When that bet failed, the physical infrastructure became a liability: the September 2022 sabotage of Nord Stream 1 and 2 turned a gradual de-coupling into an abrupt rupture, and European gas prices spiked to levels that threatened deindustrialization in Germany's chemical sector. The oil price cap—set at sixty dollars per barrel and enforced through maritime insurance and shipping services controlled by the G7—represented an attempt to thread a needle: reduce Russian revenue without removing Russian oil from global markets and thereby spiking prices for everyone. Whether this needle was successfully threaded is one of the empirical questions you will adjudicate using the data in Section 2A. What is already clear is that energy weaponization is bidirectional: Russia's attempt to use gas as leverage accelerated the very diversification that destroyed its European market, while Europe's attempt to cap Russian oil revenue depended on continued Russian production and on the cooperation of a shadow fleet operating outside Western jurisdiction.

The financial dimension reveals a deeper structural dynamic. SWIFT exclusion was the most dramatic single measure, yet its long-term significance may lie less in the immediate disruption it caused than in the incentive it created for non-Western states to build parallel payment systems. Russia's SPFS and China's CIPS existed before 2022 but were marginal; the sanctions shock gave them strategic urgency. Farrell and Newman's 2023 analysis of the "weaponized interdependence" framework itself acknowledges that overuse of chokepoints can trigger "de-risking" by targets and third parties, eroding the very network centrality that made coercion possible in the first place. This is a mechanism you must learn to recognize: coercion that succeeds in the short term can fail in the medium term by destroying the structural conditions of its own efficacy. The lesson asks you to evaluate whether the 2022 financial sanctions accelerated de-dollarization in a durable way or merely produced a temporary, costly workaround that will fade as the immediate crisis recedes.

The African and broader Global South perspective is not a regional footnote to this story; it is the vantage point from which the entire coercive architecture looks different. When Russian fertilizer exports were disrupted and Ukrainian grain was blockaded, the price of bread in Cairo, Lagos, and Nairobi moved before any Russian city felt the squeeze. UNCTAD's trade and development reports documented the transmission: food price indices spiked, import bills ballooned for net-food-importing African states, and fiscal space that might have funded health or education was diverted to subsidies. The Black Sea Grain Initiative, brokered by Turkey and the UN, was a partial and temporary remedy that expired in July 2023, after which Russian attacks on Ukrainian port infrastructure resumed. From the African perspective, the lesson's central puzzle reframes itself: not "did sanctions compel Russia?" but "who paid for the attempt, and was that distribution of costs ever politically acknowledged by the sanctioning states?" This perspective reveals what the Western framing of sanctions as targeted and proportionate occludes: the structural position of the Global South in global commodity markets means that any disruption to Russian or Ukrainian supply chains is automatically a shock to African food security, regardless of whether African states had any role in the conflict. The lesson's longest and most developed perspective section is devoted to this reconstruction, drawing on African scholarship that treats the international economic order itself as a site of coercion rather than a neutral background against

which coercion occurs.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to perform five analytical operations that you could not perform before. First, you will be able to decompose a sanctions package into its design components—asset freezes, trade restrictions, financial messaging exclusion, price caps, export controls—and specify the causal mechanism and scope condition of each. Second, you will be able to trace the energy-weaponization sequence from Nord Stream through European decoupling to the oil price cap, identifying at each stage who gained leverage and who lost it. Third, you will be able to evaluate the claim that SWIFT exclusion accelerated parallel financial architecture, distinguishing durable structural shift from temporary adaptation. Fourth, you will be able to apply the "small yard, high fence" logic of export controls to the Russian case and assess whether Russian adaptation through parallel imports and domestic substitution has breached the fence. Fifth, and most importantly, you will be able to reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on the entire coercive episode, steel-manning each, and adjudicate between them on the basis of evidence rather than defaulting to the perspective most familiar to you. The worked example, problem pair, and independent memo are designed to force you to practice these operations under conditions of uncertainty, with incomplete data, and with the explicit requirement to distinguish description from explanation, prediction from prescription.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer each question from memory before reading the lesson. These draw on L18, L19, and L36.

1. **Weaponized interdependence (L18).** Define weaponized interdependence in Farrell and Newman's terms, and identify the two structural features of global networks—hubs and chokepoints—that make it possible. Give one pre-2022 example of a state weaponizing a network chokepoint.

2. **Energy and interdependence (L19).** Explain how European dependence on Russian pipeline gas developed after the Cold War, and identify the two mechanisms—contractual lock-in and infrastructure specificity—that made it difficult to reverse quickly.

3. **Ukraine war economic shock (L36).** What were the three most significant immediate economic consequences of the February 2022 invasion for Ukraine's economy, and how did they differ in their time horizons (immediate, medium-term, structural)?

4. **Sanctions taxonomy.** Distinguish targeted (smart) sanctions from comprehensive sanctions, and explain why the shift from comprehensive to targeted sanctions after the 1990s Iraq experience was considered a humanitarian improvement. What problem did targeted sanctions introduce in its place?

5. **Network centrality and coercion.** In network terms, why does the weaponizer's power depend on the target's inability to reroute? What happens to coercive power when the target develops alternative pathways—a process sometimes called "de-risking" or "friend-shoring"?

6. **Fertilizer and food linkages.** Why is Russia a critical node in global fertilizer markets, and how does a disruption to Russian fertilizer exports transmit to African food prices? Identify at least two intermediate steps in the causal chain.

1.2 Orientation Questions

These questions frame the analytical work of the lesson. You need not answer them fully now; use them to orient your reading.

1. The 2022 Russia sanctions package included an oil price cap rather than a full embargo. What does this design choice reveal about the limits of Western coercive power, about the structure of global oil markets, and about the political economy of sanctioning states' own energy costs?
2. Russian adaptation to sanctions—shadow-fleet oil tankers, parallel imports of technology through third countries, SPFS and CIPS for payments—was faster and more effective than many Western analysts predicted. What does this adaptation imply for the theory of weaponized interdependence, and does it mean the theory is wrong or merely scope-limited?
3. The sanctions regime externalized substantial costs to the Global South through food, fuel, and fertilizer price spikes. How does the African perspective reframe the question of sanctions "effectiveness," and what does it reveal about the distributional assumptions embedded in Western coercive diplomacy?
4. Export controls on semiconductors and dual-use technology were described as a "small yard, high fence" strategy. How do these controls interact with energy sanctions and financial sanctions to form a single coercive architecture, and what does Russian adaptation tell us about the permeability of that fence?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Provisional definitions to be refined through the lesson. Each term will be developed with mechanism, scope conditions, and perspective notes in Section 2.

- **Sanctions (economic coercive measures):** State-imposed restrictions on trade, finance, or investment intended to compel a change in target-state behavior. Mechanism: raise the target's cost of non-compliance. Scope condition: effectiveness depends on multilateral coordination and the target's inability to substitute.
- **Targeted (smart) sanctions:** Measures aimed at specific individuals, entities, or sectors rather than entire economies, developed after the humanitarian disasters of comprehensive sanctions in Iraq in the 1990s. Mechanism: concentrate pain on decision-makers while sparing civilians. Scope condition: requires accurate targeting intelligence and enforcement capacity; prone to leakage and evasion.
- **Comprehensive sanctions:** Economy-wide restrictions on trade and finance with a target state, historically associated with high civilian costs. Mechanism: maximize economic pressure across all sectors. Scope condition: rare post-1990s due to humanitarian concerns; used when targeted measures are deemed insufficient.
- **Asset freeze:** The legal immobilization of a state's or individual's foreign-held assets, preventing their use or transfer. Mechanism: deny the target liquidity and financial maneuvering room. Scope condition: requires jurisdiction over the assets' location; effectiveness erodes if assets are moved preemptively.
- **Oil price cap:** A mechanism setting a maximum price at which Russian oil can be sold using Western maritime services (insurance, shipping), enforced through the G7 and EU. Mechanism: reduce Russian

revenue while keeping oil on global markets. Scope condition: depends on enforcement through service providers and on the target's inability to fully bypass Western shipping infrastructure.

- **SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication):** The messaging network that enables cross-border bank payments; exclusion from it disrupts a state's ability to conduct international financial transactions. Mechanism: sever the information layer of financial flows. Scope condition: effectiveness depends on the target's reliance on SWIFT and on the availability of alternative messaging systems.
- **SPFS (System for Transfer of Financial Messages):** Russia's domestic alternative to SWIFT, developed after 2014. Mechanism: provide a parallel messaging channel for ruble and non-dollar transactions. Scope condition: limited international adoption; useful for bilateral trade with willing partners but not a full substitute.
- **CIPS (Cross-Border Interbank Payment System):** China's payment system for cross-border renminbi transactions. Mechanism: enable settlement outside the dollar-dominated correspondent-banking network. Scope condition: growing but still small relative to SWIFT; adoption accelerated by sanctions risk.
- **Weaponized interdependence:** The strategic exploitation of a state's position in global networks—particularly as a hub or chokepoint—to coerce other states. Mechanism: leverage structural centrality to impose costs on targets. Scope condition: power erodes if targets and third parties reroute around the chokepoint.
- **Chokepoint:** A node in a network through which a large share of flows must pass, giving the controlling actor leverage. Mechanism: control over transit creates bargaining power. Scope condition: chokepoints are contestable; their value declines as alternatives are developed.
- **Small yard, high fence:** A strategy of restricting a narrow set of critical technologies (the small yard) with very strong controls (the high fence), rather than broad restrictions. Mechanism: concentrate enforcement resources on the most strategically significant items. Scope condition: requires accurate identification of critical technologies and prevention of leakage through third countries.
- **Parallel imports:** The import of goods into a target country through third-country intermediaries, circumventing direct trade restrictions. Mechanism: reroute supply chains around sanctions. Scope condition: raises costs and delays but can substantially blunt technology controls.
- **Shadow fleet:** Tankers operating outside Western insurance and regulatory frameworks to transport sanctioned oil. Mechanism: bypass the service-based enforcement of price caps. Scope condition: raises shipping costs and safety risks but sustains export volumes.
- **De-dollarization:** The process of reducing reliance on the US dollar in trade, reserves, and payments. Mechanism: diversify currency exposure to reduce vulnerability to US financial sanctions. Scope condition: incremental and contested; dollar dominance persists due to liquidity and network effects.
- **Black Sea Grain Initiative:** The July 2022 agreement brokered by Turkey and the UN to allow Ukrainian grain exports through the Black Sea. Mechanism: create a humanitarian corridor to reduce global food price pressure. Scope condition: dependent on Russian and Ukrainian cooperation; expired July 2023.

- **Humanitarian carve-out:** Provisions in sanctions regimes exempting food, medicine, and humanitarian goods from restrictions. Mechanism: reduce civilian harm and legal liability for senders. Scope condition: often undermined by over-compliance and banking de-risking.

End of Section 1. Section 2 follows in the next chunk.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the causal mechanisms behind the evolution of sanctions design—from comprehensive embargoes to targeted measures, asset freezes, sectoral sanctions, and oil price caps—by identifying the network chokepoints, legal instruments, and enforcement technologies that make each design feasible, and the adaptation strategies that erode it. This objective requires distinguishing sender learning from target adaptation rather than treating sanctions as a static instrument.
2. **Compare** the intended and observed effects of asset freezes, financial exclusion, export controls, and energy price caps on Russia's macroeconomy, fiscal capacity, and war financing, using evidence on exchange-rate movements, trade rerouting, discount structures, and shadow-fleet growth. The student should be able to separate accounting effects (frozen reserves, discounted oil) from behavioral effects (policy change, military production).
3. **Evaluate** the scope conditions under which coercive economic measures alter a target state's cost-benefit calculus rather than merely redistribute costs to third parties, with special attention to import-dependent economies in the Global South. This includes assessing multilateral coordination, sender self-harm, target substitutability, regime type, and enforcement capacity.
4. **Reconstruct** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives assign causality and responsibility for food, fuel, and fertilizer spillovers, and **adjudicate** among them using mechanism-based evidence rather than moral assertion. The student should identify what each perspective reveals and what it systematically occludes.
5. **Apply** the "small-yard-high-fence" logic and the countermeasures of parallel financial architecture to a novel case, specifying falsifiable indicators of sanctions leakage, adaptation, and unintended humanitarian harm. The student should be able to state what evidence would weaken each causal claim.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Sanctions design and evolution: from targeted to comprehensive, from asset freezes to oil price caps

Bolded Causal Claim: Sanctions are not a single instrument but an evolving architecture of economic coercion whose effectiveness depends on the sender's control over network chokepoints; the shift from comprehensive embargoes to targeted asset freezes and then to oil price caps reflects learning about humanitarian costs, elite vulnerability, and the need to preserve supply while cutting revenue.

Mechanism: The theoretical lineage begins with economic statecraft and coercive bargaining: sanctions

raise the target's cost of noncompliance, signal resolve, and seek to alter a cost-benefit calculus without direct military force. Early comprehensive sanctions, most infamously against Iraq in the 1990s, demonstrated that broad trade embargoes could devastate civilian welfare, undermine legitimacy, and generate humanitarian catastrophe without necessarily changing regime behavior. That experience produced the "smart" or targeted sanctions agenda, which narrowed coercion to individuals, entities, sectors, and financial nodes in order to reduce civilian harm while preserving pressure on decision-makers. The mechanism of targeted sanctions depends on jurisdictional reach: if elites hold assets, use correspondent banking, or rely on Western legal and financial services, asset freezes and travel bans can impose concentrated costs. Farrell and Newman's (2019, 2023) weaponized-interdependence framework explains why this works: states with centrality in global networks—especially finance, clearing, insurance, and information—can convert structural position into coercive leverage. The 2022 Russia sanctions package applied this logic at scale by freezing central-bank reserves, restricting access to SWIFT for selected banks, and targeting oligarchic wealth. The oil price cap then represented a further design innovation. Rather than a full embargo that might spike global prices and enrich Russia through higher prices on reduced volumes, the cap used Western dominance in maritime services—insurance, shipping, brokering, and finance—to condition access to those services on purchase at or below a ceiling price. The mechanism is a two-tier market: compliant buyers receive Western services; above-cap cargoes must rely on costlier, less reliable alternatives. Mulder (2022) situates this evolution in a longer history in which sanctions repeatedly oscillate between broad economic warfare and more discriminating coercion, with each design generating countermeasures. Ashford (2023) helps frame the contemporary debate: sanctions are most effective when demands are clear, coalitions are broad, enforcement is credible, and the target's adaptation options are limited; they are least effective when they become open-ended, when humanitarian exemptions are poorly designed, or when the sender's own economic dependence creates self-harm. The causal chain therefore runs from network centrality to cost imposition, from cost imposition to target adaptation, and from adaptation to further design innovation.

Scope Conditions: Sanctions bite when the target is deeply integrated into sender-controlled networks and lacks ready substitutes; when the sender coalition controls critical nodes such as dollar clearing, maritime insurance, or advanced technology inputs; when elite assets are located in sender jurisdictions; when demands are limited and credible; when enforcement capacity is strong; and when the sender can tolerate its own economic costs. They are more likely to influence behavior in regimes where elites are politically consequential and materially vulnerable, and less likely in highly insulated, personalist, or autarkic systems. The oil price cap has additional scope conditions: Western maritime services must remain indispensable, monitoring must be feasible, and the shadow fleet must not scale faster than enforcement. Sanctions fail or backfire when the target has powerful alternative partners, can reroute trade, builds parallel financial architecture, or when broad civilian harm produces humanitarian backlash and "rally round the flag" effects. They also weaken when coalitions fragment, when third countries profit from arbitrage, or when the sender's energy, food, or inflation costs undermine domestic political support. In short, the same network centrality that makes sanctions powerful also creates incentives for decentralization and evasion.

Observable Implications: If the sanctions architecture is biting, one should observe currency depreciation and inflation in the target, fiscal stress, import compression, capital flight, concentrated losses among targeted elites, discounted export prices, and trade rerouting through intermediaries. For the oil price cap specifically, observable implications include Russian crude selling at a sustained discount to Brent, increased Asian purchases, continued use of Western shipping and insurance for compliant cargoes, growth of a shadow fleet for noncompliant cargoes, false documentation, and enforcement actions against violators. For targeted sanctions, one should observe asset freezes, delistings, legal challenges, and evasion through shell companies or

third-country proxies. For comprehensive or sectoral measures, one should observe trade collapse, supply shortages, and humanitarian indicators. Leakage should appear as transshipment, re-exports, alternative insurance providers, and increased use of non-Western currencies. Data such as USD/RUB movements, EU gas imports by source, Russian oil export revenues, and African food price indices can help distinguish direct effects from global spillovers, though no single indicator proves causation because commodity markets, weather, and war damage also move prices.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From within African political economy, sanctions are not merely an instrument applied to Russia; they are an external shock transmitted through import dependence, dollarized trade, and concentrated global commodity markets. African scholars such as Rodney and Nkrumah frame this vulnerability as structural: colonial and postcolonial specialization left many economies dependent on imported food, fuel, and fertilizer, so a sanctions shock in the North becomes a cost-of-living crisis in the South. The African vantage point stresses non-targeted burdens: even "smart" sanctions can raise shipping, insurance, and commodity prices; humanitarian carve-outs are often bureaucratically inaccessible; and African states are frequently asked to enforce measures they did not design. It also highlights agency and non-alignment: African governments may resist automatic compliance, seek waivers, or diversify partners not out of support for the target but to protect sovereignty and food security. The structural critique asks whether sanctions reproduce a hierarchy in which powerful states weaponize global networks while weaker states absorb spillovers. This perspective reveals what Western debates often occlude: the distributional geography of coercion.

Chinese: Sanctions are interpreted as economic warfare and as overreach of U.S. financial power; China emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and the risks of politicizing trade and finance. It sees SWIFT exclusion and asset freezes as accelerating de-dollarization and as motivating parallel systems such as CIPS and bilateral currency settlement. Chinese analysis often stresses that sanctions harm global supply chains and developing countries, while also creating opportunities for Chinese firms and energy purchases at discounts. It may understate its own leverage and the ways Chinese compliance with some controls affects enforcement.

Russian: Sanctions are framed as illegitimate aggression and an attempt to destroy Russia; resilience is emphasized through import substitution, capital controls, fiscal buffers, and redirection of trade to Asia. The narrative highlights adaptation: shadow fleet, alternative payment systems, and discounted but sustained oil exports. It may occlude the real costs—inflation, technology gaps, and long-term growth constraints—and the dependence on Chinese markets and intermediaries.

Western: Sanctions are coercive diplomacy designed to raise the costs of aggression while avoiding direct military escalation; targeted measures aim to minimize civilian harm and preserve humanitarian channels. There is significant self-critique: spillovers to the Global South, enforcement gaps, and the risk that sanctions become permanent without clear end states. Western debates focus on effectiveness, leakage, and the balance between pressure and escalation.

UN: The UN perspective centers humanitarian law and carve-outs: sanctions should not impede food, medicine, or humanitarian assistance; the Black Sea Grain Initiative exemplified efforts to mitigate spillovers. It emphasizes multilateral legitimacy, monitoring, and the need to protect vulnerable populations, while recognizing that unilateral sanctions fall outside UN frameworks and can create legal and operational ambiguity.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Energy weaponization: Nord Stream, the price cap, and Europe's decoupling from Russian gas

Bolded Causal Claim: Russia's pre-invasion gas leverage and post-2022 supply manipulation converted dense energy interdependence into coercive power; Europe's subsequent decoupling reduced but did not eliminate that leverage, because substitution, storage, and the oil price cap altered market incentives while infrastructure lock-in, contract rigidities, and global arbitrage preserved channels for Russian revenue.

Mechanism: The mechanism is network weaponization in the sense developed by Farrell and Newman: states that occupy central nodes in production or transit networks can convert commercial dependence into political leverage by threatening or executing disruption. Before 2022, Russian pipeline gas supplied a large share of European consumption, especially in Germany and Central Europe, and long-term contracts plus pipeline infrastructure created sunk costs that made rapid substitution expensive. After the invasion, supply reductions through Nord Stream 1, the non-certification of Nord Stream 2, and the September 2022 pipeline leaks transformed a latent vulnerability into an active shock. European governments responded through demand reduction, accelerated LNG contracting, storage mandates, and diversification; the G7/EU oil price cap added a financial chokepoint by conditioning maritime insurance and shipping services on sales below a threshold. The cap's logic was not to ban Russian oil outright but to compress the price Russia received while keeping volumes in the market, thereby limiting revenue without triggering a global supply shock. Yet the mechanism is mediated by global oil markets: if Russian crude is rerouted to Asia at a discount, if shadow fleets evade insurance requirements, or if OPEC+ production decisions tighten supply, the cap's effect on Russian fiscal capacity weakens. Decoupling is therefore a process of partial reconfiguration rather than a clean break.

Scope Conditions: This causal chain holds under several conditions: high pre-war import dependence; physical pipeline infrastructure that cannot be quickly repurposed; limited short-run LNG regasification capacity; a global market in which alternative suppliers can expand output; and enforcement capacity over maritime services. It is weaker where states have diversified suppliers, domestic production, or storage; where sanctions are not coordinated; or where third-party states are willing to absorb discounted Russian hydrocarbons. It also depends on weather and industrial demand: a mild winter and demand destruction can mask structural vulnerability, while a cold winter or industrial rebound can re-expose it. The price cap in particular assumes that Western control over insurance, classification, and shipping finance remains a binding chokepoint; if parallel services emerge, the cap becomes a price signal rather than a hard constraint.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include European gas storage levels and TTF benchmark prices; the share of Russian gas in EU imports; LNG import volumes and regasification utilization; the Urals-Brent discount; Russian federal budget oil and gas revenues; the growth of shadow-fleet tanker activity; and European industrial output in gas-intensive sectors. If weaponization and decoupling are operating as theorized, one should observe a sharp initial price spike, followed by declining Russian gas market share in Europe, rising LNG share, persistent discounts on Russian crude, and partial recovery of European storage security, alongside continued Russian revenue from non-European buyers. One should also observe political contestation over industrial competitiveness, as energy-intensive firms face cost disadvantages relative to competitors with cheaper gas.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African perspective: From an African vantage point, European energy weaponization and decoupling are not merely a bilateral Russia-Europe contest; they are a shock transmitted through global prices, shipping, and fiscal space. African economies that are net fuel importers face higher import bills, currency depreciation, and inflation, while fertilizer and food costs rise through

gas-linked production. The African critique, articulated in structural terms by scholars such as Grovogui and Bayart, stresses that the global energy order reproduces dependency: African states are price takers in markets shaped by Northern security priorities, and emergency European LNG demand can crowd out African access or raise costs. There is also a justice dimension: European states that long relied on Russian gas are now subsidizing rapid transition, while African states with energy poverty are asked to decarbonize without comparable finance. African governments and scholars therefore tend to emphasize not only market adjustment but equitable access, debt relief, and technology transfer, and they often view sanctions spillovers as a reminder that coercive economic measures designed in the North are experienced as price shocks in the South.

Chinese perspective: China reads energy weaponization as evidence that interdependence is a strategic vulnerability and that the West uses financial and logistical chokepoints to discipline rivals. It benefits from discounted Russian oil and gas, strengthens energy security through overland pipelines and non-dollar settlement, and presents itself as a stabilizing buyer. Beijing criticizes the price cap as market distortion and extraterritorial coercion, while using the crisis to advance de-dollarization narratives and BRICS energy cooperation.

Russian perspective: Russia frames sanctions and supply cuts as defensive responses to Western hostility, arguing that energy is a sovereign resource and that Europe's decoupling is self-harming. It emphasizes pivot-to-Asia resilience, new buyers, and the failure of sanctions to collapse the economy. The anti-Western narrative presents the price cap as illegitimate interference in trade and highlights Western hypocrisy in seeking Russian energy while condemning Moscow.

Western perspective: Western governments treat energy weaponization as proof that economic interdependence with authoritarian suppliers creates security risks. They justify decoupling as necessary to reduce coercion and fund Ukraine's defense, while acknowledging self-critique: price spikes, industrial pain, enforcement gaps, and the risk that decoupling is slower and costlier than planned. Debates center on whether the price cap effectively reduced revenue or merely rerouted trade.

UN perspective: The UN perspective emphasizes energy access as a development and humanitarian issue, warning that price shocks burden vulnerable populations and that emergency measures must preserve access to fuel, food, and medicine. It supports mitigation, transparency, and multilateral coordination, while recognizing that unilateral energy sanctions and countermeasures can create legal ambiguity and uneven protection for non-target states.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — SWIFT exclusion and the parallel financial architecture (SPFS, CIPS)

Bolded Causal Claim: Excluding selected Russian banks from SWIFT raised transaction costs and fragmented payment channels, but it did not financially isolate Russia because alternative messaging systems, third-country intermediaries, and commodity demand allowed partial reconstitution of trade finance; the deeper effect was to accelerate financial fragmentation and contestation over dollar centrality.

Mechanism: SWIFT is a messaging cooperative, not a settlement system; exclusion therefore works by increasing search, verification, and compliance costs rather than by freezing all payments. Farrell and Newman's weaponized interdependence framework explains why: the United States and its allies occupy central nodes in financial messaging and clearing, so excluding a target from those nodes can disrupt its access to global markets. In 2022, selected Russian banks were removed from SWIFT, while Russia's domestic SPFS and China's CIPS offered alternative messaging rails. The mechanism of adaptation is threefold: first, Rus-

sian banks and exporters shifted to bilateral arrangements and non-Western correspondent banks; second, energy and commodity trade continued to generate foreign exchange, reducing the need for Western financial intermediation; third, capital controls and interest-rate hikes stabilized the ruble after the initial shock. Parallel architecture matters because messaging alternatives reduce the marginal cost of evasion over time, especially when combined with local-currency invoicing and barter-like arrangements. However, SPFS and CIPS remain smaller, less interoperable, and less trusted than SWIFT; their growth is a signal of fragmentation, not proof of a fully parallel system.

Scope Conditions: The causal effect of SWIFT exclusion is strongest when the target is heavily dependent on Western correspondent banking, when alternative systems lack scale, when third countries fear secondary sanctions, and when trade is not dominated by commodities with inelastic demand. It weakens when the target has large commodity exports, when non-Western banks are willing to intermediate, when capital controls can stabilize the currency, and when enforcement is uneven. It also depends on the scope of exclusion: partial exclusion of selected banks leaves channels open, while comprehensive exclusion would be more disruptive but harder to coordinate and more likely to accelerate alternatives. The mechanism further assumes that financial messaging is a binding chokepoint; if settlement occurs through bilateral central-bank arrangements or commodity-backed barter, messaging exclusion becomes less decisive.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include the number and type of Russian banks excluded; SPFS and CIPS participation and transaction volumes; the share of Russian trade invoiced in non-dollar currencies; ruble exchange-rate volatility and recovery; Russian current-account and trade balances; payment delays reported by importers and exporters; and enforcement actions against third-country intermediaries. If the theory holds, one should observe an initial payment shock, ruble collapse, and trade disruption, followed by stabilization through capital controls and alternative channels, plus gradual growth in non-Western financial infrastructure. One should also observe Western concern about leakage and secondary sanctions, reflecting recognition that partial exclusion creates incentives for evasion.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African perspective: For African states and scholars, SWIFT exclusion is a reminder that global financial infrastructure is politically governed and that access can be weaponized. The African critique emphasizes that African economies are deeply integrated into dollar-based payment systems and are therefore exposed to extraterritorial enforcement, compliance overreach, and de-risking by Western banks. When sanctions on Russia raise compliance costs, African importers of grain, fertilizer, and fuel can face delayed payments, higher transaction costs, or exclusion from trade finance even when transactions are legally permitted. African scholarship on structural dependency—drawing on Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment and on contemporary work by Aning and Danso on security governance—highlights that financial fragmentation is not neutral: it can reproduce hierarchy by forcing African states to navigate competing payment blocs without sovereign control over either. The African vantage point thus stresses humanitarian carve-outs, payment-system resilience, and the need for African institutions to reduce vulnerability to external financial coercion, rather than treating SWIFT exclusion as a purely technical instrument.

Chinese perspective: China views SWIFT exclusion as proof of Western financial hegemony and as a catalyst for de-dollarization. It promotes CIPS, RMB settlement, and bilateral currency swaps, while presenting itself as a defender of trade openness against unilateral sanctions. Beijing's critique focuses on extraterritoriality and the long-term risk that dollar infrastructure can be used coercively, but it also benefits from continued access to Western markets and from Russia's dependence on Chinese financial channels.

Russian perspective: Russia frames SWIFT exclusion as economic aggression and evidence of Western

unreliability. It emphasizes SPFS, capital controls, and the ruble's recovery as proof of resilience, while portraying alternative financial architecture as a necessary defense against sanctions. The anti-Western narrative presents financial fragmentation as a multipolar correction rather than a cost of aggression.

Western perspective: Western governments see SWIFT exclusion as a high-impact but bounded coercive tool: it raises costs, signals resolve, and complicates Russian war financing, but it is not a total blockade. Self-critique focuses on leakage, third-country intermediation, and the risk that overuse of financial sanctions accelerates de-dollarization. Debates center on whether partial exclusion is sufficient or whether broader secondary sanctions are needed.

UN perspective: The UN perspective emphasizes that financial sanctions must not obstruct humanitarian assistance, food trade, or development finance. It highlights the need for clear carve-outs, predictable payment channels, and monitoring of unintended effects on vulnerable populations. The UN also stresses multilateral legitimacy, noting that unilateral financial measures can create legal uncertainty and uneven protection for non-target states.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Export Controls on Technology: The Small-Yard-High-Fence Strategy and Russian Adaptation

Bolded Causal Claim: Export controls on advanced technology can degrade a target state's military-industrial capacity by denying access to chokepoint inputs and production equipment while preserving broader trade, but their coercive effect depends on allied coordination, enforcement capacity, and the target's ability to substitute, stockpile, or reroute supply.

Mechanism: Export controls are not comprehensive embargoes; they are item-specific licensing regimes that operate through production bottlenecks. The "small yard" identifies a narrow set of goods with high military or strategic value—advanced semiconductors, lithography and etching equipment, aerospace-grade materials, precision machine tools, certain chemicals, software, and technical data—while the "high fence" raises compliance barriers around those items through entity lists, end-use and end-user controls, license denials, and extraterritorial rules such as foreign direct product restrictions. The causal mechanism is not that the target stops producing weapons, but that production becomes slower, costlier, less reliable, and more dependent on inferior substitutes. Modern weapons systems are complex assemblies whose performance depends on components manufactured through concentrated global supply chains; denying access to Western-designed chips, machine tools, and specialized materials forces redesign, extends lead times, and degrades quality. The mechanism also operates through information and maintenance: controlled software updates, technical support, spare parts, and calibration services can be as important as physical components. Allied coordination is essential because unilateral controls create arbitrage opportunities; when the United States, European Union, Japan, South Korea, and other suppliers align lists and licensing standards, substitute supply shrinks. Enforcement then determines whether controls bind in practice. Customs data, corporate compliance programs, financial tracking, intelligence on diversion networks, and post-shipment verification all shape the gap between legal restriction and material effect. Russian adaptation has included pre-war stockpiling, parallel imports through third countries, reverse engineering, substitution with lower-grade or non-Western components, domestic production campaigns, and procurement through front companies and intermediary firms. The mechanism is therefore dynamic: controls impose friction; adaptation reduces friction; enforcement and intelligence determine the equilibrium. The "small yard" also has a political function: by limiting the scope of controlled items, policymakers aim to reduce collateral damage to legitimate commerce,

preserve business support, and avoid the overbreadth that can undermine coalitions. The "high fence" then compensates for narrow scope by making evasion expensive and risky. In practice, however, the boundary between military-relevant and civilian technology is porous, especially for dual-use goods, and enforcement must constantly update classifications as targets adapt.

Scope Conditions: Export controls are most effective when the controlled item has few technically equivalent substitutes; when production requires specialized equipment, intellectual property, or standards concentrated in sanctioning jurisdictions; when allies share lists and enforcement practices; when end users can be identified with reasonable confidence; and when financial and logistics channels are monitored. They are weaker when technology is mature, widely produced, or easily reverse-engineered; when third-country intermediaries have weak compliance capacity or incentives; when the target has accumulated stockpiles; when controls are announced with long grace periods; or when private actors can exploit ambiguity in classification. Scope conditions also include legal precision: controls must be specific enough to avoid capturing ordinary civilian trade, because overbreadth can harm non-target economies, raise costs for sanctioning states, and erode political support. Another condition is time. Controls may have limited immediate effect if stockpiles exist, but their impact can grow as inventories deplete and as the target faces the cost of redesigning systems around unavailable inputs. Conversely, over time targets may develop alternative suppliers or domestic substitutes, reducing the long-term coercive effect. The effectiveness of controls also depends on the target's industrial structure: a state with a large, diversified, and technologically sophisticated economy can adapt more readily than one dependent on imported high-end components. Finally, controls require continuous maintenance. Static lists become obsolete as technology diffuses and as adversaries learn to route procurement through new intermediaries.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism is operating, one should observe price premiums for controlled components in Russian procurement markets; longer production cycles for weapons and aerospace systems; quality failures or downgraded performance; increased customs seizures and enforcement actions; growth of intermediary firms in Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Central Asia, China, and other transit jurisdictions; shifts in trade statistics by partner country and harmonized system code; component teardowns showing older, non-Western, or lower-grade parts; and Russian claims of import substitution that may mask continued dependence. One should also observe allied policy updates, such as expanded entity lists, new licensing requirements, and enforcement guidance. Conversely, if controls are ineffective, one would expect stable production rates, minimal price premiums, and little change in component sourcing. The observable record is rarely unambiguous because procurement networks are deliberately opaque, but triangulation across customs data, corporate disclosures, enforcement cases, and technical analysis can reveal adaptation patterns. A further implication is that controls may produce "leakage" without total failure: even partial denial can raise costs and slow production, while complete elimination of access is unlikely. Analysts should therefore distinguish between degradation and collapse, and should avoid treating continued Russian military production as proof that controls have no effect.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African perspective: From an African vantage point, export controls on technology are often interpreted through the lens of asymmetric global governance rather than as a neutral security instrument. African scholars and policymakers may note that the same supply-chain chokepoints used against Russia also shape African access to semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, agricultural machinery, and green technologies. The small-yard-high-fence strategy can appear less as precision policy than as an extension of technological hierarchy: African states are rarely designers of control regimes but are frequently subject

to their spillovers, including higher prices, delayed equipment, and costly compliance obligations. There is also concern that enforcement against diversion can criminalize ordinary trade, push African firms into expensive due-diligence regimes, or make African intermediaries scapegoats for systemic leakage. Yet some African security actors may welcome constraints on weapons proliferation if controls are transparent, multilateral, and non-discriminatory. The key African contribution is to ask who governs chokepoints, whose development is collateralized, and whether technological denial regimes reproduce dependency rather than merely target aggressors. This perspective also highlights that African industrialization depends on access to imported technology, so control regimes that are too broad or unpredictably enforced can constrain development even when Africa is not the target. The African vantage point thus reframes export controls as a question of global technological justice: security for some must not become permanent underdevelopment for others.

Chinese perspective: China views technology controls as part of a broader U.S.-led strategy of containment and decoupling, not merely a Russia-specific measure. Beijing emphasizes that extraterritorial export controls politicize supply chains, incentivize indigenous innovation, and accelerate parallel technological ecosystems. It may support Russian adaptation indirectly by providing non-controlled components and by framing controls as illegitimate economic coercion. China's perspective highlights the tension between security and development: controls can slow targeted states but also fragment global innovation, raise costs for all, and encourage the creation of alternative standards and supply chains. It also stresses sovereignty: states have the right to develop technology without external veto. At the same time, this perspective can occlude China's own use of economic leverage and its role in sustaining Russian access to certain goods.

Russian perspective: Russia frames export controls as economic warfare and evidence of Western intent to permanently weaken Russian industry. It emphasizes adaptation through stockpiles, parallel imports, import substitution, and partnerships with non-Western suppliers. Moscow argues that controls are porous and that Russian military production continues, albeit with delays and quality trade-offs. This perspective highlights sovereignty and resilience, and it treats technological denial as proof that the West seeks not merely to end the war but to degrade Russia's long-term capacity. It occludes, however, the extent to which adaptation raises costs, degrades performance, and depends on foreign intermediaries. It also tends to understate the role of pre-war stockpiles and the limits of domestic substitution in advanced manufacturing.

Western perspective: Western governments view export controls as precision instruments that reduce collateral damage compared with comprehensive embargoes. They emphasize allied coordination, legal clarity, and targeting of military-relevant inputs. The small-yard-high-fence concept reflects a belief that narrowly scoped but strictly enforced controls can impose strategic costs without severing all commercial exchange. Self-critique acknowledges enforcement gaps, third-country diversion, and the risk that controls incentivize long-term technological decoupling. Debates focus on whether the yard is too small—leaving loopholes that sustain Russian production—or too large—harming legitimate commerce, innovation, and relations with non-target states. Western analysts also debate whether controls should be paired with secondary sanctions or whether such measures would accelerate de-dollarization and alienate partners.

UN perspective: The UN perspective stresses that export controls must include humanitarian and development exemptions, avoid obstructing access to medical, agricultural, and civilian technologies, and be implemented with transparency and due process. It highlights risks to non-target states' development and calls for monitoring of unintended consequences, capacity-building for compliance, and safeguards against overreach. The UN also emphasizes multilateral legitimacy: controls imposed by a subset of states may create legal uncertainty and uneven protection for countries not involved in their design. From this vantage point,

the key issue is not only whether controls constrain a target's military capacity, but whether they preserve space for civilian development and humanitarian access.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Global Spillovers: Food, Fuel, Fertilizer, and the Burden on the Global South

Bolded Causal Claim: The Russia-Ukraine war and associated sanctions transmitted shocks through global commodity markets, raising prices and disrupting supplies of food, fuel, and fertilizer in ways that imposed disproportionate costs on import-dependent countries in the Global South, especially in Africa, even though those countries were not the intended targets.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through linked global commodity markets and the physical disruption of trade. Russia's invasion disrupted Ukrainian grain exports through port blockades, mined waters, damaged infrastructure, and labor shortages. Sanctions and self-sanctioning affected Russian exports of energy, fertilizer, and grain, while also raising transaction costs through payment frictions, insurance premiums, shipping risks, and corporate overcompliance. Because food, fuel, and fertilizer markets are globally integrated, localized disruptions became price shocks. The three commodities are structurally linked: fertilizer production depends heavily on natural gas; fuel affects transport, mechanization, and irrigation; and food prices reflect both input costs and availability. Import-dependent countries therefore faced a triple squeeze: higher food import bills, higher energy costs, and higher fertilizer costs that reduced future agricultural yields. The mechanism also includes second-order effects. Reduced fertilizer application lowers yields in subsequent seasons; export restrictions by other producers amplify scarcity; hoarding and speculative behavior can exaggerate price movements; and currency depreciation in import-dependent economies raises the local-currency cost of dollar-denominated commodities. Fiscal stress follows: governments must choose between subsidizing consumption, cutting other spending, or allowing prices to rise, each with political and welfare consequences. The Black Sea Grain Initiative partially restored Ukrainian grain flows and reduced some price pressure, but it did not eliminate volatility, fully restore pre-war export volumes, or resolve inequalities in access. Sanctions design included humanitarian carve-outs for food and fertilizer, yet private actors often overcomplied because of legal uncertainty, payment-channel difficulties, and reputational risk. Thus the mechanism is not simply "sanctions caused hunger"; it is a chain in which war, sanctions, market structure, financial frictions, and pre-existing vulnerabilities combined to shift costs onto non-target populations.

Scope Conditions: The severity of spillovers depends on import dependence, foreign-exchange reserves, subsidy regimes, social safety nets, domestic production capacity, alternative suppliers, and exchange-rate flexibility. Countries with large grain reserves, diversified suppliers, or strong fiscal capacity are less exposed. Countries with high food-import shares, limited foreign exchange, weak safety nets, and currency depreciation are more exposed. The effect also depends on whether sanctions explicitly exempt food and fertilizer and whether financial channels remain open; legal exemptions do not automatically translate into market access if banks and insurers avoid transactions. Global market structure matters: concentrated fertilizer markets, in which a few suppliers dominate, amplify shocks more than diversified grain markets. Time horizon matters as well. Short-term price spikes affect consumption and fiscal balances; longer-term effects operate through reduced fertilizer use, lower yields, and debt distress. Finally, domestic policy choices—such as export bans, price controls, or targeted subsidies—can either buffer or amplify global shocks.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism is operating, one should observe increases in the FAO Food Price Index and regional food price indices; rising import bills for food, fuel, and fertilizer; currency depreciation in import-dependent economies; reduced fertilizer application rates; declining agricultural yields in subsequent seasons; increased malnutrition indicators; fiscal deficits or subsidy cuts; and social unrest or

protests. One should also observe changes in Black Sea export volumes, shipping insurance premiums, and the behavior of private banks and insurers. Country-level variation should correlate with import dependence and fiscal capacity rather than with direct involvement in the war. If spillovers are minimal, one would expect stable food prices, unchanged import volumes, and no deterioration in nutrition indicators. The observable record should also distinguish between price effects and availability effects: a country may face high prices even when physical supply exists, if foreign exchange or credit is constrained. Analysts should therefore examine both market prices and household access.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African perspective: The African perspective frames global spillovers as a structural injustice rather than an unfortunate side effect of great-power conflict. African economies bore costs of a European war and Western sanctions despite having limited agency in either, and despite the fact that many African states were not parties to the conflict. Scholars and policymakers emphasize that food and fuel price spikes are not mere market accidents but reflect global hierarchies in trade, finance, energy, and agriculture. African vulnerability is rooted in colonial and post-colonial structures: import dependence, limited agro-industrial capacity, debt burdens, and exposure to dollar-denominated commodity markets. Sanctions and war exposed these vulnerabilities rather than creating them from nothing. The burden is also unevenly distributed within societies: women, rural households, and informal workers often face the sharpest food insecurity and have the least capacity to absorb price shocks. African actors have demanded humanitarian carve-outs, grain corridors, debt relief, and investment in local production, while also critiquing the moral asymmetry in which African lives are treated as collateral in great-power competition. The African vantage point reveals that sanctions analysis must include non-target welfare, not just target coercion, and that global economic governance must be judged by how it protects those outside the conflict. It also highlights the need for African agency in shaping commodity, finance, and food systems rather than merely receiving emergency relief.

Chinese perspective: China emphasizes that sanctions and war disrupt global supply chains and harm developing countries, reinforcing its narrative that Western policy choices generate global economic instability. It highlights de-dollarization, alternative payment systems, and South-South cooperation as responses to Western financial dominance. China may position itself as a stabilizing trade partner and advocate for dialogue, while also benefiting from discounted Russian energy and expanded commodity trade. Its perspective draws attention to the vulnerability of developing economies to externally imposed shocks and to the need for diversified supply chains. At the same time, this perspective can occlude China's own role in commodity markets, its geopolitical competition with the West, and the ways in which its economic interests shape its framing of sanctions and spillovers.

Russian perspective: Russia frames global spillovers as consequences of Western sanctions and Ukrainian or NATO actions, arguing that restrictions on fertilizer and energy harm global food security. It presents itself as a reliable supplier willing to export if restrictions are lifted, and uses spillovers to mobilize sympathy in the Global South. This perspective highlights the real costs of sanctions and the importance of keeping food and fertilizer trade open. It occludes, however, Russia's blockade of Ukrainian ports, its own export restrictions and quotas, and its role in initiating the war. It also tends to treat all sanctions as illegitimate while minimizing the distinction between targeted restrictions and humanitarian exemptions. The Russian framing is therefore politically effective but analytically incomplete.

Western perspective: Western governments acknowledge spillovers and emphasize humanitarian carve-outs, the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and development assistance. They argue that Russia's invasion, not sanctions,

is the primary cause of disruption, and that sanctions regimes explicitly exempt food and fertilizer. Self-critique focuses on payment frictions, insurance gaps, overcompliance by private actors, and the difficulty of translating legal exemptions into market access. Debates center on how to reduce unintended harm while maintaining pressure on Russia, including through clearer guidance, dedicated payment channels, and monitoring of humanitarian impacts. Western analysts also debate whether more aggressive secondary measures would worsen spillovers or whether insufficient enforcement prolongs the war and its costs. This perspective contributes a focus on policy design and accountability but can understate the structural vulnerability of import-dependent economies.

UN perspective: The UN perspective centers on humanitarian protection, food security, and multilateral coordination. It highlights the Black Sea Grain Initiative, humanitarian exemptions, and monitoring of price and access impacts. The UN stresses that non-target populations must not bear disproportionate costs and calls for predictable trade channels, debt relief, and support for vulnerable countries. It also emphasizes the need to protect humanitarian space: sanctions and counter-sanctions should not obstruct food, fertilizer, or energy flows essential to survival. From this vantage point, the key issue is not only whether sanctions are legally justified, but whether global institutions can prevent war-related shocks from becoming hunger crises. The UN perspective contributes a human-security lens and a focus on vulnerable populations, though it may be constrained by the political interests of member states and the limits of humanitarian diplomacy.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on the political economy of coercion in the Ukraine war is not a regional footnote to a European crisis; it is a structurally distinct reading of how sanctions, energy shocks, and supply-chain ruptures travel through a world economy that was already unequal before February 2022. From within African political economy, the central puzzle is not whether sanctions on Russia are justified in legal or moral terms, but why the costs of a war fought between two European states are so disproportionately absorbed by populations that had no voice in its outbreak and no seat at the tables where sanctions were designed. This perspective is anchored in a long tradition of African scholarship that treats the global economy not as a neutral market but as a historically constructed hierarchy of extraction, dependency, and asymmetric vulnerability. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) remains the foundational statement: the underdevelopment of the continent was not a natural condition but an active process produced by the integration of African economies into European capitalism on subordinate terms. Julius Nyerere's Arusha Declaration and Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) extended this to the post-independence period, arguing that formal sovereignty masked continued structural subordination through trade, finance, and commodity dependence. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) added the psychological and political dimension: the colonial subject is produced by a system that reserves the full exercise of violence and sovereignty for the metropole while distributing vulnerability to the periphery. These are not decorative citations; they supply the analytical grammar through which African scholars read the 2022 sanctions regime.

The mechanism begins with commodity structure. African economies are, with significant variation, net importers of food, fuel, and fertilizer. The continent imports roughly 80 percent of its food in some subregions, and fertilizer import dependence is acute: Russia and Belarus together supplied a substantial share of global potash and nitrogen exports, and Ukraine and Russia were major grain exporters. When sanctions, war damage, and Black Sea port blockades disrupted these flows, the price effects were transmitted not

through diplomatic channels but through global commodity markets where African states are price-takers. The UNCTAD trade and development reports documented the resulting terms-of-trade shock: food and fuel prices spiked, import bills ballooned, and foreign-exchange reserves depleted. The African Development Bank and the World Bank recorded rising debt distress across the continent, with several states spending more on debt service than on health or education. The mechanism is not that sanctions were designed to harm Africa; it is that a sanctions architecture built by and for the G7 did not internalize the price elasticity of demand in low-income, import-dependent economies. This is what Siba Grovogui, in *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996), identifies as the deeper pattern: international law and global governance structures are constructed around the interests of powerful states, and the sovereignty of weaker states is recognized formally while being hollowed out materially.

The energy dimension compounds this. Europe's decoupling from Russian gas, however necessary from a European security perspective, reshaped global LNG markets. African gas producers such as Nigeria, Algeria, and Mozambique faced new demand from Europe, but the infrastructure, financing, and contractual terms of that demand were set by European buyers and international oil companies, not by African industrial planners. The result was a familiar pattern: African resources mobilized to solve European problems while African domestic energy access remained unaddressed. This is the extraversion dynamic that Jean-François Bayart analyzed in *The State in Africa* (1993): African states are compelled to orient their economies outward toward external patrons and markets, with domestic accumulation subordinated to external demand. The sanctions-energy nexus thus reproduced, rather than disrupted, the structural position of African economies in the global division of labor.

The financial channel is equally consequential. SWIFT exclusion of Russian banks and the freezing of Russian central-bank reserves demonstrated the weaponization of financial infrastructure that African scholars had long warned about. Mahmood Mamdani's work on the post-colonial state and on the politics of naming and categorization, and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's critique of the universalization of Western epistemologies in *The Invention of Women* (1997), both point to a broader pattern: the categories and infrastructures through which global governance operates are not neutral but carry the imprint of their origins. For African central banks and finance ministries, the lesson of 2022 was that dollar-denominated reserves and SWIFT-dependent payment systems are instruments of potential coercion, not merely technical plumbing. This accelerated interest in alternative settlement mechanisms, in gold accumulation, and in bilateral currency arrangements, though the practical capacity to escape dollar dependence remains limited. The parallel financial architecture being built by China and Russia is thus read in Africa with a mixture of interest and caution: interest because it promises reduced vulnerability to Western financial coercion; caution because substituting one external dependency for another does not resolve the underlying asymmetry.

The fertilizer and food crisis reveals the sharpest edge of the African critique. When Russian fertilizer exports were disrupted by sanctions and self-sanctioning by shipping and insurance firms, and when Ukrainian grain was blockaded, African food prices rose sharply. The World Food Programme warned of acute food insecurity across the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, and parts of Southern Africa. The African perspective does not deny that Russia's invasion caused the disruption; it insists, however, that the sanctions response was designed without adequate safeguards for non-target populations and that the humanitarian carve-outs proved insufficient in practice. The Black Sea Grain Initiative, brokered by Turkey and the UN, was welcomed but seen as fragile and as treating African food security as a byproduct of great-power bargaining rather than as a priority in its own right. The UNCTAD reports on the crisis emphasized the need for debt relief, predictable trade channels, and support for vulnerable countries, but African scholars noted that these recommendations were not matched by corresponding commitments from the G7.

The structural critique extends to the normative framing. African governments and intellectuals have pointed to what they perceive as double standards: the rapid and comprehensive mobilization of sanctions against Russia contrasted with the absence of comparable measures against other aggressors or occupiers. This is not merely a rhetorical point; it goes to the legitimacy of the sanctions regime as a whole. If sanctions are understood as an expression of international law and collective security, their selective application undermines the claim that they serve universal norms rather than particular interests. This connects to Mamdani's analysis in *When Victims Become Killers* (2001) and *Saviors and Survivors* (2009): the international community's interventions are shaped by geopolitical hierarchies, and the language of human rights and humanitarianism can obscure rather than challenge those hierarchies. The African perspective thus treats the Ukraine sanctions not as an isolated policy episode but as a revelation of the architecture of global power: who gets to sanction, who gets sanctioned, and who pays the price.

African agency is not absent from this picture, though it is often underrecognized in Western and UN accounts. African states have pursued a range of strategies: abstentions and non-alignment at the UN, diplomatic mediation efforts, pursuit of grain and fertilizer deals with both Russia and Ukraine, and participation in forums such as the African Union's peace initiatives. The African Union's 2023 grain deal with Russia, and the diplomatic visits by African leaders to Kyiv and Moscow, illustrate an effort to assert African interests rather than simply accept the terms set by others. Emmanuel Aning and Kwesi Aning's work on African security governance, and Kwesi Aning's analyses of the African Peace and Security Architecture, emphasize that African actors are not merely recipients of global shocks but are developing their own frameworks for managing them. Similarly, Sylvia Tamale's work on African feminism and decoloniality, and the broader decolonial scholarship associated with the "pluriverse" agenda, insist that African knowledge systems and political traditions offer resources for rethinking global order that are not reducible to Western liberal internationalism or to great-power realism.

What the African perspective contributes that the other four cannot is a structural and historical depth that treats the 2022 crisis as a moment in a longer arc of unequal integration. It reveals that the costs of coercion are not distributed according to the logic of the conflict but according to the pre-existing structure of the global economy. It shows that sanctions, even when legally justified and multilaterally coordinated, can function as a transfer of burden from the sanctioning coalition to non-target populations in the Global South. It insists that the legitimacy of any coercive economic measure depends not only on its target but on its distributional consequences and on the voice of those affected in its design. And it offers a normative framework—rooted in anti-colonial thought, in the demand for economic sovereignty, and in the critique of extraversion—that challenges both the Western assumption of normative leadership and the great-power assumption that the periphery is merely a theater of competition.

What it occludes is also important. The African perspective can, in its structural emphasis, understate the agency of African elites who have themselves contributed to food insecurity through governance failures, corruption, and underinvestment in agriculture. It can romanticize non-alignment as a principled stance when it sometimes reflects opportunism or dependence on Russian arms and diplomatic support. It can treat "Africa" as a more unified actor than it is, eliding the divergent interests of oil exporters and oil importers, of grain producers and grain consumers, of states with strong ties to Russia and those aligned with the West. And it can risk a functionalism in which every global shock is read as a reproduction of colonial structures, leaving less room for contingency, for genuine change, or for the possibility that some African states have benefited from the diversification of partnerships that the crisis accelerated. The strongest version of the perspective, however, does not deny these complexities; it incorporates them by insisting that structural analysis and agency are not opposites but are dialectically related, and that the task is to understand how

African actors navigate constraints that they did not create.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on the political economy of coercion in the Ukraine war is shaped by a dual identity: China is simultaneously the world's second-largest economy and a state that frames itself as the leading voice of the Global South, and it is a strategic partner of Russia that has refused to join Western sanctions while also avoiding direct material support for the war. From within this vantage point, sanctions are read primarily as an instrument of economic warfare waged by the United States and its allies to preserve hegemony, and the appropriate response is not compliance but the construction of alternative institutions that reduce vulnerability to Western financial and technological coercion.

The mechanism of concern is weaponized interdependence. Farrell and Newman's framework, developed in *Weaponized Interdependence* (2019) and extended in *Underground Empire* (2023), is taken seriously in Chinese strategic discourse, though with a different normative valence: where Western scholars often treat weaponized interdependence as a tool to be wielded responsibly, Chinese analysts treat it as a threat to be neutralized. The freezing of Russian central-bank reserves and the SWIFT exclusion of Russian banks are read as demonstrations that dollar hegemony and control over financial messaging infrastructure can be turned against any state that defies Washington. This has accelerated Chinese efforts to internationalize the renminbi, expand the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), and promote bilateral currency settlement. The mechanism is defensive: reduce exposure to a weapon that has been demonstrated to work.

The energy dimension is read through the lens of security and diversification. China is the world's largest energy importer, and the disruption of Russian gas flows to Europe reshaped global LNG markets, raising prices and tightening supply. Chinese analysts note that Europe's decoupling from Russian pipeline gas increased competition for LNG cargoes, raising costs for Asian importers including China. At the same time, China benefited from discounted Russian oil and gas, as Russia redirected exports eastward. This created a complex position: China gained commercially from Russia's distress while facing higher global energy prices and the risk of secondary sanctions. The small-yard-high-fence export control strategy, particularly US restrictions on advanced semiconductors and semiconductor manufacturing equipment, is read as the technological counterpart of financial sanctions—a targeted but expanding effort to constrain China's development. Chinese discourse frames this as "containment" and "decoupling," and the response has been a massive state-led push for technological self-sufficiency, import substitution, and the cultivation of alternative supply chains.

The global spillover dimension is addressed through a narrative of Western responsibility. Chinese official statements and state media have consistently attributed global food and fuel price spikes to sanctions and to the war itself, while emphasizing China's role as a provider of stability: grain exports, fertilizer production, and infrastructure investment through the Belt and Road Initiative. The Chinese perspective contributes a powerful critique of the extraterritorial reach of Western sanctions and a practical agenda for building parallel institutions. It also highlights the ways in which sanctions can accelerate the fragmentation of the global economy into competing blocs, a process that Chinese analysts view with concern but also as an opportunity to advance multipolarity.

What the Chinese perspective occludes is significant. It tends to understate China's own use of economic coercion, as in the case of Australia, Lithuania, and South Korea, and it presents China's rise as inherently benign and non-hegemonic, a claim that is contested by its neighbors. It also downplays the extent to which China's economic interests are served by Russia's isolation, which has made Russia a junior partner depen-

dent on Chinese markets and technology. The framing of sanctions as purely Western aggression can obscure the agency of the Russian state in choosing war and in weaponizing energy exports. And the emphasis on de-dollarization, while analytically serious, can overstate the near-term viability of alternatives to the dollar system, given the depth of dollar liquidity, the rule of law in US financial markets, and the absence of a fully convertible renminbi. The strongest version of the Chinese perspective, however, is not merely propaganda; it is a coherent structural critique of US financial hegemony that has gained traction well beyond Beijing, particularly among states that have experienced or fear Western sanctions.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on the political economy of coercion is defined by a narrative of resilience in the face of an unprecedented sanctions assault, framed as an act of economic warfare by a hostile West seeking to destroy Russia. From within this vantage point, the sanctions regime is not a legitimate tool of coercive diplomacy but an illegal and illegitimate attempt to subjugate a sovereign state, and Russia's survival and adaptation demonstrate the limits of Western power and the emergence of a multipolar world.

The mechanism of resilience is multifaceted. Russia entered the sanctions period with substantial foreign-exchange reserves, a low debt-to-GDP ratio, a current-account surplus driven by energy exports, and a banking system that had been partially insulated from Western finance since 2014. The initial shock—ruble collapse, capital flight, and the freezing of roughly half of Russia's reserves—was severe, but the imposition of capital controls, the mandatory conversion of export revenues into rubles, and the redirection of energy exports to Asia stabilized the currency and restored fiscal revenues. The ruble's recovery in 2022, while partly artificial, was presented as proof of economic sovereignty. The mechanism of adaptation includes import substitution, parallel imports through third countries, the development of domestic payment systems (Mir, SPFS), and the construction of a "shadow fleet" of tankers to circumvent the oil price cap. Russian officials and analysts emphasize that the economy did not collapse, that GDP contracted less than initially projected, and that unemployment remained low.

The energy weaponization narrative is inverted: Russia is not the aggressor using energy as a weapon but the victim of European decisions to sever long-standing commercial relationships. The Nord Stream sabotage, which Russia attributes to Western actors, is cited as evidence of Western willingness to destroy infrastructure to maintain the sanctions regime. The oil price cap is framed as a market-distorting intervention that violates free-trade principles and that Russia has successfully evaded through discounted sales to China and India. The mechanism of price-cap evasion—selling above the cap through opaque intermediaries, blending, and ship-to-ship transfers—demonstrates, in the Russian view, the futility of trying to control global commodity markets through administrative fiat.

The global spillover dimension is addressed through a counter-narrative: Russia denies weaponizing food and attributes global hunger to Western sanctions and to Ukrainian mining of Black Sea ports. The Black Sea Grain Initiative is acknowledged but framed as a concession by Russia to demonstrate its humanitarian concern, while the West is accused of failing to deliver on promises to facilitate Russian fertilizer and grain exports. Russian discourse emphasizes that sanctions on Russian fertilizer and banking channels have disrupted global food supply, and that the burden falls on the poorest countries. This is not merely deflection; it contains a partial truth, in that sanctions on Russian banks did complicate fertilizer trade finance, and the UN and Western governments have acknowledged the need for humanitarian carve-outs.

What the Russian perspective occludes is substantial. It systematically understates the economic costs of sanctions: the loss of access to Western technology, the brain drain, the contraction of non-energy sectors,

the dependence on China, and the long-term degradation of industrial capacity. It ignores the role of the invasion in causing the initial disruption and in making Russia an international pariah. It presents the ruble's recovery as a sign of strength rather than as the product of draconian capital controls and forced conversion. It denies or minimizes war crimes and civilian harm. And it treats the "multipolar world" as an accomplished fact rather than as an aspiration. The strongest version of the Russian perspective, stripped of its propaganda elements, is a serious claim about the limits of sanctions: that a large, resource-rich, relatively self-sufficient economy with willing buyers in Asia can withstand even comprehensive sanctions, and that the attempt to coerce such an economy may accelerate the very fragmentation of the global order that the sanctioning states seek to prevent.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on the political economy of coercion in the Ukraine war is rooted in the tradition of coercive diplomacy and economic statecraft, updated for an era of weaponized interdependence. From within this vantage point, sanctions are a legitimate and necessary response to an act of aggression that violated the foundational norms of the post-1945 international order, and the central challenge is to design sanctions that are effective, targeted, and attentive to global spillovers.

The mechanism of sanctions design has evolved significantly. The shift from comprehensive sanctions, as in Iraq in the 1990s, to targeted or "smart" sanctions in the 2000s, and then to the unprecedented measures of 2022—asset freezes, SWIFT exclusion, export controls, and the oil price cap—reflects a learning process. Nicholas Mulder's *The Economic Weapon* (2022) traces the genealogy of sanctions from the League of Nations to the present, showing how the ambition to use economic coercion as a substitute for war has repeatedly collided with the reality that sanctions harm civilians and can entrench rather than weaken target regimes. The 2022 package was designed with this history in mind: targeted at the Russian state and its elites, with humanitarian carve-outs, and with the oil price cap intended to reduce Russian revenues without removing Russian oil from global markets. The mechanism of the price cap is novel: rather than prohibiting the purchase of Russian oil, it prohibits the use of Western shipping, insurance, and finance for transactions above a set price, leveraging Western dominance in maritime services to enforce a global price ceiling.

The energy dimension is read as a story of painful but necessary decoupling. Europe's dependence on Russian gas was recognized as a strategic vulnerability long before 2022, but the political will to address it was lacking. The war forced the issue, and the result—rapid LNG diversification, demand reduction, and the construction of new infrastructure—was achieved at significant economic cost but without the catastrophic shortages that had been feared. Western analysts credit market flexibility, policy coordination, and the mild winter of 2022-23, while acknowledging that the adjustment was uneven and that some sectors and countries suffered more than others.

The financial and technological dimensions are read as demonstrations of Western structural power. Farrell and Newman's weaponized interdependence framework is central here: the United States and its allies control the key nodes of the global financial and technological infrastructure, and the 2022 sanctions demonstrated the capacity to weaponize these nodes against a major power. The export control strategy—described as "small yard, high fence"—aims to restrict Russia's access to advanced technology, particularly semiconductors, while minimizing disruption to global supply chains. The mechanism is to identify chokepoints where Western firms dominate and to deny access through licensing and extraterritorial application of US law.

The global spillover dimension is where the Western perspective is most self-critical. Western policymakers

and analysts have acknowledged that sanctions on Russia contributed to global food and fuel price spikes, that the burden fell disproportionately on the Global South, and that the humanitarian carve-outs were insufficient in practice. The Black Sea Grain Initiative is credited as a partial remedy, and there is recognition that more needs to be done on debt relief, fertilizer access, and food security. Emma Ashford's work, including her 2023 analysis of sanctions, has been influential in pushing the Western debate toward greater realism about the limits and costs of sanctions. The Western perspective contributes a serious engagement with the design and effectiveness of coercive economic measures, a willingness to learn from past failures, and an institutional capacity for coordination and innovation. It also contributes a normative framework—human rights, democracy, territorial integrity—that, whatever its inconsistencies, provides a language for holding aggressors accountable.

What the Western perspective occludes is its own complicity in the structures that make sanctions possible and costly. It tends to treat Western financial and technological dominance as a natural feature of the global economy rather than as a product of historical power. It can underestimate the resentment generated by the extraterritorial application of US law, which affects not only targets but also third parties. It sometimes frames Global South concerns as implementation problems to be managed rather than as structural critiques to be engaged. And it can overstate the effectiveness of sanctions in changing target-state behavior, while understating their role in accelerating the fragmentation of the global economy. The strongest version of the Western perspective is one that takes these critiques seriously: that sanctions are a tool of last resort, that their legitimacy depends on proportionality and on attention to non-target populations, and that the long-term challenge is to build a global economic order in which coercion is less necessary because the underlying grievances are addressed through diplomacy and institutional reform.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on the political economy of coercion in the Ukraine war is organized around the protection of civilians, the preservation of humanitarian space, and the mitigation of global spillovers, particularly food and energy insecurity. From within this vantage point, the central issue is not the legitimacy of sanctions per se but whether the international community can prevent a war between two states from becoming a hunger and energy crisis for the world's most vulnerable populations.

The mechanism of concern is the transmission of war-related shocks through global markets. The UN, through agencies such as the World Food Programme, the Food and Agriculture Organization, and UNCTAD, has documented how the disruption of Ukrainian grain exports and Russian fertilizer exports drove up global food prices, with disproportionate effects on import-dependent countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The UNCTAD trade and development reports have provided the most systematic analysis of these spillovers, tracking price indices, trade volumes, and debt distress. The mechanism is not sanctions alone but the interaction of war, sanctions, self-sanctioning by private firms, and the pre-existing vulnerability of low-income countries. The UN perspective insists on disaggregating these causes rather than attributing all harm to any single actor.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative is the centerpiece of the UN's practical response. Brokered by Turkey and the UN in July 2022, the initiative created a safe corridor for Ukrainian grain exports through the Black Sea, with inspections in Istanbul to address Russian concerns about arms smuggling. The initiative facilitated the export of over 30 million tonnes of grain and foodstuffs before Russia withdrew in July 2023. The UN also worked to facilitate Russian fertilizer and grain exports, recognizing that sanctions and self-sanctioning had created obstacles even where humanitarian exemptions existed. The mechanism here is humanitarian

diplomacy: using the UN's convening power to create ad hoc arrangements that protect civilian populations without resolving the underlying conflict.

The financial and energy dimensions are addressed through calls for debt relief, predictable trade channels, and support for vulnerable countries. The UN has emphasized that the global financial architecture is ill-equipped to handle simultaneous shocks to food, fuel, and fertilizer prices, and that low-income countries face a triple crisis of debt, inflation, and currency depreciation. The UN's advocacy for the extension of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, for the removal of obstacles to Russian fertilizer exports, and for increased humanitarian funding reflects a consistent prioritization of human security over geopolitical alignment.

The normative framework is multilateral and legalistic. The UN stresses that sanctions must comply with international law, including humanitarian law, and that non-target populations must not bear disproportionate costs. It calls for humanitarian exemptions that are clear, predictable, and actually implemented, and for monitoring of price and access impacts. It emphasizes the need to protect humanitarian space: sanctions and counter-sanctions should not obstruct food, fertilizer, or energy flows essential to survival. From this vantage point, the key issue is not only whether sanctions are legally justified, but whether global institutions can prevent war-related shocks from becoming hunger crises. The UN perspective contributes a human-security lens and a focus on vulnerable populations, though it may be constrained by the political interests of member states and the limits of humanitarian diplomacy. It also contributes a data and monitoring function that is essential for evidence-based policy, and a convening role that no other actor can replicate. What it occludes is the power asymmetry among member states: the UN's effectiveness depends on the cooperation of the very powers whose actions it seeks to moderate, and its humanitarian framing can sometimes depoliticize structural inequalities that require political, not merely humanitarian, solutions.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African	Centers the sanctions package's externalities in food, fuel, and fertilizer markets; treats African import dependence, foreign-exchange shortages, and debt as part of the causal chain rather than background noise; demands humanitarian carve-outs and structural support	Can flatten variation among African states and may understate Russian agency in generating the initial shock; sometimes treats all Western policy as uniformly extractive	Human security, sovereign equality, and anti-collateral-damage: coercion against an aggressor must not be financed by hunger in non-target states	African food price indices, fertilizer import dependence, and UNCTAD trade and development reports on commodity shocks	Western: costs to third parties are spillovers, not intent, and targeted design plus carve-outs already mitigate them
Chinese	Shows how sanctions weaponize interdependence and dollar hegemony; documents parallel financial architecture and trade rerouting; frames controls as accelerants of multipolar fragmentation	May overstate US decline and understate China's own use of economic leverage; can treat Russian adaptation as proof of systemic shift rather than costly improvisation	Sovereignty, non-interference, and multipolarity; opposition to extraterritorial coercion	Expansion of alternative payment channels, bilateral currency settlement, and Sino-Russian trade growth	Western: alternatives remain shallow and dollar dominance persists; adaptation is evidence of pressure, not failure

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Documents adaptation—parallel imports, shadow fleet, discounted Asian sales, ruble invoicing—and frames sanctions as illegal economic warfare	Obscures the war's causal role; ignores domestic inflation, technological degradation, and civilian costs; overstates Western decline	Anti-hegemony and sovereign resistance; sanctions are illegitimate coercion	Continued oil exports, ruble stabilization after the initial shock, and trade redirection	African/Western: resilience is financed by war revenues and borne partly by Russian civilians; adaptation does not legitimate aggression
Western	Explains design logic: asset freezes, SWIFT exclusion, export controls, and price cap as calibrated coercion; includes self-critique on spillovers and efficacy	May overestimate control over global markets; understate Global South costs; assumes liberal-order legitimacy	Rules-based order and accountability for aggression; coercion must be targeted and lawful	2022 sanctions package, oil price cap, and export-control enforcement	African: third-party costs are structural, not incidental; Russian: measures are extraterritorial overreach
UN	Humanitarian carve-outs, Black Sea Grain Initiative, monitoring, and convening; human-security lens	Constrained by member-state power; may depoliticize structural inequality; limited enforcement	Humanitarian neutrality, multilateralism, protection of civilians	BSGI documentation, UNCTAD reports, food price monitoring	African: humanitarianism without structural reform is insufficient; Western: carve-outs may blunt coercive pressure

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case. The 2022 Russia sanctions package, from the initial asset freezes and SWIFT exclusions through the December 2022 oil price cap, is best understood not as a single embargo but as a sequenced attempt to convert Western control over financial and maritime chokepoints into coercive leverage, followed by Russian adaptation through parallel trade, discounted energy sales, and alternative shipping and payment channels.

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the package worked through incentives and constraints on central bankers, oligarchs, commodity traders, shipowners, insurers, and farmers in import-dependent states; each actor recalculated risk, liquidity, and compliance costs in real time. At the state level, Russian fiscal-military capacity, European energy dependence, and G7 coordination determined both the sanctions' reach and their political durability. At the systemic level, the case tested dollar hegemony, alliance cohesion, the legal architecture of the UN Charter, and the legitimacy of extraterritorial economic coercion. At the transnational level, the decisive action occurred in shipping lanes, insurance markets, grain corridors, parallel import networks, and currency settlement systems that no single state fully controlled.

Mechanism. The mechanism is chokepoint activation followed by evasion and market rerouting. Asset freezes immobilized a large share of Russia's foreign reserves, reducing its ability to defend the ruble and finance imports. SWIFT exclusions raised transaction costs and pushed trade toward slower, more expensive settlement channels. Export controls denied Russia access to advanced semiconductors, machine tools, and energy technology, degrading long-term productive capacity. The oil price cap then used Western dominance in maritime insurance, finance, and classification services to permit Russian oil sales only below a threshold, aiming to reduce revenue without removing volume from global markets. Russia adapted by selling discounted crude to Asian buyers, using a shadow fleet, rerouting trade through third countries, and invoicing in non-dollar currencies. The result was not collapse but a costly reconfiguration of trade geography: Western leverage remained real, yet its efficacy depended on the continued concentration of financial and maritime services and on the willingness of third parties to absorb discounted Russian commodities.

Perspective reconstruction. The African perspective reads the package as a global market shock whose costs were distributed far beyond the target state. It notes that food, fuel, and fertilizer prices rose in import-dependent economies, that foreign-exchange shortages and debt-service pressures intensified, and that the Black Sea Grain Initiative provided only partial and temporary relief. It treats humanitarian carve-outs as necessary but insufficient because they do not restore purchasing power or repair sovereign balance sheets. It also frames the episode as evidence that sanctions design must include non-target states as stakeholders rather than afterthoughts. Finally, it insists that African agency—through the African Union, regional economic communities, and diplomatic mediation—should shape any future coercive regime, rather than merely absorbing its consequences. The Chinese perspective interprets the same package as economic warfare that accelerates de-dollarization and multipolar fragmentation; it points to the expansion of alternative payment channels and to Sino-Russian trade growth as evidence that coercion can undermine the very interdependence on which it depends. The Russian perspective frames sanctions as illegal and illegitimate coercion, emphasizing adaptation through parallel imports, shadow shipping, and ruble invoicing as proof of resilience and sovereign resistance. The Western perspective defends the package as calibrated coercive diplomacy in response to aggression, while also acknowledging self-critique about spillovers, enforcement gaps, and uncertain long-term efficacy. The UN perspective centers humanitarian carve-outs, the Black Sea Grain Initiative, monitoring, and convening, treating the case as a test of whether global institutions can prevent war-related shocks from becoming hunger crises.

Explicit adjudication. The Western perspective best explains the design and strategic logic of the package,

because it captures why policymakers sequenced asset freezes, SWIFT exclusion, export controls, and the price cap as instruments of calibrated coercion. The Russian and Chinese perspectives best explain adaptation and the partial erosion of Western leverage, because they identify the shadow fleet, parallel imports, and alternative settlement channels that blunted the initial shock. The UN perspective best explains the institutional attempt to manage humanitarian fallout, though it remains constrained by the power of member states. Yet the African perspective best explains the case as a whole, because the package's most consequential effects were transnational market transmissions rather than bilateral coercion alone: the sanctions mattered globally because food, fuel, and fertilizer prices moved through integrated markets, and because import-dependent states bore costs they did not choose. What the African perspective misses is the security imperative that motivated the package and the extent to which Russian adaptation was itself costly, technologically degrading, and dependent on the continued willingness of third parties to absorb discounted commodities. A complete explanation therefore requires the African lens for distributional outcomes, the Western lens for coercive intent, and the Russian-Chinese lens for evasion and systemic counter-adaptation.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Mechanism mapping.** Distinguish four channels through which the 2022–23 crisis reached African food markets: (a) direct legal prohibitions on food or fertilizer trade; (b) indirect financial, insurance, shipping, and port frictions; (c) war effects such as the Black Sea blockade and Ukrainian export collapse; and (d) market expectations and futures-price amplification. Which channel was most important for African wheat and fertilizer prices, and what evidence would separate them?

2. **Level-of-analysis diagnosis.** Explain how the crisis operated at the individual level (household food insecurity and coping strategies), the state level (import dependence, subsidy capacity, and foreign-exchange constraints), the systemic level (global commodity markets, dollar invoicing, and energy costs), and the transnational level (grain traders, insurers, banks, and shipping firms). Which level offers the strongest leverage for policy intervention?

3. **Perspective reconstruction.** In three to four sentences each, reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of the food crisis. For each, identify one contribution and one occlusion, especially regarding whether sanctions, war, or market structure should be treated as the primary cause.

4. **Historical analogue.** Compare the 2022–23 crisis with either the 1973–74 food crisis or the sanctions-era humanitarian debates around Iraq. What is genuinely analogous, and what differs because of targeted sanctions, financial de-risking, and the Black Sea Grain Initiative?

5. **Falsification.** State two pieces of evidence that would weaken the claim that Western sanctions were the principal cause of African food insecurity, and two pieces that would strengthen it. Be explicit about the difference between correlation in price indices and demonstrated causal mechanism.

6. **Policy evaluation.** Assess the Black Sea Grain Initiative and humanitarian carve-outs in sanctions regimes. What metric—such as African food price indices, fertilizer import volumes, Ukrainian grain exports, or shipping insurance premia—best indicates whether these instruments worked, and for whom?

MODEL ANSWER

The 2022–23 food crisis is best explained as a compound shock in which war disruption and market amplification were primary, while sanctions contributed through indirect financial and logistical channels rather than through direct prohibitions on food or fertilizer trade. The causal chain ran from the Black Sea port closure and Ukrainian export collapse to global wheat futures; from Russian fertilizer export friction, including payment-channel difficulties, insurance constraints, and port logistics, to higher input costs for African agriculture; from energy price spikes to fertilizer production costs; and from dollar appreciation to larger import bills for African states. Even where no legal ban existed, compliance overreach and risk aversion by banks and shippers raised transaction costs, so the relevant mechanism was often de-risking rather than statutory prohibition. The oil price cap attempted to reduce Russian revenue while preserving supply, but its effectiveness depended on enforcement, the growth of shadow-fleet shipping, and the discounts accepted by buyers. African states therefore faced a double squeeze: higher food import prices and higher fertilizer prices, combined with limited fiscal space and constrained access to concessional finance.

At the individual level, households experienced price spikes because wheat, fertilizer, and fuel are imported and often dollar-denominated, forcing coping strategies such as reduced dietary diversity or asset sales. At the state level, import-dependent governments with limited foreign-exchange reserves could not fully subsidize consumption, so price shocks translated quickly into political and social stress. At the systemic level, Black Sea supply uncertainty, energy costs, and post-pandemic inflation fed futures markets and amplified spot prices. At the transnational level, grain traders, insurers, banks, and shipping firms repriced risk, sometimes withdrawing services from transactions that were legally permissible but commercially unattractive. The strongest policy leverage therefore lies at the transnational and systemic levels: humanitarian carve-outs must be made operationally credible to private actors, and emergency finance must address foreign-exchange constraints rather than merely condemning price spikes.

The African perspective correctly centers the burden on non-targets and treats the crisis as an exposure of structural import dependence, dollarized food systems, and limited policy space. It also warns against reducing African states to passive victims, because strategic reserves, regional trade, and fertilizer subsidy choices matter. Its occlusion can be an underestimation of Russian agency in the Black Sea blockade and in Russia's own export restrictions. The Chinese perspective frames sanctions as economic warfare and a catalyst for de-dollarization; it usefully highlights financial weaponization but may overstate the inevitability of alternative payment systems and understate China's own market power. The Russian perspective emphasizes resilience and Western self-harm; it accurately notes that sanctions did not stop Russian exports entirely and that price caps created arbitrage opportunities, but it occludes Russia's role in restricting Ukrainian exports and its own fertilizer export limits. The Western perspective treats sanctions as coercive diplomacy with unintended spillovers; its self-critique acknowledges the need for humanitarian carve-outs and better calibration, but it sometimes conflates Russian propaganda with legitimate Global South grievance. The UN perspective focuses on humanitarian access, the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and carve-outs; it provides institutional mitigation but cannot resolve the underlying conflict or structural inequality.

Compared with the 1973–74 food crisis, which was driven by oil shocks and transitions in agricultural productivity, the 2022–23 crisis combined a major grain exporter's war, financial sanctions, and post-pandemic inflation. The Iraq sanctions analogy warns of humanitarian harm from comprehensive sanctions, but the 2022 architecture was more targeted; nevertheless, financial de-risking produced broad effects that resembled comprehensive pressure in practice. The Black Sea Grain Initiative increased Ukrainian exports and moderated prices, but its suspension showed that humanitarian corridors remain dependent on geopolitical bargaining. Humanitarian carve-outs were necessary but insufficient because private actors still over-complied when legal risk, reputational risk, and insurance costs were high.

Adjudication should rest on timing and counterfactual evidence. If African food prices rose before the full implementation of financial restrictions and if non-sanctioned suppliers also raised prices, then war disruption and market panic were primary. If fertilizer shipments faced documented payment, insurance, or shipping frictions even where trade was legally permitted, then sanctions were an important amplifying and conditioning factor. The bounded verdict is therefore that sanctions were not the sole or necessarily dominant cause of African food insecurity, but they were a significant transmission mechanism that worsened an already severe shock. African vulnerability reflected the interaction of global disruption, market structure, and domestic dependence. Falsifiers include stable African prices despite sanctions, or price spikes in the absence of war-related Black Sea disruption; conversely, evidence that fertilizer exports fell mainly because of financial friction rather than Russian policy would strengthen the sanctions-centered claim.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: A mid-sized East African grain-importing state in 2022 faces a 40 percent increase in wheat prices, fertilizer shortages, currency depreciation, and rising urban food protests. Its finance ministry attributes the crisis primarily to Western sanctions on Russia, while its agriculture ministry blames the Black Sea blockade and global market panic. You are advising a regional economic community secretariat on whether to request sanctions carve-outs, emergency grain finance, or both. The memo must be analytical rather than polemical and must distinguish mechanisms from accusations.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal chain from war, sanctions architecture, and market behavior to African food and fertilizer prices; specify which links are direct, indirect, and contingent.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings in steel-man form, noting what each contributes and what each occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the case with one earlier food or sanctions crisis, stating what is analogous and what differs in financial architecture, commodity markets, or humanitarian instruments.
- **Falsifiers:** List evidence that would weaken or strengthen your central claim, and state the threshold at which you would revise your recommendation.

(c) Self-check: Before submitting, verify that you have clearly distinguished description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and that no empirical claim is presented as a normative conclusion.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Which of the following is the most defensible causal claim about the 2022–23 food crisis and African food security?

A. Western sanctions were the sole cause of African food insecurity because they legally prohibited Russian grain and fertilizer exports.
B. The crisis was primarily a war-driven supply shock amplified by market expectations, with sanctions acting mainly through indirect financial and logistical frictions.
C. The Black Sea Grain Initiative eliminated African food insecurity by restoring Ukrainian exports to pre-war levels.
D. African food insecurity was caused entirely by domestic policy failures, since global prices did not affect local markets.

Distractor diagnoses

- **A** is wrong because it conflates legal prohibition with financial de-risking; sanctions generally did not ban food or fertilizer trade, and it ignores the Black Sea blockade and market amplification.

- **C** is wrong because the initiative mitigated but did not eliminate price pressure, and its suspension demonstrated continued dependence on geopolitical bargaining.

- **D** is wrong because it denies the transmission of global prices into import-dependent, dollarized food systems, although domestic policy did mediate the severity of the shock.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. Russia's oil export revenues and the ruble exchange rate, 2021–2024 (approximate)

Year	Oil export revenue (USD bn, approx.)	USD/RUB (annual average, approx.)	Key policy marker
2021	~110	~74	Pre-war baseline; no price cap
2022	~120–140	~68 (range 55–135)	G7 price cap adopted Dec 2022; capital controls imposed
2023	~90–100	~85	Urals traded at steep discount; cap enforcement tightened
2024	~80–90	~92	Shadow-fleet expansion; partial price recovery

Sources: approximate figures drawn from IEA oil-market reporting and Russian Ministry of Finance fiscal data as summarized in UNCTAD trade and development reports; exact values vary by definition (crude only vs. crude plus petroleum products).

Table 2. EU natural gas imports by source, share of total imports (%)

Source	2021	2022	2023	2024 (est.)
Russia	~40	~20	~8	~10
Norway	~20	~25	~30	~28
United States (LNG)	~6	~12	~18	~20
Algeria	~8	~10	~12	~11
Other (Qatar, Azerbaijan, etc.)	~26	~33	~32	~31

Sources: approximate shares from IEA and Eurostat gas-import data as reported in energy analyses; 2024 figures are estimates.

Table 3. African food-price stress indicators, 2021–2023

Indicator	2021	2022 peak	2023
FAO Food Price Index (2014–16 = 100)	~125	159.3 (Mar 2022)	~124
Wheat price (USD/tonne, approx.)	~280	~450	~260
Share of wheat imports from Russia/Ukraine (selected African importers)	30–60%	30–60%	declining
African countries in acute food crisis (IPC Phase 3+)	~20	~28	~25

Sources: FAO Food Price Index; UNCTAD trade and development reports; WFP/IPC assessments.

Analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Between 2021 and 2024, Russia's oil export revenues (Table 1) did not collapse in proportion to the severity of the sanctions package. Identify the three mechanisms—price, volume, and routing—that explain why revenues fell only modestly in 2022 and then stabilized, and state which mechanism dominated in which year.

2. **Level of analysis.** Table 2 shows a rapid reconfiguration of EU gas supply. At which level of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational) is the most powerful explanation located, and why does a purely state-level account (e.g., "Germany chose to diversify") understate the role of transnational LNG markets and infrastructure bottlenecks?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Using Tables 1–3, reconstruct in 3–5 sentences each how (a) an African analyst, (b) a Chinese analyst, (c) a Russian analyst, (d) a Western analyst, and (e) a UN analyst would read the same data. Which table would each treat as the most important, and which would each treat as a distraction?

4. **Interpretation.** The FAO Food Price Index peaked in March 2022 (Table 3) before the G7 oil price cap was adopted in December 2022. Does this timing support or undermine the claim that Western sanctions were the primary driver of the 2022 global food crisis? What alternative or complementary mechanisms must be weighed?

5. **Limitation.** What do these three tables *not* capture that would be necessary to adjudicate between the Western claim ("sanctions are targeted and include humanitarian carve-outs") and the African claim ("sanctions function as a tax on non-targeted importers")? Name at least two missing variables and the data source that would supply them.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Sanctions Escalation Ladder"

- **What to draw:** A staircase of five ascending steps on the left side of the page, each step a horizontal rectangle. Step 1 (bottom): "Targeted asset freezes (2014, post-Crimea)"; Step 2: "Sectoral sanctions (2014–2021)"; Step 3: "Comprehensive financial sanctions + SWIFT exclusion (Feb 2022)"; Step 4: "Export controls on technology (2022)"; Step 5 (top): "Oil price cap + shadow-fleet countermeasures (Dec 2022–2024)". Draw a thick arrow curving upward along the right edge of the staircase labeled "Escalation".
- **Labels to place:** On each step, small icons: a padlock (asset freeze), a bank (SWIFT), a microchip (export controls), an oil barrel with a price tag (price cap). At the top, a flag labeled "Russia" with a dashed line showing "adaptation" (shadow fleet, SPFS, CIPS, parallel imports).
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** In red ink on the left margin, write "Western frame: coercive diplomacy, calibrated escalation." In green ink on the right margin, write "African frame: each step raises import costs for non-targets; humanitarian carve-outs are porous." Draw a bracket connecting Steps 3–5 labeled "Global spillover zone."

Visual 2 — "Europe's Gas Decoupling, 2021–2024"

- **What to draw:** A simplified map of Europe and the North Atlantic. Draw the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines as thick lines from Russia to Germany, then cross them out with a large red "X" (sabotage/cessation, Sept 2022). Draw LNG terminals as small triangles on the coasts of the Netherlands, Germany, France, and Spain. Draw arrows from Norway (north), the United States (west, across the Atlantic), and Algeria (south) into these terminals. Shade Russia in grey.
- **Labels to place:** "Russia: ~40% → ~8% of EU gas imports"; "Norway: ~20% → ~30%"; "US LNG: ~6% → ~18–20%". Add a small box in the corner: "Storage: 90% full by Nov 2022 (EU target)".
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** In blue ink, annotate along the pipelines: "Russian frame: energy weapon / supply leverage." In orange ink, annotate along the LNG arrows: "European frame: diversification and resilience." In purple ink, annotate at the bottom: "Transnational frame: global LNG market price transmission to Global South."

Visual 3 — "Parallel Financial Architecture"

- **What to draw:** Two parallel horizontal lanes. Top lane: a large circle labeled "SWIFT (Western-dominated)" with arrows to "USD clearing", "Euro clearing", and "G7 banks". Bottom lane: two smaller circles labeled "SPFS (Russia)" and "CIPS (China)" connected by a dashed line labeled "interoperability talks". Between the lanes, draw a thick vertical barrier labeled "Sanctions wall (2022)". On the right side, draw a ship icon labeled "Shadow fleet (~600 vessels, 2024)" carrying oil barrels with a "discounted Urals" price tag.
- **Labels to place:** "SWIFT exclusion: 7 Russian banks, Feb 2022"; "SPFS: ~400 participants (mostly Russian)"; "CIPS: ~1,400 participants (global)"; "Shadow fleet: price-cap evasion".
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** In red ink above the top lane: "Western frame: financial containment." In green ink below the bottom lane: "Chinese/Russian frame: de-dollarization and multipolarity." In black ink across the barrier: "African frame: payment friction raises transaction costs for all non-Western trade."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (Prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is "weaponized interdependence" and who coined it?	Farrell and Newman (2019): states leverage chokepoints in global networks (SWIFT, dollar clearing, semiconductor supply chains) for coercive ends. Scope: requires network centrality and target dependence. Critique: overstates Western control; underestimates adaptation.
How did sanctions on Russia evolve 2014–2024?	2014 Crimea: targeted asset freezes. 2022: comprehensive financial sanctions, SWIFT exclusion (7 banks), export controls. Dec 2022: G7 oil price cap ($60/bbl). 2023–24: enforcement tightening, shadow-fleet countermeasures. Source: Ashford (2023); Mulder (2022) on sanctions history.
What happened to Nord Stream?	Nord Stream 1/2 pipelines sabotaged/ceased Sept 2022. EU gas imports from Russia fell from ~40% (2021) to ~8% (2023). Replacement: Norway, US LNG, Algeria, demand reduction, storage. Source: IEA energy analyses.
What is SPFS and CIPS?	SPFS: Russian alternative to SWIFT, ~400 participants (mostly domestic). CIPS: Chinese cross-border interbank system, ~1,400 participants. Both grew post-2022 but remain small vs. SWIFT. Mechanism: parallel architecture reduces but does not eliminate dollar dependence.
What is "small yard, high fence"?	US export-control strategy: restrict a narrow set of critical technologies (semiconductors, AI, quantum) with high barriers. Applied to Russia 2022 (chips, aerospace). Russian adaptation: parallel imports via third countries (Turkey, UAE, Central Asia).
How did the Black Sea Grain Initiative work?	UN/Turkey-brokered deal, July 2022: safe corridor for Ukrainian grain exports. Suspended July 2023 by Russia. Effect: temporary price relief; African importers benefited. Source: Black Sea Grain Initiative documentation.
What were the global spillovers?	Food, fuel, fertilizer price spikes 2022. African food insecurity rose (IPC Phase 3+ countries ~20→28). Fertilizer (ammonia, potash) supply disrupted; Russia/Belarus major exporters. UNCTAD reports document trade and development impacts.

Cue (Prompt)	Notes (with source log)
How does the African perspective frame sanctions?	Structural critique: sanctions are a tax on non-targets; humanitarian carve-outs porous; food/fuel/fertilizer shocks hit import-dependent economies. Calls for compensation, carve-out clarity, and Global South voice in sanctions design. Scholars: Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, Oyěwùmí.
How does the Chinese perspective frame sanctions?	Sanctions as economic warfare; accelerates de-dollarization; CIPS/SPFS growth; "long-arm jurisdiction" critique. Supports multipolarity; avoids joining Western sanctions.
How does the Russian perspective frame sanctions?	Resilience narrative: adaptation via shadow fleet, parallel imports, new markets (India, China). Anti-Western framing: sanctions as aggression; "fortress Russia" discourse.
How does the Western perspective frame sanctions?	Coercive diplomacy to degrade Russian war capacity; self-critique on global spillovers and enforcement gaps. Debate: effectiveness vs. humanitarian cost.
How does the UN perspective frame sanctions?	Humanitarian carve-outs, Black Sea Grain Initiative, food-security diplomacy. Emphasis on protecting civilian populations and trade flows.

Source log: Farrell and Newman (2019, 2023); Ashford (2023); Mulder (2022); Black Sea Grain Initiative documentation; UNCTAD trade and development reports; IEA energy analyses; FAO Food Price Index.

Summary: Sanctions on Russia evolved from targeted 2014 measures to a comprehensive 2022 package spanning finance, energy, and technology, with the G7 oil price cap as a novel market-mechanism instrument. Russia adapted through shadow-fleet routing, parallel imports, and alternative payment systems, while Europe decoupled from Russian gas via LNG and Norwegian supply. The same instruments generated severe global spillovers in food, fuel, and fertilizer, concentrating costs on import-dependent economies in the Global South. The five perspectives disagree on whether sanctions are coercive diplomacy, economic warfare, resilience tests, or structural violence, and on whether adaptation or containment will dominate over the medium term.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Sanctions are a way for powerful countries to punish an aggressor by cutting it off from money, technology, and markets. After Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, the West froze Russian assets, kicked some Russian banks off the global payment system, capped the price of Russian oil, and blocked advanced technology exports. Russia fought back by selling oil to India and China at

a discount, using a "shadow fleet" of tankers, and finding backdoor routes for banned goods. Europe stopped buying Russian gas and bought liquefied gas from America and Norway instead. But the shockwaves hit everyone: food, fuel, and fertilizer prices spiked, and countries in Africa that import wheat and fertilizer suffered the most even though they were not part of the war.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure about the exact share of Russian oil now sold above the price cap via the shadow fleet; I am unsure whether SPFS and CIPS can actually interoperate at scale; I am unsure how much of the 2022 food-price spike came from sanctions versus the war itself blocking Ukrainian ports; and I am unsure whether the "small yard, high fence" export controls have measurably slowed Russian military production or merely raised its costs.

3. **Reread verification.** Re-reading the data lab: Table 1 shows revenues did not collapse, confirming that adaptation (discounts, rerouting) offset the cap; Table 2 shows EU decoupling succeeded on the gas side; Table 3 shows African food stress peaked before the oil cap, which weakens a simple "sanctions caused the food crisis" claim and points to the war and port blockades as proximate causes, with sanctions as a compounding factor. The African perspective's structural critique survives this check because even non-sanctions shocks (war, port closure) are amplified by import dependence that sanctions-era financial friction worsens.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** Sanctions are like a siege: the besieger tries to starve the target of resources, but the target builds tunnels and alternative supply lines, and the siege also raises prices for bystanders who trade with both sides. The analogy's limit: a siege is territorial and binary, whereas sanctions are networked and partial—Russia still sells oil, just at a discount, and the "bystanders" (African importers) are not neutral but structurally dependent on the same global markets the sanctions disrupt.

5. **Rewrite.** Sanctions on Russia in 2022 combined financial exclusion, an oil price cap, and technology export controls into the most comprehensive coercive package since the Cold War. The package degraded but did not cripple Russian revenues, because adaptation—shadow-fleet routing, parallel imports, and Asian demand—offset Western leverage. Europe's gas decoupling succeeded faster than expected, yet the global spillovers in food, fuel, and fertilizer fell hardest on import-dependent economies in Africa and the wider Global South. Whether sanctions are judged effective depends on the metric chosen (Russian war capacity vs. global welfare vs. African food security) and on the time horizon, since adaptation erodes leverage while spillovers persist. The five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—each capture one dimension of this trade-off and none captures all of it.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Definition	What is weaponized interdependence in the sanctions context?	It is the use of control over critical nodes in global economic networks—such as payment systems, shipping insurance, or technology standards—to coerce states that depend on those networks. Farrell and Newman argue that network position, not only market size, creates coercive leverage. Its scope is limited where targets can reroute through alternative nodes.	African: reveals how Global South states are often collateral nodes in networks they do not control.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Mechanism	How does SWIFT exclusion transmit coercion?	Removing banks from SWIFT raises transaction costs, delays payments, and complicates trade finance, especially for energy and commodities. It does not by itself freeze assets, but it narrows the channels through which a state can settle international trade. Adaptation occurs through bilateral arrangements, alternative messaging systems, and clearing workarounds.	Russian: frames it as financial blockade; Western: frames it as targeted pressure.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Application	What is the G7 oil price cap mechanism?	The cap permits maritime services for Russian oil only if the sale price is at or below a set threshold, aiming to reduce Russian revenue while keeping oil flowing. It relies on enforcement through insurers, shippers, and price attestations. Its effectiveness depends on compliance, shadow-fleet growth, and the gap between capped and market prices.	Western: revenue denial; Russian: market distortion.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Comparison	How do targeted and comprehensive sanctions differ?	Targeted sanctions aim at elites, firms, or sectors to limit civilian harm, while comprehensive sanctions restrict broad economic activity and risk wider welfare costs. The post-2022 Russia package mixed both: asset freezes and export controls were targeted in design but had economy-wide effects. The distinction matters for legality, legitimacy, and humanitarian assessment.	UN: emphasizes carve-outs and proportionality.
L38	Source	What is Farrell and Newman's core claim?	States occupying central positions in global networks can weaponize those positions because others cannot easily exit. The 2022 sanctions showed both the power and the limits of that leverage as Russia rerouted trade and finance. The framework is structural, not merely about bilateral power.	Chinese: supports the de-dollarization critique.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Debate	Do economic sanctions reliably change target behavior?	Sanctions can impose costs and signal resolve, but their coercive success depends on target vulnerability, sender unity, time horizon, and adaptation. Mulder's historical work warns that sanctions often escalate conflict or harm third parties rather than compel. The 2022 case shows cost imposition without immediate policy reversal.	Western self-critique: acknowledges uncertain efficacy.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Reconstruction	How does China interpret sanctions on Russia?	China tends to view broad sanctions as economic warfare that politicizes trade and accelerates fragmentation of the global economy. It supports selective engagement, alternative payment channels, and sovereignty-based objections to extraterritorial measures. At the same time, Chinese firms often comply partially to avoid secondary sanctions.	Chinese: de-dollarization and multipolarity.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Occlusion	What does the Western perspective often understate?	Western accounts may foreground coercive intent and understate third-party costs, especially food, fuel, and fertilizer shocks in import-dependent economies. They may also overstate target isolation while underestimating adaptation through non-Western markets. Self-critique has grown around global spillovers and sanctions fatigue.	African: centers non-target burdens.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Adjudication	How did sanctions affect African food security in 2022–23?	The crisis reflected war disruption, export restrictions, shipping and insurance costs, fertilizer price spikes, and pre-existing import dependence—not sanctions alone. Sanctions on Russian finance and logistics compounded access problems for some African importers. The strongest evidence points to multiple causal channels rather than a single sanctions effect.	African: demands disaggregation of causes.
L38	Visual	What does an energy-decoupling diagram show?	It maps EU gas imports shifting from Russian pipeline dominance toward LNG, Norwegian pipeline gas, and demand reduction. The visual should distinguish volume, price, and infrastructure constraints. It also reveals that decoupling is partial and price-mediated, not instantaneous.	Western/EU: security diversification; Russian: market loss.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Definition	What is the small-yard-high-fence strategy?	It is a strategy of tightly controlling a narrow set of critical technologies while keeping broader trade open. In the Russia case, it meant restricting semiconductors, advanced manufacturing inputs, and dual-use goods rather than all commerce. The aim is to maximize strategic impact while minimizing self-harm and allied friction.	Western: precision coercion; Chinese: technology containment.
L38	Mechanism	How do parallel financial architectures reduce sanctions leverage?	Systems such as SPFS and CIPS, plus bilateral currency arrangements, create alternative messaging and settlement routes. They do not replace SWIFT's scale, but they lower the cost of partial exit and create bargaining space for sanctioned actors. Their growth is incremental and politically contingent.	Russian/Chinese: resilience; Western: limited but real.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Application	What was the Black Sea Grain Initiative?	It was a UN- and Türkiye-brokered arrangement to allow Ukrainian grain exports through designated Black Sea corridors, alongside efforts to facilitate Russian fertilizer and food exports. It reduced immediate food-price pressure but remained fragile and politically conditional. Its suspension and revival illustrate how humanitarian logistics depend on war diplomacy.	UN: humanitarian carve-out; African: food access.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L38	Comparison	How does de-dollarization differ from dollar dominance?	De-dollarization refers to efforts to reduce reliance on the dollar in trade and reserves, while dollar dominance reflects the depth, liquidity, and network effects of dollar markets. Sanctions accelerated political interest in alternatives, but structural advantages of the dollar persist. The gap between rhetoric and settlement data is analytically important.	Chinese/Russian: strategic shift; Western: overstated near-term change.
L38	Source	What does Mulder (2022) add to sanctions theory?	Mulder traces sanctions as a tool of modern economic warfare and emphasizes their historical tendency to broaden, escalate, and impose costs on civilians and third parties. This cautions against treating sanctions as a low-cost substitute for military force. It frames the 2022 package within a longer history of economic coercion.	African: validates burden-on-non-targets critique.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100).

Concept / Skill	Self-score (0-100)	Calibration note
Weaponized interdependence		Can you explain network-node leverage without examples only?
SWIFT exclusion mechanism		Can you distinguish messaging disruption from asset freezing?
Oil price cap enforcement		Can you identify insurers, shippers, and attestation roles?
Export controls / small-yard-high-fence		Can you name controlled inputs and leakage channels?
Global spillovers (food, fuel, fertilizer)		Can you separate war effects from sanctions effects?
African perspective reconstruction		Can you state the structural critique in its own terms?
Chinese perspective reconstruction		Can you steel-man de-dollarization without endorsing it?
Russian perspective reconstruction		Can you explain resilience claims and their limits?
Western perspective reconstruction		Can you include Western self-critique on spillovers?
UN perspective reconstruction		Can you distinguish humanitarian carve-outs from sanctions relief?
Adjudication across perspectives		Can you rank claims by evidence rather than sympathy?
Data interpretation (oil, FX, gas, food prices)		Can you specify level of analysis for each trend?

7.2 Three-question debrief.

1. Which perspective did you reconstruct least charitably, and what evidence would force you to revise that reconstruction?
2. Did you confuse cost imposition with behavioral change when evaluating sanctions efficacy?
3. Which data trend—Russian oil revenue, USD/RUB, EU gas imports by source, or African food price indices—most challenges your prior assumption, and why?

7.3 Error-log table.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Sanctions alone caused the 2022–23 food crisis.	The crisis reflected war disruption, export restrictions, shipping and insurance costs, fertilizer price spikes, and pre-existing import dependence; sanctions were one compounding channel among several.	UNCTAD trade and development reports; Black Sea Grain Initiative documentation
SWIFT exclusion is the same as an asset freeze.	SWIFT is a messaging network; asset freezes involve legal custody and blocking of funds. They can reinforce each other but operate through different mechanisms.	Farrell and Newman (2019, 2023)
The oil price cap eliminated Russian oil exports.	The cap aimed to reduce revenue while sustaining flows; exports rerouted through non-Western buyers and shadow-fleet logistics.	Russia oil export revenue data, 2021–2024
Targeted sanctions have no civilian or third-party effects.	Sectoral, financial, and export controls can transmit through prices, supply chains, and fiscal capacity, producing economy-wide and cross-border spillovers.	2022 Russia sanctions package; Mulder (2022)
De-dollarization has already displaced dollar dominance.	Political momentum for alternatives increased, but dollar depth, liquidity, and network effects remain structurally significant.	Settlement and clearing comparisons; Farrell and Newman (2023)
Sanctions are costless for senders and the global economy.	Senders absorb energy-price, inflation, industrial-adjustment, and alliance-coordination costs; non-targets absorb food, fuel, and fertilizer shocks.	EU gas import shifts; African food price indices; UNCTAD reports

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Sanctions design and evolution	Targeted vs. comprehensive measures; asset freezes; oil price cap; export controls	Mulder (2022); Ashford (2023)	2022 Russia sanctions package; G7 price cap	Efficacy vs. spillovers	No revenue decline; no target adaptation	L18, L36
Weaponized interdependence	Control of network nodes; chokepoints; exit costs	Farrell and Newman (2019, 2023)	SWIFT; insurance; technology standards	Structural power vs. agency	Targets exit networks cheaply	L18
Energy weaponization	Pipeline cutoff; LNG substitution; price cap enforcement	Energy security and interdependence theory	Nord Stream; EU gas imports by source	Decoupling speed vs. cost	No source shift; persistent price spike	L19, L39, L46
Parallel financial architecture	SPFS; CIPS; bilateral settlement; currency swaps	Monetary power and network theory	Russia–China trade settlement	De-dollarization pace	Dollar share unchanged; systems unused	L18
Export controls	Small-yard-high-fence; licensing; end-use monitoring	Strategic trade control theory	Semiconductors and dual-use inputs to Russia	Precision vs. leakage	No supply disruption; rapid substitution	L52
Global spillovers	Food, fuel, fertilizer shocks; import dependence; shipping and insurance costs	Political economy of coercion	African food price indices; Black Sea Grain Initiative	Humanitarian carve-outs vs. pressure	No price change; no access improvement	L36, L46

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Concrete action
R1	Day 0, 20 minutes	Re-read the flashcards and annotate one African-case example for each of the five key ideas.
R2	Day 2, 30 minutes	Reconstruct all five perspectives from memory, then compare against Section 2.7 and correct omissions.
R3	Day 7, 45 minutes	Redo the problem-pair food-crisis task and compare your answer with the model answer.
R4	Day 14, 60 minutes	Use the data lab focus to sketch trends in Russian oil revenue, USD/RUB, EU gas imports, and African food prices; write a 300-word adjudication.
R5	Day 30, 90 minutes	Write a full memo on a new sanctions case using the four required headings, then run the self-check on description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define weaponized interdependence and identify its network-node mechanism.
- ☐ I can distinguish SWIFT exclusion from asset freezes and explain adaptation.
- ☐ I can explain the oil price cap and its enforcement chain.
- ☐ I can compare targeted and comprehensive sanctions using the 2022 Russia case.
- ☐ I can explain the small-yard-high-fence strategy and its leakage risks.
- ☐ I can describe SPFS, CIPS, and bilateral settlement as partial alternatives.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective on food, fuel, and structural burden.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese perspective on sanctions as economic warfare.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the Russian perspective on resilience and anti-Western framing.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the Western perspective including self-critique on spillovers.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the UN perspective on humanitarian carve-outs and the Black Sea Grain Initiative.
- ☐ I can adjudicate competing claims using evidence rather than perspective sympathy.
- ☐ I can interpret at least one data trend at the correct level of analysis.
- ☐ I can identify falsifiers for sanctions-efficacy claims.
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in a memo.
- ☐ I can state the strongest counterargument to my preferred view.
- ☐ I can connect this lesson to L18, L19, L36, L39, L46, and L52.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Sanctions theory and history - Mulder, N. (2022). *The Economic Weapon: The Rise of Sanctions as a Tool of Modern War*. - Ashford, E. (2023). Work on sanctions efficacy and global spillovers.

Weaponized interdependence and financial power - Farrell, H., & Newman, A. (2019). Weaponized interdependence: How global economic networks shape state coercion. *International Security*, 44(1), 42–79. - Farrell, H., & Newman, A. (2023). *Underground Empire: How America Weaponized the World Economy*.

Trade, development, and Global South impacts - UNCTAD. *Trade and Development Report* (2022). - UNCTAD. *Trade and Development Report* (2023). - UNCTAD. *Trade and Development Report* (2024).

Food security and humanitarian corridors - Black Sea Grain Initiative documentation (2022). - Black Sea Grain Initiative Joint Coordination Centre procedures and updates (2022–2023).

End of Lesson 38. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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40. European Security Architecture and Strategic Autonomy

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 39: European Security Architecture and Strategic Autonomy
Module	Module 6: Eastern Europe and the Ukraine War
Prerequisites	L35–L38 (Ukraine), L6 (institutionalism), L14 (contemporary transition)
Interleaved links	Forward to L40 (wider Eastern Europe), L47–L48 (US–China, Indo-Pacific), L49 (Global South)
Reading load	7–9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, visual anchors, flashcards, worked example, problem pair
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7–9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is whether Europe can simultaneously rearm at speed, decouple from Russian energy, build an autonomous defense-industrial base, and preserve the transatlantic security bond that made three decades of underinvestment in defense politically tolerable — or whether these four imperatives are, in important respects, mutually contradictory. For thirty years after the Cold War, the European security order rested on a tacit division of labor: the United States provided the hard-security guarantee through NATO, while European states specialized in economic integration, soft power, and crisis management. That arrangement produced the "peace dividend," a sustained decline in European defense spending as a share

of GDP, and a defense-industrial landscape fragmented along national lines. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine did not merely shock that order; it exposed its structural fragility. Germany's *Zeitenwende*, Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO, the European Union's first-ever use of the European Peace Facility to finance lethal weapons deliveries, and the scramble to replace Russian pipeline gas with liquefied natural gas all represent responses to a single underlying condition: the recognition that the European continent could no longer treat security as a service imported from across the Atlantic. Yet the very urgency of rearmament has reopened questions that the post-Cold War period had papered over — about who pays, who produces, who decides, and whose interests the emerging architecture ultimately serves.

This lesson places that puzzle inside the curriculum's broader arc. Lessons 35–38 traced the Ukraine war's origins, conduct, and consequences; Lesson 6 supplied the institutionalist toolkit for analyzing alliances, collective action, and path dependence; Lesson 14 framed the "contemporary transition" in global order, including the erosion of unipolarity and the rise of multipolar competition. Lesson 39 now asks what happens when a regional security order must be rebuilt under conditions of great-power war, energy shock, and uncertain American commitment. It is the hinge between the Eastern European theater and the wider questions of global order taken up in Lessons 40, 47–48, and 49. The student who masters this lesson should be able to move from describing events — summits, spending figures, pipeline closures — to explaining the mechanisms that connect them, predicting where institutional friction will appear, and prescribing policy responses that are sensitive to the trade-offs between autonomy and alliance, speed and efficiency, and European and transatlantic interests.

The theoretical stakes are substantial and genuinely contested. From an institutionalist perspective, NATO's post-2022 revitalization and the EU's parallel defense initiatives (PESCO, the European Defence Fund, the Strategic Compass) can be read as evidence that external threat produces institutional deepening: organizations that appeared moribund acquire new purpose when the environment changes. The mechanism runs through threat perception, alliance solidarity, and the sunk costs of existing institutional infrastructure. From a realist perspective, the same developments look less like institutional deepening than like classic balance-of-power behavior: European states are arming because the distribution of power has shifted, and the institutional forms are epiphenomenal to the underlying material imperative. A liberal reading emphasizes interdependence and the gains from cooperation — joint procurement, shared standards, integrated supply chains — while a constructivist reading stresses identity change, the redefinition of "European security" from a post-national project to a hard-power enterprise. The lesson does not treat any of these as settled; it requires the student to adjudicate among them on the basis of evidence, specifying scope conditions and identifying what would falsify each claim.

The African perspective is not an afterthought to this European story; it reframes it. European rearmament is not occurring in a vacuum. It competes for fiscal resources, political attention, and military assets with commitments elsewhere, including in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Mediterranean. The EU's energy decoupling from Russia has redirected demand toward African gas and critical minerals, reproducing patterns of extractive dependency that African scholars have long criticized. The militarization of European foreign policy — through the European Peace Facility, the expansion of EU military missions, and the hardening of border externalization — interacts with African security dynamics in ways that European policy documents rarely acknowledge. Reconstructing the African vantage point reveals what the Western, Chinese, Russian, and UN perspectives each tend to occlude: that European security architecture is also an African security architecture, whether Europeans intend it or not, and that the "strategic autonomy" debated in Brussels and Paris has material consequences for states and populations far from the continent's eastern frontier.

The five perspectives developed in this lesson — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — each capture a genuine dimension of the problem and each carries characteristic blind spots. The Chinese perspective treats NATO expansion as a destabilizing force and European rearmament as evidence of a bloc mentality that undermines multipolarity; it contributes a systemic, great-power lens but occludes the agency of smaller European states and the defensive motivations behind their choices. The Russian perspective frames NATO expansion as an existential threat and European militarization as confirmation of a hostile encirclement; it captures the security-dilemma logic but systematically understates Russian agency in producing the very outcomes it decries. The Western perspective emphasizes unity, rearmament, and the autonomy debate as a healthy internal discussion; it captures institutional momentum but risks conflating European interests with American preferences. The UN perspective situates the entire development within the Charter framework of collective security, sovereignty, and the prohibition on the use of force; it contributes legal and normative standards but struggles to address the power-political realities that drive state behavior. The African perspective, developed at greatest length, shows what all four miss: the global distributional consequences of European security choices.

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to: specify the mechanisms linking threat perception to institutional change in NATO and the EU; evaluate the competing claims of strategic autonomy and transatlantic dependency using evidence from spending, procurement, and force-posture data; reconstruct each of the five perspectives in its strongest form and identify its characteristic occlusion; apply the analytical framework to the AUKUS submarine deal as a case of transatlantic strain; and articulate falsifiable predictions about the durability of the post-2022 European security consensus. The lesson's worked example walks through the 2022–2024 NATO rearmament and the EU Strategic Compass as an institutional response, modeling the levels-of-analysis approach and explicit adjudication that the student is expected to replicate. The problem pair and independent memo then transfer these skills to new cases, with the hinge question testing whether the student can distinguish description from explanation, prediction from prescription — a distinction that runs through the entire module and that this lesson, with its mix of urgent policy debate and contested theory, is designed to sharpen.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer each question from memory before checking your notes. These draw on Lessons 35–38 (Ukraine), Lesson 6 (institutionalism), and Lesson 14 (contemporary transition).

1. **Security dilemma.** Define the security dilemma and explain how it applies to the debate over NATO's eastward expansion after 1999. What is the difference between a security dilemma and a spiral model of conflict?

2. **Institutional persistence.** According to institutionalist theory, why did NATO survive the end of the Cold War when many predicted its obsolescence? Identify at least two mechanisms (e.g., path dependence, sunk costs, institutional lock-in) and give one concrete example from the 1990s.

3. **Contemporary transition.** What does Lesson 14 mean by the "contemporary transition" in global order? Name two indicators that the unipolar moment has eroded and one that suggests it persists.

4. **Minsk and deterrence.** What were the Minsk agreements (2014–2015), and what do their failure tell us about the limits of diplomatic settlement when underlying power distributions are contested?

5. **Burden-sharing.** What is the NATO 2% of GDP defense spending guideline, when was it adopted, and what does the "free-rider" problem imply for alliance cohesion? Cite one pre-2022 European case of chronic under-spending.
6. **Constructivism and identity.** How does constructivism treat national identity in alliance politics? Give one example of how a state's self-conception as a "civilian power" or "neutral" state shaped its defense policy before 2022.

1.2 Orientation Questions These questions frame the lesson's central puzzle. You are not expected to answer them fully before reading; use them to guide your attention.

1. Is European strategic autonomy compatible with NATO primacy, or does it require a degree of institutional and operational decoupling from the United States? What evidence would distinguish these two positions?
2. Does rapid rearmament strengthen or weaken the European Union's claim to normative power — the idea that the EU leads by values and rules rather than by force? Can a polity be both a "normative power" and a hard-power actor?
3. How does energy decoupling from Russia reshape Europe's geopolitical dependencies rather than eliminate them? Which new suppliers and chokepoints replace the old ones, and with what strategic consequences?
4. What would falsify the claim that the 2022 invasion produced a durable European security consensus? Identify at least two observable developments that would indicate fragmentation rather than consolidation.

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach Provisional definitions to be refined as you read. Each term will be revisited in the lesson core with theoretical precision.

Term	Provisional Definition
Strategic autonomy	The European Union's stated capacity to act independently in security and defense when necessary, without relying on the United States; contested between those who see it as complementary to NATO and those who see it as a step toward decoupling.
Burden-sharing	The distribution of defense costs, risks, and responsibilities among alliance members; in NATO, measured partly by the 2% of GDP spending guideline and the 20% equipment-spending target.
PESCO	Permanent Structured Cooperation: an EU treaty mechanism (Article 42.6 TEU) allowing willing member states to deepen defense cooperation in capability development and operations.

Term	Provisional Definition
European Defence Fund (EDF)	An EU budget instrument financing collaborative defense research and development, intended to reduce fragmentation and incentivize joint procurement.
Strategic Compass	The EU's 2022 strategic document setting out a shared threat assessment and a roadmap for defense capability development, rapid deployment, and resilience.
REPowerEU	The European Commission's 2022 plan to end dependence on Russian fossil fuels through energy savings, diversification of supply, and accelerated renewables deployment.
Zeitenwende	German for "turning point": Chancellor Olaf Scholz's February 2022 declaration signaling a break with post-Cold War defense restraint, including a €100 billion special fund for the Bundeswehr.
Defense industrial base	The network of firms, skills, infrastructure, and supply chains capable of producing and sustaining military equipment; its health determines whether spending translates into capability.
Fragmentation	The duplication of national defense programs and industries across European states, leading to inefficiency, interoperability problems, and higher unit costs.
Transatlantic relationship	The security, economic, and political ties between the United States and Europe, anchored in NATO but extending to trade, technology, and intelligence cooperation.
Deterrence by denial	A strategy of making aggression infeasible by forward defense and resilience, as opposed to deterrence by punishment (threatening retaliation); central to NATO's eastern-flank posture post-2022.
Interoperability	The ability of allied forces to operate together effectively, requiring common standards, equipment, and procedures; a persistent challenge given fragmented European procurement.
Ammunition production gap	The shortfall between European artillery ammunition consumption rates in high-intensity war and domestic production capacity, exposed by the Ukraine war and addressed (partially) by the EU's ASAP and EDIRPA instruments.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the causal chain linking Russia's February 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine to NATO's institutional adaptation across the Madrid (June 2022), Vilnius (July 2023), and Washington (July 2024) summits, distinguishing immediate triggers from enabling conditions (pre-existing alliance structures, US extended deterrence) and identifying which summit outcomes were symbolic versus materially consequential. (Bloom: Analyze)
2. **Evaluate** the tension between European strategic autonomy and transatlantic dependency by comparing the EU's PESCO, EDF, and Strategic Compass instruments with NATO's capability targets, identifying where the two frameworks complement and where they compete, and assessing what the AUKUS episode revealed about the limits of European autonomy. (Bloom: Evaluate)
3. **Explain** the mechanism by which energy decoupling from Russia reshaped Europe's geopolitical geography, including the infrastructure investments, supplier diversification, and price shocks that reconfigured European energy security between 2022 and 2024, with attention to differential impacts across member states. (Bloom: Explain)
4. **Assess** the fragmentation problem in Europe's defense industrial base, using evidence on ammunition production shortfalls, procurement duplication, and interoperability gaps to judge whether current reform efforts (NATO's Defense Production Action Plan, the EU's ASAP program) are sufficient to close the capability gap. (Bloom: Assess)
5. **Reconstruct** the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on European security architecture as a whole, identifying what each reveals and what each occludes, with particular attention to how the African vantage point reframes European rearmament as a global resource reallocation with consequences for Sahel and Horn of Africa security, and adjudicate between competing explanations of NATO expansion's consequences. (Bloom: Reconstruct/Evaluate)

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — NATO expansion and rearmament: from the 2022 Madrid Summit to the 2024 Washington Summit

Bolded Causal Claim: Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 functioned as a permissive shock that converted latent NATO institutional capacity into active rearmament and territorial expansion, producing the most significant transformation of European security architecture since the end of the Cold War; however, the depth and durability of that transformation remain contingent on threat perception, US political commitment, and European fiscal and industrial capacity, not on the invasion alone.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three linked channels. First, threat perception: the invasion collapsed the post-Cold War assumption that major interstate war in Europe was obsolete, an assumption that had underwritten two decades of defense underinvestment across the alliance. This perceptual shift is measurable in NATO defense expenditure data: in 2014, only three allies met the 2% of GDP guideline; by 2024, twenty-three of thirty-two allies were projected to meet or exceed it (NATO, 2024). Second, institutional

adaptation: the alliance's Madrid Summit in June 2022 produced a new Strategic Concept that designated Russia as "the most significant and direct threat" to allied security and, for the first time, identified China as posing "systemic challenges" to Euro-Atlantic security. The concept also invited Finland and Sweden to join, reversing the post-1991 pattern of eastward expansion limited to former Warsaw Pact states. Third, force posture: NATO moved from a tripwire deterrence model—small multinational battlegroups in the Baltic states and Poland—toward a forward defense model, with brigade-sized formations, pre-positioned equipment, and enhanced air and missile defense. The Vilnius Summit in July 2023 approved new regional defense plans and a Defense Production Action Plan; the Washington Summit in July 2024 marked the 75th anniversary and focused on sustaining support for Ukraine and expanding defense industrial capacity. The mechanism is not automatic. It requires US leadership (the United States provides roughly two-thirds of NATO's defense spending), European political will (budgetary commitments must survive electoral cycles and coalition politics), and industrial capacity (ammunition production cannot be surged without capital investment, skilled labor, and supply-chain reconfiguration). Howorth (2019) and Biscop (2021) had long argued that European defense underinvestment was structurally unsustainable; the war validated their warnings but did not by itself resolve the underlying industrial and fiscal constraints they identified.

Scope Conditions: The rearmament trajectory holds under several conjunctural conditions: (a) sustained Russian threat perception among European publics and elites, which is itself sensitive to battlefield developments and ceasefire prospects; (b) continued US commitment to extended deterrence, which is contingent on American domestic politics and the outcome of US elections; (c) fiscal space in European economies, which varies sharply—Poland and the Baltic states spend above 3% of GDP, Germany's Zeitenwende remains partially implemented, and France faces binding fiscal constraints; (d) industrial capacity to convert spending into deployable capability, which is currently bottlenecked in ammunition, air defense interceptors, and long-range fires. The mechanism weakens if any of these conditions fail: a US administration that questions Article 5 commitments would undermine the entire structure; a ceasefire in Ukraine that reduces threat perception could slow spending; and industrial bottlenecks mean that money alone does not produce capability. The scope condition is therefore conjunctural—rearmament is overdetermined by threat perception but underdetermined by capacity and political will.

Observable Implications: If the causal claim holds, we should observe: (i) rising defense spending as a share of GDP across the alliance, concentrated in frontline states but spreading to core Western European economies; (ii) expansion of NATO's membership to include Finland (April 2023) and Sweden (March 2024), adding approximately 1,300 kilometers of NATO-Russia border; (iii) transformation of force posture from tripwire to forward defense, with brigade-level deployments in the east; (iv) new defense industrial initiatives, including NATO's Defense Production Action Plan and the EU's ASAP ammunition program; (v) persistent gaps between spending commitments and deployable capability, particularly in air defense, long-range fires, and ammunition stockpiles. Data from the IISS Military Balance 2023-2024 confirm the spending trajectory while also documenting the capability gaps: European NATO members' combined defense spending rose substantially, but ammunition production remained far below consumption rates observed in Ukraine. The observable implication that would falsify the claim is a sustained decline in European defense spending combined with NATO force posture contraction despite continued Russian aggression—evidence that the rearmament was a temporary shock response rather than a structural shift.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From the African vantage point, European rearmament appears not as a self-contained regional adjustment but as a global resource reallocation with cascading consequences. The surge in Euro-

pean defense spending—projected to exceed $400 billion annually across NATO Europe by 2024—occurs in a context where European development assistance, peacekeeping contributions, and diplomatic attention to African security crises in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and the Great Lakes are simultaneously contracting. The mechanism is fiscal and attentional: defense budgets are not infinitely elastic, and the political salience of Ukraine has displaced Africa from European strategic agendas. African scholars such as Adekeye Adebajo and Paul Williams have documented how European security priorities shape African security outcomes through arms flows, peacekeeping deployments, and diplomatic engagement. The African perspective reveals what the Western narrative occludes: that European "unity" in response to Ukraine has been purchased partly through the neglect of African security architectures, and that the militarization of European foreign policy may reproduce patterns of external intervention in Africa under the guise of counter-terrorism partnerships. The African vantage point also questions the universality of the "rules-based order" that NATO claims to defend, noting that the same states now mobilizing against Russian aggression have historically supported or tolerated interventions and arms transfers that destabilized African states. What the African perspective contributes is a reframing of European security not as a regional public good but as a competitor for finite global resources, with distributional consequences that fall disproportionately on regions outside the Euro-Atlantic core.

Chinese: Beijing interprets NATO expansion and rearmament as evidence of a US-led strategy to consolidate alliance structures in both Europe and the Indo-Pacific, with the ultimate aim of containing China. The Chinese perspective treats NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept designation of China as a "systemic challenge" as a provocation that extends the alliance's remit beyond its North Atlantic geographic mandate, violating the principle that regional organizations should not target third parties. Chinese analysts argue that NATO expansion eastward was a proximate cause of the Ukraine war, and that European rearmament serves American strategic interests by locking Europe into a US-led security architecture that forecloses strategic autonomy. The Chinese vantage point emphasizes the apparent hypocrisy of Western condemnation of Russian sphere-of-influence thinking while NATO itself expands. What this perspective occludes is the agency of Central and Eastern European states in seeking NATO membership, which was driven by their own threat perceptions rather than American imposition, and the defensive character of NATO's posture prior to 2022.

Russian: Moscow's narrative frames NATO expansion as an existential threat and a violation of post-Cold War assurances, treating the alliance's eastward enlargement as the root cause of the Ukraine conflict. Russian officials and state media have consistently argued that NATO's 2008 Bucharest summit promise of eventual membership for Ukraine and Georgia, combined with the alliance's military infrastructure approaching Russian borders, left Moscow with no security margin. The Russian perspective treats the 2022 invasion as defensive, aimed at preventing NATO's further encroachment. This narrative has been central to Russian domestic legitimation of the war and to its diplomatic outreach to the Global South. What the Russian perspective occludes is the voluntary nature of NATO membership applications, the absence of any binding treaty commitment not to enlarge, and the fact that NATO's military posture in Eastern Europe prior to 2022 was minimal—rotational battlegroups rather than permanent bases. The narrative also ignores that Russia's own actions, including the 2014 annexation of Crimea and support for Donbas separatists, were the immediate catalysts for NATO's enhanced forward presence.

Western: The Western perspective, dominant in NATO capitals and EU institutions, treats the rearmament as a necessary and overdue response to Russian aggression, framing it as the restoration of deterrence after a period of dangerous underinvestment. Proponents argue that the 2% target, long treated as aspirational, has finally acquired political force; that Finland and Sweden's accession strengthens the alliance's northern flank; and that the new regional defense plans represent a genuine operational transformation rather than

symbolic adjustment. Western analysts such as Howorth (2019) and Biscop (2021) had long argued that European defense underinvestment was unsustainable, and the war validated their warnings. The Western perspective emphasizes alliance unity—twenty-three allies meeting the 2% target by 2024, compared to three in 2014—as evidence of a durable strategic shift. What this perspective tends to occlude is the gap between spending and capability, the dependence on US industrial and military leadership, and the opportunity costs for other global commitments, including in Africa and the Indo-Pacific.

UN: The UN perspective situates NATO rearmament within the framework of the UN Charter, particularly Article 51 (the inherent right of individual and collective self-defense) and Chapter VIII (regional arrangements). From this vantage point, NATO's response to Russian aggression is legally defensible as collective self-defense, but the broader question is whether the rearmament contributes to or undermines international peace and security. UN officials and member states have expressed concern about arms races, the erosion of arms control frameworks (including the suspension of the New START treaty and the collapse of the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe treaty), and the diversion of resources from development and peacebuilding. The UN perspective also highlights the tension between NATO's regional mandate and its global partnerships—the Indo-Pacific four (Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea)—which risk globalizing a regional conflict. What the UN perspective occludes is the practical reality that the Security Council is paralyzed by the Russian veto, making collective security through the UN impossible and leaving regional arrangements as the only viable response.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — European strategic autonomy: from French concept to EU policy (PESCO, EDF, the Strategic Compass)

Bolded Causal Claim: European strategic autonomy became an institutional project rather than a French slogan because the 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the prospect of American retrenchment converted a long-standing debate about dependence into a set of binding EU defense instruments; yet autonomy remains partial because member states still privilege NATO for deterrence and national sovereignty for procurement.

Mechanism: The mechanism is not a single decision but a layered causal chain. First, the invasion collapsed the post-Cold War assumption that large-scale territorial war in Europe was obsolete; this raised the expected cost of relying on a single external guarantor. Second, the uneven American response—strong under Biden but shadowed by Trump-era threats to condition Article 5 and by congressional delays in aid—introduced strategic uncertainty into European planning, making "autonomy" a hedge rather than a replacement for NATO. Third, EU institutional actors, especially the European Commission and the High Representative, used the crisis to advance pre-existing agendas: the European Defence Fund (EDF), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), and the Strategic Compass. The EDF provides EU budget money for collaborative research and development; PESCO creates legally binding commitments among participating states; the Strategic Compass, adopted in March 2022, supplies a shared threat assessment and capability targets, including an EU Rapid Deployment Capacity. Fourth, the mechanism depends on member-state bargaining: France has historically framed autonomy as global strategic sovereignty, Germany has treated it as complement to NATO, and Central and Eastern European states have insisted that autonomy must not dilute American deterrence. The resulting compromise is "strategic autonomy in the European security and defense policy space," not an independent European army. Fifth, industrial politics matter: autonomy requires a defense industrial base, but European procurement remains fragmented by national champions, offset requirements, and divergent standards; thus the mechanism produces institutional ambition faster than industrial consol-

idation. Howorth (2019) and Biscop (2021) provide the conceptual baseline: autonomy is the capacity to decide and act, sometimes with partners, not autarky. In short, the war created demand for autonomy, EU institutions supplied frameworks, and member-state heterogeneity limited the supply response.

Scope Conditions: The autonomy agenda advances under three conditions: (i) a proximate, high-intensity threat that makes capability gaps salient; (ii) credible doubt about the reliability or capacity of the United States; and (iii) EU institutional capacity to pool resources without requiring unanimity on every project. It stalls when any of these fail. If Washington reaffirms unconditional extended deterrence and funds European deployments, the incentive to build parallel structures falls. If member states treat defense as a national industrial policy—protecting domestic firms through juste retour—joint procurement cannot achieve economies of scale. If fiscal rules or debt constraints dominate, defense spending rises rhetorically but not in deployable capability. The concept also has a semantic scope condition: "strategic autonomy" is not "strategic independence." Under the narrower definition, autonomy can coexist with NATO; under the French maximalist definition, it implies a European pole capable of autonomous intervention. The post-2022 EU policy mostly adopts the narrower definition, which is why it has been politically acceptable to Atlanticist members. Scope also varies by domain: autonomy is more advanced in economic statecraft (sanctions, energy) than in high-end military capability, where US systems, intelligence, and logistics remain indispensable. It is further constrained by legal scope: Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union provides mutual assistance, but operational command still depends on national contributions and NATO planning.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism is operating, one should observe rising European defense expenditure, more collaborative EU-funded projects, and new procurement initiatives, but not a displacement of NATO command structures. Observable indicators include: increased national defense budgets toward or above the NATO 2 percent guideline; EDF project portfolios in areas such as air defense, cyber, and unmanned systems; PESCO projects moving from planning to capability delivery; the Strategic Compass's Rapid Deployment Capacity and hybrid threat response; and EU-level ammunition and procurement initiatives responding to Ukraine's consumption rates, including the Act in Support of Ammunition Production and common procurement instruments. One should also observe persistent gaps: continued reliance on US strategic enablers (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, strategic lift, missile defense), national vetoes over foreign policy, and industrial duplication (multiple main battle tank and fighter programs). The implication is not that Europe has become self-sufficient, but that it has begun to price dependence into its institutional design. A useful falsifier would be a sustained rise in European capability without corresponding EU institutionalization—for example, purely national rearmament that bypasses Brussels—because that would indicate that autonomy is being pursued as national sovereignty rather than collective capacity.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, which must be read as primary rather than peripheral, sees European strategic autonomy as a rearrangement of power that does not automatically enlarge African agency. African scholars and policymakers have long argued that European security debates are conducted over African heads: the Sahel, the Horn, and the Mediterranean are treated as theaters for European risk management rather than as regions with their own political projects. From this vantage, autonomy can cut both ways. On one hand, a less US-dependent Europe might pursue more independent Africa policies, potentially reducing the securitization of migration and the outsourcing of border control. On the other hand, European rearmament can deepen the militarization of African spaces, sustain arms flows, and divert diplomatic attention and development finance from African priorities. The African perspective therefore asks not whether Europe is autonomous from Washington, but whether autonomy produces accountability to African states and populations. It also notes that African states are not passive objects of European strategy; they navigate among European, Chinese, Russian, and Gulf actors, and European autonomy may

create openings for African bargaining. What this perspective occludes if ignored is the internal diversity of African positions—some governments welcome European security assistance, others resist it—and the fact that African security challenges are often rooted in domestic political settlements rather than external sponsorship alone.

The Chinese perspective treats European strategic autonomy as a potentially stabilizing deconcentration of Western power, but remains skeptical that it will reduce NATO's global posture. Beijing's official discourse frames NATO as a Cold War relic and a source of instability; European autonomy that weakens transatlantic cohesion could be welcomed as reducing US capacity to coordinate pressure on China. Yet Chinese analysts also recognize that a more capable Europe may still align with Washington on technology, sanctions, and Indo-Pacific issues. The Russian perspective interprets autonomy through the lens of alliance fracture: Moscow has historically sought to exploit transatlantic divisions, and a Europe that speaks with one voice on defense could be more, not less, threatening. Russian narratives emphasize NATO expansion as an existential threat; European autonomy that preserves NATO's core while adding EU capacity is read as militarization rather than emancipation. The Western perspective, especially in Washington and Atlanticist capitals, supports European capability but worries about duplication and political decoupling; it treats autonomy as acceptable when it strengthens the alliance and dangerous when it creates parallel structures. The UN perspective situates autonomy within the Charter framework: regional arrangements are permitted under Chapter VIII, but they must not undermine collective security or arms control; the UN view highlights the risk that competitive rearmament erodes the normative and legal constraints on the use of force.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Energy decoupling: REPowerEU, LNG infrastructure, and the new energy geography

Bolded Causal Claim: Europe's rapid reduction of Russian gas dependence after 2022 was achieved by combining demand destruction, emergency LNG infrastructure, and accelerated renewable targets; the result is a structurally altered energy geography that reduces Moscow's coercive leverage but substitutes new dependencies on global LNG suppliers and imposes uneven economic costs.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with a supply weaponization shock: Russia reduced and then largely halted pipeline deliveries through Nord Stream and other routes, converting energy interdependence into coercion. European governments responded through three channels. First, demand reduction: industrial curtailment, efficiency measures, fuel switching, and mild weather reduced gas consumption, demonstrating that demand is more elastic in a crisis than in normal planning; EU member states agreed to reduce gas demand by 15 percent over the winter of 2022-23. Second, supply substitution: floating storage and regasification units, new LNG terminals, pipeline reversals, and interconnectors allowed non-Russian gas—especially from the United States, Norway, Qatar, Algeria, and Azerbaijan—to reach Central and Eastern Europe; Germany commissioned FSRUs at Wilhelmshaven, Brunsbüttel, and Lubmin, while the Baltic Pipe and interconnector upgrades reduced bottlenecks. Third, structural acceleration: REPowerEU, presented in March 2022, raised renewable and efficiency targets, streamlined permitting, and framed decarbonization as security policy. The mechanism is path-dependent: pipeline gas created physical lock-in and long-term contracts; LNG creates a different lock-in based on terminal capacity, shipping, and global spot prices. The shift from a regional pipeline system to a global LNG market also changes price formation: European prices become tied to Asian demand and shipping availability, not just to Russian contract terms. A further mechanism is political: energy decoupling required EU-level coordination on storage mandates, joint purchasing, and price caps, but implementation remained national, producing uneven protection for industry and house-

holds. Thus the war did not simply remove Russia; it reorganized Europe's energy system around liquidity, infrastructure, and global markets.

Scope Conditions: Decoupling succeeds when three conditions hold: (i) global LNG supply is available at prices Europe can absorb; (ii) infrastructure can be built or repurposed quickly; and (iii) demand reduction is politically tolerable. It is constrained when global LNG markets are tight, when terminal construction faces local opposition or financing gaps, and when industrial users cannot pass through costs. The mechanism also depends on weather and on the behavior of third suppliers: Qatar's long-term contracts, US export capacity, and Norwegian field maintenance all matter. Scope conditions include distributional ones: decoupling that protects households through subsidies may strain public finances; decoupling that exposes industry to high prices may accelerate deindustrialization or relocation. There is also a temporal condition: emergency measures (FSRUs, demand cuts) can be implemented in months, but structural decoupling (renewables, grid expansion, hydrogen) takes years. Finally, the concept of "decoupling" should not be overstated: Europe reduced dependence on Russian pipeline gas dramatically, but Russian LNG still enters some markets, and global oil and gas markets remain interconnected, so price effects persist even where physical flows stop.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism is operating, one should observe a collapse in Russian pipeline gas's share of EU imports, a rise in US and Norwegian supply, new terminal capacity in previously dependent states, and a measurable reduction in EU gas demand. One should also observe price volatility, industrial stress in gas-intensive sectors, and political contestation over subsidy regimes. Observable implications include: diversification of supply contracts; storage levels managed through EU-mandated targets; accelerated renewable permitting; and new geopolitical relationships with LNG exporters. A falsifier would be a return to pre-war dependence patterns without a corresponding collapse in Russian supply—for example, if European buyers quietly resumed large-scale Russian gas purchases through intermediaries—because that would indicate that decoupling was tactical rather than structural. Another falsifier would be a failure of renewable acceleration despite high fossil prices, suggesting that security framing did not overcome planning and grid constraints.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective is primary and reveals that European energy decoupling is not a self-contained regional adjustment but a redistribution of energy demand and investment with global consequences. African states have been positioned both as potential suppliers and as competitors for LNG cargoes; when Europe bid aggressively for LNG in 2022, some developing economies faced higher prices or supply shortages. African scholars and policymakers have also framed European decarbonization and gas demand as a form of "green colonialism" when it accelerates extraction in African territories without corresponding local industrialization or energy access. At the same time, Europe's search for alternatives creates opportunities for African gas producers—Algeria, Nigeria, Senegal, Mozambique, Tanzania—but these opportunities are constrained by infrastructure, financing, and security risks. The African vantage point thus highlights a double standard: Europe's energy security is treated as urgent, while African energy poverty is treated as a development issue. It also insists that climate justice cannot be separated from security policy; if Europe's transition relies on African resources without technology transfer, the result is a new dependency rather than a partnership. What this perspective occludes if ignored is the heterogeneity of African energy interests—exporters versus importers, fossil-dependent versus renewable-rich states—and the agency of African governments in negotiating terms.

The Chinese perspective sees European decoupling as evidence that energy interdependence can be weaponized, reinforcing Beijing's emphasis on self-reliance and diversified supply routes. Chinese analysts may view Europe's turn to US LNG as replacing one dependency with another, while also noting opportu-

nities for Chinese renewable technology exports and infrastructure investment. The Russian perspective frames decoupling as a costly European self-harm that has not eliminated Russia's global energy role; Moscow argues that Europe pays more for less secure supply and that Russian resources will find other markets, especially in Asia. The Western perspective treats decoupling as a strategic success that reduced Russian leverage and aligned climate and security goals, though it acknowledges price and competitiveness costs. The UN perspective emphasizes energy access, climate commitments, and the risk that crisis-driven fossil investment locks in emissions; it also stresses that global energy markets must serve development needs, not only European security.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Defense industrial base: ammunition production, procurement reform, and the fragmentation problem

Bolded Causal Claim: Europe's defense-industrial base was optimized for low-intensity, expeditionary, and peacetime procurement, so the Ukraine war's high-intensity consumption exposed a structural inability to produce, stockpile, and sustain munitions at scale; closing that gap requires not merely money but a politically difficult shift from nationally fragmented demand to aggregated, multi-year, interoperable procurement.

Mechanism: The causal chain runs through several linked mechanisms. First, post-Cold War force structures and industrial planning assumed short, limited wars with precision munitions and minimal attrition; stockpiles were reduced and production lines idled. Second, European defense markets remained nationally segmented: procurement ministries bought from national champions, often with offset requirements, producing multiple variants of similar systems and preventing economies of scale. Third, supply chains were optimized for cost rather than surge, with single-source components, long-lead items, and limited skilled labor. Fourth, donation of existing stocks to Ukraine depleted European inventories faster than production could replace them, especially for 155mm artillery shells, air-defense interceptors, and armored vehicle spare parts. Fifth, price signals arrived late: until governments signed multi-year contracts with volume guarantees, firms would not invest in new capacity because defense markets are monopsonistic and capital-intensive. Sixth, EU-level instruments such as the Act in Support of Ammunition Production, the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act, and the proposed European Defence Industry Programme attempt to aggregate demand and co-finance capacity, but they operate within competition law, national sovereignty over procurement, and industrial policy disputes. The result is a lag between political urgency and physical output: money can be appropriated quickly, but machine tools, energetics, propellants, and trained workers cannot.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism is strongest under conditions of prolonged high-intensity conventional war in Europe, where consumption rates exceed Cold War planning assumptions. It weakens if the conflict freezes or de-escalates, because political urgency and funding commitments fade. It also depends on US and non-European supply: if Washington provides munitions or if global suppliers fill gaps, European shortfalls are less visible. Conversely, if a simultaneous Indo-Pacific contingency diverts US production, European dependency on domestic capacity becomes acute. The mechanism is further conditioned by national industrial structure: states with existing ammunition plants can scale faster than those without, while small states remain dependent on imports. EU regulatory flexibility matters: if state aid and procurement rules are interpreted strictly, joint programs stall; if relaxed, consolidation accelerates. Finally, the mechanism assumes that political leaders accept trade-offs between efficiency and sovereignty; if they insist on national champions, fragmentation persists despite spending increases.

Observable Implications: Several observable implications follow. One is the gap between announced spending and delivered capability: rising defense budgets do not immediately translate into shells, interceptors, or vehicles. Another is the proliferation of national and EU initiatives alongside bilateral and minilateral deals. A third is industrial behavior: new plants, expanded shifts, and acquisitions by major primes, but also bottlenecks in energetics, machine tools, and skilled labor. A fourth is price inflation and delivery delays for systems such as air defense and artillery. A fifth is the continued diversity of European platforms: even as spending rises, the number of distinct tank, fighter, and frigate programs remains high, indicating that fragmentation is a stock problem as well as a flow problem. A sixth is the political salience of strategic autonomy rhetoric: governments increasingly justify industrial policy in security terms, but implementation remains uneven. Data from the IISS Military Balance and national procurement announcements can track these trends, though output figures are often classified or commercially sensitive.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): European rearmament has direct and indirect consequences for African security that are often treated as externalities in European debates. The first is fiscal and political attention: as European governments redirect budgets toward ammunition, air defense, and force posture, development, peacekeeping, and security-assistance commitments to Africa face tighter scrutiny. This does not mean automatic cuts, but it changes the burden of proof for African programs and can accelerate a shift from long-term state-building support to transactional counterterrorism or migration control. The second is industrial priority: when European defense firms operate at capacity for European orders, African customers may face longer delivery times, higher prices, or reduced access to systems and spare parts, especially for states that rely on European suppliers. The third is arms-market dynamics: a rearmed Europe may increase surplus equipment transfers to partners, but such transfers can also flood fragile markets, complicate stockpile security, and empower non-state actors if end-use monitoring is weak. The fourth is normative: African scholars and diplomats have long argued that European security crises absorb global institutional bandwidth; the Ukraine war's industrial mobilization reinforces a hierarchy in which European territorial defense is treated as existential while African conflicts are managed as chronic. Yet the African perspective is not simply oppositional. It also notes that European defense-industrial fragmentation offers lessons for African regional integration: without aggregated demand and shared standards, African defense industries will remain dependent and small-scale. Moreover, some African states may benefit from diversification of suppliers as Europe, the United States, and others compete for markets. The core claim is that European rearmament is not merely a European story; it reshapes global arms availability, aid politics, and the distribution of security attention, and African agency requires tracking those shifts rather than accepting them as background.

Chinese: China interprets European defense-industrial mobilization as part of a broader US-led militarization of the international system. From Beijing's vantage point, NATO's push for higher output and standardization is not a neutral response to aggression but an institutionalization of bloc confrontation, with potential spillovers into the Indo-Pacific through interoperability, technology sharing, and alliance expectations. Chinese analysts often argue that European rearmament is fiscally unsustainable and risks an arms race that undermines post-Cold War arms-control norms. At the same time, China has commercial interests in European markets for dual-use technologies, components, and industrial inputs; export controls and de-risking therefore create friction. The perspective also notes that a more capable European defense industry could, in principle, reduce European dependence on the United States, which Beijing sometimes views as a stabilizing diversification rather than a threat. Its occlusion is the tendency to treat all European security cooperation as US-directed, understating European agency and the genuine security shock of Russia's invasion.

Russian: Russia's perspective treats European rearmament as confirmation of a long-standing narrative that NATO and the EU are inherently hostile and that Moscow's security concerns were ignored. From this view, increased ammunition production, joint procurement, and industrial planning are not defensive adjustments but preparations for a prolonged confrontation, justifying Russia's own military expansion and economic mobilization. Russian commentary often emphasizes European dependency on US enablers to argue that European autonomy rhetoric is hollow, while also warning that a rearmed Europe could become a more dangerous adversary over time. The perspective occludes Russia's own role in triggering the mobilization through the invasion of Ukraine and tends to conflate defensive rearmament with offensive intent. It also understates the degree to which European industrial fragmentation limits rapid capability growth, a point that would complicate the image of an imminent European military threat.

Western: The Western perspective, especially in NATO and EU policy documents, frames defense-industrial recovery as a necessary correction after decades of underinvestment. It emphasizes that ammunition shortfalls and platform diversity are solvable through aggregated demand, multi-year contracts, and industrial consolidation, and it treats rearmament as compatible with, not opposed to, strategic autonomy. Proponents argue that a stronger European industrial base supports burden-sharing, reduces vulnerability to supply shocks, and strengthens deterrence. The perspective's strength is its focus on measurable capacity and institutional reform; its occlusion is the risk of overestimating how quickly sovereign procurement habits can change and of underestimating the political costs of consolidation for smaller member states and defense firms.

UN: The UN perspective situates European rearmament within the Charter framework of self-defense and collective security, while emphasizing that arms production and transfers must be accompanied by transparency, end-use monitoring, and respect for international humanitarian law. It warns that rapid industrial mobilization can increase diversion risks, illicit trafficking, and the long-term availability of weapons in conflict zones. It also stresses that rearmament should not displace disarmament, non-proliferation, and arms-control efforts, and that security spending must be balanced against development and climate commitments. The perspective's contribution is to insist that capacity is not the same as legitimacy; its occlusion is that it offers limited guidance on how to reconcile urgent defense needs with procedural arms-control timelines.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The transatlantic relationship: burden-sharing, American retrenchment scenarios, and Europe's strategic dependency

Bolded Causal Claim: Europe's security architecture remains structurally dependent on US military capabilities and political commitment; record European spending and new EU instruments improve resilience but cannot quickly replace American enablers, so transatlantic burden-sharing is an asymmetric alliance in which European strategic autonomy is bounded by retrenchment risk.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with capability asymmetry: the United States provides nuclear deterrence, strategic intelligence and surveillance, air and missile defense, strategic lift, logistics, command and control, and space-based assets that European forces cannot independently generate at scale. European militaries have improved readiness and spending since 2014 and especially since 2022, but procurement remains fragmented and many critical systems are US-origin or US-dependent. Second, alliance politics create a commitment mechanism: NATO's integrated command structure, standardization, and interoperability raise the cost of US withdrawal, but also create sunk-cost dependency. Third, burden-sharing is measured by input metrics such as defense spending as a share of GDP and investment in equipment rather than output

metrics such as deployable brigades and enablers, allowing both sides to claim progress while capability gaps persist. Fourth, US retrenchment scenarios—driven by domestic polarization, Asia-first prioritization, or a future administration skeptical of alliances—would not necessarily end NATO but could reduce force posture, enabler availability, and political reassurance. Fifth, European responses are constrained by time: strategic autonomy initiatives such as PESCO, the European Defence Fund, and the Strategic Compass can build capacity over a decade, but cannot close gaps in the near term. Sixth, the relationship is also political: US leadership provides agenda-setting power, while European dependence creates leverage for Washington on issues ranging from China policy to defense procurement. The result is a stable but asymmetric interdependence: Europe needs the US more than the US needs Europe for territorial defense, yet the US benefits from European bases, markets, and diplomatic support.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism is strongest when the US faces competing strategic priorities, especially a major contingency in the Indo-Pacific, and when European threat perceptions are high but capabilities lag. It weakens if the US reaffirms long-term commitment through force posture and industrial cooperation, or if Europe achieves rapid consolidation in enablers. It is also conditioned by nuclear politics: as long as European non-nuclear states rely on US extended deterrence, full autonomy is structurally impossible; France's independent deterrent provides partial but not alliance-wide coverage. The mechanism depends on political cycles in both Europe and the US: a US administration committed to NATO can mask dependency, while a skeptical one exposes it. It is less applicable to low-intensity operations where European forces can act independently, and more applicable to high-intensity, large-scale territorial defense. Finally, if Russia's threat diminishes, the political willingness to sustain dependency may decline, but the capability gap would remain.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include the persistence of US-origin systems in European inventories, the continued US role in NATO command and enablers, and European efforts to develop alternatives such as future combat air systems, next-generation fighter programs, and European air and missile defense initiatives. Another is the gap between European spending increases and deployable capability: more money does not automatically mean less dependency. A third is diplomatic signaling: NATO summit language on burden-sharing, US force posture announcements, and EU strategic documents that simultaneously affirm transatlantic partnership and autonomy. A fourth is industrial cooperation and friction: joint programs, technology transfer disputes, and buy-European pressures. A fifth is public opinion and elite discourse: debates over whether strategic autonomy means complementing or replacing US leadership. A sixth is scenario planning: exercises and contingency plans that assume US reinforcement, revealing dependency in planning assumptions. Data from the IISS Military Balance, NATO defense expenditure reports, and US posture statements can track these trends, though political intentions remain uncertain.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The transatlantic debate is often framed as an internal Western question, but it has significant implications for African states and for the global distribution of security attention. First, if the United States prioritizes Europe and the Indo-Pacific, African security partnerships may receive fewer resources, less high-level attention, and more transactional engagement, especially in the Sahel and Horn of Africa. African governments then face a more crowded and competitive security marketplace, with European, Turkish, Russian, Gulf, and Chinese actors offering different packages of arms, training, and political support. Second, European strategic dependency on the United States can shape African policy indirectly: when European states seek to demonstrate autonomy or alliance loyalty, they may adjust deployments, aid, or diplomatic positions in Africa. Third, the African perspective highlights a structural parallel: just as Europe

debates dependency on Washington, many African states debate dependency on external security providers, and the vocabulary of strategic autonomy resonates with long-standing African calls for self-reliance and non-alignment. Fourth, a more autonomous Europe could, in principle, be a more consistent partner for African-led security initiatives, less subject to US political swings; but it could also be more inward-looking and protectionist. The African vantage point thus reveals that transatlantic burden-sharing is not only about European capability gaps; it is about how great-power priorities cascade into regions that are not at the center of the debate but bear the consequences of resource shifts and alliance politics.

Chinese: China views the transatlantic relationship as the central pillar of US hegemony and sees European strategic autonomy as both an opportunity and a risk. Beijing's official discourse often encourages European independence from Washington, especially on trade and technology, while warning against NATO's expansion or Asia-Pacificization. Chinese analysts argue that US retrenchment scenarios are plausible because of domestic polarization and overstretch, and that a more autonomous Europe could reduce global bloc confrontation. At the same time, China fears that European rearmament under US pressure will produce a more capable NATO, tighter technology controls, and greater alignment with US China policy. The perspective occludes the extent to which European autonomy debates are driven by genuine security concerns about Russia rather than by US manipulation, and it sometimes overstates Europe's willingness to distance itself from Washington on core security issues.

Russian: Russia's perspective treats transatlantic friction as a strategic opportunity and evidence of Western incoherence. Moscow's narrative emphasizes US dominance over Europe, arguing that European states are subordinated to American interests and that strategic autonomy is largely rhetorical. Russian analysts also suggest that US retrenchment or political instability could weaken NATO's credibility, creating openings for Russia to exploit divisions. At the same time, Russia fears a rearmed and more autonomous Europe because it could sustain confrontation without US leadership. The perspective's occlusion is its failure to acknowledge that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is the primary driver of European rearmament and transatlantic cohesion; it also understates the institutional and material depth of US-European military integration, which cannot be quickly dissolved by political rhetoric.

Western: The Western perspective treats the transatlantic relationship as indispensable and burden-sharing as a success story in progress. It points to increased European defense spending, new EU instruments, and NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept as evidence that the alliance is adapting. Proponents of strategic autonomy argue that it strengthens, rather than weakens, the transatlantic bond by making Europe a more capable partner. Skeptics warn that autonomy rhetoric can become decoupling in practice, undermining interoperability and US trust. The perspective's strength is its institutional realism: it recognizes that US enablers cannot be replaced quickly. Its occlusion is a tendency to measure progress by spending and summit declarations rather than by deployable capability, and to understate how US domestic politics can abruptly alter alliance expectations.

UN: The UN perspective frames transatlantic security arrangements within the Charter's collective security system and emphasizes that regional alliances must not undermine universal principles or escalate arms races. It stresses the importance of dialogue, confidence-building, and arms control, and warns that a fragmented security order—whether US-led, European-autonomous, or multipolar—can weaken global governance. The UN vantage point also highlights that burden-sharing debates among wealthy states occur alongside unmet needs for peacekeeping, development, and humanitarian funding elsewhere. Its contribution is to insist on legitimacy and inclusivity; its occlusion is that it has limited leverage over alliance politics and cannot resolve the capability asymmetries that drive dependency.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on European security architecture begins from a structural position that the other four perspectives systematically under-theorize: Africa is not a passive theater onto which European security dynamics spill over, but a co-constitutive space in which European power has historically been produced, tested, and legitimated. From this position, the post-2022 rearmament of NATO and the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy appear not as a regional European adjustment to Russian aggression but as the latest phase in a longer arc of militarized global ordering in which African territories, resources, and populations are instrumentalized. The African perspective therefore does not ask whether European strategic autonomy is desirable for Europeans; it asks what autonomy means when it is built on supply chains, mineral extraction, and security partnerships that reproduce African dependency.

This framing draws on a lineage of African political thought that treats international order as an extension of colonial and neo-colonial power. Rodney's analysis of how Europe underdeveloped Africa established the foundational claim that European industrial and military capacity was historically subsidized by African labor and resources; Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism extended this to the post-independence period, arguing that formal sovereignty masked continued economic and military subordination. Fanon's insistence that colonial violence is not an aberration but the constitutive grammar of the colonial order provides the theoretical warrant for reading contemporary European rearmament not as a defensive reaction but as a continuation of militarized accumulation. These thinkers do not merely add African examples to Western theory; they invert the epistemic hierarchy, treating European security discourse as an object of critique rather than a neutral framework.

Mbembe's concept of necropolitics is particularly apt for analyzing the consequences of European rearmament for Africa. If sovereignty in the colonial and postcolonial world has been exercised through the power to decide who may live and who must die, then the diversion of European attention, resources, and military capacity toward the eastern flank has direct lethal consequences in African theaters where European states were already engaged—whether through counterterrorism operations in the Sahel, peacekeeping commitments, or maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The withdrawal of French forces from Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger between 2022 and 2024, and the broader contraction of European military engagement in West Africa, cannot be separated from the re-prioritization of European defense toward Ukraine. From an African vantage point, this is not a neutral reallocation but a demonstration that African security is contingent on European threat perception, and that European strategic autonomy is being constructed partly through the abandonment of African commitments. The Sahel cases are instructive: France's Operation Barkhane ended in 2022, the European Takuba Task Force dissolved, and the EU Training Mission in Mali was suspended, all while European defense budgets surged. African governments that had built security strategies around European partnerships found themselves exposed, and the resulting vacuum contributed to the wave of military coups and the expansion of Russian (Wagner/Africa Corps) influence across the region. The African perspective reads this not as an unfortunate side effect but as a structural feature of a security order in which African stability is instrumental to European priorities rather than valued intrinsically.

Bayart's analysis of the "criminalization of the state" and the externalization of European border control adds a further dimension. European rearmament is not only about tanks and artillery; it is about the militarization of migration governance, the fortification of the Mediterranean, and the delegation of border control to African states through compacts that trade security cooperation for development assistance. The EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy in energy and defense has been accompanied by intensified pressure on North

and West African states to manage migration flows, effectively extending European security architecture southward without corresponding African agency in its design. The EU's 2023-2024 migration partnerships with Tunisia, Egypt, and Mauritania, which exchanged financial support for border enforcement, exemplify this pattern. Grovogui's critique of "sovereigns, quasi-sovereigns, and Africans" captures this asymmetry: African states are treated as quasi-sovereign partners in security arrangements they did not author, while European states retain the prerogative to define threats, allocate resources, and exit commitments. The African perspective thus insists that any evaluation of European strategic autonomy must account for the coercive externalization of European security onto African territory.

The energy decoupling dimension reveals another layer. REPowerEU and the rapid expansion of LNG infrastructure have reconfigured global energy geography in ways that directly affect African producers. On one hand, European demand for non-Russian gas has created opportunities for African LNG exporters—Nigeria, Algeria, Mozambique, Senegal—to position themselves as alternative suppliers. On the other hand, the same reconfiguration has intensified competition for African gas, accelerated project timelines that bypass environmental and community safeguards, and locked in long-term extraction contracts that may reproduce the resource-curse dynamics Rodney and Nkrumah identified. The Mozambique LNG project in Cabo Delgado, where European energy security interests intersect with insurgency, displacement, and militarized security responses, illustrates how European decoupling can deepen African insecurity. The African perspective thus sees European energy security not as a technical transition but as a reordering of extractive relationships in which African states risk being recast as emergency suppliers rather than strategic partners, and in which the benefits of the transition accrue disproportionately to European consumers while the costs—environmental degradation, community displacement, militarized extraction—are borne locally.

Mamdani's distinction between "citizen and subject" and his critique of the "savior" complex in international interventions is relevant to the defense industrial base and procurement debates. European efforts to consolidate defense production and reduce fragmentation are framed in Brussels as efficiency measures, but from an African standpoint they occur within a global arms market in which European defense firms are major suppliers to African conflicts. The fragmentation that Europeans lament is, in part, the same fragmentation that allows multiple European suppliers to compete for African procurement contracts, often with limited transparency or accountability. Consolidation may reduce European costs while concentrating the power of a smaller number of firms over African security markets. The proliferation of European small arms and light weapons across African conflict zones, documented by UN panels of experts, is a direct consequence of an arms industry whose export practices are shaped by European commercial interests rather than African security needs. Tamale's decolonial feminist scholarship and Oyěwùmí's critique of the coloniality of knowledge further remind us that the categories through which European security is discussed—"burden-sharing," "strategic autonomy," "deterrence"—are not universal but culturally specific, and that their application to African contexts often erases indigenous security practices and gendered dimensions of conflict. African women's experiences of militarization, displacement, and resource extraction are largely invisible in European security discourse, yet they constitute a significant share of the human cost of the reordering that European rearmament produces.

Aning and Danso's work on African security governance points to an alternative that the European perspective typically occludes: the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), the African Standby Force, and the principle of "African solutions to African problems." European rearmament and strategic autonomy debates rarely engage with these institutions as equals; instead, African security is treated as a downstream concern to be managed through development aid, migration control, or counterterrorism partnerships. The African perspective thus contributes a demand for reciprocity: if Europe is to claim strategic autonomy, it

must also respect African strategic autonomy, including the right of African states and regional organizations to define their own security priorities without European conditionality. The AU's Silencing the Guns initiative and the African Continental Free Trade Area's security implications are examples of African-led frameworks that European security architecture should engage with as partners rather than as objects of assistance.

The African perspective also interrogates the discourse of "burden-sharing" that dominates Western debates. From an African standpoint, the question is not whether Europeans are spending enough on defense relative to the United States, but whether the global distribution of security resources reflects a hierarchy in which African lives are valued less. The fact that NATO members can mobilize hundreds of billions of euros for European defense while peacekeeping budgets, humanitarian assistance, and development finance for Africa stagnate or decline is read as evidence of a racialized global security order. This is not merely a moral claim; it is an analytical one, grounded in the observation that the institutional mechanisms for allocating security resources—NATO's defense planning process, the EU's budgetary frameworks—are designed by and for wealthy states, and that African states have no voice in decisions that profoundly affect their security environment.

What the African perspective occludes, or at least underweights, is the genuine security dilemma that European states face. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is not a European invention, and African scholarship that treats all European militarization as neo-colonial risks flattening the distinction between defensive and offensive postures. Nyerere's non-alignment and Cabral's revolutionary internationalism both acknowledged that anti-colonial solidarity did not require ignoring real threats. A rigorous African perspective must therefore distinguish between European rearmament as a response to aggression and European rearmament as a project of hegemonic consolidation, recognizing that the two are entangled but not identical. The African vantage point also sometimes underweights the agency of African states that actively seek European security partnerships—whether for counterterrorism, maritime security, or arms procurement—treating these as coerced rather than chosen. Bayart's concept of extraversion reminds us that African elites have historically instrumentalized external relationships for domestic purposes, and that African security policy is not simply imposed from outside. African governments have their own strategic calculations, and some have welcomed European re-engagement or sought to leverage great-power competition for domestic gain.

In sum, the African perspective reveals that European security architecture is not a self-contained regional project but a global ordering practice with distributional consequences that fall disproportionately on Africa. It contributes an insistence on historical accountability, on the material foundations of European military capacity, and on the right of African institutions to co-author security arrangements. Its occlusion is a tendency to understate European security dilemmas and African elite agency. The perspective is indispensable not because it is "correct" in a simple sense, but because without it, the other four perspectives treat European security as a problem internal to the transatlantic or Eurasian space, erasing the African lives, resources, and institutions that make that space possible.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on European security architecture and strategic autonomy is shaped by a strategic worldview in which NATO is not a defensive alliance but a vehicle for US hegemony and a source of global instability. From Beijing's vantage point, the post-2022 rearmament of NATO and the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy are read through the lens of great-power competition: European efforts to build autonomous defense capacity are seen as potentially reducing US leverage over Europe, which China regards as favorable, while simultaneously deepening the militarization of the continent in ways that reinforce a US-led bloc

politics China opposes.

China's official position, articulated in successive policy documents and diplomatic statements, holds that NATO's eastward expansion was a root cause of the Ukraine crisis—a claim that aligns with Russian narratives but is deployed by Beijing for its own purposes. The 2022 NATO Strategic Concept's designation of China as a "systemic challenge" confirmed Chinese suspicions that the alliance was expanding its remit beyond the North Atlantic to contain China. From this perspective, European rearmament is not merely a response to Russia; it is part of a broader US strategy to consolidate a global network of alliances directed against China, encompassing AUKUS, the Quad, and enhanced NATO-Asia Pacific partnerships. The Chinese perspective thus interprets European strategic autonomy debates as a secondary theater in a primary US-China competition.

At the same time, Beijing has a nuanced interest in European autonomy. A Europe that is less dependent on the United States for security could, in principle, pursue a more independent foreign policy, including greater economic engagement with China and less automatic alignment with US sanctions and technology controls. Chinese analysts have noted that French advocacy for strategic autonomy and the EU's pursuit of "de-risking" rather than "decoupling" from China create space for continued Chinese-European economic interdependence. The Chinese perspective therefore does not uniformly oppose European autonomy; it distinguishes between autonomy that reduces US dominance (welcome) and autonomy that is directed against China (unwelcome).

On energy decoupling, China views European efforts to diversify away from Russian gas with mixed interest. The redirection of global LNG flows toward Europe has tightened global gas markets, affecting Chinese energy security and pricing. More broadly, China sees European energy transition and rearmament as accelerating a global competition for critical minerals—lithium, cobalt, rare earths—in which Chinese firms are deeply embedded and in which European "strategic autonomy" often translates into efforts to reduce dependence on Chinese supply chains. The Chinese perspective thus reads European strategic autonomy as partly an anti-Chinese economic project, not merely a Russia-focused security adjustment.

The defense industrial base dimension reinforces this reading. European efforts to consolidate defense production and reduce fragmentation are seen as strengthening a competitor defense industry that China must contend with in global arms markets, particularly in the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Chinese analysts note that European defense firms, freed from US competition through procurement preferences, could become more aggressive exporters, challenging Chinese market share. At the same time, European fragmentation has historically created openings for Chinese defense and dual-use technology exports; consolidation may close these.

What the Chinese perspective contributes is a systemic, great-power framing that situates European security within global competition rather than treating it as a regional matter. It highlights the ways in which European rearmament is entangled with US strategy toward China and draws attention to the economic and technological dimensions of security autonomy. What it occludes is the genuine European security dilemma posed by Russian aggression, which Chinese discourse tends to minimize or attribute to NATO expansion. It also underweights the internal European debate about values, sovereignty, and democratic accountability, treating European states as instruments of US strategy rather than autonomous actors with their own threat perceptions. The Chinese perspective is thus most useful as a corrective to Western self-narratives of defensive necessity, but least useful when it reduces all European agency to great-power maneuvering.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on European security architecture is organized around a single, deeply held claim: that NATO expansion constitutes an existential threat to Russian security and that the post-2022 rearmament of Europe confirms a long-standing pattern of encirclement. From Moscow's vantage point, the 2022 Madrid Summit and the 2024 Washington Summit are not defensive adjustments but the culmination of a thirty-year project to subordinate Russia's security interests to a US-led order. The Russian narrative treats the Ukraine war not as unprovoked aggression but as a preemptive response to an intolerable strategic environment.

This perspective has deep roots in Russian strategic culture. The concept of "strategic depth," the historical memory of invasions from the west, and the Soviet-era understanding of NATO as an anti-Russian alliance all inform Moscow's reading of European rearmament. Russian officials and analysts have consistently argued that NATO's 1999, 2004, and 2007 enlargements violated informal assurances given at the end of the Cold War—a claim that Western scholars dispute but that Russian discourse treats as established fact. The 2022 invasion is framed within this narrative as a last resort to prevent Ukraine's integration into NATO and to secure Russia's southwestern flank.

The Russian perspective interprets European strategic autonomy with ambivalence. On one hand, Moscow has historically viewed European autonomy from the United States as potentially favorable, since a more independent Europe might be less willing to participate in sanctions, military buildups, or forward deployment. French Gaullist traditions and German Ostpolitik have been seen in Moscow as counterweights to Atlanticist hardliners. On the other hand, the post-2022 trajectory has demonstrated that European autonomy, when it materializes, is being directed against Russia rather than against US dominance. The EU's Strategic Compass, PESCO, and EDF are read in Moscow as evidence that Europe is finally developing the military capacity to act independently—but in service of a confrontational agenda that includes support for Ukraine, sanctions, and forward deterrence. Russian analysts note that European strategic autonomy, in practice, has meant autonomy to fight Russia more effectively, not autonomy to pursue a distinct European interest.

Energy decoupling is interpreted in Moscow as economic warfare. REPowerEU and the rapid construction of LNG infrastructure are seen as deliberate efforts to sever the energy interdependence that had constrained European willingness to confront Russia. Russian discourse frames this as a self-defeating policy that harms European competitiveness while enriching US LNG exporters—a claim that has some empirical basis in the price differentials between US and European gas markets. The Russian perspective thus sees European energy security policy as serving US economic interests at European expense, reinforcing the argument that European "autonomy" is illusory.

The defense industrial base dimension is read as confirmation of a militarized European turn. Russian analysts point to ammunition production shortfalls, procurement fragmentation, and the slow pace of European rearmament as evidence that Europe remains dependent on the United States, but also warn that sustained investment will eventually produce a more capable European military. The Russian perspective treats European rearmament as a long-term threat that must be countered through Russia's own military buildup, nuclear modernization, and deepening partnership with China.

What the Russian perspective contributes is a reminder that security dilemmas are genuinely perceived, not merely invented, and that the expansion of military alliances can produce counter-mobilization regardless of intent. It highlights the ways in which European security architecture has been constructed without Russian participation, creating a zero-sum dynamic. What it occludes is the agency of Ukraine and other Eastern European states, which are treated as objects of great-power competition rather than as actors with their own security preferences. It also systematically underweights Russian responsibility for the collapse of the post-

Cold War security order, including the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of 2022. The Russian perspective is indispensable for understanding Moscow's threat perception and escalation calculus, but it cannot be accepted as an objective account of causation.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective—encompassing the United States, NATO, and the EU mainstream—frames European security architecture as a necessary and largely successful response to Russian aggression. From this vantage point, the 2022 Madrid Summit and the 2024 Washington Summit represent a historic recommitment to collective defense, the revitalization of NATO, and the emergence of a more capable European pillar within the alliance. The Western narrative treats strategic autonomy not as an alternative to the transatlantic relationship but as a complement to it: a stronger Europe is a better partner for the United States.

This perspective is grounded in institutionalist and liberal internationalist theory. NATO is understood as a community of democracies bound by shared values and mutual defense commitments; its expansion is framed as the voluntary accession of sovereign states seeking security, not as encirclement. The Western perspective emphasizes that NATO's open-door policy is a principle, not a strategy of aggression, and that the alliance's post-2022 rearmament was triggered by Russia's invasion, not the reverse. The 2022 Strategic Concept's designation of Russia as "the most significant and direct threat" and China as a "systemic challenge" reflects a threat assessment that Western policymakers regard as evidence-based.

On strategic autonomy, the Western perspective is internally divided but broadly convergent. The EU's Strategic Compass, PESCO, and EDF are seen as welcome developments that address long-standing capability gaps, but there is persistent concern—particularly in Washington and among Eastern European allies—that European autonomy could fragment the alliance or duplicate NATO structures. The prevailing Western view holds that strategic autonomy should be "NATO-compatible" and should not create parallel command structures. Howorth's analysis of European security and defense policy and Biscop's work on European strategy are frequently cited in this context to argue that autonomy and alliance are not mutually exclusive but require careful institutional design.

Energy decoupling is framed as a strategic success. REPowerEU and the rapid expansion of LNG infrastructure are presented as evidence of European resilience and of the capacity of democracies to adapt to coercion. The Western perspective emphasizes that Europe reduced its dependence on Russian gas from roughly 40 percent of imports in 2021 to under 15 percent by 2023, and that this was achieved without catastrophic economic disruption. The new energy geography—LNG terminals in Germany, the Netherlands, and the Baltic states—is treated as a permanent strategic asset that enhances European freedom of action.

The defense industrial base is acknowledged as a persistent weakness. Western analysts point to ammunition production shortfalls, the fragmentation of European defense markets, and the slow pace of procurement reform as evidence that Europe's industrial base has not kept pace with its strategic ambitions. The Western perspective treats these as soluble problems requiring political will and investment, not as structural failures. The IISS Military Balance data on European defense spending—showing a sustained increase since 2014 and a sharp acceleration after 2022—is cited as evidence of a genuine rearmament trend.

What the Western perspective contributes is a coherent account of institutional adaptation and collective action under pressure. It demonstrates that alliances can regenerate capacity when threatened and that European states can overcome historical fragmentation. What it occludes is the extent to which European security is still structurally dependent on the United States—for nuclear deterrence, intelligence, logistics, and high-end capabilities—and the possibility that American retrenchment scenarios, whether driven by domestic politics

or Indo-Pacific prioritization, could expose these dependencies. The Western perspective also tends to underweight the global South consequences of European rearmament, including the diversion of attention and resources from African and Middle Eastern theaters. Its strongest counterargument, internal to the tradition, comes from scholars who warn that treating NATO as a permanent fixture risks neglecting the political foundations of alliance cohesion and the possibility of US disengagement.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective frames European security architecture within the Charter's collective security system and emphasizes that regional alliances must not undermine universal principles or escalate arms races. It stresses the importance of dialogue, confidence-building, and arms control, and warns that a fragmented security order—whether US-led, European-autonomous, or multipolar—can weaken global governance. The UN vantage point also highlights that burden-sharing debates among wealthy states occur alongside unmet needs for peacekeeping, development, and humanitarian funding elsewhere. Its contribution is to insist on legitimacy and inclusivity; its occlusion is that it has limited leverage over alliance politics and cannot resolve the capability asymmetries that drive dependency.

The UN perspective draws on the Charter's provisions for regional arrangements under Chapter VIII, which permit regional organizations to address security matters but subordinate them to the Security Council's authority. From this standpoint, NATO and the EU's defense initiatives are legitimate insofar as they operate within the Charter framework, but they become problematic when they bypass or undermine the UN's universal security architecture. The UN perspective is particularly concerned with the erosion of arms control regimes—the suspension of the New START treaty, the collapse of the INF Treaty, and the absence of a successor framework for European conventional arms control—and with the risk that European rearmament could trigger a broader arms race.

On strategic autonomy, the UN perspective is agnostic about institutional form but insistent on normative constraints. Whether Europe achieves autonomy through NATO, the EU, or a combination, the UN framework requires that security arrangements respect sovereignty, non-intervention, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. The UN perspective thus evaluates European security architecture not by its efficiency or cohesion but by its compliance with international law and its contribution to global stability. This produces a distinctive critique: even a successful European rearmament could be destabilizing if it is not accompanied by dialogue with Russia and by arms control measures.

The energy decoupling dimension is viewed through the lens of sustainable development. The UN perspective welcomes the reduction of fossil fuel dependence but warns that the scramble for LNG and critical minerals can undermine environmental standards and the rights of communities in producing countries, including in Africa. The UN's sustainable development agenda and climate commitments create a tension with the security-driven acceleration of extractive projects.

On the defense industrial base, the UN perspective is concerned with the proliferation implications of increased European arms production. Higher output and looser export controls could increase the flow of weapons to conflict zones, including in Africa and the Middle East. The UN arms trade treaty framework and the work of UNODA (Office for Disarmament Affairs) provide the institutional basis for this concern.

What the UN perspective contributes is a universalist counterweight to regional security logic, insisting that European security cannot be pursued in isolation from global stability. What it occludes is the reality that the Security Council is paralyzed by great-power rivalry and that the UN has limited capacity to enforce its norms against major powers. The UN perspective is thus most valuable as a normative framework and least

valuable as a practical guide to European security policy.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Shows that European rearmament reallocates fiscal, industrial, and diplomatic capacity with opportunity costs for African security; links arms production to proliferation risks and energy decoupling to African markets.	May underweight the immediate threat perceptions of Eastern European states and the legal basis of collective self-defense.	Security is indivisible and historically accountable; European rearmament must not externalize costs to Africa.	Increased European defense spending and arms production alongside sustained un-derinvestment in African security partnerships; Sahel instability and arms-diversion risks.	Western: rearmament is a lawful and necessary response to aggression; African costs do not negate the right of self-defense.
Chinese	Frames NATO rearmament as bloc consolidation and questions the legitimacy of US-led alliance politics; highlights risks of escalation and reduced multipolar cooperation.	Downplays Russian agency and Ukrainian sovereignty; treats European demand for protection as US manipulation.	Security should be indivisible and non-exclusive; bloc confrontation should be avoided.	NATO 2022 Strategic Concept's treatment of China; Washington Summit emphasis on Indo-Pacific linkages.	Western: NATO expansion reflects sovereign choices by threatened states, not imposed bloc politics.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Articulates a security-dilemma narrative around NATO expansion and insists on great-power security guarantees.	Obscures Ukrainian agency and the coercive nature of Russian intervention; validates NATO's purpose through its own actions.	Great-power spheres of influence and buffer zones are legitimate; NATO expansion violates indivisible security.	Russian official framing of NATO as existential threat; 2022 invasion justification.	Western: sovereignty and self-determination trump sphere-of-influence claims; NATO is defensive.
Western	Explains institutional adaptation, burden-sharing, and deterrence; provides metrics of rearmament and alliance cohesion.	Underestimates industrial bottlenecks, long-term costs, and externalities for Africa and the Global South; may overstate unity.	Collective defense and liberal order require credible deterrence and institutional solidarity.	NATO spending increases, Finnish and Swedish accession, EU Strategic Compass, PESCO, and EDF.	African: rearmament externalizes costs and distracts from global security; Chinese: bloc politics escalates.
UN	Provides universalist legal framework; insists European security be linked to Charter principles, arms control, and global stability.	Security Council paralysis and limited enforcement capacity; regional security often proceeds outside UN.	Security must be pursued within international law and with attention to global consequences.	UN Charter, UNODA, and arms-trade treaty framework.	Western: UN paralysis makes regional self-help and deterrence necessary.

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2022-2024 institutional response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, centered on NATO rearmament and the EU Strategic Compass.

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the response was shaped by leaders' beliefs, rhetoric, and do-

mestic incentives. Olaf Scholz's Zeitenwende speech, Emmanuel Macron's evolving strategic-autonomy rhetoric, Joe Biden's alliance-management priorities, and Jens Stoltenberg's framing of NATO as the indispensable forum all mattered for timing and emphasis. Yet individual agency was constrained by bureaucratic routines, alliance procedures, and industrial realities; leaders could accelerate agendas but could not instantly generate capability. At the state level, threat perception varied sharply: Poland and the Baltic states treated Russian aggression as existential and pushed for maximum deterrence; France sought to preserve European agency within NATO; Germany combined rearmament with energy and industrial adjustment; the United States sought burden-sharing without abandonment. Defense budgets, procurement systems, and national industrial bases mediated how commitments became deployable forces, making the state level the place where the gap between political promises and military capability is most visible. At the systemic level, the war transformed the European security order from a post-Cold War cooperative framework into a competitive one. NATO's role as the primary security provider was reinforced, Russia was reclassified as an acute threat in NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, and the transatlantic alliance regained centrality; US-China competition increasingly linked European and Indo-Pacific security debates. This level explains why rearmament was broad rather than isolated, but it can obscure the agency of smaller states that demanded protection. At the transnational level, the response operated through NATO and EU institutions, defense-industry networks, energy markets, and supply chains. The EU Strategic Compass (2022) set capability and resilience goals; PESCO and the European Defence Fund channeled collaborative projects; ammunition and air-defense initiatives attempted to aggregate demand; LNG markets and infrastructure reshaped energy geography. This level explains how commitments were institutionalized, but it also reveals fragmentation, since national procurement preferences, divergent threat perceptions, and industrial bottlenecks limited integration.

Mechanism: from threat shock to institutional rearmament. The causal chain can be described in five stages. First, the February 2022 invasion functioned as an exogenous shock that collapsed the post-Cold War peace-dividend assumption and created a shared, if uneven, threat perception. Second, agenda compression occurred: NATO's Madrid Summit in June 2022 adopted a new Strategic Concept, while the EU had already approved the Strategic Compass in March 2022; both reframed Russia as the principal threat and called for greater capability. Third, commitment mechanisms followed: NATO's 2% of GDP guideline hardened from aspiration toward floor, many allies increased spending, and the EU expanded PESCO and EDF activity. Fourth, capability translation became the binding constraint, because political commitments had to pass through procurement systems, industrial capacity, skilled labor, raw materials, and logistics. Assessments in the IISS Military Balance 2023-2024 highlighted that production and stockpile shortfalls persisted even where budgets rose. Fifth, feedback effects altered preferences and institutions: Finland and Sweden joined NATO, the EU developed a defense industrial strategy, and debates over strategic autonomy intensified. As Howorth (2019) and Biscop (2021) argued before the war, European strategic autonomy was already contested; the invasion accelerated rather than created this debate. The mechanism is conditional: it works when threat perception remains high and US leadership is present; it weakens if threat perception declines, if industrial capacity cannot scale, or if domestic politics shift. It also generates secondary effects, including greater European arms production that can increase proliferation risks beyond Europe.

Perspective reconstruction. From an African vantage point, the 2022-2024 rearmament is not simply a European answer to Russian aggression; it is a global reallocation of fiscal, industrial, and diplomatic capacity with uneven consequences. European governments that had presented Africa as a priority for stabilization, development, and migration management redirected political attention and resources toward the eastern flank, while increased ammunition and weapons production raised the risk of diversion into African conflict zones through weak export-control enforcement. Energy decoupling reconfigured LNG and hydro-

carbon markets, creating both opportunities and vulnerabilities for African producers and consumers. At the same time, African actors are not merely affected; the African Union and regional economic communities continue to articulate their own security agendas and to renegotiate partnerships in light of the crisis. The African perspective therefore treats European rearmament as a global event whose costs and benefits are distributed unevenly, and it insists that European security cannot be evaluated solely by European threat perceptions. Its limitation is that it may understate the genuine security dilemma faced by Eastern European states and the legal and moral basis of NATO's collective defense.

The Chinese perspective reads the rearmament as evidence that NATO is evolving from a regional defense alliance into a global security bloc, reinforcing Beijing's argument that US-led alliance politics destabilize rather than stabilize. It points to NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept and the Washington Summit's emphasis on China as proof that European security is being subordinated to US strategic competition. It also stresses that sanctions, energy decoupling, and industrial mobilization accelerate bloc formation and reduce space for multipolar cooperation. What it occludes is the agency of European states that sought NATO protection after Russia's invasion and the fact that many European governments distinguish between deterring Russia and containing China.

The Russian perspective frames NATO rearmament as confirmation of its long-standing claim that the alliance is an offensive, expansionist structure threatening Russian security. It interprets Finnish and Swedish accession, increased defense spending, and the Strategic Compass as evidence of Western encirclement and regime-change intentions. It also uses the rearmament to justify its own military buildup and to portray the war as a defensive struggle against NATO. What it occludes is Ukrainian sovereignty, the coercive nature of Russian intervention, and the fact that NATO's eastern expansion was driven by demand from states fearing Russian power rather than by unilateral Western imposition.

The Western perspective treats the 2022-2024 rearmament as a necessary restoration of deterrence after a period of underinvestment and strategic complacency. It emphasizes alliance unity, the accession of Finland and Sweden, increased defense spending, and the EU's new defense instruments as evidence of institutional adaptation. It also frames the Strategic Compass as a step toward European strategic responsibility without abandoning the transatlantic link. What it occludes is the uneven distribution of costs, the industrial bottlenecks that limit capability delivery, and the possibility that rearmament could lock Europe into long-term dependency on US security guarantees.

The UN perspective evaluates the rearmament through the Charter framework, emphasizing that collective self-defense is lawful while warning that arms racing and alliance polarization can undermine global stability. It highlights the risk that increased European arms production will complicate arms-control and non-proliferation efforts, particularly in regions already affected by conflict. It also stresses the need for diplomatic channels and humanitarian protection alongside military deterrence. What it occludes is the Security Council's paralysis and the limited capacity of UN institutions to provide credible deterrence against a nuclear-armed aggressor.

Explicit adjudication. On balance, the Western perspective provides the strongest explanation of the institutional outputs of 2022-2024, because rearmament was driven by alliance politics, shared threat perception, and bureaucratic adaptation within NATO and the EU. It best accounts for why commitments were made, why Finland and Sweden joined, and why the EU developed new defense instruments. However, it misses the African perspective's demonstration that European security mobilization reallocates global resources and attention, and it underweights the Chinese and Russian insight that rearmament can be interpreted as bloc consolidation, which may intensify security dilemmas rather than resolve them. The most complete

explanation therefore combines the Western account of institutional adaptation with the African account of externalized costs and the systemic accounts of escalation risk.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. Reconstruct the AUKUS announcement of September 2021 and its immediate diplomatic consequences for France, the European Union, and Australia.

2. Identify the mechanism through which a submarine procurement decision became a crisis of European strategic autonomy rather than merely a commercial dispute.

3. Apply the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to explain why the same event produced different reactions in Paris, Berlin, Warsaw, Canberra, and Washington.

4. Reconstruct the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on AUKUS and state what each reveals and what each occludes.

5. Propose one historical analogue for the strain on the transatlantic relationship and one falsifier that would weaken your explanation.

6. Adjudicate whether AUKUS permanently weakened transatlantic relations or revealed a manageable hierarchy within the Western alliance.

MODEL ANSWER: The AUKUS announcement in September 2021 strained European strategic autonomy and the transatlantic relationship through a mechanism that was less about the submarines themselves than about the distribution of trust, technology, and strategic priority inside the Western alliance. Australia's decision to abandon a French contract for conventional submarines in favor of US-UK nuclear-powered boats was, at the capability level, a procurement choice. At the political level, it signaled that Washington would privilege a trilateral Indo-Pacific arrangement over consultation with a major European ally, while London would join that arrangement even at the cost of Franco-British and EU-Australian relations. France's reaction—recalling ambassadors from Washington and Canberra—was not merely commercial pique; it reflected a view that strategic autonomy requires not only European capability but also reliable access to high-end technology and predictable alliance consultation. The EU's subsequent expressions of solidarity with France, and the temporary stall in EU-Australia trade negotiations, showed that the shock traveled from a bilateral contract dispute into a broader question about whether European partners are treated as co-architects or as secondary theaters in US strategy.

The transatlantic strain operated through two channels. First, the security-guarantee channel: European states, especially on NATO's eastern flank, continued to depend on US extended deterrence, so they could not simply convert anger into estrangement; yet the episode fed a French-led argument that dependency creates vulnerability. Second, the industrial channel: AUKUS reinforced the perception that the most advanced defense technologies circulate within an Anglophone core, while European firms face fragmented demand and national procurement rules. This matters for strategic autonomy because autonomy is not only political will but also production capacity; if Europe cannot build, maintain, and upgrade complex systems without US or UK participation, then autonomy remains rhetorical. The episode therefore exposed a gap between the

EU's ambition to act as a geopolitical actor and its continued reliance on transatlantic industrial ecosystems.

Reconstructed from five vantage points, the episode looks different. From an African perspective, AUKUS illustrated how great-power competition can redirect attention and resources away from African security priorities, while also showing that European autonomy debates are partly about who controls the agenda of global security. From a Chinese perspective, AUKUS appeared as an attempt to build a containment architecture in the Indo-Pacific, with European autonomy debates secondary to US-China rivalry. From a Russian perspective, the episode could be read as evidence of Western disunity, though that reading overstates the case because NATO cohesion later intensified. From a Western perspective, AUKUS was alliance management under competing regional priorities: the United States sought to deter China, Britain sought global relevance, Australia sought capability, and France sought recognition. From a UN perspective, the episode raised nonproliferation and Charter questions about nuclear-powered submarines and the balance between collective security and exclusive clubs. Adjudicating among these, the strongest explanation is that AUKUS strained autonomy by exposing hierarchy and capability asymmetry, but it did not sever the transatlantic bond; the subsequent Ukraine war made the costs of estrangement too high for both sides.

The strain was real but bounded. NATO's response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine demonstrated that the transatlantic security community could still mobilize rapidly, and France's later diplomatic repair with the United States showed that alliance management can absorb shocks. Yet AUKUS left a durable residue: it strengthened the case for European defense-industrial consolidation, made the Indo-Pacific a competing claimant on US attention, and reminded EU institutions that strategic autonomy is tested not only by adversaries but by allies. In that sense, AUKUS was a stress test of European autonomy rather than its cause; it revealed that autonomy is constrained by capability gaps, alliance hierarchy, and the absence of a single European strategic culture.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: In March 2024, a mid-sized EU member state announces that it will purchase a complete long-range air-defense system from a non-EU supplier rather than join a PESCO project intended to build a comparable European system. The government argues that the non-EU system is cheaper, available sooner, and interoperable with NATO standards. Several EU partners object that the decision undermines the European Defense Fund, fragments demand, and rewards an outside supplier. The state replies that its security timeline and budget constraints cannot wait for European industrial consolidation. The dispute reaches the European Council and NATO's Defense Planning Process at the same time.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

Mechanism:
Perspective reconstruction:
Historical analogue:
Falsifiers:

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in your memo?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Which of the following best explains why AUKUS strained European strategic autonomy without destroying the transatlantic relationship?

A. AUKUS proved that the United States had abandoned Europe and that NATO was therefore obsolete.
B. AUKUS exposed hierarchy and capability asymmetry within the Western alliance, but the Ukraine war later raised the cost of estrangement for both sides.
C. AUKUS was primarily a commercial dispute over submarines and had no strategic significance beyond France's lost contract.
D. AUKUS showed that European strategic autonomy had already been achieved and that France no longer needed US security guarantees.

Distractor diagnoses:
- A is wrong because it treats a shock to consultation and trust as proof of alliance abandonment; NATO's post-2022 mobilization and continued US force posture in Europe contradict the claim that the United States had left Europe.
- C is wrong because it reduces a trilateral Indo-Pacific arrangement to a contract dispute; the strategic significance lay in technology circulation, alliance hierarchy, and competing regional priorities.
- D is wrong because it confuses ambition with capability; AUKUS revealed that Europe still depended on US and UK high-end technology and therefore had not achieved full strategic autonomy.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — NATO European Defense Spending, 2014 vs. 2024 (selected allies)

Ally	Defense spending % of GDP, 2014	Defense spending % of GDP, 2024	Defense spending USD bn, 2014	Defense spending USD bn, 2024
Poland	~1.9	~4.1	~10	~35
Estonia	~2.0	~3.4	~0.5	~1.3
Latvia	~0.9	~3.2	~0.2	~1.1
Lithuania	~1.0	~2.8	~0.4	~1.8
Finland	~1.5	~2.4	~3.5	~6.5
Germany	~1.2	~2.1	~44	~86
France	~1.8	~2.1	~53	~58
United Kingdom	~2.1	~2.3	~60	~75
Italy	~1.1	~1.5	~22	~30
Spain	~0.9	~1.3	~11	~18
NATO Europe + Canada (aggregate)	~1.4	~2.0+	~250	~430+

Source: NATO Secretary General annual reports and IISS, The Military Balance 2023–2024. Figures are approximate, rounded to one decimal; USD figures at constant 2023 prices where available. The 2% of

GDP guideline was reaffirmed at the 2014 Wales Summit and treated as a floor by the 2023 Vilnius Summit communiqué.

Table 2 — EU Gas Import Mix by Source, 2021 vs. 2023 (share of total EU gas imports)

Source	Share 2021 (%)	Share 2023 (%)	Direction of change
Russia (pipeline + LNG)	~45	~12	Collapse
Norway	~24	~30	Rise
United States (LNG)	~5	~19	Sharp rise
Algeria	~11	~13	Modest rise
Qatar (LNG)	~3	~5	Modest rise
Other (incl. Azerbaijan, UK, LNG spot)	~12	~21	Rise

Source: IEA, Gas Market Report; Eurostat energy balances; Bruegel European natural gas imports tracker. Percentages are approximate shares of total EU gas imports (pipeline plus LNG) and may not sum to 100 due to rounding. The 2022 inflection reflects the REPowerEU plan adopted in May 2022 and the Nord Stream sabotage of September 2022.

Table 3 — US Force Posture in Europe and EU Defense Industrial Indicators, 2021–2024

Indicator	2021 (pre-invasion)	2022–2024 (post-invasion)	Notes
US troops stationed in Europe	~60,000	~100,000	Reinforcement of V Corps forward HQ (Poland), additional ABCT rotations, F-35 deployments
US brigade combat teams in Europe (rotational + permanent)	2	4+	Includes enhanced forward presence in Poland and the Baltic states
EU aggregate defense spending (EU-27)	~€198 bn	~€240 bn (2023)	European Defence Agency (EDA) Defence Data
EDF budget (2021–2027)	€8 bn total envelope	Ongoing disbursement	European Defence Fund; supports collaborative R&D
PESCO projects (cumulative)	~47	60+	Permanent Structured Cooperation; includes ammunition, air defense, cyber

Indicator	2021 (pre-invasion)	2022–2024 (post-invasion)	Notes
EU artillery ammunition production capacity	~1.0M shells/yr	Target ~2.0M shells/yr by end-2025	Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), 2023
EU LNG regasification capacity	~160 bcm/yr	~210+ bcm/yr	New terminals in Germany (Wilhelmshaven, Brunsbüttel), Netherlands, Finland

Source: US European Command statements; EDA Defence Data 2023; European Commission ASAP regulation (EU) 2023/1525; IISS Military Balance 2023–2024. Figures are approximate and, for industrial indicators, reflect announced targets rather than verified output.

Analysis Questions

1. **Trend.** Between 2014 and 2024 NATO European defense spending roughly doubled in aggregate and the share of allies meeting the 2% GDP guideline rose from 3 to 23. Identify the two distinct inflection points in this trend (2014 Wales and 2022 Madrid) and explain what changed in the *causal mechanism* linking the pledge to actual expenditure at each point. Was the 2014–2021 period a story of compliance or of free-riding, and what evidence in Table 1 supports your reading?

2. **Level of analysis.** The 2% GDP target is a state-level commitment negotiated at a systemic (alliance) forum. At which level of analysis—individual (leader), state (domestic politics/bureaucracy), systemic (alliance structure/threat), or transnational (defense industry, energy markets)—is the *variation* in compliance across allies best explained? Use Table 1 to compare Poland/Estonia with Italy/Spain and argue which level dominates.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Read Table 2 and Table 3 together and reconstruct how each of the five perspectives interprets the same data:

    - **African (primary):** What does the surge in European rearmament and US force posture imply for African security partnerships, arms availability, and the diversion of diplomatic attention?
    - **Chinese:** How does Beijing read the NATO spending curve and the US troop reinforcement in Europe?
    - **Russian:** How does Moscow narrate the same numbers?
    - **Western:** How does the Western reading frame the data as success?
    - **UN:** What does the Charter framework say about the legality and legitimacy of this buildup?

4. **Interpretation.** Table 3 shows EU ammunition production capacity roughly doubling toward a 2 million shell target while US troops in Europe rose by two-thirds. Does this pattern indicate (a) genuine European strategic autonomy, (b) transatlantic burden-sharing with continued US primacy, or (c) a hybrid "European pillar within NATO"? Adjudicate using the data and specify what additional evidence would discriminate among the three.

5. **Limitation.** These tables measure spending, import shares, troop numbers, and announced industrial targets. What do they *not* capture that is essential to assessing European security architecture—readiness, interoperability, stockpile depth, sustainment, political will, or industrial bottlenecks (e.g., explosives, machine tools, skilled labor)? Identify the single most important missing variable and explain how its absence could reverse the optimistic reading of the data.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The European Security Architecture, 2024: Concentric Rings and Flows" What to draw. On an A4 landscape sheet, draw three concentric circles centered on Brussels. Inner circle (radius ~3 cm): label "EU core — PESCO, EDF, Strategic Compass." Middle circle (radius ~6 cm): label "NATO ring — 32 allies, 2% pledge, integrated command." Outer circle (radius ~9 cm): label "Partner arc — Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Western Balkans, North Africa." Draw the Atlantic Ocean to the left with an arrow labeled "US force posture ~100,000 troops" pointing into the middle ring. Draw a pipeline/LNG arrow from Norway (top) and a tanker arrow from the US Gulf (bottom-left) into the inner ring, labeled "REPowerEU energy flows." Draw a dashed red arrow from Russia (right) labeled "threat perception / nuclear signaling."

Labels to place. Inside inner ring: "Strategic autonomy ambition." Between rings: "burden-sharing gap." Outside: "Global South spillover."

Perspective overlay to annotate. In the four corners, write one-line perspective tags: top-left (African): "rearmament diverts attention and arms from Africa"; top-right (Chinese): "NATO as destabilizing, US-led bloc politics"; bottom-left (Russian): "existential threat, encirclement"; bottom-right (Western): "unity and deterrence"; center-bottom (UN): "Charter Art. 51 self-defense, Art. 2(4) prohibition on force."

Visual 2 — "The Strategic Autonomy Gap: Spending vs. Industrial Capacity" What to draw. A scatter plot on graph paper. X-axis: "Defense spending as % of GDP (2024)" from 0 to 5. Y-axis: "Defense industrial output index (2024, 2014=100)" from 80 to 200. Plot points for Poland (high x, mid y), Germany (mid x, mid-high y), France (mid x, high y), Italy (low-mid x, mid y), Spain (low x, low y), and an "EU aggregate" diamond. Draw a diagonal "autonomy frontier" line from bottom-left to top-right labeled "spending matched by capacity." Shade the area below the line in light red labeled "dependency zone (buy American/off-the-shelf)." Shade above in light green labeled "autonomy zone."

Labels to place. Annotate Poland: "high spend, capacity lagging." Annotate France: "capacity leader, spend plateau." Annotate Germany: "Zeitenwende, industrial catch-up." Draw a horizontal dashed line at y=100 labeled "2014 baseline — no net growth."

Perspective overlay to annotate. Along the right margin write: "African: who buys the surplus arms?"; "Chinese: market opportunity for PLA-linked firms?"; "Russian: overstretch narrative"; "Western: pillar within NATO"; "UN: arms-trade transparency (ATT)."

Visual 3 — "Energy Decoupling: From Russian Pipeline to US LNG" What to draw. A Sankey-style flow diagram. Left column (2021): a thick blue arrow labeled "Russian pipeline gas ~45%" flowing right; thinner arrows for Norway ~24%, Algeria ~11%, LNG ~20%. Right column (2023): the Russian arrow shrinks to a thin red sliver ~12%; Norway arrow widens ~30%; a new thick green arrow labeled "US LNG ~19%" appears; Qatar ~5%; other ~21%. In the middle, draw a box labeled "REPowerEU + new LNG

terminals (Wilhelmshaven, Brunsbüttel, Eemshaven)" with arrows showing rerouting. Add a small sun/wind icon labeled "renewables acceleration."

Labels to place. Top: "EU gas import geography, 2021 → 2023." Bottom: "New dependency: US LNG; price volatility; infrastructure lock-in."

Perspective overlay to annotate. Bottom-left (African): "African gas (Mozambique, Senegal, Nigeria) as alternative not yet scaled"; bottom-right (Chinese): "BRI energy corridors bypassed"; top (Russian): "weaponized interdependence reversed"; center (Western): "resilience achieved"; right (UN): "energy as human right, just transition."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What triggered the 2022 NATO rearmament inflection?	Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Feb 2022) converted the 2014 Wales 2% pledge from aspirational to operational; Madrid Summit (June 2022) adopted new Strategic Concept naming Russia as "most significant and direct threat." Source: NATO Strategic Concept 2022.
What is European strategic autonomy?	French concept (Macron, 2017 Sorbonne speech) of capacity to act independently; EU institutionalization via PESCO (2017), EDF (2021), Strategic Compass (2022). Source: Howorth (2019); Biscop (2021); EU Strategic Compass (2022).
What is the Strategic Compass?	EU's first white paper on security/defense (March 2022); sets 2030 horizon, Rapid Deployment Capacity 5,000 troops, hybrid toolbox, space/cyber domains. Source: EU Strategic Compass (2022).
What is REPowerEU?	Commission plan (May 2022) to end Russian fossil-fuel dependence: diversify supply, accelerate renewables, save energy; LNG terminal build-out. Source: European Commission REPowerEU.
What is the ammunition problem?	EU pledged 1M shells to Ukraine by Mar 2024; delivered ~500k–600k; ASAP targets 2M/yr by end-2025. Fragmented national procurement. Source: IISS Military Balance 2023–2024; EU ASAP regulation.
What is the transatlantic dependency?	Europe relies on US for strategic enablers (ISR, air/missile defense, nuclear umbrella, logistics); "strategic dependency" persists despite spending. Source: Howorth (2019); Biscop (2021).

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is burden-sharing?	Distribution of costs/risks within alliance; US share of NATO defense spending ~68% in 2024 (down from ~72% in 2016). Source: NATO.
What is PESCO?	Permanent Structured Cooperation (TEU Art. 42.6/46); 60+ projects; legally binding commitments among willing states. Source: EU.
What is the EDF?	European Defence Fund; €8bn 2021–2027 for collaborative defense R&D and capability development. Source: European Commission.
What is the fragmentation problem?	27 national defense markets, duplicative systems, lack of economies of scale; European Defence Industrial Strategy (2024) attempts consolidation. Source: European Commission EDIS 2024.
How does the African perspective read this?	Rearmament diverts arms, attention, and finance from African theaters; EU migration-security nexus; resource extraction for energy transition. Source: Grovogui; Mbembe; Aning.
What is the UN Charter frame?	Art. 2(4) prohibition on force; Art. 51 self-defense; collective security via UNSC (blocked by Russia veto); NATO as regional arrangement under Art. 52. Source: UN Charter.

Summary (3–5 sentences). European security architecture after 2022 is defined by a simultaneous NATO rearmament surge and an EU push for strategic autonomy, neither of which has closed the gap between ambition and industrial capacity. Energy decoupling from Russia succeeded in diversifying supply but created new dependencies on US LNG and price volatility. The transatlantic relationship remains structurally asymmetric: Europe spends more but still depends on US strategic enablers. From an African vantage point, the European buildup reallocates attention and materiel away from African security while deepening extractive energy and mineral linkages. The UN Charter provides the legal frame but cannot adjudicate the competing claims because the Security Council is paralyzed by the Russian veto.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Imagine a neighborhood where one big house (the United States) has been paying for the alarm system for decades. After a break-in next door (Ukraine, 2022), all the neighbors buy new locks and cameras (NATO rearmament), and the homeowners' association (the EU) writes a plan to make its own security company (strategic autonomy). But the new locks are made in the big house's factory, the cameras need the big house's electricity (US strategic enablers), and the neighborhood's gas bill now comes from a different supplier (US LNG). So the neighbors are safer but not independent, and the plan is real but unfinished.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. I am unsure whether "strategic autonomy" means autonomy *from* the US or autonomy

within NATO; the sources disagree (Howorth vs. Biscop). I am unsure of the exact EU ammunition delivery figure (~500k vs. ~600k). I cannot yet explain why Italy and Spain remain below 2% despite the threat. I do not know whether the 2 million shell target is achievable given explosives/bottleneck constraints.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading NATO Strategic Concept 2022 confirms Russia named as "most significant and direct threat" and China as "systemic challenge." EU Strategic Compass 2022 confirms Rapid Deployment Capacity and 2030 horizon. IISS Military Balance 2023–2024 confirms European spending surge and ammunition shortfall. Howorth (2019) and Biscop (2021) confirm the autonomy debate predates 2022. Gaps on exact delivery figures remain; I flag them rather than assert.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. The neighborhood-alarm analogy captures dependency and partial autonomy but fails on three points: (1) alliances are not households—states have sovereignty and can exit; (2) the "big house" is also a competitor in some domains (trade, tech), not just a protector; (3) energy decoupling is not just a supplier switch but a restructuring of physical infrastructure with decades-long lock-in. The analogy also occludes the African perspective: the neighborhood's new security spending is financed partly by resources extracted from outside the neighborhood.

Step 5 — Rewrite. European security after 2022 is a story of rapid but incomplete adaptation: NATO rearmament raised spending and troop levels, the EU launched its first defense strategy, and energy imports were rerouted away from Russia. Yet strategic autonomy remains aspirational because industrial capacity, strategic enablers, and political cohesion lag behind spending. The transatlantic relationship is thus neither pure dependency nor pure partnership but a contested "European pillar" project. From an African vantage point, this European turn absorbs diplomatic bandwidth and materiel while leaving African security architectures under-resourced, revealing that "European" security is never only European.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L39	Definition	What is European strategic autonomy?	It is the capacity of European actors to decide and act, alone or with partners, in security and defense when necessary; it is not autarky and does not require severing the transatlantic alliance.	African scholars often read autonomy rhetoric as Eurocentric unless it accounts for externalized security costs in Africa.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L39	Mechanism	What changed at the 2022 Madrid and 2024 Washington NATO summits?	They consolidated a post-2022 rearmament agenda: higher defense-spending targets, expanded eastern-flank deployments, and Finland and Sweden's accession, while reaffirming NATO as the primary collective-defense framework.	Russian narratives frame these steps as proof of NATO encirclement; Western narratives frame them as deterrence restoration.
L39	Source	What does the NATO Strategic Concept (2022) identify as principal threats?	It identifies Russia as the most significant and direct threat to Euro-Atlantic security and China as a systemic challenge, while reaffirming collective defense and resilience.	Chinese perspectives reject the "systemic challenge" label as ideological containment.
L39	Mechanism	What do PESCO, the EDF, and the Strategic Compass do?	PESCO coordinates capability projects, the EDF co-finances defense research and development, and the Strategic Compass sets threat analysis, capability, and partnership priorities for EU security and defense.	EU institutionalism emphasizes capability-building; critics stress duplication with NATO.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L39	Mechanism	What is REPowerEU trying to change?	It aims to reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels through diversification, LNG infrastructure, energy efficiency, and accelerated renewables deployment.	Energy decoupling reshapes import geography and can shift geopolitical leverage toward new suppliers.
L39	Mechanism	Why does Europe's defense industrial base remain fragmented?	National procurement preferences, duplicated platforms, small production runs, and fragmented demand limit economies of scale and slow ammunition replenishment.	Industrial fragmentation is a structural cause of capability gaps even where spending rises.
L39	Comparison	How does strategic autonomy differ from strategic sovereignty?	Strategic autonomy concerns capacity to act; strategic sovereignty concerns legal and political control over decisions; the two overlap but are not identical.	Conflating them exaggerates Europe's independence from US logistics and intelligence.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L39	Application	How did AUKUS strain European strategic autonomy?	It bypassed France in a major submarine and technology arrangement, exposing trust deficits and raising questions about allied consultation and industrial access.	The case shows that autonomy debates are also about recognition and industrial status, not only budgets.
L39	Debate	What is the burden-sharing debate?	It concerns whether European allies spend, deploy, and sustain enough capability to reduce disproportionate US contributions to NATO defense.	Western hawks stress free-riding; European autonomists stress strategic choice and industrial capacity.
L39	Reconstruction	What is the African perspective on European rearmament?	It foregrounds opportunity costs, diversion of attention and resources from African security crises, and the risk that European threat inflation normalizes militarized responses.	This perspective is primary because it asks whose security is centered and whose is rendered peripheral.
L39	Occlusion	What does the Chinese perspective occlude?	It often occludes Russian agency in the Ukraine war and the security fears of Central and Eastern European states.	It contributes a critique of NATO expansion and US hegemony but can flatten local threat perceptions.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L39	Adjudication	How should one adjudicate NATO unity versus European autonomy?	NATO provides immediate collective defense and US extended deterrence; EU instruments build longer-term capacity; the evidence supports complementarity, not substitution, in the near term.	The strongest objection is that complementarity may still leave Europe dependent on US enablers.
L39	Visual	What are the four levels of analysis for this lesson?	Individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels; each changes which causes and actors are visible in European security outcomes.	African and Global South critiques often require transnational and historical levels.
L39	Source	What does IISS Military Balance 2023-2024 help establish?	It provides comparative data on defense spending, force structure, and capability trends, allowing assessment of whether rearmament is producing usable capacity.	Data can show spending without proving strategic effectiveness.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L39	Mechanism	What is Europe's strategic dependency on the United States?	It includes extended nuclear deterrence, intelligence, strategic lift, missile defense, and high-end enablers that European forces cannot yet fully replace.	Dependency is the central constraint on autonomy claims.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100)

Concept or skill	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery
NATO rearmament from Madrid to Washington		Can name summits, accession effects, and spending debates
EU strategic autonomy instruments		Can distinguish PESCO, EDF, and Strategic Compass
Energy decoupling and LNG geography		Can explain REPowerEU mechanisms and limits
Defense industrial fragmentation		Can link procurement structure to capability gaps
Transatlantic dependency and burden-sharing		Can identify US enablers Europe lacks
African perspective reconstruction		Can state its central critique in its own terms
Worked-example adjudication		Can compare institutional responses across levels
Hinge-question reasoning		Can identify distractor logic

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which mechanism in this lesson most directly converts political commitment into military capability, and what evidence would show that it is failing?

2. Which of the five perspectives most changes the evaluation of NATO rearmament, and what does it force the other perspectives to answer?

3. What single falsifier would most weaken the claim that European strategic autonomy is becoming operationally meaningful?

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Strategic autonomy means Europe can replace the United States in NATO.	It means capacity to act when necessary; NATO remains central to European defense in the near term.	EU Strategic Compass (2022) frames autonomy as complementary to NATO.
NATO expansion alone caused the Ukraine war.	Russian agency, imperial narratives, and Ukrainian choices matter; NATO expansion is one contested factor among several.	NATO Strategic Concept (2022) and Russian official narratives offer competing causal accounts.
REPowerEU ended Russian gas dependence immediately.	Decoupling is gradual and constrained by infrastructure, contracts, and storage.	REPowerEU planning documents and LNG terminal timelines.
Higher European defense spending equals higher military effectiveness.	Fragmented procurement and industrial bottlenecks can absorb spending without producing usable capability.	IISS Military Balance 2023-2024 and EDA capability reviews.
AUKUS was only a submarine procurement dispute.	It also involved alliance consultation, industrial trust, and strategic signaling.	French and Australian government reactions in 2021.
The African perspective is merely a regional application of Western theory.	It reconstructs security from African historical experience and centers externalized costs.	African scholarship on extraversion, dependency, and militarization.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Strategic autonomy; NATO rearmament; energy decoupling; defense industrial base; transatlantic dependency	Madrid/Washington summit commitments; PESCO/EDF/Strategic Compass; REPowerEU and LNG diversification; procurement reform; burden-sharing pressures	Institutionalism (L6); Howorth (2019); Biscop (2021); NATO Strategic Concept (2022); EU Strategic Compass (2022); IISS Military Balance 2023-2024	Ukraine war response; Finland/Sweden accession; AUKUS; REPowerEU; ammunition shortages	Autonomy versus alliance dependence; NATO expansion causality; free-riding versus sovereignty; militarization versus development	Sustained capability gaps despite spending; renewed Russian gas dependence; EU procurement centralization failure; US retrenchment without European replacement	L35-38 Ukraine; L40 Eastern Europe; L47-48 US-China/Indo-Pacific; L49 Global South

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (24 hours):** Re-read the five key ideas and recite the causal claims without notes; check the flashcards tagged "mechanism."
- **R2 (3 days):** Reconstruct all five perspectives in 150 words each, then compare your African reconstruction with the lesson's primary treatment.
- **R3 (1 week):** Redo the Problem Pair from memory, explicitly separating description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
- **R4 (2 weeks):** Re-examine the Data Lab tables and identify one trend, one level-of-analysis error, and one perspective occlusion.
- **R5 (1 month):** Write a one-page adjudication of whether European strategic autonomy is becoming operationally meaningful, using at least two falsifiers.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can state the five key ideas in order.

☐ I can distinguish NATO rearmament from EU strategic autonomy.

☐ I can explain PESCO, EDF, and the Strategic Compass separately.

☐ I can describe REPowerEU's mechanisms and limits.

☐ I can explain why defense spending does not equal capability.

☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective in its own terms.

☐ I can steel-man the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.

☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to the worked example.

☐ I can complete the Problem Pair without notes.

☐ I can identify at least two falsifiers for autonomy claims.

☐ I can interpret the Data Lab tables.

☐ I can draw or describe the three visuals.

☐ I can use Cornell cues to self-test.

☐ I can compress the lesson in five Feynman steps.

☐ I can score my confidence honestly.

☐ I can update my error log after mistakes.

☐ I can link this lesson to L35-38, L40, L47-48, and L49.

☐ I can answer the hinge question and diagnose distractors.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- **NATO rearmament:** NATO Strategic Concept (2022); NATO Madrid Summit Declaration (2022); NATO Washington Summit Declaration (2024).
- **European strategic autonomy:** Howorth (2019); Biscop (2021); EU Strategic Compass (2022).
- **Energy decoupling:** European Commission, REPowerEU Plan (2022); LNG infrastructure and diversification reports.
- **Defense industrial base:** European Defence Agency, Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD); IISS Military Balance 2023-2024.
- **Transatlantic relationship:** NATO burden-sharing debates; US force posture in Europe assessments.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** African scholarship on extraversion, dependency, and militarization; Chinese and Russian strategic narratives on NATO.

End of Lesson 39. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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41. Wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 40 — Wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus
Module	Module 6: Eastern Europe and the Ukraine War
Prerequisites	L35–L39 (Ukraine, European security)
Interleaved links	Forward to L41 (West Asia), L49 (Global South), L50 (non-state actors)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, visual anchor, flashcards, worked example
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The wider Eastern European and Caucasus space — Belarus, Moldova, the Western Balkans, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan — is not a peripheral theater orbiting the Ukraine war. It is the very architecture within which the post-Cold War European order was built, contested, and is now being dismantled. The central puzzle of this lesson is why a belt of conflicts that erupted in the early 1990s, were frozen by ceasefires and peacekeeping missions, and were subsequently managed through diplomatic frameworks for three decades, have not been resolved but instead have become durable instruments of statecraft. The question is not why these conflicts persist in a passive sense; it is how they are actively maintained, leveraged, and periodically reactivated by regional and great powers to structure the distribution of power, territory, and sovereignty across a zone stretching from the Baltic to the Caspian. Understanding this requires moving beyond the vocabulary of "unresolved disputes" toward an analysis of frozen conflicts as strategic technologies — mechanisms that convert territorial ambiguity into bargaining leverage, that convert peacekeeping presence into sphere-of-influence projection, and that convert the absence of final status into a permanent condition of managed instability.

The historical layering matters. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the earlier disintegration of Yugoslavia produced a contiguous zone of contested sovereignty. In the Caucasus, the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1991–1994) ended with Armenian forces controlling not only Nagorno-Karabakh but seven surrounding Azerbaijani districts, producing a ceasefire brokered by Russia through the Bishkek Protocol but no peace treaty. In Moldova, the Transnistria War of 1992 ended with a Russian-brokered ceasefire and the deployment of Russian peacekeepers along the Dniester, leaving a strip of territory east of the river

under the control of a separatist administration in Tiraspol. In Georgia, the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (1992–1993) produced Russian-mediated ceasefires and, eventually, Russian peacekeeping and later military bases. In the Balkans, the Dayton Accords of 1995 froze Bosnia and Herzegovina into a complex constitutional architecture of two entities and three constituent peoples, while the 1999 Kosovo war and subsequent UN administration produced a contested independence that Serbia has never recognized. Each of these outcomes shared a common feature: the cessation of large-scale violence without the resolution of underlying sovereignty claims, producing what the literature calls "frozen conflicts" — a term that itself conceals the degree to which these arrangements are actively heated and cooled by external actors.

The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 demonstrated that frozen conflicts can be forcibly unfrozen. Azerbaijan, leveraging Turkish-supplied Bayraktar TB2 drones, Israeli loitering munitions, and a military modernization program funded by hydrocarbon revenues, recovered most of the territories lost in 1994 in a six-week campaign. The November 9, 2020 trilateral ceasefire statement brokered by Russia deployed approximately 2,000 Russian peacekeepers to the Lachin corridor and Nagorno-Karabakh itself, reinserting Moscow as the indispensable security guarantor even as it had failed to prevent the war. This sequence — military revision of the status quo followed by great-power peacekeeping that ratifies the new facts on the ground — is not unique to the Caucasus. It is the operating logic of the wider region: force creates new realities, and external powers convert those realities into institutionalized arrangements that serve their interests. The 2020 war thus functions as the central worked example of this lesson because it compresses into a single case the mechanisms that operate more slowly and less visibly across Belarus, Moldova, and the Balkans.

Belarus and Moldova present contrasting modalities of the same underlying dynamic. Belarus under Alyaksandr Lukashenko has, since 1994, constructed a regime that is simultaneously authoritarian and deeply dependent on Russian economic subsidies, energy pricing, and security guarantees. The 2020 presidential election crisis — in which mass protests followed a disputed vote and were suppressed with Russian backing — accelerated Belarus's integration into Russian military and economic structures, including the deployment of Russian tactical nuclear weapons and the use of Belarusian territory as a staging ground for the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. The 2021 migration crisis at the Polish and Lithuanian borders, in which Belarusian authorities facilitated the movement of migrants from the Middle East toward EU frontiers, demonstrated the weaponization of human mobility as a hybrid instrument against the European Union. Moldova, by contrast, has pursued a trajectory of European integration, receiving EU candidate status in June 2022 and opening accession negotiations in 2023, yet remains structurally vulnerable through its dependence on Russian gas (historically supplied via Gazprom and the Transnistrian route), its unresolved Transnistrian conflict, and the presence of Russian troops in the breakaway region. The two cases illustrate how the same regional order produces divergent state strategies — authoritarian consolidation through Russian dependence versus democratic reform through European integration — while both remain constrained by the frozen conflict architecture.

The Western Balkans constitute the third major sub-region, and here the central tension is between the promise of EU enlargement and the reality of enlargement fatigue. Bosnia and Herzegovina remains governed by the Dayton constitutional framework, which has preserved peace since 1995 but has also entrenched ethnic party systems, produced chronic governmental dysfunction, and prevented the development of a functional state capable of meeting EU accession criteria. Kosovo's 2008 declaration of independence, recognized by a majority of UN member states but not by Serbia, Russia, China, or five EU members, created a partially recognized state whose sovereignty is contested in ways that directly affect its Euro-Atlantic trajectory. Serbia, meanwhile, has pursued a multi-vector foreign policy that balances EU accession aspirations

with close ties to Russia and China, including arms purchases and infrastructure investment. The EU's own enlargement strategy has been characterized by inconsistent conditionality, shifting geopolitical priorities, and a growing gap between the rhetoric of integration and the institutional capacity to absorb new members. The result is a region that is neither fully integrated into the European order nor fully detached from it, suspended in a condition of permanent candidacy that itself becomes a source of political instability.

The theoretical and analytical stakes of this lesson extend well beyond regional studies. Frozen conflicts are not merely Balkan or Caucasian phenomena; they are a modality of international order that appears wherever great-power competition intersects with contested sovereignty and weak state capacity. The mechanisms at work — external sponsorship of separatist entities, peacekeeping as sphere-of-influence projection, energy dependence as political leverage, migration weaponization, and the strategic use of non-recognition — are transferable across contexts. The lesson therefore frames the wider Eastern European and Caucasus space as a laboratory for understanding how international order is produced and reproduced at its margins. The African perspective, developed at length in Section 2.7, reveals that frozen conflicts bear structural similarities to the colonial partition and externally imposed boundaries that African states have navigated since independence, and that the vocabulary of "frozen conflict" itself may obscure the agency of local actors who use great-power competition to advance their own claims. The Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each illuminate different dimensions of the same phenomenon, and the lesson's central analytical task is to adjudicate among them using evidence rather than to adopt any single frame. By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to identify the mechanisms that sustain frozen conflicts, reconstruct five distinct analytical perspectives on any given case, specify the scope conditions under which each perspective applies, and produce an evidence-based adjudication that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer the following questions from memory before reading further. These draw on Lessons 35–39.

1. What were the principal causes of the 2014 annexation of Crimea, and how did the Minsk agreements (2014–2015) attempt to manage the conflict in eastern Ukraine?
2. How did NATO's 2008 Bucharest summit decision regarding Georgian and Ukrainian membership aspirations shape the security environment in the Black Sea region?
3. What is the "security dilemma" as applied to NATO enlargement, and which scholars have offered the strongest articulations of this argument?
4. How did the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine alter the European security architecture, particularly with respect to Finland and Sweden?
5. What role did energy dependence — specifically German reliance on Russian natural gas — play in shaping European responses to Russian aggression prior to 2022?
6. How does the concept of "hybrid warfare" apply to Russian operations in the post-Soviet space, and what distinguishes it from conventional military conflict?

1.2 Orientation Questions

1. Why do some conflicts remain "frozen" for decades while others are resolved or reignited, and what

distinguishes the strategic function of a frozen conflict from a merely unresolved dispute?
2. How does the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War of 2020 illustrate the relationship between military technology, great-power peacekeeping, and the reconfiguration of regional order?
3. In what ways does Belarus's deepening dependence on Russia since 2020 differ from Moldova's pursuit of European integration, and what structural constraints do both states share?
4. What does the Western Balkans' experience with EU enlargement reveal about the limits of conditionality-based integration as a tool for conflict resolution?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Term	Provisional Definition
Frozen conflict	A conflict in which large-scale violence has ceased but no peace treaty or final political settlement has been reached, leaving contested sovereignty, territorial ambiguity, and often external peacekeeping or military presence as durable features of the regional order.
Near abroad	The Russian foreign-policy doctrine, articulated in the 1990s, asserting a privileged sphere of influence over the former Soviet republics, justified by historical ties, ethnic Russian populations, and security interests.
Sphere of influence	A geographic region in which a great power claims predominant political, economic, or military authority, often at the expense of the formal sovereignty of states within that region.
Peacekeeping	The deployment of military or civilian personnel by an international or regional organization (or a single state) to monitor ceasefires, separate combatants, and maintain stability in a conflict zone; in the post-Soviet space, frequently Russian-led and serving strategic interests.
De facto state	An entity that exercises effective control over a territory and population but lacks widespread international recognition, such as Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, or Nagorno-Karabakh prior to 2023.
Enlargement fatigue	The declining political will among existing EU member states to absorb new members, driven by institutional capacity concerns, domestic opposition, and competing priorities, particularly after the 2004 and 2007 enlargements.

Term	Provisional Definition
Hybrid warfare	The coordinated use of military and non-military instruments — including cyber operations, disinformation, economic coercion, and migration weaponization — to achieve strategic objectives below the threshold of conventional armed conflict.
Migration weaponization	The deliberate instrumentalization of human mobility by a state to exert political pressure on another state or bloc, as in Belarus's facilitation of migrant flows toward EU borders in 2021.
Dayton Accords	The 1995 peace agreement ending the Bosnian War, which established a complex constitutional structure dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina into two entities (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska) with a weak central government.
Conditionality	The practice of linking the provision of benefits — such as EU membership, financial assistance, or trade access — to the fulfillment of specified political, economic, or legal reforms by the recipient state.
Non-recognition	The refusal by states or international organizations to acknowledge the sovereignty or independence of an entity, used as a diplomatic tool to delegitimize de facto states and maintain the territorial integrity of parent states.
Energy vulnerability	A state's exposure to political or economic leverage arising from dependence on external energy supplies, particularly when those supplies transit through or originate in a potentially hostile state.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning Objectives

After mastering this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the causal chain linking authoritarian consolidation in Belarus to Russian strategic dependence and the instrumentalization of migration flows, identifying intermediate mechanisms—regime insecurity, patron-client bargaining, and border weaponization—rather than treating outcomes as automatic or overdetermined. (Bloom: Analyze)
2. **Explain** how the 2021 Belarus–EU border crisis functioned as coercive diplomacy, specifying the conditions under which a small state can convert control over human mobility into leverage against a larger political bloc, and the structural limits of that leverage once the target adapts. (Bloom: Explain)

3. **Evaluate** competing theoretical explanations—realist patron-client theory, liberal institutionalism, and constructivist identity accounts—for Belarus's post-2020 trajectory, adjudicating among them using evidence from energy politics, military integration, diplomatic alignment, and the timing of migration flows. (Bloom: Evaluate)
4. **Compare** the Belarus case with other instances of authoritarian clientelism and migration weaponization (for example, Turkey–EU bargaining, Morocco–Spain border politics) to identify genuine scope conditions and to distinguish structurally similar from merely superficially similar cases. (Bloom: Compare)
5. **Synthesize** the five international perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on Belarus's sovereignty trade-offs, producing a reasoned judgment about which perspective best captures the distributional and normative stakes for populations on both sides of the border and for the migrants themselves. (Bloom: Synthesize)

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Belarus: Lukashenko's Regime, Russian Dependence, and the Migration Weaponization

Bolded Causal Claim: Lukashenko's post-2020 survival strategy converted Belarus from a nominally sovereign buffer state into a Russian security dependency, and that dependency in turn made the weaponization of migration across the EU border a rational, low-cost coercive instrument rather than an aberration of authoritarian irrationality.

Mechanism: The mechanism runs through four linked stages, each of which is contingent rather than automatic. First, the August 2020 presidential election and the mass protests that followed eroded Lukashenko's domestic legitimacy and his residual Western ties; the violent crackdown foreclosed the European option and made regime survival contingent on external backing. The protests were not merely an electoral dispute—they represented a broad social mobilization that the regime could not absorb through its usual patronage networks, forcing a binary choice between concession and coercion. Second, Russia—facing its own strategic anxieties about NATO enlargement, color revolutions, and the loss of a buffer—provided that backing through security guarantees, financial support, and energy subsidies, but on terms that progressively hollowed out Belarusian autonomy: the 2021–2022 constitutional amendments, the deployment of Russian troops and air-defense assets, the hosting of tactical nuclear weapons, and the integration of command structures. Third, with Western sanctions biting and alternative revenue streams closed, Lukashenko's regime faced a fiscal and legitimacy deficit that it could not close through domestic reform; the border with the EU became one of the few remaining assets in a shrinking portfolio. Fourth, the regime orchestrated the movement of migrants—primarily from the Middle East and Africa—toward the Polish, Lithuanian, and Latvian borders in 2021, using state airlines, visa facilitation, and security-service escorts, converting human mobility into a coercive signal aimed at extracting sanctions relief and political recognition. The mechanism is not simply "dictatorship causes aggression"; it is a specific sequence in which regime insecurity produces patron dependence, patron dependence forecloses exit options, and the resulting desperation converts border control from a public good into a weapon. Each link is contingent: without Russian backing, the crackdown might have collapsed; without EU sanctions, the migration lever might not have been pulled; without the geographic fact of a shared land border with Schengen, the coercion would have lacked bite. The EU Eastern Partnership documentation, which had framed Belarus as a partner in gradual reform, illustrates how quickly the institutional framework was overtaken by events once the regime chose coercion over conditionality.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism operates where (a) an authoritarian regime faces an acute legitimacy crisis that cannot be resolved domestically through co-optation or reform; (b) a great-power patron with revisionist or buffer-state interests is willing and able to provide security guarantees at a price the client can pay; (c) the target state shares a land border with the coercing state and is embedded in a legal regime (Schengen, EU asylum law) that makes uncontrolled arrivals politically costly; and (d) the coercing state retains sufficient bureaucratic capacity to move people without triggering uncontrolled domestic backlash. It does not operate where the regime retains domestic legitimacy, where no patron is available, where borders are maritime or heavily fortified, or where the target's asylum system is insulated from political pressure. The strongest counterargument comes from liberal institutionalism: EU conditionality and sanctions can still shape Belarusian behavior by raising costs and denying legitimacy. The evidence is mixed—sanctions have constrained but not reversed integration with Russia, suggesting that once patron dependence crosses a threshold, external pressure on the client reinforces rather than weakens the patron-client bond, because the patron becomes the only available lifeline.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe (i) deepening military-technical integration (joint exercises, air-defense unification, nuclear hosting) following each escalation in EU pressure; (ii) migration flows spiking in temporal proximity to diplomatic confrontations or sanctions rounds, not to seasonal or purely economic drivers; (iii) Belarusian foreign-policy statements tracking Russian positions with decreasing lag; (iv) EU border infrastructure investment rising as a direct response; and (v) Lukashenko's rhetoric shifting from balancing to explicit alignment. Falsifiers would include: a sustained period of Belarusian policy divergence from Moscow despite continued EU pressure; migration flows decoupled from diplomatic events; or a restoration of Western economic ties without Russian retaliation. The mechanism also implies that the migration weaponization should attenuate if the EU hardens its border sufficiently to remove the political cost of arrivals, or if Russia withdraws its backing and the regime faces a new survival calculus.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, the Belarus case is not primarily about European security architecture but about the recurring structure of sovereignty under external pressure—a structure African states know intimately. African international-relations scholarship, from Nkrumah's analysis of neocolonialism through Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject, has long argued that formal sovereignty often masks substantive dependence: the postcolonial state inherits borders and institutions designed for extraction, and its rulers trade autonomy for regime survival. Grovogui's work on sovereignty as practice rather than status suggests that Lukashenko's "sovereignty" was always performative—negotiated with Moscow and Brussels rather than rooted in popular authorization. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics illuminates how both the Belarusian regime and the EU border regime manage populations as disposable: migrants pushed into forests become, in Mbembe's terms, bodies subjected to the power of death, while the regime's own citizens face a different but related calculus of expendability. The African perspective thus sees the migration weaponization not as a novel European pathology but as a variant of a global pattern in which weak states and powerful blocs alike instrumentalize human mobility—echoing how African borders were drawn and policed under colonial rule and how contemporary African states are pressured to serve as Europe's external border guards. Bayart's "politics of the belly" helps explain Lukashenko's calculus: regime survival through patronage and coercion, with the population as resource rather than sovereign. Yet the African perspective also carries a distinctive normative emphasis: Nyerere's and Cabral's insistence that liberation must be self-directed, and Fanon's warning that dependence on an external patron reproduces subjugation even when it preserves the ruler. From this angle, the tragedy is not only that Belarusians lose autonomy but

that the EU's border externalization exports the costs of European security to populations—many of them African—who have no voice in the bargain. The African vantage point therefore foregrounds questions that Western security discourse often backgrounds: who pays for the "stability" of the border, whose mobility is criminalized, and whether the language of sovereignty is being used to legitimize domination rather than to protect self-determination. It also cautions against reading the crisis solely through a Russia-versus-West lens, because that framing erases the agency and suffering of the migrants themselves and the longer history of border violence that predates this particular confrontation.

Chinese: China approaches Belarus through the lens of non-interference and economic connectivity. Beijing has invested in the Great Stone industrial park near Minsk as a flagship Belt and Road node and has consistently treated Belarus's internal politics as a sovereign matter. Chinese commentary frames Western sanctions as illegitimate interference and emphasizes stability and development over political conditionality. The Chinese perspective contributes an insistence that economic engagement should not be held hostage to political reform, and it highlights the material costs of sanctions for third parties. It occludes, however, the domestic repression that preceded Russian dependence and tends to treat "stability" as an unqualified good, understating the agency of Belarusian protesters and the coercive dimensions of the migration crisis. From Beijing's vantage, the crisis is a symptom of great-power confrontation rather than a consequence of authoritarian breakdown.

Russian: Russian discourse frames Belarus as an integral part of the "Russian world" and the Union State, and treats Western engagement with Minsk as encroachment on a legitimate sphere of influence. The near-abroad doctrine holds that Russia has special security interests in post-Soviet space, and the 2020 crisis is read as a Western-backed color revolution averted by Russian support. The migration crisis is either denied, minimized, or framed as a legitimate response to EU sanctions. This perspective contributes a reminder that NATO enlargement and EU conditionality are themselves coercive instruments that reshape the strategic environment. It occludes the extent to which Russian backing enabled authoritarian consolidation and the human costs of the border weaponization, and it treats Belarusian sovereignty as derivative of Russian security rather than as an independent value.

Western: Western analysis treats Belarus as a case of failed democratization and Russian subversion, emphasizing the 2020 election fraud, repression, and the subsequent loss of Belarusian autonomy. EU and US policy has combined sanctions, support for civil society, and border hardening. The Western perspective contributes a normative commitment to democratic governance and human rights, and it has generated substantial documentation of abuses. Its self-critique—visible in debates about enlargement fatigue and the slow response to 2020—acknowledges that inconsistent engagement (welcoming Lukashenko when convenient, sanctioning when not) may have accelerated dependence on Moscow. It occludes, however, the extent to which EU border externalization and asylum policy created the very vulnerability that migration weaponization exploited, and it sometimes underestimates the structural constraints on Belarusian agency.

UN: The UN perspective centers on Charter principles—sovereignty, non-intervention, human rights—and on the protection of migrants and refugees. UNHCR and IOM have documented conditions at the border and called for access and humane treatment. The UN contributes a legal framework that transcends great-power competition and insists on the dignity of individuals regardless of geopolitical context. It occludes, in practice, the enforcement gap: without Security Council consensus, UN mechanisms cannot compel state behavior, and the migration crisis has been managed primarily by regional actors. The UN vantage thus highlights both the normative resources and the institutional limits of multilateralism in a polarized environment.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Moldova: Transnistria, EU Accession, and Energy Vulnerability

Bolded Causal Claim: Moldova's European integration is blocked not by a single veto but by a layered sovereignty deficit—Transnistria's de facto statehood, Russian military presence, and energy dependence—that EU conditionality can manage but not resolve without a settlement of the 1992 conflict.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three interlocking channels. First, territorial: the Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (TMR), established after the 1992 war and sustained by Russian military backing, controls roughly twelve percent of Moldovan territory and a significant share of industrial capacity. The presence of the Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF), successor to the Soviet 14th Army, provides both a security guarantee for TMR authorities and a standing threat that constrains Chisinau's policy space. Second, energy: Moldova's gas supply historically transited through Ukraine and was contracted with Gazprom; Moldovagaz is fifty percent plus one share owned by Gazprom, giving Moscow leverage over pricing and supply. The 2021–2022 energy crisis, when Gazprom reduced deliveries and demanded debt repayment, demonstrated how energy dependence translates into political pressure. Third, institutional: EU accession requires the acquis communautaire across all territory, but Chisinau cannot enforce standards in TMR; this creates a "sovereignty gap" that the EU's own rules cannot bridge. The EU's response—financial support, the Iasi-Ungheni pipeline, and the "energy solidarity" mechanism—addresses symptoms but not the structural condition. The mechanism is thus cumulative: each channel reinforces the others, and progress on one (for example, energy diversification) does not automatically unlock progress on the others (territorial reintegration). De Waal's analysis of frozen conflicts emphasizes that such arrangements persist precisely because they serve multiple actors' interests simultaneously: Russia retains leverage, TMR elites retain power, and Moldovan governments avoid the costs of confrontation.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism applies most strongly to small, post-Soviet states with unresolved territorial disputes, energy import dependence, and proximity to Russia. It is weaker where the disputed territory is economically marginal, where alternative energy routes exist, or where the great-power patron has withdrawn. Moldova's case is intensified by its landlocked position, its remittance-dependent economy, and the fact that Transnistria hosts significant industrial assets (steel, electricity generation at Cuciurgan). The mechanism also depends on the EU's willingness to advance accession despite unresolved conflicts—a willingness that has grown since 2022 but remains contested among member states. Cornell's work on Eurasian security underscores that the "frozen" quality of these conflicts is not accidental but structurally produced by the absence of a hegemonic settlement.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe: (a) Moldovan governments pursuing EU integration while avoiding direct confrontation with TMR or Russia; (b) energy crises recurring during periods of geopolitical tension; (c) EU financial support increasing without corresponding territorial progress; (d) TMR authorities maintaining alignment with Moscow while seeking economic ties with Chisinau; (e) Gagauzia's autonomy becoming a secondary flashpoint. These patterns are visible in the 2020–2024 period: Sandu's election, the 2021 gas crisis, the 2022 EU candidacy, the 2023 opening of negotiations, and continued OGRF presence.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage treats Moldova's predicament as a case of incomplete decolonization and externalized sovereignty. From this perspective, the Transnistrian conflict is not merely a post-Soviet anomaly but an instance of how imperial powers (here, Russia) retain leverage over nominally independent states through territorial fragments and economic dependencies. African scholars such as Mamdani and

Grovogui have analyzed how sovereignty in the post-colonial world is often "shared" or "delegated" to external actors, producing states that are formally independent but substantively constrained. The African lens highlights what Western frameworks often miss: that Moldova's energy dependence is not just a technical problem but a structural feature of unequal exchange, and that EU accession may reproduce dependency in new forms—replacing Russian leverage with Brussels conditionality. The African perspective also draws attention to the human costs: Moldovan workers migrating to Russia and the EU, remittances sustaining households, and the gendered dimensions of labor migration. It insists that sovereignty must be measured not by treaty signatures but by the capacity of a state to determine its own energy, labor, and territorial futures. This vantage is the longest because it reframes the entire debate: Moldova is not a "frontline state" in a Western sense but a post-colonial society negotiating multiple dependencies, and its experience resonates with African states that have faced similar externalized sovereignty.

Chinese: China's perspective emphasizes non-interference and economic engagement. Beijing has not taken a strong position on Transnistria, preferring to avoid entanglement in European security disputes. Chinese interests in Moldova are modest—some trade and infrastructure interest—but the broader principle matters: China opposes the use of territorial disputes to justify external intervention or to condition economic relations. The Chinese vantage sees EU accession conditionality as a form of political interference that exceeds the economic sphere, and it worries that the Moldovan case could legitimate similar conditionality in other contexts. It occludes the security dimension: China's framework does not address how Russian military presence affects Moldovan sovereignty.

Russian: Russia's perspective frames Transnistria as a protectorate of Russian-speaking populations and a strategic asset. Moscow argues that the 1992 conflict was caused by Moldovan nationalism and that TMR's existence protects a community that would otherwise be marginalized. The Russian vantage treats OGRF as a peacekeeping force (though it is not OSCE-mandated) and insists that any settlement must account for TMR's "statehood." It occludes the coercive dimension: the military presence and energy leverage are not framed as instruments of influence but as natural expressions of historical ties. The Russian perspective also uses Moldova as a cautionary tale about EU expansion, arguing that Brussels absorbs states without resolving their internal conflicts.

Western: The Western perspective centers on Euro-Atlantic integration, democratic reform, and the containment of Russian influence. It treats Moldova's EU candidacy as a strategic gain and supports Chisinau's reform agenda. The Western vantage emphasizes the 2022 candidacy and 2023 negotiations as milestones and frames energy diversification as a success story. It occludes, in its more triumphalist variants, the unresolved territorial problem and the risk that accession without settlement could create a "Cyprus problem" in the EU—importing an unresolved conflict into the Union. Western self-critique, increasingly present since 2022, acknowledges that earlier enlargement strategies underestimated the security dimension and that the Eastern Partnership lacked the tools to resolve frozen conflicts.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes Charter principles, the 1992 ceasefire, and the OSCE-led mediation (the 5+2 format). The UN supports Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity while calling for a peaceful settlement. It occludes the enforcement gap: the 5+2 format has been stalled since 2019, and without great-power consensus, UN mechanisms cannot compel progress. The UN vantage highlights the normative framework but also its institutional limits in a polarized environment.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The Balkans: Bosnia's Frozen Conflict, Kosovo-Serbia, and EU Enlargement Fatigue

Bolded Causal Claim: The Western Balkans remain trapped in a "stabilization without integration" equilibrium because EU enlargement fatigue, unresolved sovereignty disputes, and ethno-nationalist political entrepreneurs have converted post-conflict institutions into mechanisms for perpetuating division rather than transcending it.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through institutional path dependence and incentive structures. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dayton Accords (1995) created a complex power-sharing system that froze wartime ethnic divisions into constitutional categories. The Office of the High Representative (OHR) retains "Bonn powers" to impose legislation, but its authority has eroded as EU and US attention shifted eastward. The result is a state where ethnic parties have no incentive to build cross-cutting coalitions: the electoral system rewards ethnic outbidding, and the constitutional structure allows any of the three constituent peoples to block decisions. In Kosovo-Serbia relations, the 2008 declaration of independence and Serbia's non-recognition create a parallel sovereignty gap. The EU-facilitated dialogue (since 2011) has produced agreements (the 2013 Brussels Agreement) but not implementation, because neither side has sufficient incentive to compromise without a credible EU membership prospect. The mechanism is thus: EU conditionality requires reforms that threaten incumbent elites; elites therefore perform reform rhetorically while blocking substantively; the EU, facing its own enlargement fatigue and internal divisions, cannot credibly threaten exclusion or promise accession; the equilibrium stabilizes at a sub-optimal level. This is reinforced by external actors—Russia supports Serbia and Republika Srpska; Turkey and Gulf states engage in cultural and economic diplomacy; China invests in infrastructure—creating a multi-polar environment where no single external actor can impose convergence. King's analysis of the Caucasus and Balkans emphasizes how external powers have historically used regional divisions as instruments of influence, and the current multi-polarity reproduces that pattern.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism applies where (a) post-conflict institutions encode ethnic or communal divisions; (b) the external patron (EU) has lost credibility or capacity; (c) local elites benefit from the status quo; and (d) alternative external partners provide resources without conditionality. It is weaker where a single external actor has overwhelming leverage, where institutions are designed for integration rather than division, or where economic interdependence creates cross-cutting interests. The Balkans case is intensified by the region's small size, its location between competing spheres, and the legacy of the 1990s wars. The mechanism also depends on the EU's internal cohesion: when member states disagree on enlargement (as France and Bulgaria have), the conditionality loses credibility.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe: (a) repeated crises in Bosnia (secessionist rhetoric from Republika Srpska, blockage of state institutions); (b) Kosovo-Serbia dialogue producing agreements that are not implemented; (c) EU member states disagreeing on enlargement (France's skepticism, Bulgaria's veto on North Macedonia); (d) local leaders using external partnerships to hedge against EU pressure; (e) youth emigration and brain drain. These patterns are visible throughout the 2010s and 2020s, including the 2021–2022 Bosnian crisis, the 2023 Kosovo-Serbia tensions over license plates and municipal elections, and the continued stagnation of accession negotiations.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective reads the Balkan frozen conflicts through the lens of post-colonial statecraft and the politics of externally imposed settlements. African scholars, from Fanon to Mam-

dani to Mbembe, have analyzed how colonial and post-colonial states are constructed through violence and then stabilized through institutional arrangements that freeze rather than resolve group divisions. The Dayton Accords, from this vantage, resemble the colonial "indirect rule" systems that Mamdani identified in Africa: they recognize and empower communal leaders as the legitimate representatives of groups, thereby incentivizing ethnic entrepreneurship and foreclosing cross-cutting politics. The African perspective also highlights the racialized and civilizational hierarchies embedded in EU enlargement discourse—the notion that the Balkans are "European but not quite," perpetually in need of tutelage. This resonates with African experiences of conditionality and the "development" discourse that treats non-Western (or semi-Western) societies as deficient. The African vantage insists that the Balkan problem is not primarily a failure of local elites but a failure of the international order to create conditions for genuine self-determination: the OHR's Bonn powers, the EU's conditionality, and NATO's presence all represent forms of external sovereignty that constrain democratic politics. It also draws attention to the economic dimensions: deindustrialization, unemployment, and emigration that make ethnic politics a rational strategy for survival. The African perspective is longest here because it offers a fundamental critique: the Balkans are not a "European problem" to be solved by more Europe; they are a case of how international intervention, however well-intentioned, can produce durable dependency and frozen conflict, and this insight travels directly from African post-colonial experience.

Chinese: China's perspective emphasizes economic development and non-interference. Beijing has invested in Balkan infrastructure (the "16+1" format, later "14+1" after Baltic withdrawals) and treats the region as a node in the Belt and Road Initiative. China does not take positions on Kosovo's status or Bosnia's constitutional arrangements, preferring to engage all parties economically. The Chinese vantage sees EU enlargement fatigue as an opportunity for deeper economic engagement and worries that geopolitical competition (Western pressure to exclude Chinese firms) undermines development. It occludes the security and identity dimensions: China's framework does not address how ethnic politics or historical grievances shape the region, and its economic focus can be read as ignoring the very conflicts that make development fragile.

Russian: Russia's perspective treats the Balkans as a historic sphere of influence and a front in the contest with NATO. Moscow supports Serbia's position on Kosovo, backs Republika Srpska's autonomy, and opposes NATO expansion in the region. The Russian vantage frames the 1999 NATO bombing of Yugoslavia as an original sin and uses it to delegitimize Western claims to moral authority. It occludes its own destabilizing role: Russian support for ethno-nationalist entrepreneurs is not framed as interference but as solidarity with "traditional" allies. The Russian perspective also uses the Balkans to argue that Western intervention produces chaos, contrasting it with Russia's (self-proclaimed) respect for sovereignty—while simultaneously undermining sovereignty in practice.

Western: The Western perspective centers on Euro-Atlantic integration, democratic consolidation, and the prevention of renewed conflict. It treats the Balkans as a "European" region that must eventually join the EU and NATO, and it frames the 1990s interventions as necessary humanitarian actions. The Western vantage has shifted from the confident enlargement of the 2000s to a more anxious "stabilization" mode, acknowledging that the "European perspective" has lost credibility. Western self-critique, increasingly prominent, recognizes that the EU's conditionality was too technocratic, that it underestimated the political economy of ethnic elites, and that the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent crises diverted attention. The Western perspective occludes, in its more self-critical variants, the extent to which Western powers themselves designed the institutions (Dayton, the Ahtisaari plan) that now constrain progress.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes Charter principles, the ICTY's legacy, and peacekeeping (UNMIK in

Kosovo, EUFOR in Bosnia). The UN supports territorial integrity and peaceful dispute resolution, and it has invested heavily in transitional justice. It occludes the enforcement gap: UN mechanisms depend on Security Council consensus, which is absent on Kosovo (Russia and China oppose recognition). The UN vantage highlights the normative and legal framework but also its institutional limits in a region where great powers disagree fundamentally on the status of territories.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan: the Second Karabakh War (2020), Russian peacekeeping, and the shifting regional order

Bolded Causal Claim: The Second Karabakh War of September–November 2020 was a regional-order shock rather than a contained bilateral conflict: Azerbaijan's military victory, enabled by Turkish support and a transformed force structure, broke the post-1994 stalemate, exposed the conditional nature of Russia's security guarantees to Armenia, and inserted Turkey and Russia as joint arbiters of the South Caucasus, while leaving Georgia's own frozen conflicts and Euro-Atlantic aspirations embedded in a more multipolar and less predictable environment.

Mechanism: The war's outcome rested on several interacting mechanisms. First, military-technological asymmetry: Azerbaijan invested hydrocarbon revenues in drones, precision-guided munitions, and combined-arms coordination, while Armenia's defenses remained anchored in Soviet-era equipment and static trench lines that proved vulnerable to aerial reconnaissance and strike. Second, alliance signaling: Russia's CSTO commitments to Armenia did not translate into intervention against Azerbaijan, because Moscow sought to preserve leverage over both parties and avoid a direct clash with Turkey; Armenia's expectation of patron protection was therefore disappointed. Third, domestic legitimation: Azerbaijan's leadership framed territorial recovery as national restoration, while Armenia's post-2018 political transition under Nikol Pashinyan created both reformist energy and military vulnerability. Fourth, postwar institutionalization: the November 9, 2020 ceasefire deployed Russian peacekeepers along the Lachin corridor and established Turkish-Russian monitoring, converting battlefield gains into a new, externally managed status quo. Fifth, regional diffusion: the war demonstrated that frozen conflicts could be "unfrozen" when power balances shift, encouraging other actors to reconsider military options and prompting Georgia to reassess its own dependence on Western rhetorical support without comparable security guarantees. The subsequent Azerbaijani consolidation of control in 2023 and the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers by 2024 further showed that peacekeeping mandates can be overtaken by facts on the ground when the patron's broader capacity is strained. The war also revealed the importance of Turkey's defense-industrial base, Iran's anxieties about Turkish and Israeli-linked influence near its borders, and Georgia's role as a transit state whose value rises when north-south routes are politicized.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism applies where a state has sufficient fiscal and technological capacity to overcome entrenched defensive positions, where the patron's commitment is ambiguous or subordinated to wider geopolitical balancing, where domestic politics reward territorial recovery, and where external powers prefer a managed postwar order to continued fighting. It does not imply that all frozen conflicts are militarily reversible: Georgia's Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain under Russian military protection and recognition, making a similar reversal far costlier and more escalatory. It also does not imply that military victory resolves underlying legitimacy or minority-security questions; Azerbaijan's 2023 reintegration ended Armenian self-rule in Karabakh but produced mass displacement and unresolved questions of rights, property, and reconciliation. The mechanism is further bounded by energy markets, alliance structures, and the

willingness of regional powers to absorb escalation risks.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include Azerbaijan's territorial recovery and expanded state capacity; Armenia's political crisis and subsequent foreign-policy diversification; Turkey's emergence as a South Caucasus security actor; Russia's retention of a peacekeeping role but loss of exclusive mediator status; Georgia's heightened exposure to a multipolar neighborhood and its continued, but complicated, Euro-Atlantic orientation; and the growing salience of east-west transit routes, including the Middle Corridor, as alternatives to Russian-controlled north-south routes after 2022. One should also observe increased militarization, refugee and displacement flows, and the fragility of externally brokered ceasefires when local and great-power interests diverge. Armenia's questioning of CSTO reliability and its search for additional security partners, as well as Georgia's receipt of EU candidate status in December 2023 amid domestic political contestation, further illustrate how the regional shock reverberated beyond the battlefield.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* The African vantage treats the South Caucasus not as a distant European periphery but as a familiar post-imperial landscape in which colonial and imperial borders, ethnic federalism, and external patronage produce durable insecurity. African scholarship on sovereignty, state formation, and the politics of recognition—associated with thinkers such as Mamdani, Mbembe, and Grovogui—highlights how great powers define which territorial claims are legitimate and which populations are expendable. From this perspective, Russian peacekeeping can be read not as neutral stabilization but as a form of tutelage that preserves leverage; Turkish and Azerbaijani assertions of sovereignty can be read as anti-imperial recovery, yet they also risk reproducing exclusionary majoritarianism. The African perspective foregrounds displacement, the human cost of "frozen" and "unfrozen" conflicts, and the gap between international legal language and lived security. It also cautions against treating Western or Russian frameworks as the only available grammars of order, insisting that local agency and historical experience of externally imposed borders matter. This makes the African reading longer and more skeptical of all external guarantors, including those claiming humanitarian or civilizational missions.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes non-interference, territorial integrity, and connectivity. Beijing generally supports Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and opposes external military intervention, while seeking stable transit routes for the Belt and Road Initiative. It occludes ethnic and human-rights dimensions and avoids security commitments that could entangle it in regional rivalries.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames the South Caucasus as part of its "near abroad," where Moscow claims a privileged mediator and security role. It presents peacekeeping as stabilizing and territorial integrity as negotiable only within a Russia-managed order. It occludes its own contribution to militarization and the erosion of its credibility after 2022.

Western: The Western perspective emphasizes Euro-Atlantic integration, democracy, and territorial integrity, and it has supported Georgia's and Armenia's reform agendas. It occludes the limits of its security commitments and the extent to which Western powers outsourced mediation to Russia in the 1990s and 2000s.

UN: The UN perspective stresses Charter principles, peaceful settlement, and the legal framework of territorial integrity and self-determination. It supports mediation and humanitarian protection but occludes the enforcement gap created by Security Council divisions and the absence of a robust UN peacekeeping role in the region.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Frozen conflicts as strategic instruments: how unresolved disputes structure regional order

Bolded Causal Claim: Frozen conflicts are not simply diplomatic failures or humanitarian tragedies; they are often strategically maintained arrangements in which ambiguity about sovereignty, borders, and status serves the interests of local elites, regional patrons, and great powers, thereby structuring regional order through buffer zones, militarized lines of contact, and permanently incomplete sovereignty.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates at four levels. First, strategic ambiguity: an unresolved status allows patrons to retain leverage over both the de facto and de jure authorities without committing to full recognition or reintegration. Second, institutionalization of the freeze: ceasefires, peacekeeping missions, and contact lines create durable facts on the ground that make reversal costly and normalize a "no war, no peace" condition. Third, elite instrumentalization: local leaders in both the parent state and the breakaway entity use the conflict to consolidate power, justify militarization, and deflect from governance failures. Fourth, great-power concert and rivalry: external powers may prefer a frozen conflict to outcomes that would empower a rival, alter alliance structures, or create precedents for secession. These mechanisms are reinforced by legal stalemate—tensions between territorial integrity and self-determination, uti possidetis, and Security Council vetoes—and by economic incentives, including control of transit routes, sanctions evasion, and resource rents. The result is a regional order in which conflict is managed rather than resolved, and in which periodic flare-ups serve as reminders of latent violence without necessarily producing settlement. The freeze can also become a resource in itself: it generates external funding, military assistance, and diplomatic attention that would diminish under a final settlement, giving both local and external actors incentives to preserve ambiguity.

Scope Conditions: This argument applies where military balances prevent decisive victory, where at least one external patron benefits from the status quo, where local elites derive political or economic rents from continued confrontation, and where international mediation lacks enforcement capacity. It does not apply to all unresolved disputes: some are genuinely intractable due to identity, territory, or resource competition without being strategically maintained; others may be frozen primarily by exhaustion rather than design. The mechanism also assumes a minimum of institutional continuity—ceasefire monitoring, diplomatic channels, and elite bargaining—that can sustain ambiguity without collapsing into full-scale war. Where that continuity breaks down, as in 2008 Georgia or 2020 Karabakh, the freeze gives way to rapid reconfiguration. The argument is therefore probabilistic and conditional, not a claim that every unresolved dispute is a deliberately engineered instrument.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include persistent ceasefire lines and militarized borders; long-term displacement and refugee populations; underdevelopment in conflict zones; repeated but inconclusive negotiation formats; external military bases justified by "stabilization"; and the use of conflict status as leverage in broader diplomatic bargaining. One should also observe sudden collapses of frozen orders when power balances shift, followed by new rounds of displacement and recognition disputes. The mechanism predicts that "peace" in such settings will be procedural and reversible rather than transformative. It also predicts that external mediators will often measure success by the absence of large-scale violence rather than by political settlement, and that local populations will bear the costs of this lowered ambition.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* The African perspective is especially attuned to frozen conflicts because many African states live with unresolved territorial and sovereignty disputes inherited from colonial borders and post-colonial state formation. Scholarship by Mamdani, Mbembe, Bayart, and others emphasizes that the state in Africa has often been experienced as an external apparatus,

and that sovereignty is contested from within as well as from outside. From this vantage, a "frozen conflict" is not an anomaly but a modality of rule: it allows external powers and local elites to govern through exception, emergency, and selective recognition. African cases such as Western Sahara, Somaliland, and the Sudans illustrate how international recognition regimes can freeze injustice as effectively as they freeze violence. The African perspective foregrounds displacement, the political economy of war, and the ways in which international law's categories—territorial integrity, self-determination, uti possidetis—often reproduce colonial boundaries while denying democratic legitimacy to affected populations. It is therefore skeptical of both Western liberal peacebuilding and Russian-style tutelage, insisting that durable order must address historical injustice and material inequality rather than merely manage ceasefires.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes stability, non-interference, and development. It supports territorial integrity and opposes unilateral secession, while viewing frozen conflicts as risks to trade corridors and investment. It occludes human-rights and democratic-governance dimensions and prefers quiet diplomacy to public conditionality.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats frozen conflicts in the "near abroad" as security buffers and instruments of influence. It presents peacekeeping and mediation as stabilizing, while using ambiguity to retain leverage over neighboring states. It occludes the costs borne by local populations and the ways in which frozen conflicts perpetuate militarization.

Western: The Western perspective emphasizes territorial integrity, human rights, and liberal peacebuilding, and it has often sought to resolve frozen conflicts through conditionality and integration. It occludes its own inconsistent engagement, the limits of conditionality, and the ways in which Western-designed settlements can institutionalize stalemate.

UN: The UN perspective stresses Charter principles, mediation, and peacekeeping, and it provides the legal and institutional vocabulary for managing frozen conflicts. It occludes the enforcement gap created by Security Council divisions and the tendency of UN mechanisms to prioritize procedural stability over substantive justice.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective on wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus begins not with the post-Soviet space but with the colonial genealogy of the state system itself. For African international-relations scholars, the frozen conflicts of the Caucasus and the Balkans are not exotic pathologies of a distant region; they are recognizable instances of a recurring pattern in which imperial powers draw borders, collapse, and leave behind contested sovereignties that are then managed, exploited, or frozen by successor states and external patrons. The African vantage point thus reframes the lesson's central topic: not as a regional security problem to be solved by Euro-Atlantic integration or by Russian sphere-of-influence management, but as a manifestation of the deeper politics of sovereignty, recognition, and imperial afterlives that African states have lived since independence. This reframing is not a denial of the specificity of the post-Soviet experience; it is an insistence that the analytical categories through which that experience is understood have been shaped by a particular, Eurocentric history of state formation that African scholarship has spent decades deconstructing.

At the core of this perspective is the understanding that sovereignty is an achievement rather than a given.

Robert Jackson's distinction between juridical and empirical sovereignty, developed in the context of post-colonial Africa, is directly applicable: African states entered independence possessing recognized borders and international legal personality while often lacking effective control over their territories. The frozen conflicts of Eastern Europe — Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, Northern Cyprus, Kosovo — present structurally similar configurations: entities exercising de facto control without broad international recognition, or states possessing de jure sovereignty without full empirical control. Mahmood Mamdani's analysis of colonialism's "define and rule" strategies shows how imperial powers constructed ethnic and tribal categories that hardened into political identities and administrative boundaries; the Soviet nationalities policy, with its titular republics and autonomous regions, performed an analogous function, creating national categories whose territorialization became explosive upon imperial collapse. The African perspective thus reads frozen conflicts not as eruptions of primordial hatred but as products of imperial categorization — a reading that shifts attention from the passions of local populations to the structural conditions that make such conflicts possible and profitable.

This structural reading generates a sharp critique of the selective application of territorial integrity. African states have lived through secessionist crises — Biafra, Katanga, Eritrea, Somaliland, South Sudan — and have observed the international community's inconsistent responses: Eritrea recognized after a long war, Somaliland unrecognized despite decades of relative stability, South Sudan recognized after mass violence, Biafra crushed. Siba Grovogui's work on sovereignty and international law argues that the norms governing recognition and territorial integrity were constructed to protect European empires and were only later universalized, carrying their colonial asymmetries with them. Applied to Eastern Europe, this produces a skepticism that African diplomats and scholars frequently voice: Western insistence on Ukraine's territorial integrity, while Kosovo's independence was recognized, appears to African observers as power politics dressed in legalism. This skepticism does not translate into support for aggression; rather, it reflects a lived experience of an international order in which principles are enforced by the powerful against the weak. African states' frequent abstentions or opposition in UN votes on Ukraine are thus better understood as assertions of non-alignment and distrust of Western-led order than as endorsements of Russian policy — a distinction that Western commentary often fails to grasp.

The African perspective also illuminates the material and political economies that sustain frozen conflicts. Jean-François Bayart's concept of extraversion — the strategy by which African elites leverage external resources and patrons to maintain domestic power — travels well to the post-Soviet space. Belarus's dependence on Russian subsidies and security guarantees, Moldova's energy vulnerability, the Balkan states' EU conditionality — these are forms of extraversion in which local elites convert external dependence into domestic authority. Walter Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment as a relational process, in which the development of some regions is structurally linked to the underdevelopment of others, suggests that frozen conflicts are not merely local failures but are embedded in regional and global hierarchies of power and extraction. Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics — the power to dictate who may live and who must die — captures the condition of populations in frozen conflict zones, where sovereignty is suspended, violence is routine, and accountability is absent. The African perspective thus centers the costs borne by ordinary people, not the security dilemmas of great powers, and insists that any analysis of frozen conflicts that does not account for these costs is analytically incomplete.

Regional organization provides a further point of comparison. The African Union's principle of uti possidetis — the inheritance of colonial borders — and its peace and security architecture, including the Peace and Security Council and the African Standby Force, represent an attempt to manage contested sovereignty through regional mechanisms rather than great-power diktat. African experience with regional mediation

— ECOWAS in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the AU in Darfur and the Great Lakes — demonstrates both the possibilities and the limits of such approaches: regional actors possess local knowledge and legitimacy but often lack resources and are themselves implicated in the conflicts they mediate. Applied to Eastern Europe, the African perspective asks why the OSCE and the EU have failed to resolve frozen conflicts, and whether the answer lies partly in the hegemonic character of Western-led institutions, which smaller states experience as instruments of great-power interest rather than neutral forums. It also notes that African regionalism, for all its weaknesses, has at least the virtue of being owned by its members, whereas Eastern European security architecture has been shaped by external powers whose interests do not always align with those of the region's populations.

African feminist scholarship adds a dimension that the other four perspectives largely neglect. Sylvia Tamale's work on African feminism and decolonization insists that sovereignty must be understood not only at the state level but in terms of bodily autonomy, gendered violence, and the everyday experience of insecurity. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's critique of the colonial imposition of gender categories suggests that the ethnic and national identities mobilized in frozen conflicts are themselves constructed through colonial epistemologies that naturalize difference. Applied to the Balkans and the Caucasus, this perspective would note that the consociational power-sharing arrangements imposed by Western peacebuilders — most notoriously at Dayton — institutionalized ethnic categories that had been politically mobilized during war, effectively freezing not only territorial disputes but also gendered and ethnic hierarchies. The African feminist contribution is thus to insist that peace processes that exclude women and marginalized groups, or that treat ethnicity as a natural rather than constructed category, reproduce the very conditions that generate conflict.

What the African perspective contributes uniquely, then, is fourfold. First, it denaturalizes borders and sovereignty, revealing them as political constructs with colonial histories rather than as neutral legal facts. Second, it exposes the selectivity of international legal principles, showing that territorial integrity and self-determination are applied according to power rather than law. Third, it centers the material and everyday costs of frozen conflicts on populations rather than on state security, and it provides a vocabulary — extraversion, necropolitics, underdevelopment — for understanding how conflicts are sustained by elite interests and global hierarchies. Fourth, it insists on non-alignment as a legitimate strategic posture, not as neutrality or appeasement, but as a refusal to be conscripted into great-power competition on terms set by others. These contributions are not merely academic; they shape how African states vote in international forums, how they negotiate with external powers, and how they conceptualize their own security.

The African perspective also has significant occlusions that must be acknowledged. It may understate the specific nuclear and conventional military dimensions of the post-Soviet space, where the risk of escalation between nuclear-armed powers is qualitatively different from most African conflicts. It may over-analogize colonial and Soviet experiences, obscuring differences in state capacity, ideological legitimation, and the role of nationalism in Eastern Europe. It may not fully engage with the agency of Eastern European states that seek Euro-Atlantic integration as a genuine security choice rather than as a form of extraversion — a choice driven by historical experience of Russian domination that African analogies can flatten. It risks romanticizing non-alignment in a context of active aggression, where abstention can functionally benefit the aggressor. And its focus on colonialism as the master frame may not adequately capture the distinct dynamics of Russian imperial revival, which draws on pre-Soviet as well as Soviet legacies and operates through different mechanisms than Western colonialism. These limitations do not invalidate the perspective; they define its scope conditions. The African vantage point is most powerful when it is used not to replace other analyses but to unsettle their assumptions — to ask questions that the other four perspectives, embedded

as they are in the very order they analyze, are structurally disinclined to ask.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus is anchored in the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, the primacy of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the pursuit of stability conducive to economic connectivity. From Beijing's vantage point, the frozen conflicts of the post-Soviet space are primarily problems of regional stability that threaten trade routes, energy corridors, and the broader project of Eurasian integration under the Belt and Road Initiative. China does not seek to resolve these conflicts through political conditionality or military intervention; instead, it engages pragmatically with all parties, including de facto authorities, in pursuit of commercial access and logistical continuity. This approach reflects a deeper strategic logic: China's rise depends on a stable Eurasian landmass, and frozen conflicts are tolerated so long as they do not disrupt the flows of goods, energy, and capital that sustain Chinese growth.

On the specific cases, China has consistently supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Azerbaijan in principle, while simultaneously maintaining economic relations with Russia and engaging with breakaway entities where commercially useful. In the Second Karabakh War, China remained officially neutral, calling for restraint and offering to mediate, but did not challenge Azerbaijan's military victory or Russia's peacekeeping deployment. In the Balkans, China has invested heavily in infrastructure — the Belgrade-Budapest railway, port developments in Greece and the Adriatic — without taking sides in the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, treating both as potential partners. In Belarus, China has cultivated economic ties, including the Great Stone industrial park, while avoiding entanglement in the political crisis of 2020. This pattern reflects a consistent preference for bilateral economic engagement over multilateral political commitment.

The Chinese perspective contributes a distinctive emphasis on connectivity and development as alternatives to security-centric framings. It suggests that frozen conflicts are partly sustained by economic underdevelopment and that integration into broader trade networks can create constituencies for peace. The BRI's emphasis on infrastructure, energy, and digital connectivity offers a model in which regional order is built through material interdependence rather than through military alliances or political conditionality. Chinese scholars and officials frequently contrast this approach with Western interventionism, arguing that development-oriented engagement is more sustainable than externally imposed settlements.

What the Chinese perspective occludes is equally significant. Its commitment to non-interference can function as a shield for authoritarian partners, and its economic pragmatism can legitimate de facto authorities without addressing the human rights and governance deficits that sustain conflicts. The perspective tends to treat smaller states as nodes in a connectivity network rather than as agents with their own security preferences, and it underestimates the security dilemma: infrastructure projects can be perceived as strategic threats by neighboring states, as the BRI's reception in the Balkans and Central Asia demonstrates. China's reluctance to challenge Russia's sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space, despite its formal commitment to sovereignty, reveals a hierarchy of interests in which great-power relations take precedence over small-state security. Finally, the Chinese perspective offers little by way of mechanism for resolving frozen conflicts; it manages their symptoms through economic engagement but does not address their political roots. The result is a stabilizing but not transformative contribution: China can dampen escalation and create economic incentives for restraint, but it cannot by itself reconfigure the political orders that produce frozen conflicts.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus is organized around the doctrine of the "near abroad" — the claim that the post-Soviet space constitutes a sphere of privileged Russian interests in which Moscow retains legitimate security, political, and cultural stakes. This doctrine, articulated in various forms since the early 1990s, treats the dissolution of the Soviet Union not as a clean break but as a reconfiguration of a historically integrated space in which Russia remains the central power. From this vantage point, NATO and EU expansion into Eastern Europe and the Caucasus is not merely a geopolitical inconvenience but an existential threat to Russian security, and frozen conflicts are instruments through which Moscow manages the boundaries of its influence and prevents the consolidation of hostile alignments on its periphery.

The mechanisms are well documented. Russia has maintained military bases in Armenia, Georgia's breakaway regions, Moldova's Transnistria, and Belarus, and has deployed peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh following the 2020 war. It has used energy supplies, trade restrictions, and political support for friendly elites as levers of influence. In Belarus, Lukashenko's regime survives through Russian economic and security backing, and the 2020 migration crisis on the Polish border demonstrated how Belarus could be used as an instrument of pressure against the EU. In the Balkans, Russia has cultivated ties with Serbia, supported Bosnian Serb leaders, and opposed Kosovo's independence, positioning itself as a counterweight to Western influence. The Russian perspective frames these activities not as aggression but as defensive measures to protect compatriots, maintain stability, and resist Western encroachment.

The intellectual foundations of this perspective draw on a long tradition of Russian geopolitical thought, from nineteenth-century pan-Slavism to Soviet-era concepts of the socialist camp, adapted to post-Cold War conditions. Russian scholars and officials frequently invoke the Monroe Doctrine as a precedent for sphere-of-influence claims, arguing that all great powers assert privileged interests in their neighborhoods. The protection of Russian-speaking populations is framed as a humanitarian and legal obligation, drawing on the concept of "compatriots abroad" (sootechestvenniki) developed in the 1990s. The narrative of NATO betrayal — the claim that Western leaders promised not to expand eastward in 1990 — serves as a foundational grievance that legitimizes resistance to further enlargement.

What the Russian perspective occludes is substantial. It systematically understates the agency of neighboring states, which have their own security preferences shaped by historical experience of Russian domination rather than by Western manipulation. It treats frozen conflicts as management tools while obscuring the human costs borne by displaced populations and the ways in which these conflicts perpetuate militarization and corruption. It invokes international law selectively, defending sovereignty when it serves Russian interests while violating it through annexation and intervention. It also underestimates the counterproductive effects of its own policies: the 2008 war in Georgia and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine have accelerated rather than prevented NATO and EU expansion, suggesting that the sphere-of-influence strategy has been self-defeating. Finally, the Russian perspective struggles to account for the genuine appeal of Euro-Atlantic integration to populations in the region, which cannot be reduced to Western propaganda or elite manipulation. The perspective is thus most coherent as a description of Russian interests and fears, and least coherent as a normative framework for regional order, because it cannot reconcile its claims of defensive necessity with the evident costs imposed on neighboring societies.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus is built on the twin pillars of Euro-Atlantic integration and the liberal international order: territorial integrity, human rights, democratic governance, and the rule of law. From this vantage point, the frozen conflicts of the post-Soviet space and the

Balkans are obstacles to the consolidation of stable, democratic states aligned with Western institutions, and their resolution requires the extension of EU and NATO norms, standards, and conditionality to the region. The Western approach has been most fully articulated through the EU's Eastern Partnership, launched in 2009, and through NATO's open-door policy, both of which treat integration as a transformative process that can overcome historical divisions through institutional reform and economic modernization.

The mechanisms of Western influence include association agreements, visa liberalization, financial assistance, and the promise of eventual membership. In Moldova, the EU has supported reform efforts and energy diversification, while in the Balkans, accession negotiations have been used to incentivize democratic consolidation and regional reconciliation. In the Caucasus, Western engagement has been more limited, constrained by Russian presence and by the complexity of the conflicts, but the EU and the US have supported Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and have mediated between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Western perspective also encompasses a significant peacebuilding and state-building enterprise, most visibly in Bosnia, where the Dayton Accords created a complex consociational structure designed to end war but which has since become a source of political paralysis.

Self-critique is an increasingly prominent feature of the Western perspective. Scholars and policymakers have acknowledged the limits of conditionality, the fatigue of enlargement, and the strategic overreach of treating integration as a universal solution. The 2008 war in Georgia prompted debates about whether Western encouragement of Georgian NATO aspirations contributed to escalation. The 2022 invasion of Ukraine forced a reckoning with the gap between rhetorical commitments and material support. In the Balkans, enlargement fatigue has undermined the credibility of the EU's transformative promise, while in the Caucasus, Western engagement has been criticized as too little, too late. This self-critique is not merely tactical; it reflects a deeper uncertainty about whether the liberal international order can be extended to regions where great-power competition, historical grievances, and weak institutions create conditions that institutional reform alone cannot address.

What the Western perspective occludes is its own inconsistent engagement and the ways in which its frameworks can institutionalize stalemate. The Dayton Accords froze Bosnia's ethnic divisions into constitutional structures that have proven resistant to reform. The recognition of Kosovo's independence, while legally defensible on humanitarian grounds, created a precedent that Russia has exploited to justify its own interventions. Western conditionality has often been applied unevenly, rewarding geopolitical allies while punishing others, undermining the credibility of normative claims. The perspective also tends to underestimate the security dilemma: NATO expansion, however defensive in intent, is perceived as threatening by Russia, and the failure to address this perception has contributed to escalation. Finally, the Western perspective can occlude the agency of local populations, treating them as beneficiaries of integration rather than as actors with their own visions of order. The result is a perspective that is normatively compelling but strategically contested, and whose effectiveness depends on conditions — local ownership, great-power restraint, institutional capacity — that are frequently absent in the regions it seeks to transform.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus is grounded in the Charter principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, non-use of force, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. From this vantage point, frozen conflicts are violations of the international legal order that require mediation, peacekeeping, and the gradual restoration of state authority, all conducted within the framework of international law and with respect for the rights of affected populations. The UN has been involved in the region through peacekeeping missions — UNPROFOR in Bosnia, UNOMIG in Georgia, UNMIK in Kosovo —

and through mediation efforts, including the Geneva International Discussions on Georgia and the Minsk Group on Nagorno-Karabakh, though the latter's effectiveness has been limited by great-power divisions.

The UN perspective contributes a legal and institutional vocabulary that is indispensable for managing frozen conflicts. It provides the framework for ceasefires, monitoring missions, and humanitarian access, and it establishes norms — on refugees, on the protection of civilians, on the illegality of the use of force — that constrain even powerful states. The UN's human rights mechanisms, including the Human Rights Council and treaty bodies, document violations in conflict zones and provide a basis for accountability. The UN also serves as a forum in which smaller states can assert their claims against great-power pressure, and its General Assembly resolutions on Ukraine's territorial integrity, for example, have provided a measure of international legitimacy for positions that might otherwise be dismissed as Western.

The mechanisms of UN engagement include mediation by the Secretary-General's special representatives, peacekeeping and observer missions, humanitarian coordination through OCHA, and the work of specialized agencies. In the Balkans, the UN played a central role in the 1990s, though its record was marred by failures — most notably at Srebrenica — that damaged its credibility. In Georgia, UNOMIG monitored the ceasefire until 2009, when Russia's veto forced its closure. In Nagorno-Karabakh, the UN has been largely sidelined, with Russia and Turkey dominating the post-2020 settlement. This pattern illustrates a structural feature of the UN perspective: it is most effective when great powers agree, and least effective when they do not.

What the UN perspective occludes is the enforcement gap created by Security Council divisions and the tendency of UN mechanisms to prioritize procedural stability over substantive justice. The UN can monitor ceasefires but cannot enforce them against the will of a permanent member. It can mediate but cannot compel parties to accept settlements that threaten their interests. Its peacekeeping missions are often deployed with mandates too weak to protect civilians, and its mediation efforts can become exercises in managing rather than resolving conflicts. The UN perspective also tends to treat frozen conflicts as discrete disputes amenable to technical solutions, rather than as symptoms of deeper structural inequalities and great-power competition. Its emphasis on neutrality, while necessary for legitimacy, can obscure power asymmetries and can privilege the status quo over justice. Finally, the UN's institutional design — particularly the veto power of the permanent members — means that its capacity to act is inversely related to the severity of the conflict when great powers are involved. The result is a perspective that is essential for establishing norms and providing forums but that is structurally incapable of resolving the conflicts it addresses when those conflicts implicate the interests of its most powerful members.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reveals frozen conflicts as instruments of external power projection that reproduce dependency; centers sovereignty as lived, substantive self-determination rather than legal abstraction; exposes racialized hierarchies in whose conflicts receive sustained international attention	May underweight the agency of local elites who instrumentalize frozen conflicts for domestic legitimation; can overstate the coherence of "external" versus "internal" actors; risks romanticizing pre-colonial regional orders	Sovereignty as substantive self-determination, not merely formal statehood; opposition to great-power imposition of "stability" that freezes injustice and locks in dependency	Differential international response to Nagorno-Karabakh versus African conflicts (e.g., Western Sahara, eastern DRC); Russian peacekeeping as sovereignty-constraining rather than sovereignty-protecting; the instrumental use of migration by Belarus	Western: underweights the role of local ethnic nationalism and elite manipulation in perpetuating conflicts; African framing can flatten intra-regional power asymmetries

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Highlights non-interference as a normative principle against humanitarian intervention-ism; emphasizes economic connectivity (BRI, Middle Corridor) as an alternative to military confrontation; demonstrates that great-power competition can be managed through development rather than force	Ignores how non-interference serves as cover for supporting authoritarian status quo; underweights minority protection and human rights; BRI can create debt dependency and infrastructure leverage that constrains sovereignty in practice	State sovereignty and territorial integrity as paramount; opposition to external intervention; preference for economic over military solutions; "win-win" development as conflict prevention	China's consistent support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity at the UN; BRI investments in Georgian and Azerbaijani transit infrastructure; China's refusal to recognize Kosovo	Western: non-interference is selectively applied and enables authoritarian consolidation; African: economic connectivity without political conditionality reproduces dependency under new management

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Reveals the security-dilemma logic of the "near abroad"; shows how frozen conflicts serve as buffers, leverage, and instruments of influence; demonstrates the material and strategic interests behind peacekeeping deployments	Naturalizes Russian hegemony; treats sovereignty of neighboring states as conditional on Russian security interests; obscures the coercive dimensions of "protection"; conflates Russian security with regional stability	Sphere of influence as legitimate security architecture; "near abroad" as zone of privileged interests; stability through managed ambiguity; great-power responsibility for regional order	Russian peacekeeping in Nagorno-Karabakh (2020–2024); military bases in Armenia (Gyumri), Moldova (Transnistria), Georgia (pre-2008); the "passportization" policy in South Ossetia and Abkhazia	Western: legitimizes imperialism and denies agency to smaller states; African: reproduces colonial logics of "protection" that constrain genuine sovereignty
Western	Emphasizes Euro-Atlantic integration as a peace project; highlights self-determination and human rights; provides institutional frameworks (EU, NATO, OSCE) for conflict resolution and democratic consolidation	Enlargement fatigue and inconsistent application; can be blind to how Western policies (NATO expansion, Kosovo recognition) contributed to security dilemmas; overestimates institutional capacity; self-critique often arrives too late	Liberal international order; rules-based system; democracy and human rights as universal; self-determination within territorial integrity; conditionality as reform incentive	EU Eastern Partnership (2009); NATO's role in Balkan stabilization; OSCE Minsk Group mediation (1992–2020); EU accession negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine	Russian: Western enlargement provoked insecurity and violated implicit post-Cold War understandings; African: selective attention and racialized hierarchy of concern

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Provides legal frameworks (Charter, international law); mediation forums; peacekeeping as neutral third party; normative baseline for territorial integrity and self-determination in balance	Veto paralysis when great powers are involved; treats conflicts as technical rather than structural; neutrality can privilege status quo over justice; institutional design inversely relates capacity to act to severity of conflict	Charter principles; peaceful settlement of disputes; territorial integrity and self-determination in balance; impartiality; consent-based peacekeeping	UNSC resolutions supporting Azerbaijan's territorial integrity (e.g., 822, 853, 874, 884); UN mediation efforts in Georgia; UN peacekeeping in Cyprus as comparator	African: neutrality obscures power asymmetries and serves great-power interests; Russian: UN is Western-dominated instrument; Western: UN is structurally incapable of enforcement

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The Second Karabakh War (2020): Azerbaijan's Military Victory, Russian Peacekeeping, and the Reconfiguration of the South Caucasus

The Second Karabakh War, fought between September 27 and November 10, 2020, represents the most significant territorial reconfiguration in the South Caucasus since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Azerbaijan, having recovered approximately 7,000 square kilometers of territory including the strategically vital city of Shusha, achieved a military victory that reversed the outcomes of the First Karabakh War (1988–1994). The subsequent Russian-brokered ceasefire introduced a 1,960-strong Russian peacekeeping contingent along the Lachin corridor and in Nagorno-Karabakh itself, while Turkey secured a monitoring role through a joint observation center. The war and its aftermath reconfigured not only the territorial map but also the regional order: Armenia's defeat triggered a domestic political crisis, Azerbaijan's confidence surged, Russia's role shifted from distant arbiter to direct military presence, and Turkey emerged as a consequential regional power. Understanding this case requires moving across four levels of analysis, each of which captures a distinct causal mechanism.

Levels of Analysis

At the *individual* level, the war was shaped by the leadership calculations of three key figures. Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan's president since 2003, had spent over a decade building military capacity and diplomatic lever-

age, positioning the war as the fulfillment of a national mission. Nikol Pashinyan, Armenia's prime minister, came to power in the 2018 Velvet Revolution with limited security experience and faced a legitimacy deficit that constrained his ability to make concessions in negotiations; his domestic vulnerability made him both unable to compromise before the war and unable to sustain the war effort once it began. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's president, saw in the conflict an opportunity to project Turkish power into the Caucasus, consolidate his nationalist base, and demonstrate the efficacy of Turkish military technology—particularly Bayraktar TB2 drones. At the *state* level, Azerbaijan's military modernization—funded by hydrocarbon revenues and accelerated by Turkish training and equipment—created a capability asymmetry that Armenia, dependent on Russian arms and constrained by its alliance with Moscow, could not match. Armenia's strategic doctrine, built around the assumption of Russian security guarantees and the defensive advantages of mountainous terrain, proved inadequate against combined-arms operations integrating drones, artillery, and special forces. Turkey's intervention, while not direct military participation in combat, provided decisive enabling capabilities. At the *systemic* level, the war occurred during a period of Russian retrenchment and American disengagement from the Caucasus. The United States, absorbed by domestic politics and the Middle East, had reduced its diplomatic footprint; the OSCE Minsk Group, co-chaired by the US, Russia, and France, had produced no substantive progress in nearly three decades. Russia, while still the dominant external power, was increasingly focused on Ukraine and Syria, and its relationship with Turkey—complicated by Syria, Libya, and energy cooperation—created incentives for accommodation rather than confrontation. The multipolar transition meant that no single power could impose order; instead, regional powers (Turkey, Russia) competed and cooperated in a fluid arrangement. At the *transnational* level, the Armenian diaspora—particularly in France, the United States, and Russia—lobbied for international recognition of Artsakh and for sanctions against Azerbaijan, but proved unable to translate moral claims into material support. Turkish-Azerbaijani ethnic and linguistic solidarity provided a transnational basis for Turkey's intervention that went beyond strategic calculation. Energy transit routes—the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and the Southern Gas Corridor—gave Azerbaijan economic leverage and connected the conflict to European energy security. The proliferation of drone warfare technology, developed in Turkey and deployed by Azerbaijan, represented a transnational military-technical shift that rendered obsolete Armenia's defensive doctrine.

Mechanism

The causal mechanism linking these levels can be specified as follows. Azerbaijan's military victory was produced by the interaction of three conditions: (1) a capability asymmetry created by Turkish-Azerbaijani military cooperation and hydrocarbon-funded modernization; (2) Russian non-intervention, which reflected Moscow's calculation that Armenia's defeat was acceptable if it preserved Russian influence through peacekeeping; and (3) Armenian political and military unpreparedness, rooted in the 2018 revolution's disruption of security institutions and Pashinyan's inability to negotiate from strength. The ceasefire mechanism—Russian peacekeeping in exchange for territorial concessions—then locked in the new status quo: Azerbaijan recovered most of its lost territory, Russia inserted a direct military presence that it had previously lacked, Turkey gained a monitoring role and expanded influence, and Armenia lost territory and strategic depth while retaining a reduced Armenian-populated enclave under Russian protection. The mechanism is not simply "military victory" but "military victory converted into political settlement through great-power brokerage," where the broker (Russia) extracted a presence that it could not have obtained through diplomacy alone.

Perspective Reconstruction

The African perspective, as the primary lens, reveals what the other four miss about the structural logic of the conflict. From this vantage point, the Second Karabakh War is not primarily about ethnicity or territory but

about the reproduction of dependency through externally imposed "stability." The frozen conflict that preceded the war—maintained for nearly three decades by Russian, American, and French mediation—served not to resolve the underlying dispute but to lock in a status quo that benefited external powers: Russia retained leverage over both Armenia and Azerbaijan, the West maintained a fiction of multilateral engagement, and the populations of the region lived under the shadow of renewed violence. The war's outcome, in which Russia inserted peacekeepers and Turkey gained a monitoring role, reproduces the colonial pattern in which African and post-Soviet territories are managed by external powers whose "peace" is indistinguishable from control. The African perspective also notes the racialized hierarchy of attention: the international community mobilized diplomatic energy for Nagorno-Karabakh that it has never mobilized for comparable or more severe conflicts in Africa, suggesting that the "international community" is not a neutral arbiter but a structure of power that allocates concern according to geopolitical interest. Sovereignty, from this perspective, is not the formal recognition of statehood but the substantive capacity to determine one's own future without external military presence; by that standard, neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan achieved sovereignty in 2020, and the Russian peacekeeping contingent is evidence of continued subordination.

The Chinese perspective emphasizes non-interference and the primacy of territorial integrity. China supported Azerbaijan's position throughout, consistent with its principle that territorial integrity is paramount and that secessionist movements—whether in Nagorno-Karabakh, Taiwan, or elsewhere—must not be legitimized. Beijing's interest in the conflict was primarily economic: the Middle Corridor, connecting China to Europe through the Caucasus, requires stability and predictable transit, and China has invested in Georgian and Azerbaijani infrastructure. China did not intervene militarily or diplomatically in a visible way, consistent with its non-interference doctrine, but its economic presence creates a form of influence that is less visible than Russian military bases or Turkish drones. The Chinese perspective would view the Russian peacekeeping deployment with ambivalence: it stabilizes the region (good for trade) but introduces a military presence that could constrain Chinese economic expansion (bad for sovereignty). China's strongest contribution is its demonstration that economic connectivity can provide an alternative to military confrontation; its occlusion is its failure to address how non-interference can serve as cover for supporting authoritarian status quo and its silence on minority protection.

The Russian perspective frames the war and its outcome as a vindication of the "near abroad" doctrine. From Moscow's viewpoint, the Minsk Group's failure demonstrated that Western-led mediation was ineffective; Russia's unilateral brokerage produced a ceasefire within six weeks where three decades of multilateral effort had failed. The peacekeeping deployment secured Russian military presence in a region where it had been losing influence to Turkey, and the ceasefire terms—while conceding territory to Azerbaijan—preserved a Russian role as arbiter and protector of the remaining Armenian population. Russia's calculation, as de Waal (2022) has analyzed, was that Armenia's defeat was acceptable if it preserved Russian influence; a prolonged war or Armenian victory would have been worse, as it would have strengthened Turkey and potentially drawn in NATO. The Russian perspective's contribution is its candor about great-power interests; its occlusion is its naturalization of hegemony and its treatment of Armenian and Azerbaijani sovereignty as conditional on Russian security.

The Western perspective emphasizes the failure of the liberal international order's conflict-resolution mechanisms. The OSCE Minsk Group, co-chaired by the US, Russia, and France, produced no substantive progress in twenty-eight years; the 2020 war demonstrated that the "frozen conflict" framework was not a solution but a deferral. Western self-critique, articulated by scholars such as Cornell (2011) and de Waal (2018), acknowledges that the West's emphasis on "stability" over justice, and its reluctance to pressure either party, contributed to the conditions for war. The West's strongest contribution is its insistence on human rights,

minority protection, and the principle that territorial disputes must be resolved through negotiation rather than force; its occlusion is its failure to recognize how Western policies—including NATO expansion and the Kosovo precedent—contributed to the security dilemmas that made the war more likely, and its persistent overestimation of institutional capacity.

The UN perspective centers on the legal framework: UNSC resolutions 822, 853, 874, and 884 (1993) affirmed Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and demanded Armenian withdrawal from occupied territories. The UN's contribution is the establishment of a normative baseline that Azerbaijan could invoke; the war's outcome, in which Azerbaijan recovered territory consistent with UNSC resolutions, can be read as a vindication of international law. However, the UN's occlusion is severe: the Security Council was paralyzed by great-power disagreement throughout the conflict, the UN played no role in the ceasefire, and the peacekeeping deployment was Russian, not UN. The UN's emphasis on neutrality and consent-based peacekeeping meant that it could not address the power asymmetries that determined the outcome. The UN perspective is essential for establishing norms but structurally incapable of enforcing them when great powers are involved.

Explicit Adjudication

Which perspective best explains the Second Karabakh War? The systemic-level analysis—combining Russian retrenchment, Turkish assertiveness, and American disengagement—provides the most complete causal account: the war became possible because the great-power equilibrium that had frozen the conflict for three decades shifted, and the outcome was determined by which powers were willing to act (Turkey, Russia) and which were not (US, France). However, this systemic account, while powerful, misses what the African perspective captures: the war was not merely a great-power chess game but a reproduction of dependency in which the populations of the region—Armenian and Azerbaijani alike—were denied substantive sovereignty. The Russian peacekeeping deployment, celebrated in Moscow as a diplomatic triumph, is from the African vantage point evidence that the "resolution" of the conflict is in fact its continuation under new management. The Western perspective's self-critique is valuable but arrives too late and remains focused on institutional failure rather than structural inequality. The Chinese perspective's emphasis on economic connectivity offers a genuine alternative but is silent on the military and political dimensions. The UN perspective provides the legal baseline but is structurally incapable of enforcement. The best explanation, therefore, is a synthesis: the systemic perspective explains *why the war happened when it did*, the state-level perspective explains *why Azerbaijan won*, and the African perspective explains *what the "resolution" actually means for the people who live there*. No single perspective is sufficient; the African perspective's contribution is to insist that the question "who won?" must be answered not only in terms of territory and power but in terms of whether the outcome expanded or contracted the substantive sovereignty of the populations involved. By that standard, the Second Karabakh War produced a victor in Azerbaijan, a loser in Armenia, and a continued subordination for both under Russian and Turkish regional management.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks:

1. **Mechanism identification.** Explain how the August 2008 war transformed Georgia's security environment from a contested but intact territorial state into one with two Russian-recognized breakaway entities, and identify which causal channel—military defeat, diplomatic recognition, or institutional lock-in—most durably constrained Tbilisi's subsequent options.

2. **Perspective reconstruction (Russian).** Steel-man the Russian claim that the war was a defensive response to Georgian aggression against South Ossetia, and identify what this perspective occludes about the pre-war militarization of the conflict zone and the passportization of South Ossetian residents.
3. **Perspective reconstruction (Western).** Reconstruct the Western self-critique that NATO's Bucharest summit promise of eventual membership (April 2008) created a commitment gap that encouraged Georgian risk-taking without delivering security guarantees, and state the scope condition under which this explanation holds.
4. **African perspective application.** Using the sovereignty-plus-frozen-conflicts lens, analyze how Georgia's experience resembles or diverges from African cases of externally guaranteed partition, with attention to the politics of recognition and external patronage.
5. **Prediction and falsifiers.** Given the 2008 outcome, predict the most likely trajectory of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations over the following decade, and specify at least two pieces of evidence that would falsify your prediction.
6. **Adjudication.** Weigh the competing explanations—Russian revisionism, Western overreach, and Georgian agency—and state which best fits the evidence, with explicit scope conditions and a note on what each explanation occludes.

Model Answer:

The August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia constitutes a critical juncture in the post-Soviet Eurasian order, and its consequences for Georgian foreign policy illustrate how military defeat can be converted into diplomatic realignment under specific scope conditions. The mechanism operates through three sequential channels. First, military defeat: Georgian forces, having initiated operations against Tskhinvali on 7-8 August, were rapidly pushed back by Russian intervention, resulting in the loss of effective control over both breakaway regions within days. Second, diplomatic recognition: Russia's subsequent recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states internationalized the partition, converting a de facto frozen conflict into a legally contested one and foreclosing Georgian territorial recovery through negotiation alone. Third, institutional lock-in: the EU-brokered ceasefire of 12 August and the deployment of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) created a stabilization framework that, while preventing renewed large-scale war, also froze the territorial status quo in Russia's favor and established a new baseline for all subsequent diplomacy.

The Russian perspective frames the war as a defensive humanitarian intervention to protect South Ossetian civilians and Russian peacekeepers from Georgian aggression. This narrative draws on the immediate trigger—Georgian artillery fire on Tskhinvali—and positions Moscow as responding to a provocation rather than initiating a war of choice. What this perspective occludes, as de Waal's analysis of the Caucasus emphasizes, is the longer-term militarization of the conflict zone, the distribution of Russian passports to South Ossetian residents that created a pretext for intervention, and the strategic interest in preventing Georgian NATO accession. The perspective is internally coherent but incomplete: it treats the immediate trigger as the cause while backgrounding the structural conditions that made escalation likely.

The Western perspective, particularly in its self-critical variant, acknowledges that the NATO Bucharest summit promise of eventual membership (April 2008) created a dangerous commitment gap. Georgia received rhetorical assurance of future accession without Article 5 protection, potentially emboldening Tbilisi to attempt a fait accompli in South Ossetia while leaving it exposed to Russian retaliation. This self-critique does

not absolve Russia of aggression but identifies Western policy incoherence as a permissive condition. The scope condition for this explanation is that it applies most strongly to the 2008 case, where the temporal proximity of the Bucharest promise and the August war is striking; it applies less well to cases where no such commitment gap existed.

The African perspective, reconstructed from within rather than fitted to Western theory, illuminates the sovereignty paradox at the heart of Georgia's experience. Georgia's territorial integrity was violated by an external power invoking protection of co-ethnics, a pattern familiar in African contexts where external patronage sustains de facto states and where the international recognition regime privileges certain claims over others. The frozen conflict framework—unresolved disputes that structure regional order—operates similarly across both regions, though the African vantage point emphasizes how the politics of recognition, rather than merely the fact of partition, determines which entities survive. Mamdani's analysis of the colonial legacy of indirect rule and the production of sub-national identities offers a comparative lens: external powers often manufacture or amplify such identities to justify intervention, and the resulting entities persist not because of popular legitimacy but because of patronage.

For Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, the war produced a paradoxical outcome that reshaped its foreign policy for the following decade. In the short term, it accelerated Georgia's Western alignment: the EU Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) followed in 2014, and NATO-Georgia cooperation deepened through the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package and the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre. Yet the territorial loss also made full NATO membership practically impossible, since Article 5 cannot extend to contested territory without risking direct confrontation with Russia. The trajectory thus shifted from accession to integration-without-membership—a pattern that persisted through 2024, when Georgia's EU candidacy was granted but membership remained distant.

Falsifiers of this prediction would include: (a) a Russian withdrawal from the breakaway regions and restoration of Georgian territorial control, which would reopen the accession path; (b) NATO extending Article 5 guarantees to pre-2008 Georgian territory while explicitly excluding the breakaway regions, a legally and politically fraught option; or (c) Georgia abandoning Euro-Atlantic aspirations in favor of neutrality or Russian alignment, which would indicate that the integration strategy had failed. None of these materialized through 2024, supporting the integration-without-membership thesis, though the 2024 Georgian Dream government's rhetorical shift toward "peace" and criticism of Western "war parties" introduced new uncertainty.

Adjudicating among competing explanations, Russian revisionism best explains the military intervention and recognition decisions, but Western overreach and Georgian agency are necessary to explain the timing and escalation. The scope condition is that this explanation holds for the 2008 case specifically; it does not generalize to all post-Soviet conflicts, where local dynamics vary considerably. The African perspective adds the insight that the recognition regime itself is a political instrument, not a neutral arbiter, and that frozen conflicts persist because they serve the interests of external patrons rather than local populations.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Case description (150-200 words):

In September 2023, Azerbaijan launched a military operation in Nagorno-Karabakh that resulted in the dissolution of the self-declared Republic of Artsakh and the exodus of over 100,000 ethnic Armenians to Armenia. The operation followed Azerbaijan's 2020 victory in the Second Karabakh War and the deployment of Russian peacekeepers under the November 2020 ceasefire agreement. By 2023, Russian peacekeepers were

unable or unwilling to prevent the Azerbaijani advance, and Armenia's government, having lost faith in Russian security guarantees, pivoted toward Western partners while remaining formally in the CSTO. The case raises questions about the durability of Russian-brokered ceasefires, the role of energy politics in shaping great-power responses, the humanitarian consequences of military solutions to frozen conflicts, and whether any externally backed peace process can deliver sustainable outcomes. Students should analyze this case using the four levels of analysis and all five perspectives.

Required memo headings (respond to each as a prompt):

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal channel—military, diplomatic, institutional, or economic—through which the September 2023 operation reconfigured the South Caucasus order, and specify the scope conditions under which that channel operates.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Steel-man all five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on the operation and its aftermath, stating for each what it contributes and what it occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one comparable case of a frozen conflict resolved by military force backed by an external patron, and state the limits of the analogy.
- **Falsifiers:** Specify at least two pieces of evidence that would disconfirm your central explanatory claim.

Self-check: Did you distinguish description (what happened) from explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen next), and prescription (what should be done)?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which of the following best explains why frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space persist as strategic instruments rather than being resolved through negotiation?

A. The United Nations lacks the enforcement capacity to impose settlements on unwilling parties.

B. External patrons benefit from the status quo and local elites derive legitimacy and resources from the unresolved dispute.

C. Ethnic hatreds in the region are primordial and therefore intractable.

D. EU enlargement has proceeded too rapidly, destabilizing the regional balance.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **Option A** is wrong because it mistakes an institutional weakness for a causal mechanism; the UN's limited enforcement is a background condition, not an explanation for why specific actors prefer frozen conflicts to resolution. It also ignores that some frozen conflicts persist precisely because powerful states—not the UN—prefer them.
- **Option C** is wrong because it relies on a primordialist account of ethnicity that the lesson's theoretical framework explicitly rejects; ethnic identities in these conflicts are politically constructed and instrumentalized by elites and external patrons, not ancient and immutable.
- **Option D** is wrong because it reverses the causal arrow and overstates EU agency; enlargement fatigue and hesitation, not excessive speed, characterize the post-2008 period, and the persistence of frozen

conflicts predates and outlasts specific EU policy phases.

- **Option B** is correct because it identifies the mechanism—external patron interest plus local elite legitimation—that the lesson's five key ideas and the African perspective in particular emphasize; frozen conflicts persist when they serve the strategic interests of powerful states and the political survival of local actors.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Frozen conflict zones in wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus (indicative, 2024)

Zone	De facto authority	External patron / guarantor	Core unresolved issue	Strategic / energy relevance
Transnistria (Moldova)	Transnistrian Moldovan Republic	Russia: Operational Group of Russian Forces; political backing	Sovereignty, demilitarization, status of Russian speakers, withdrawal of forces	Dniester corridor; Moldova's territorial integrity; EU border management; Cobasna ammunition depot
Abkhazia (Georgia)	Republic of Abkhazia	Russia: military bases, diplomatic recognition, economic subsidies	Status, return of displaced Georgians, security guarantees, property rights	Black Sea coastline; north–south transit; Russian forward position
South Ossetia (Georgia)	Republic of South Ossetia	Russia: military bases, diplomatic recognition	Status, borders, security guarantees, humanitarian access	Roki Tunnel; North–South corridor; leverage over Tbilisi
Nagorno-Karabakh / Artsakh (Azerbaijan–Armenia)	Azerbaijani control after 2023; formerly Armenian-majority de facto entity	Russia: peacekeeping force 2020–2024; Turkey: military and diplomatic support to Azerbaijan	Rights and security of Armenian population, border delimitation, connectivity, accountability for displacement	Proximity to Southern Gas Corridor; Caspian–Turkey–Europe energy route; regional balance

Table 2 — Russian military presence by country (indicative, 2024)

Country	Russian military presence	Political / legal status	Function in regional order
Belarus	Rotational Russian forces; nuclear-sharing announced in 2023	Union State integration; hosting under bilateral arrangements	Forward position, sanctions-evasion space, pressure on NATO's eastern flank, migration leverage
Armenia	Russian base at Gyumri; peacekeepers withdrew from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2024	CSTO member; contested domestic debate over security dependence	Deterrence against Azerbaijan/Turkey; leverage over Yerevan's foreign-policy choices
Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia)	Bases in Sokhumi and Tskhinvali	Occupied territories in Georgian and Western legal framing; recognized by Russia	Buffer, leverage over Tbilisi, demonstration effect for other post-Soviet states
Moldova (Transnistria)	Operational Group of Russian Forces, roughly 1,500 personnel	No consent of Chisinau; unresolved since 1992	Blocks reintegration; maintains ammunition stockpile; complicates EU accession
Ukraine (occupied territories)	Large-scale occupation forces	Illegal annexation claims rejected by most states	War of attrition; Black Sea access; restructuring of European security

Table 3 — EU accession status and energy exposure (indicative, 2024)

Country	EU status	Energy transit / vulnerability	Interpretive note
Ukraine	Candidate (2022)	Major transit route for Russian gas to the EU, now diminished by war; wartime infrastructure damage	Security conditionality dominates accession politics
Moldova	Candidate (2022)	High dependence on imported electricity and gas; vulnerability linked to Transnistria and to supply routes	Reform conditionality plus territorial conditionality
Georgia	Candidate (2023, with conditions)	Transit state for Caspian oil and gas via BTC and South Caucasus Pipeline	Democratic-backsliding concerns complicate accession
Armenia	CEPA (2018); no accession path	Limited transit role; dependence on Russian energy and remittances	Balancing Russia, Turkey, and EU

Country	EU status	Energy transit / vulnerability	Interpretive note
Azerbaijan	No accession path; strategic energy partner	Major oil and gas exporter to the EU through Southern Gas Corridor	Authoritarian stability traded for energy security
Serbia	Negotiating	Diversification efforts; continued Russian gas dependence	Kosovo conditionality and geopolitical hedging
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Candidate (2022)	Fragmented energy governance under Dayton	Institutional paralysis slows reform

Analysis questions

1. **Trend.** What trend do the tables suggest about the relationship between Russian military presence and EU accession status?
   Answer guide: The tables show a clustering pattern rather than a simple inverse relationship. States with Russian military presence on their territory—Moldova and Georgia—are EU candidates but face territorial and reform conditionality. States with no Russian military presence but with unresolved disputes or authoritarian governance—Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina—also face accession delays. Energy exporters such as Azerbaijan have no accession path but possess strategic leverage. The trend is therefore not "Russian presence blocks EU membership automatically"; rather, Russian presence converts territorial disputes into accession conditionality, while EU enlargement fatigue and domestic reform gaps create additional veto points.

2. **Level of analysis.** Which level of analysis best explains why frozen conflicts persist, and which level is most often neglected?
   Answer guide: The state level explains institutional incentives: governments use unresolved disputes to mobilize nationalism, delay reform, or justify security spending. The systemic level explains great-power competition: Russia's "near abroad" doctrine, NATO/EU enlargement, and Turkey's regional ambitions. The transnational level explains energy markets, diaspora politics, and cross-border patronage. The individual level—leaders such as Lukashenko, Putin, Aliyev, Pashinyan, and Sandu—is often neglected but matters because frozen conflicts are sustained by elite bargains, not only by structural forces. A full explanation requires all four levels; reducing the problem to "Russian imperialism" or "local nationalism" alone is analytically insufficient.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each perspective reads the data.
   Answer guide:

   - **African (primary):** The tables reveal a sovereignty gap: de facto authorities exist where international recognition is withheld, echoing colonial-era distinctions between legal sovereignty and effective control. The African vantage point asks who gets to decide which authority is legitimate and why some self-determination claims are recognized while others are frozen.

   - **Chinese:** The data show infrastructure and connectivity stakes; Beijing reads frozen conflicts

as risks to BRI corridors and as arguments for non-interference, because external intervention can destabilize trade routes.

- **Russian:** The tables display a security perimeter: Russian bases and peacekeepers are framed as stabilizing facts on the ground and as protection of Russian speakers or compatriots.

- **Western:** The data show enlargement conditionality and energy diversification; frozen conflicts are treated as obstacles to Euro-Atlantic integration and as vulnerabilities created by incomplete post-Cold War settlement.

- **UN:** The tables show gaps between Charter principles and practice: territorial integrity, self-determination, and peaceful settlement are all invoked, but enforcement depends on Security Council politics and consent-based peacekeeping.

4. **Interpretation.** Do the data support the claim that "frozen conflicts are static"?
   Answer guide: No. The tables are snapshots, but the underlying processes are dynamic. Nagorno-Karabakh moved from frozen conflict to war in 2020 and to Azerbaijani reintegration in 2023. Belarus's migration weaponization in 2021 turned a domestic authoritarian crisis into a transnational border crisis. Moldova's energy vulnerability shifted after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The term "frozen" is therefore a diplomatic convenience: it describes the absence of a final settlement, not the absence of change. The data show that these conflicts are managed, militarized, and periodically reactivated.

5. **Limitation.** What are the most important limitations of these tables?
   Answer guide: The tables compress contested political realities into administrative categories. Recognition status is disputed; troop numbers are opaque and politically manipulated; EU accession status changes with Council decisions; energy data fluctuate with war, sanctions, and infrastructure repair. The tables also risk reifying "frozen conflict" as a natural category rather than a policy choice. They do not capture informal power, patronage networks, or the lived experience of displacement. Finally, they are Western-centric in their sourcing if drawn from EU and NATO documents, so they may understate African, Chinese, or Russian interpretive frameworks.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — Hand-drawn map of wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus **What to draw:** Draw a simplified outline map from the Baltic Sea to the Caspian Sea. Include the Black Sea as a large shaded body of water. Mark capitals with small circles: Minsk, Chisinau, Tbilisi, Yerevan, Baku, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Pristina. Draw country borders lightly. Shade four frozen-conflict zones with diagonal hatching: Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Draw Russian military bases as small triangles inside or beside the hatched zones. Draw the EU's eastern border as a thick dark line. Draw major energy routes as dashed lines: BTC pipeline, South Caucasus Pipeline, and a diminished Druzhba line. Add a legend in the corner.

How to label it: Label each hatched zone "de facto authority / disputed status." Label Russian triangles "Russian base / peacekeeping." Label the thick line "EU border / enlargement frontier." Label dashed lines

"energy transit." Add small arrows showing direction of gas or oil flow.

Perspective overlay to annotate: In the margin, write four short labels: "African lens: whose sovereignty is recognized?"; "Chinese lens: which corridors are at risk?"; "Russian lens: where is the security perimeter?"; "Western lens: where is the integration frontier?" This keeps the map from appearing as a neutral geographic fact and shows that the same territory is read through different normative frameworks.

Visual 2 — Causal chain: frozen conflict as strategic instrument **What to draw:** Draw five boxes in a horizontal chain, connected by arrows: (1) Unresolved sovereignty claim; (2) External patron guarantees; (3) Military asymmetry; (4) Negotiation deadlock; (5) Regional order structured by ambiguity. Above the chain, draw a smaller box labeled "Energy vulnerability" with arrows pointing into boxes 2 and 5. Below the chain, draw a smaller box labeled "Displacement and non-recognition" with arrows pointing into boxes 1 and 4. Use solid arrows for direct causation and dashed arrows for feedback loops.

How to label it: Label box 1 "No final settlement"; box 2 "Russia / Turkey / EU as guarantors"; box 3 "Local forces + external bases"; box 4 "Talks without recognition"; box 5 "Managed instability." Label the top box "Pipelines, gas, electricity"; label the bottom box "Refugees, IDPs, contested citizenship."

Perspective overlay to annotate: Place perspective tags beside the boxes: "Russian: near abroad" beside box 2; "Western: enlargement conditionality" beside box 4; "UN: Charter principles vs consent" beside box 5; "African: sovereignty without recognition" beside box 1; "Chinese: corridor security" beside the energy box. This visualizes how the same mechanism is interpreted differently by each tradition.

Visual 3 — Matrix of EU integration depth and Russian military presence **What to draw:** Draw a two-axis scatterplot. X-axis: "EU integration depth" with categories none, association, candidate, negotiating. Y-axis: "Russian military presence" with categories none, limited/rotational, occupation/bases. Plot countries as labeled dots: Azerbaijan (none / none), Armenia (association / limited), Georgia (candidate / occupation), Moldova (candidate / limited-occupation), Ukraine (candidate / occupation), Serbia (negotiating / none), Bosnia and Herzegovina (candidate / none). Add a shaded diagonal band labeled "High tension zone." Add a separate small cluster labeled "Energy exporters."

How to label it: Label axes clearly. Label each dot with the country name. Add a legend: dot = state; shaded band = high tension; dashed circle = energy exporters. Add a note: "Positions are indicative and change with Council decisions."

Perspective overlay to annotate: Annotate the matrix with three perspective notes: "Western: accession is the anchor"; "Russian: presence is the anchor"; "African: the matrix itself privileges Euro-Atlantic categories and may obscure non-Western security orders." This prevents the visual from being read as an objective map of progress.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is a "frozen conflict"?	A conflict that lacks a final peace settlement but is managed through ceasefires, de facto authorities, and external guarantors. The term is diplomatic shorthand, not a description of stasis. Source log: de Waal (2018); Cornell (2011).
Why is Transnistria "frozen"?	Russian-backed de facto authority since 1992; Operational Group remains; Moldova cannot reintegrate territory without security guarantees and demilitarization. Source log: EU Eastern Partnership documentation.
What did the 2020 Karabakh war change?	Azerbaijan regained territory; Russia deployed peacekeepers; Turkey gained influence; Armenia's security dependence was exposed. Source log: de Waal (2022).
How does Belarus weaponize migration?	Lukashenko's regime used border pressure against Poland and the EU after the 2020 protests and Russian support, turning domestic authoritarian survival into transnational leverage. Source log: general IR literature on migration weaponization.
What is the EU Eastern Partnership?	EU framework for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine; combines association, reform conditionality, and differentiation. Source log: EU Eastern Partnership documentation.
Why is Moldova energy-vulnerable?	Dependence on imported electricity and gas, exposure to Transnistria, and supply-route politics; vulnerability increased after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Source log: EU Eastern Partnership documentation.
What is Bosnia's Dayton problem?	The 1995 settlement ended war but created a fragmented state; ethnic veto points and parallel structures block reform and EU accession. Source log: general IR literature on post-conflict institutional design.
What is the Kosovo–Serbia deadlock?	Kosovo declared independence in 2008; Serbia does not recognize it; EU-facilitated dialogue has not produced mutual recognition; five EU states do not recognize Kosovo. Source log: EU Eastern Partnership documentation; general IR literature.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is Russia's "near abroad" doctrine?	A post-Soviet security framing that treats former Soviet space as a privileged sphere of influence; used to justify bases, peacekeeping, and intervention. Source log: King (2008); de Waal (2018).
What does the African perspective add?	It foregrounds the gap between legal sovereignty and effective control, questions selective recognition, and treats frozen conflicts as continuations of imperial ordering rather than merely regional disputes. Source log: Grovogui; Mbembe; Mamdani (general arguments).
What does the Chinese perspective add?	It emphasizes non-interference, corridor security, and BRI connectivity; it reads instability as a threat to trade routes rather than as a sovereignty crisis. Source log: general IR literature on Chinese foreign policy.
What does the UN perspective add?	It invokes Charter principles—territorial integrity, self-determination, peaceful settlement—but is constrained by Security Council politics and consent-based peacekeeping. Source log: UN Charter; general IR literature.

Summary (3–5 sentences): Wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus are structured by unresolved conflicts that are "frozen" in name but dynamic in practice. Russian military presence, EU accession conditionality, and energy transit routes convert local disputes into regional order. Each of the five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—identifies a different mechanism and a different blind spot. The data show correlation between unresolved status and external patronage, but they do not prove that any single actor controls outcomes. A rigorous analysis must combine state, systemic, transnational, and individual levels of explanation.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.**
   Some wars end without a real peace. One side keeps the land, the other keeps the claim, and a powerful neighbor sends troops to "keep order." The result is not peace but a managed pause. Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan all show versions of this: a dispute stays open because someone benefits from it staying open. Energy pipelines and EU membership talks make the pause more valuable, not less.

2. **Mark gaps.**
   My first explanation is too Russia-centered. It underplays Armenian agency, Azerbaijani military modernization, Turkish influence, and EU conditionality. It also treats "frozen" as if nothing changes,

which the 2020 and 2023 Karabakh events contradict. I need to separate description (what exists), explanation (why it persists), prediction (what could reactivate it), and prescription (what should be done).

3. **Reread verification.**
   After rereading the data tables and perspective notes, the corrected claim is: frozen conflicts persist where three conditions overlap—no mutually recognized sovereignty, an external patron with military capacity, and an economic or strategic asset that makes ambiguity profitable. This is a scope condition, not a universal law. It does not explain every case equally well, and it may overstate material incentives while understating identity and trauma.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.**
   A frozen conflict is like a divorce in which one partner keeps the house, the other keeps the legal claim, and a relative moves in as "mediator" but actually protects the occupant. The analogy helps show why formal agreements fail when power and property are misaligned. Its limit is severe: states are not persons, violence is institutionalized, and "mediators" may be parties to the dispute. The analogy should not be used to predict behavior.

5. **Rewrite.**
   Frozen conflicts in wider Eastern Europe and the Caucasus are unresolved sovereignty disputes sustained by external patronage, military asymmetry, and strategic economic value. They are not static; they are periodically reactivated by war, migration pressure, or energy politics. Russian, Western, Chinese, UN, and African perspectives each capture part of the mechanism but none captures all of it. The best analysis treats "frozen" as a political label for managed ambiguity, not as an empirical description of peace.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L40	Definition	What is a “frozen conflict” in the post-Soviet space?	A protracted territorial dispute in which active hostilities have ceased but no political settlement has been reached, leaving de facto entities, ceasefire lines, and often Russian peacekeepers in place; examples include Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh before 2020.	African scholars read frozen conflicts through colonial borders and sovereignty; Chinese view them as internal affairs; Russian as near-abroad management; Western as Euro-Atlantic security gaps; UN as Charter violations requiring mediation.
L40	Mechanism	How did Belarus weaponize migration in 2021?	Minsk facilitated the movement of Middle Eastern and African migrants to the EU border (Poland/Lithuania) as retaliation for sanctions, using human flows as coercive leverage; the EU responded with sanctions and border fortification.	African perspective highlights the racialized treatment of migrants; Western frames it as hybrid warfare; Russian as legitimate statecraft; UN as a human-rights concern; Chinese as a sovereignty issue.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L40	Application	Why is Moldova's energy vulnerability tied to Transnistria?	Moldova historically depended on Russian gas transiting through Ukraine and on electricity from the Cuciurgan plant in Transnistria; Gazprom debt disputes and the 2022 cutoffs exposed this structural dependence, accelerating EU integration efforts.	Western/EU frames this as energy security; Russian as market leverage; African as resource dependency echoing post-colonial patterns; Chinese as infrastructure geopolitics; UN as develop-ment/humanitarian.
L40	Comparison	How do Western and Russian positions on Kosovo and Karabakh differ?	Western states recognized Kosovo's independence (2008) citing remedial secession; Russia opposed it but later recognized Abkhazia/South Ossetia; Russia backed Azerbaijan's territorial integrity in Karabakh until 2020, then brokered ceasefire; Western states largely supported Azerbaijan's territorial integrity post-2020.	African states often resist secession precedents (AU principle); Chinese supports territorial integrity; UN Charter ambiguity persists.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L40	Source	What is Cornell's (2011) core argument about the South Caucasus?	Svante Cornell argues the South Caucasus is a region of overlapping security complexes where unresolved conflicts and great-power competition (Russia, Turkey, Iran, US/EU) create persistent instability, and that Western engagement has been inconsistent.	Western academic framing; African scholars might critique the Eurocentric security lens; Russian sees sphere of influence.
L40	Debate	What is "enlargement fatigue" and how does it affect the Balkans?	After the 2004/2007 enlargements, EU member states grew skeptical of further expansion; this slowed accession for Western Balkan states (Serbia, Bosnia, North Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, Kosovo), creating reform stagnation and vulnerability to Russian/Chinese influence.	Western self-critique; Balkan states feel abandoned; Russian exploits; Chinese offers alternative via BRI; African parallels with AU integration struggles.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L40	Mechanism	What role did Russian peacekeepers play after the 2020 Karabakh war?	Under the November 2020 trilateral ceasefire, roughly 2,000 Russian peacekeepers deployed along the Lachin corridor and contact line for five years; they became the guarantor of the new status quo but their authority was contested and later undermined by Azerbaijan's 2023 offensive.	Russian frames as stabilizer; Western as occupation; Armenian as betrayal; Azerbaijani as temporary; UN as unauthorized force.
L40	Reconstruction	How do African scholars like Grovogui or Mamdani frame frozen conflicts?	They situate frozen conflicts within the colonial inheritance of arbitrary borders and the post-Cold War reconfiguration of sovereignty; emphasize that "frozen" is a misnomer masking ongoing violence, economic extraction, and humanitarian harm; and critique great-power mediation that privileges stability over justice.	Primary African lens; challenges Western conflict-resolution paradigms.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L40	Occlusion	What does China's non-interference stance occlude in the Caucasus?	It occludes accountability for human rights abuses, the agency of smaller states seeking security guarantees, and the role of external arms transfers in altering military balances; it prioritizes BRI corridor stability over conflict resolution.	Chinese frames as sovereignty respect; others see abdication.
L40	Adjudication	How do Western and Russian explanations of the 2008 Georgia war differ?	Western accounts emphasize Russian provocation and disproportionate response; Russian accounts frame Georgian aggression against South Ossetia and NATO expansion as root cause; evidence supports both Georgian initiation of shelling and Russian pre-positioning, requiring multi-causal adjudication.	Adjudication requires separating immediate trigger from structural causes.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L40	Visual	What would a map of post-Soviet frozen conflicts show?	Shaded de facto entities (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh pre-2020/2023) with ceasefire lines, Russian military bases, and EU/NATO borders; reveals the spatial logic of Russian forward presence and Western institutional frontiers.	Visual literacy; African cartographic critique of colonial borders.
L40	Debate	Why did Armenia's CSTO membership fail to protect it in 2020/2022?	CSTO's collective defense clause was not invoked during Azerbaijan's 2020 offensive or 2022 incursions because the alliance is Russia-dominated and Armenia's conflicts were framed as border disputes; this exposed the hollowness of Russian security guarantees and pushed Armenia toward Western diversification.	Russian sphere-of-influence limits; Western opportunity; Armenian agency.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L40	Mechanism	What is the EU Eastern Partnership and its limitation?	Launched in 2009, it offers association agreements, DCFTAs, and visa liberalization to six post-Soviet states; its limitation is that it demands reforms without offering membership timelines, creating "integration without accession" and leaving states exposed to Russian pressure.	Western self-critique; Russian sees encirclement; African parallels with EU-Africa partnerships.
L40	Source	What does de Waal (2018, 2022) contribute to understanding Caucasus conflicts?	Thomas de Waal provides granular, field-based analysis of Nagorno-Karabakh and the South Caucasus, emphasizing local agency, the failure of international mediation (OSCE Minsk Group), and the 2020 war's transformation of the regional order.	Western scholarship with local grounding; African scholars may note absence of post-colonial framing.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100)

Skill / Concept	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Gap to close
Defining "frozen conflict" and listing post-Soviet cases			

Skill / Concept	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Gap to close
Explaining Belarus migration weaponization as coercion			
Tracing Moldova's energy dependence to Transnistria			
Comparing Kosovo and Karabakh recognition politics			
Reconstructing the 2008 Georgia war from five perspectives			
Explaining CSTO non-invocation in 2020/2022			
Mapping EU Eastern Partnership limits			
Applying African sovereignty lens to frozen conflicts			
Identifying what each perspective occludes			
Distinguishing description, explanation, prediction, prescription			

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to steel-man from within, and what specific assumption of yours blocked it?
2. Where did you conflate a description of a ceasefire line with an explanation of why the conflict persists?
3. Which falsifier in your memo would most seriously challenge your preferred causal claim, and did you treat it fairly?

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Frozen conflicts are actually frozen."	They are protracted, low-intensity contests with periodic flare-ups, economic extraction, and humanitarian harm; "frozen" is a diplomatic convenience.	de Waal (2018, 2022); Grovogui/Mamdani framing of ongoing violence.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Russian peacekeepers are neutral stabilizers."	They are instruments of Russian influence, deployed without UN mandate, and their presence locks in Russian leverage over the host state.	2020 trilateral ceasefire; subsequent Azerbaijan 2023 offensive.
"EU enlargement is automatic once reforms are met."	Enlargement fatigue and member-state veto politics mean reforms are necessary but not sufficient; Western Balkans remain stalled.	EU Eastern Partnership documentation; Balkan accession timelines.
"CSTO guarantees Armenian security."	CSTO's collective defense was not invoked in 2020 or 2022; the alliance is Russia-dominated and treats Armenia's conflicts as bilateral border disputes.	Armenian government statements; CSTO summit records.
"China's non-interference is neutral."	It systematically favors territorial integrity and BRI stability, occluding human rights and smaller-state agency.	Chinese foreign ministry statements on Caucasus; BRI corridor priorities.
"The 2008 Georgia war was unprovoked Russian aggression."	Evidence supports Georgian shelling of Tskhinvali as immediate trigger alongside Russian pre-positioning and NATO-expansion context; multi-causal.	EU fact-finding mission (Tagliavini) findings; King (2008).

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Frozen conflict; de facto state; ceasefire line; migration weaponization; energy vulnerability; enlargement fatigue	Coercive leverage via human flows; gas transit dependence; peacekeeping as influence; reform-without-accession; territorial integrity vs. remedial secession	Cornell (2011) overlapping security complexes; de Waal (2018, 2022) local agency; King (2008) Georgia war; Grovogui/Mamdani sovereignty critique; EU Eastern Partnership docs	Belarus 2021 border crisis; Moldova/Transnistria energy; Bosnia/Kosovo; 2020 & 2023 Karabakh; 2008 Georgia war; CSTO non-invocation	Whether frozen conflicts are stabilizing or destabilizing; whether EU enlargement fatigue is reversible; whether Russian peacekeeping is legitimate	A CSTO invocation in a future Armenia-Azerbaijan clash; EU granting accession dates to Balkans; China mediating a Caucasus settlement; Belarus ending migration facilitation	L35-39 Ukraine/European security; L41 West Asia; L49 Global South; L50 non-state actors

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 20 min):** Re-read flashcards 1-7; recite the five perspectives' core stances on frozen conflicts from memory; check against Section 2.7.
- **R2 (Day 3, 30 min):** Redraw the frozen-conflict map from memory (visual card); annotate Russian bases and EU borders; compare with your original.
- **R3 (Day 7, 45 min):** Reconstruct the 2008 Georgia war worked example using all four levels of analysis; write a 200-word adjudication paragraph.
- **R4 (Day 14, 60 min):** Complete the independent memo (Section 2.10) under timed conditions; score against the self-check line; log errors.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 min):** Full synthesis: explain how the five key ideas interact to structure regional order in Eastern Europe/Caucasus; present to a peer or record a 5-minute audio.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define "frozen conflict" and list five post-Soviet cases.
☐ I can explain Belarus's 2021 migration weaponization as coercive leverage.
☐ I can trace Moldova's energy vulnerability to Transnistria and Russian gas.
☐ I can compare Western and Russian positions on Kosovo and Karabakh.
☐ I can reconstruct the 2008 Georgia war from all five perspectives.
☐ I can explain why CSTO did not protect Armenia in 2020/2022.
☐ I can state the limits of the EU Eastern Partnership.
☐ I can apply the African sovereignty lens to frozen conflicts.
☐ I can identify what each of the five perspectives occludes.

☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in a memo.
☐ I can draw and label a frozen-conflict map.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit honestly.
☐ I have logged at least three errors in the error-log.
☐ I have written the independent memo under timed conditions.
☐ I have scheduled R1-R5 in my calendar.
☐ I can name Cornell, de Waal, and King and their core claims.
☐ I can explain enlargement fatigue and its Balkan effects.
☐ I can state the strongest counterargument to my preferred causal claim.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- **Frozen conflicts and sovereignty:** Cornell (2011); de Waal (2018, 2022); King (2008).
- **Belarus and migration weaponization:** EU Eastern Partnership documentation; reports on the 2021 border crisis.
- **Moldova and energy:** EU-Moldova Association Agreement texts; Gazprom-Moldovagaz disputes.
- **Balkans and enlargement:** EU Commission enlargement reports; Western Balkans summit conclusions.
- **South Caucasus:** OSCE Minsk Group records; 2020 trilateral ceasefire text.
- **African perspectives:** Grovogui on sovereignty; Mamdani on colonial borders; Fanon on violence and liberation.
- **Chinese perspectives:** BRI corridor documentation; Chinese foreign ministry statements on Caucasus.
- **Russian perspectives:** "near abroad" doctrine texts; CSTO charter and summit communiqués.
- **UN perspectives:** UN Charter Chapter VI/VII; UN mediation support unit materials.
- **Comparative:** EU fact-finding mission (Tagliavini) report on Georgia 2008.

End of Lesson 40. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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42. The West Asian State System: Ottoman Legacy, Sykes-Picot, Oil, and Rentierism

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 41: The West Asian State System: Ottoman Legacy, Sykes-Picot, Oil, and Rentierism
Module	Module 7: West Asia and Iranian Geopolitics
Prerequisites	L9 (sovereignty), L10 (imperialism), L11 (mandate system)
Interleaved links	Forward to L42 (Iran), L43 (sectarian), L44 (proxy warfare), L46 (hydrocarbons)
Reading load	7-9 hours

Field	Value
Content channels	Text, tables, visuals, flashcards, worked example, problem pair, data lab
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple: why does the state system of West Asia (the Middle East and North Africa, understood here as the post-Ottoman Arab and Iranian core) exhibit such persistent fragility, and why do its borders, regimes, and political economies remain objects of contestation more than a century after their creation? The answer is not that the region is culturally or religiously predisposed to disorder; that explanation is both empirically false and analytically lazy. The answer is that the modern West Asian state system was constructed, not evolved. It was assembled in a compressed period between 1916 and the early 1930s by imperial powers acting on strategic calculations that had little to do with the societies they were partitioning, and it was subsequently locked in place by hydrocarbon rents that insulated rulers from their populations. Understanding the region therefore requires understanding the architecture: the Ottoman inheritance that preceded it, the European mandate system that replaced it, the oil economy that sustained it, and the ideological challenges—pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, and most recently the 2011 uprisings—that have repeatedly tested its legitimacy. This lesson teaches you to reconstruct that architecture as a causal system rather than as a catalogue of crises.

The Ottoman Empire is the indispensable starting point because it supplied both the institutional raw material and the geopolitical vacuum that made the modern system possible. For four centuries the Ottomans governed the Arab provinces through a flexible arrangement of provincial administration, religious millets, and local notables, never fully homogenizing the territories they controlled. When the empire collapsed in 1918, it left behind not a set of nation-states waiting to be born but a patchwork of administrative units, tribal confederations, sectarian communities, and commercial networks. The European powers—Britain and France above all—did not discover pre-existing nations; they invented them, or at least froze certain administrative boundaries into international borders. Fromkin's account of the Paris settlement emphasizes that the diplomats of 1919-1922 were improvising, often ignorant of local conditions, and driven by imperial rivalry as much as by any principle of self-determination. Hourani's longer history reminds us that Arab political thought before and during this period was not passive: it contained its own visions of unity, reform, and constitutionalism that were overridden or co-opted. The lesson's first move is therefore to hold both of these truths simultaneously—the region was shaped by external imposition, and it was also the site of indigenous political agency.

The second move is to interrogate the "artificiality thesis," the claim that Middle Eastern borders are uniquely arbitrary and therefore uniquely unstable. This thesis has become a cliché in policy discourse, invoked to explain everything from the Iraq war to the Syrian civil war. Yet it is theoretically underspecified. All borders are constructed; the question is not whether they are natural but whether the states they enclose possess the capacity and legitimacy to govern. Anderson's work on state and social transformation in North Africa shows that some post-colonial states built durable institutions despite arbitrary origins, while others did not. The African parallel is instructive here: the borders drawn at Berlin in 1884-1885 were equally arbitrary, yet the

African state system has proven remarkably resilient, not because the borders were legitimate but because the norm of territorial integrity became entrenched and because post-colonial elites invested in state institutions. The Middle Eastern case differs not in the arbitrariness of its borders but in the specific political economy of oil, which allowed rulers to substitute rent for representation and to build states that were strong in coercion but weak in social contract. This is the rentierism argument, and it is the lesson's third key idea.

Rentierism, as developed in the literature on Gulf states, posits that when a state derives a large share of its revenue from external rents—primarily hydrocarbon exports—rather than from domestic taxation, the fiscal contract between ruler and ruled is weakened. Citizens become clients rather than taxpayers; parliaments become consultative rather than representative; and the state can afford to buy off dissent. The scope conditions matter: rentierism explains the durability of Gulf monarchies far better than it explains the collapse of republican regimes in Egypt, Syria, or Iraq, which were not rentier states in the same sense. Owen's analysis of state, power, and politics in the making of the modern Middle East traces how different regime types—monarchies, republics, one-party states—emerged from the same colonial moment but followed divergent paths depending on resource endowments, institutional inheritances, and geopolitical position. The lesson therefore refuses a single theory of the region and instead asks you to match mechanism to case.

The fourth key idea addresses the ideological contestation of the post-Ottoman order. Pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism were not merely romantic movements; they were competing state-building projects that challenged the legitimacy of the nation-state as the appropriate unit of political community. Nasserism, Ba'athism, and various Islamist movements offered alternative scales of solidarity—Arab nation, Islamic umma—that directly undermined the borders drawn by Sykes-Picot and the mandates. The nation-state eventually prevailed, but not because it was natural; it prevailed because it was backed by international recognition, by Cold War patronage, and by the institutional inertia of bureaucracies and armies. The fifth key idea brings the story to the present: the 2011 uprisings were a crisis of legitimacy of precisely these post-colonial states, triggered by the failure of the authoritarian bargain—economic growth without political inclusion, security without dignity. The uprisings did not overthrow the state system; they exposed its brittleness. Some regimes survived through repression and patronage (Egypt, Bahrain), others collapsed into civil war (Syria, Libya, Yemen), and the regional order was reconfigured by proxy interventions that the lesson's forward links to L44 (proxy warfare) will develop.

What you will be able to do after mastering this lesson is substantial. You will be able to reconstruct the causal chain from Ottoman collapse through mandate to contemporary fragility without collapsing into monocausal explanations. You will be able to evaluate the artificiality thesis on its merits rather than repeating it. You will be able to apply rentierism with appropriate scope conditions. You will be able to distinguish pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, and nationalism as competing projects rather than as interchangeable anti-Western sentiments. You will be able to analyze the 2011 uprisings as a systemic crisis rather than as a series of national accidents. And you will be able to hold five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—in productive tension, recognizing that each illuminates something the others occlude. The African perspective, developed most fully in Section 2.7, is primary not because the Middle East is Africa but because the African experience of externally imposed state construction offers the sharpest comparative mirror: it reveals what the West Asian case shares with other post-colonial regions and, crucially, what makes it distinctive.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer these from memory before reading further. They draw on Lessons 9, 10, and 11.

1. **Sovereignty (L9):** Distinguish internal sovereignty from external sovereignty, and explain why the mandate system (L11) created a hybrid status in which a territory was neither fully sovereign nor a colony.
2. **Imperialism (L10):** Contrast territorial imperialism with economic imperialism. Which form better describes British and French involvement in the Middle East between 1918 and 1945, and why?
3. **Mandate system (L11):** What was the legal basis of the mandate system under the League of Nations Covenant (Article 22), and how did it differ from annexation in principle if not always in practice?
4. **African borders (L10/L11):** The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 drew borders in Africa with minimal local consultation. Name one mechanism by which those borders nevertheless became durable, and consider whether the same mechanism operated in the Middle East.
5. **Indirect rule:** Define indirect rule and identify one Middle Eastern or African case where it was applied. What was its long-term effect on state capacity?
6. **Self-determination:** Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points (1918) proclaimed self-determination. Explain one way in which the Paris Peace Conference (1919) contradicted this principle in the Middle East.

1.2 Orientation Questions

1. If the Ottoman Empire had not collapsed in 1918, would the modern Middle Eastern state system exist in anything like its current form? What does this counterfactual reveal about the contingency of borders?
2. Is the "artificiality" of Middle Eastern borders a cause of conflict, or is it a post-hoc rationalization for failures of governance and political economy?
3. Can a state be durable without a fiscal contract between ruler and ruled? Evaluate the rentierism thesis using at least one Gulf and one non-Gulf case.
4. The 2011 uprisings are often framed as a "failure" of the Arab state. From an African perspective that has witnessed multiple waves of post-colonial state crisis, what would be a more analytically precise framing?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Term	Provisional Definition
Rentier state	A state that derives a substantial share of its revenue from external rents (especially hydrocarbon exports) rather than from domestic taxation, weakening the fiscal contract between ruler and ruled.
Mandate	A League of Nations trusteeship under Article 22 of the Covenant, by which a victorious power administered a former Ottoman or German territory under international supervision, nominally toward self-government.

Term	Provisional Definition
Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916)	A secret Anglo-French accord dividing Ottoman Arab provinces into spheres of influence; became shorthand for externally imposed Middle Eastern borders.
Pan-Arabism	A political ideology and movement advocating the unification of Arab peoples into a single nation-state or federation, transcending the borders established after World War I.
Pan-Islamism	A political ideology advocating solidarity or unity of the global Muslim community (umma), often challenging the legitimacy of the nation-state as the primary unit of political organization.
Artificiality thesis	The claim that Middle Eastern (and African) borders are arbitrary colonial constructs and that this arbitrariness explains regional instability; contested on both empirical and theoretical grounds.
Ottoman millet system	The Ottoman arrangement granting recognized religious communities (millets) autonomy in personal-status law and communal affairs, shaping the sectarian landscape inherited by successor states.
Capitulations	Extraterritorial privileges granted to foreign nationals in the Ottoman Empire, symbolizing imperial economic penetration and later abolished by Turkish nationalists.
Hydrocarbon rent	Revenue derived from the extraction and export of oil and gas, typically accruing to the state and shaping its fiscal structure, patronage capacity, and foreign relations.
Neo-patrimonialism	A mode of rule in which formal state institutions are fused with personal, clientelist networks, common in post-colonial states including many in West Asia and Africa.
State failure	The collapse or severe weakening of a state's monopoly on legitimate force, basic service provision, and territorial control; a contested concept with normative and analytical dimensions.
Sectarianism	The politicization of religious identity (Sunni, Shi'a, etc.) as a basis for political mobilization, resource distribution, and conflict; often instrumentalized by elites rather than primordial.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to: (1) explain the Ottoman imperial legacy as a system of layered sovereignty, provincial administration, and communal autonomy, and show how its collapse created the political vacuum that European powers filled after 1914; (2) analyze the mandate system as an institutional mechanism that converted military conquest into internationally legitimated tutelage, identifying its legal form, administrative practices, and long-term effects on state capacity and legitimacy; (3) evaluate the "artificiality thesis" about Middle Eastern borders by distinguishing imposed boundaries from Ottoman administrative precedents, local bargaining, geography, and subsequent state-building; (4) reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives differently interpret the construction of the post-Ottoman order, specifying each perspective's core normative commitments, characteristic evidence, and characteristic blind spots; and (5) apply the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to a historical case of border-making or mandate rule, producing an adjudicated causal explanation rather than a chronological narrative. These objectives move from conceptual reconstruction through comparative perspective analysis to applied causal judgment, and each is assessable through short analytical essays, structured comparisons, or case-based memos.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Ottoman legacy and the mandate system: how the modern Middle East was constructed Bolded Causal Claim: The modern state system of West Asia was produced by a specific historical sequence—Ottoman imperial collapse, secret great-power partition, and League of Nations mandate rule—rather than by the spontaneous emergence of pre-existing nations; the central causal claim is that externally guaranteed, territorially fixed states replaced a flexible imperial sovereignty and thereby embedded legitimacy deficits, coercive centralization, and border contestation into the region's political order. This is not a claim that every border was arbitrary, that local actors were passive, or that Ottoman rule was a benign multicultural harmony. It is a claim about macro-structure: the basic unit of sovereignty was reorganized by imperial powers, and that reorganization set durable constraints on later state-building, even where local elites, geography, and pre-existing administrative units mediated the outcome.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the character of Ottoman sovereignty itself. Ottoman rule in the Arab provinces was not a modern nation-state system but a layered imperial order in which the sultan-caliph claimed dynastic and religious authority, provincial governors exercised delegated power, local notables managed revenue and order, and millets organized communal life under religious leaders. Borders were often fuzzy, sovereignty was divisible, and legitimacy rested on protection, taxation, and religious recognition rather than on a single national demos. The First World War destroyed this arrangement: Ottoman entry into the war, defeat, and partition plans created a vacuum in the Arab provinces. The 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, a secret Anglo-French accord, proposed spheres of influence—British in Mesopotamia and southern Palestine, French in Syria and Lebanon, with an internationalized Jerusalem—while later wartime promises, including those associated with the Arab Revolt and the Balfour Declaration, introduced contradictory commitments. The postwar settlement was therefore not a single blueprint but a contested improvisation, as Fromkin (1989) emphasizes in tracing how diplomatic decisions produced an enduring regional order.

The League of Nations mandate system then converted conquest into legal tutelage. Under Article 22 of the Covenant, certain territories were deemed "not yet able to stand by themselves" and were assigned to mandatory powers "on behalf" of the League. Britain and France became mandatory powers in the Arab provinces, and the mechanism of construction operated through several channels. First, territorialization: borders were drawn and states created—Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan—often by combining or dividing

Ottoman administrative units. Second, institutional transplantation: mandatory administrations imported bureaucracies, legal codes, armies, police, and educational systems, while installing or recognizing monarchs such as Faisal in Iraq and Abdullah in Transjordan. Third, elite co-optation: mandatory powers incorporated notables, tribal leaders, religious figures, and urban politicians into new state structures, creating ruling coalitions whose authority depended partly on external backing. Fourth, coercive consolidation: revolts and resistance were suppressed, including the 1920 Iraqi revolt, the 1925–1927 Syrian revolt, and later disturbances in Palestine, often through air power, punitive expeditions, and emergency rule. Fifth, economic extraction and strategic control: oil concessions, pipeline routes, military bases, and communications infrastructure tied new states to imperial interests.

Hourani (1991) helps situate this process within longer Arab social and intellectual histories, showing that the new states were not blank slates but arenas in which older elites, religious identities, and emerging nationalist ideas interacted. Owen (2004) foregrounds state power and political economy, arguing that the modern Middle Eastern state was built through the centralization of coercion and the management of resources, not merely through constitutional design. Anderson (1987) contributes a comparative state-and-society perspective, useful for seeing how externally imposed institutions interacted with local social structures and how state transformation could be both coercive and adaptive. The mandate system's distinctive feature was its legal ambiguity: mandatory powers exercised sovereignty-like authority while denying that they were sovereign, and the new states gained international recognition before they possessed robust domestic legitimacy. This gap between external recognition and internal consent is the mechanism's most consequential legacy.

Scope Conditions: This key idea applies most directly to the former Ottoman Arab provinces placed under British and French mandates—Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan/Jordan—during the construction phase from roughly 1916 to the mid-twentieth century. It applies less directly to Turkey, where a republican revolution under Mustafa Kemal produced a different state-building trajectory; to Iran, which was never formally colonized but experienced concessionary imperialism and great-power interference; to much of the Arabian Peninsula, where state formation followed tribal, dynastic, and oil-related paths; and to Egypt, which had been an Ottoman province but followed a distinct trajectory under British occupation and later independence. The claim is also scope-limited in another sense: it is a macro-structural argument about sovereignty, not a micro-level claim that every border was meaningless. Some borders followed Ottoman vilayets or mutasarrifiyyas; some reflected sectarian or geographic realities; some were negotiated by local elites; and some proved durable because states developed institutions, armies, and national narratives. The artificiality thesis is therefore strongest where borders combined disparate communities under weak institutions and weakest where states successfully consolidated authority. Temporally, the construction phase matters most, but its effects were mediated by later events—decolonization, the Cold War, oil booms, wars, and the 2011 uprisings—so the mechanism should not be treated as a single deterministic cause of all subsequent regional politics.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is correct, several observable implications follow. First, state boundaries should cut across ethnic, sectarian, tribal, or linguistic communities in ways that create majority-minority tensions or irredentist claims, as in Iraq's Kurdish and Shia-Sunni dynamics or Syria's Alawite-Sunni configuration. Second, postcolonial states should inherit coercive, centralized institutions whose legitimacy remains contested, producing recurring crises of authority rather than stable liberal constitutionalism. Third, ideologies that transcend the nation-state—pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, and various forms of regionalism—should gain traction precisely because the state form is experienced as externally imposed or incomplete. Fourth, external powers should retain influence through military bases, oil concessions, secu-

rity guarantees, and diplomatic intervention, because the original construction embedded dependency. Fifth, border disputes and competing claims to territory should recur, especially where mandate lines divided communities or created ambiguous frontiers. Sixth, moments of systemic stress, such as the 2011 uprisings, should expose the fragility of states whose legitimacy was never fully domesticated.

At the same time, the mechanism implies counter-evidence that must be taken seriously. States in the region did develop bureaucracies, armies, educational systems, and national identities; many citizens came to identify with their states; and borders proved remarkably durable despite repeated challenges. The mechanism therefore predicts structural vulnerability, not inevitable collapse. It also predicts variation: states with greater resource wealth, more effective coercive institutions, or more successful elite bargains should show greater resilience, while states with shallow institutions and sharp communal cleavages should show greater fragility. The observable task is not to confirm a single narrative but to trace how constructed origins interact with later agency, resources, and conflict.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective begins from a parallel and deeply formative experience: the partition of Africa, the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, colonial state construction, and the postcolonial crisis of the inherited state. It treats the West Asian mandate system not as a unique tragedy but as one instance of a broader imperial technology: converting conquest into legal trusteeship, drawing boundaries across societies, installing or recognizing compliant elites, and creating states whose primary function was extraction, control, and external legitimation. Scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Fanon, and others have analyzed colonial states as "bifurcated," "decentralized despotisms," or instruments of external domination, and have shown how postcolonial elites often inherited coercive apparatuses rather than legitimate nations. From this vantage, the artificiality critique is not merely about lines on maps; it is about the mismatch between state form and social reality, and about how international recognition can substitute for domestic consent. The African perspective contributes a comparative lens that resists Eurocentric exceptionalism: West Asia is not uniquely "artificial," because all modern states are constructed, but colonial and mandate construction left particular vulnerabilities, especially where states were recognized before they were rooted. It also highlights the continuity between colonial and postcolonial governance, warning against narratives that treat independence as a clean break. At the same time, this perspective can occlude the specific weight of Ottoman legacies, Islamic political idioms, regional great-power rivalries, and oil geopolitics in West Asia; it may overstate similarity between African and West Asian trajectories; and it can understate the agency of local actors who negotiated, resisted, or repurposed mandate institutions. Its strongest contribution is to show that the "Middle East problem" is also a problem of colonial state form, not only of religion, culture, or ancient hatreds.

Chinese: China's perspective is shaped by an anti-colonial sovereignty discourse, the experience of unequal treaties, and a strong commitment to non-interference. It tends to view the mandate system as an illegitimate infringement on self-determination and as an example of Western powers imposing political arrangements on weaker societies. At the same time, contemporary Chinese discourse generally insists that existing borders and governments must be respected, because territorial revisionism threatens stability and invites external manipulation. This perspective contributes a normative defense of sovereignty and a critique of Western intervention; it often occludes internal legitimacy deficits, the historical role of non-Western empires, and the ways in which sovereignty claims can protect coercive regimes.

Russian: Russia frames the post-Ottoman order through sovereign choice, great-power competition, and anti-Western multipolarity. It emphasizes that external powers imposed borders and regimes in the Middle

East and that later Western interventions—such as Iraq in 2003 or Libya in 2011—repeat the logic of mandate rule under liberal auspices. This perspective contributes a powerful critique of interventionism and a defense of state sovereignty against externally driven regime change; it occludes Russia's own imperial and Soviet history, its strategic interests in the region, and the possibility that sovereignty defenses can shield authoritarian rule from accountability.

Western: Western perspectives range from imperial nostalgia to liberal institutionalism, modernization theory, and contemporary state-failure analysis. They often treat mandate construction as a well-intentioned but flawed modernization project, and later focus on weak states, sectarianism, authoritarianism, and the dilemmas of intervention. This perspective contributes institutional analysis, legal frameworks, and human-rights discourse; it occludes the structural violence of colonial construction, overstates the autonomy of postcolonial states, and can treat regional dysfunction as endogenous rather than partly produced by imperial ordering.

UN: The UN perspective inherits the League mandate legacy through the trusteeship system and the broader decolonization framework. It frames self-determination as the corrective to mandate rule, while also privileging territorial integrity, non-intervention, and the sovereign equality of member states. This perspective contributes legal frameworks for decolonization, human rights, and international peacekeeping; it occludes how great-power politics shaped which self-determination claims were recognized, and it struggles with states that possess international sovereignty but lack internal legitimacy.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Sykes-Picot and the Politics of Borders: The Artificiality Thesis and Its Limits

Bolded Causal Claim: The secret Anglo-French Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 and the subsequent boundary-making at the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and San Remo (1920) produced a state system in West Asia whose borders frequently misaligned with pre-existing social, ethnic, and sectarian geographies; this misalignment generated the influential "artificiality thesis," which attributes regional instability to colonial cartography, though the thesis both illuminates and overstates the sources of political fragility.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three linked stages. First, imperial bargaining: the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) divided Ottoman Arab provinces into British and French zones of influence, with a proposed international administration for Palestine; the agreement was negotiated without Arab participation and prioritized strategic interests—control of routes to India, access to oil, and naval positioning—over ethnographic or political realities. As David Fromkin (1989) documents, the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and the San Remo conference (1920) converted these zones into League of Nations mandates, and subsequent treaties (Lausanne 1923, the various mandate instruments) converted zones into states with defined borders. Albert Hourani (1991) traces how this process imposed a state framework on societies whose primary solidarities were tribal, sectarian, and urban-notable rather than national. Second, institutional conversion: the mandate system transformed imperial zones into administered territories under British and French authority, and the new states inherited borders that cut across tribal, sectarian, and ethnic networks while simultaneously lacking the infrastructural and ideological resources to forge national cohesion. Third, legitimation crisis: the resulting states faced the challenge of building nations within borders they did not choose. The "artificiality thesis" (associated with scholars such as Elie Kedourie and, in popular discourse, with regional leaders) holds that these states are artificial constructs lacking organic national foundations, and that their persistent fragility—coupled with recurrent irredentism and sectarian conflict—stems directly from this colonial imposition. The mechanism is not merely cartographic, however. Borders also built upon Ottoman provincial

(vilayet) boundaries, which had their own administrative logic; local notables, tribal leaders, and emerging nationalist movements actively shaped outcomes; and several states (Turkey, Iran, Egypt) were not mandate creations at all. The thesis therefore captures a genuine structural condition—colonial imposition of borders without consent—while risking determinism by treating borders as destiny rather than as one variable among many in state-building.

Scope Conditions: The artificiality thesis applies most strongly where three conditions coincide: (a) borders were drawn by external powers without local consultation; (b) the resulting state contained significant populations whose primary identities (sectarian, ethnic, tribal) cross-cut the new territorial boundaries; and (c) post-independence state institutions remained weak relative to sub-state or trans-state identities. This configuration is most visible in Iraq (Kurdish, Sunni Arab, Shia Arab populations within one state), Syria (Alawi, Sunni, Kurdish, Druze), and Lebanon (confessional power-sharing). The thesis applies less strongly where borders aligned with pre-existing administrative units or where robust state-building occurred—Turkey under Atatürk, Iran under the Pahlavis, Egypt with its deep bureaucratic tradition. It also applies weakly to the Gulf monarchies, whose borders, while externally influenced, enclosed relatively homogeneous populations and whose rentier resources enabled state consolidation. The thesis further loses explanatory power over time: states that have existed for a century develop institutional habits, national narratives, and vested interests that cannot be reduced to their origins.

Observable Implications: If the artificiality thesis holds, one expects recurring border disputes (Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, which Saddam Hussein justified partly by claiming Kuwait was an artificial British creation), persistent sectarian or ethnic politics (Iraq's post-2003 confessional system, Lebanon's consociational arrangement), irredentist movements (Kurdish nationalism across Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran), and recurrent state failure or fragmentation (Syria and Iraq after 2011). One also expects that external powers will exploit these fissures. Conversely, if the thesis is overstated, one expects successful state consolidation despite artificial origins (Jordan, the Gulf states), the development of genuine national identities over time, and the salience of non-border factors—regime type, economic performance, external intervention—in explaining instability. The evidence supports a middle position: borders matter as structural constraints, but they are neither necessary nor sufficient for state failure; weak institutions, authoritarianism, and external intervention are equally or more consequential.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: The African perspective reconstructs the Middle Eastern experience as a variant of a shared postcolonial condition. African scholars such as Mahmood Mamdani (1996) and Siba Grovogui (2006) have analyzed how colonial borders in Africa produced "bifurcated" states and "invented" nations, and the same analytical lens applies to West Asia: Sykes-Picot is read not as a unique Middle Eastern tragedy but as one instance of a general imperial practice of territorial engineering that prioritized European interests over African and Asian self-determination. The African vantage point contributes the insight that "artificiality" is not a Middle Eastern pathology but a structural feature of the colonial state system globally; it also contributes skepticism toward the notion that pre-colonial borders were somehow "natural," since African polities were themselves heterogeneous and contested. What this perspective occludes is the specific role of oil rents and sectarian geopolitics in West Asia, which have no direct African parallel; and it risks flattening important differences between African and Middle Eastern state-formation trajectories. The African perspective is primary here because it frames the lesson's central puzzle—how colonial border-making produced durable but contested states—as a global postcolonial problem rather than a regional anomaly.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes non-interference and territorial integrity, treating Sykes-Picot

as a historical fact whose consequences must be managed through sovereign state-building rather than border revision. Beijing's position, articulated in UN forums and bilateral relations, holds that existing borders are inviolable and that external attempts to redraw them (as in the 2003 Iraq war or proposals for Kurdish independence) are destabilizing. This contributes stability and a counterweight to Western interventionism; it occludes how Chinese economic interests (oil, infrastructure) benefit from the status quo and how non-interference can shield authoritarian regimes from accountability.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames Sykes-Picot as an Anglo-French imperial imposition that discredited Western claims to moral authority in the region. Moscow emphasizes sovereign choice and anti-Western framing: borders should not be redrawn by external powers, and regional actors must determine their own arrangements. This contributes a critique of Western intervention and a defense of state sovereignty; it occludes Russia's own imperial history and its strategic interest in maintaining friendly (often authoritarian) governments in Damascus and Tehran.

Western: The Western perspective is bifurcated. One strand (associated with liberal internationalism) treats Sykes-Picot as a cautionary tale about imperial hubris and advocates for self-determination and democratic state-building. Another strand (realist) treats borders as given and focuses on managing their consequences through alliances and intervention. The Western perspective contributes institutional frameworks (mandates, trusteeships, international law) and resources for state-building; it occludes its own role in creating the problem and tends to frame regional dysfunction as endogenous rather than partly produced by imperial ordering.

UN: The UN perspective inherits the League mandate legacy through the trusteeship system and the broader decolonization framework. It frames self-determination as the corrective to mandate rule, while privileging territorial integrity, non-intervention, and sovereign equality. This contributes legal frameworks for decolonization and peacekeeping; it occludes how great-power politics shaped which self-determination claims were recognized, and it struggles with states that possess international sovereignty but lack internal legitimacy.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Oil, Rentierism, and the Political Economy of Gulf States

Bolded Causal Claim: The discovery, extraction, and global marketing of petroleum in the Gulf transformed the political economy of West Asian states, producing "rentier states" whose dependence on externally generated hydrocarbon rents restructured state-society relations, weakened domestic accountability mechanisms, and created distinctive patterns of authoritarian governance and regional power.

Mechanism: The mechanism is best understood through rentier state theory, first articulated by Hossein Mahdavy (1970) in the Iranian context and systematized by Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani (1987). The core mechanism is fiscal: when a state derives a substantial share of its revenue from external rents (oil exports) rather than from domestic taxation, the "fiscal contract" between state and society is fundamentally altered. In a tax-based state, rulers must extract resources from citizens, creating reciprocal demands for representation and accountability; in a rentier state, rulers distribute rents to citizens, converting them from taxpayers into dependents and clients. This produces what Beblawi called the "rentier mentality"—a political culture in which wealth is perceived as a gift from nature and the state rather than as the product of productive labor. The mechanism operates through several channels: (a) the allocation state, which distributes rents through public employment, subsidies, and welfare; (b) the repression channel, in which oil revenues fund security apparatuses that deter opposition; (c) the modernization channel, in which oil wealth funds infrastructure and education without corresponding political liberalization; and (d) the external dependence channel, in which the state's revenue base is tied to global oil markets and foreign consumers, creating vulnerability

to price shocks and external pressure. Roger Owen (2004) situates this political economy within the broader making of the modern Middle East, showing how oil transformed state capacity and regional hierarchies. Michael Ross (2012) has extended the framework, arguing that oil wealth tends to produce authoritarianism, reduced female labor-force participation, and increased conflict risk—though these effects are conditional on institutional context and oil price levels. Lisa Anderson (1987) demonstrates in the Libyan and Tunisian cases how state and social transformation under resource wealth produced divergent outcomes, underscoring that rentierism interacts with pre-existing social structures, regime type, and historical timing. The mechanism is not deterministic: Norway and the United Kingdom, for instance, are oil producers without rentier political pathologies, because they had strong pre-existing institutions and diversified economies.

Scope Conditions: Rentierism applies most strongly where four conditions hold: (a) hydrocarbons constitute a dominant share of government revenue and exports (typically above 50-60%); (b) rent per capita is high enough to fund substantial state distribution; (c) the state has a small population relative to its resource base (the Gulf monarchies—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Oman, Bahrain); and (d) pre-existing institutions were weak or authoritarian, so that oil wealth reinforced rather than transformed existing power structures. The theory applies less strongly to "semi-rentier" states such as Iran and Iraq, which have larger populations, more diversified (though still hydrocarbon-dependent) economies, and more contested political systems. It applies weakly or not at all to resource-poor states (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen), which must rely on taxation, aid, or remittances and whose political dynamics follow different logics. The theory also has temporal scope conditions: it explains the boom decades (1970s, 2000s) better than bust periods (1980s, 2014-2016), when fiscal contraction forced adjustment and sometimes political opening.

Observable Implications: If rentierism holds, one expects: high government spending as a share of GDP; minimal or no personal income taxation; large public sectors employing a substantial share of the citizen workforce; generous welfare and subsidy systems; sovereign wealth funds accumulating surplus rents; limited political liberalization despite high per-capita income and education levels; and vulnerability to oil price collapses (the 1980s debt crises, the 2014-2016 fiscal adjustments). One also expects regional power projection funded by oil wealth (Saudi Arabia's military spending, Qatar's media and diplomatic investments). Conversely, if rentierism is overstated, one expects that institutional factors (monarchical legitimacy, tribal structures, religious authority) matter more than fiscal structure; that oil wealth can fund modernization and state capacity that eventually enables political opening; and that the "resource curse" is not inevitable. The evidence supports a nuanced view: rentierism explains much about Gulf governance but underpredicts variation among rentier states (Kuwait's parliamentary politics versus Saudi Arabia's absolutism) and struggles to explain the timing of political change (the 2011 uprisings affected both rentier and non-rentier states).

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: The African perspective approaches rentierism through the lens of resource extraction and neocolonial political economy, drawing on Walter Rodney (1972) and Samir Amin (1976) analyses of how external control of African resources distorted development and governance. From this vantage point, Gulf oil rentierism is not a unique Middle Eastern phenomenon but a variant of the broader "resource curse" that has afflicted Nigeria, Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and other African states. The African perspective contributes the insight that rentierism is fundamentally about the relationship between external extraction and domestic accountability, a dynamic visible across the Global South; it also contributes skepticism toward modernization theory's assumption that wealth automatically produces democracy. What it occludes is the specific institutional form of Gulf monarchies, which differ from African postcolonial states in their dynastic legitimacy and tribal foundations; and it risks overemphasizing external exploitation while

underemphasizing domestic agency in rentier state formation. The African perspective is primary here because it reframes rentierism from a Middle Eastern exceptionalism into a general postcolonial political economy, revealing that the Gulf states' apparent stability may rest on the same extractive foundations that have produced fragility elsewhere.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats oil and rentierism through the lens of energy security and economic partnership. Beijing's growing dependence on Gulf oil (China became the world's largest oil importer) has produced a strategy of "energy diplomacy" that emphasizes long-term contracts, infrastructure investment, and non-interference in domestic governance. This contributes a pragmatic, development-oriented framework that avoids the conditionality of Western approaches; it occludes how Chinese demand sustains rentier structures and how non-interference can shield authoritarian governance from external pressure.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames Gulf oil through the lens of great-power competition and energy geopolitics. Moscow views oil rents as a source of regional power that Western states have historically sought to control (the 1953 Iran coup, the 2003 Iraq war), and it positions itself as an alternative partner for rentier states seeking to diversify their relationships. This contributes a multipolar framing and a critique of Western energy dominance; it occludes Russia's own dependence on hydrocarbon rents and its use of energy as a geopolitical weapon.

Western: The Western perspective on rentierism is split between a modernization-theory strand (which expected oil wealth to produce liberalization) and a political-economy strand (which emphasizes the "resource curse" and authoritarian entrenchment). The Western perspective contributes extensive empirical research on rentierism (Ross, Beblawi, Luciani) and policy frameworks for governance reform; it occludes the Western role in creating and sustaining rentier structures (through oil companies, military support for monarchies, and Cold War alliances) and tends to treat rentierism as a domestic pathology rather than a global political economy.

UN: The UN perspective approaches rentierism through development frameworks, human rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals. It emphasizes resource governance, transparency (the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative), and the equitable distribution of resource wealth. This contributes normative standards and technical assistance; it occludes the structural power asymmetries between rentier states and global markets, and its frameworks often assume state capacity and political will that rentier systems may lack.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The post-Ottoman order and its contestation: pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, and the nation-state

Bolded Causal Claim: The post-Ottoman state system in West Asia was never stabilized by a single legitimating ideology; instead, it was contested from its inception by competing transnational projects—pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, and the nation-state form—whose rivalry produced a pattern of ideological oscillation that shaped state-building, regime legitimation, and regional order across the twentieth century.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the Ottoman collapse, which removed a supra-national imperial framework that had governed diverse populations through a millet system of religious communities rather than through territorial nation-states. The mandate system then imposed the nation-state as the exclusive legitimate form, but the populations and elites of the region did not uniformly accept this form as the natural unit of political community. Three competing projects emerged to fill the legitimacy vacuum. First, pan-

Arabism, articulated by thinkers such as Sati' al-Husri and later institutionalized in Ba'athist ideology and Nasserist practice, proposed that the Arab nation—defined by language, culture, and shared history—should be the basis of political community, potentially transcending the artificial borders drawn by Sykes-Picot and the mandates. Second, pan-Islamism, with roots in the late Ottoman period and revived by movements from the Muslim Brotherhood (founded 1928) to later Islamist currents, proposed the umma as the relevant community, subordinating territorial states to a religious solidarity that could be either revolutionary or quietist. Third, the nation-state itself, defended by monarchies and republics alike, asserted territorial sovereignty and sought to cultivate a distinct national identity (Egyptian, Syrian, Iraqi) within inherited borders. The mechanism of contestation operated through regime legitimation strategies: ruling elites instrumentalized these ideologies to bolster domestic authority while simultaneously defending territorial sovereignty, producing a structural tension between ideological aspiration and state interest. When pan-Arab projects were attempted—the United Arab Republic (1958–1961), the Arab Federation (1958), various unity schemes—they collapsed because the institutional and economic interests of ruling elites in Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad outweighed ideological commitment. The 1967 Arab-Israeli war discredited pan-Arabism as a state project, creating space for pan-Islamism's resurgence, catalyzed by the 1979 Iranian revolution and the subsequent rise of Islamist movements across the region. States then oscillated: secular nationalist regimes (Syria, Iraq, Egypt under Nasser) gave way to regimes that incorporated Islamist elements or were challenged by them. This oscillation weakened institutional consolidation because each ideological shift required re-legitimation, patronage restructuring, and often repression of the previous project's adherents. The result was a state system perpetually contested, where legitimacy was borrowed from transnational ideologies rather than built through domestic institutional performance.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism applies most strongly to the Arab core states (Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and to a lesser extent Jordan and Lebanon) where pan-Arab and pan-Islamic movements had significant social bases and where the gap between state boundaries and identity communities was acute. It applies less to Turkey, which under Atatürk pursued a radical nation-state project that suppressed pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic alternatives, and to Iran, which developed a distinct Shiite Islamist state ideology after 1979. It applies least to the Gulf monarchies, which relied on dynastic, tribal, and rentier legitimacy rather than mass ideological mobilization, though they were affected by transnational Islamist currents. The mechanism also requires a degree of state capacity sufficient to attempt ideological projects but insufficient to fully institutionalize them; where states were very weak (Lebanon) or very strong (Turkey), the contestation took different forms.

Observable Implications: The mechanism implies several observable patterns: repeated attempts at Arab political unity (UAR, Arab Federation, various federation proposals in the 1950s–1970s); the dominance of Ba'athist ideology in Syria and Iraq; the rise and fall of Nasserism as a regional project; the eclipse of pan-Arabism after 1967 and the corresponding rise of Islamism; state sponsorship or toleration of Islamist movements as tools against rivals (e.g., Saudi support for Wahhabism, Syrian support for Hamas); the use of nationalist rhetoric by regimes that were in practice territorial; and the persistent gap between official ideology and state practice. It also implies that regime change often involved ideological rebranding rather than institutional transformation, as seen in Egypt's shifts from Nasserism to Sadatism to Mubarak's neoliberal nationalism.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point sees the post-Ottoman contestation as structurally analogous to post-colonial African state-building: the imposition of nation-state forms over pre-existing transnational

communities and the search for legitimating ideologies beyond the inherited colonial state. African scholarship illuminates this parallel with particular force. Nkrumah's pan-Africanism and Cabral's theory of national liberation were direct counterparts to pan-Arabism, responding to the same structural condition—the mismatch between colonial borders and lived identities. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state, in which colonial and post-colonial regimes governed through differentiated legal regimes that privileged certain communities as "citizens" while reducing others to "subjects," applies with equal force to post-Ottoman states that privileged sectarian, ethnic, or tribal communities in their institutional design. Bayart's "politics of the belly" captures how post-colonial states in both regions generated legitimacy through patronage and distribution rather than institutional performance, making ideological projects instruments of elite competition rather than genuine programs of transformation. The African perspective thus reframes the contestation not as a failure of Arab or Islamic political culture but as a predictable consequence of externally imposed state forms operating under conditions of weak institutionalization. It also cautions against treating Islamism as exceptional: African experiences with religious and ethnic mobilization—in Nigeria, Sudan, and elsewhere—demonstrate similar patterns of identity-based contestation of the post-colonial state, suggesting that the West Asian case is a variant of a broader post-colonial condition rather than a unique civilizational phenomenon. What the African perspective reveals that others miss is the structural logic common to both regions: the nation-state was not a natural evolution but an imposed form, and the transnational ideologies that contested it were rational responses to that imposition. What it occludes is the specific geopolitical weight of oil and the Arab-Israeli conflict, which gave West Asian contestation a different intensity and internationalization than most African cases, and the particular role of religious authority in West Asian politics, which has no exact African parallel.

Chinese: China views the post-Ottoman contestation through the lens of non-interference and state sovereignty. Beijing's position is that ideological projects—pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism—are internal matters and that external powers should not exploit them to intervene or to support factional agendas. China's own experience with national unification after 1949 and its suspicion of pan-nationalisms, which it associates with separatism and instability, shapes its preference for stable, recognized states over transnational ideological projects. This perspective contributes a stability-first framework and economic partnership without ideological conditionality; it occludes the democratic and human-rights dimensions of contestation and tends to treat all ideological mobilization as a threat to order.

Russian: Russia frames the post-Ottoman order as a product of Western imperial manipulation—Sykes-Picot, the mandates—and sees pan-Arab and pan-Islamic movements partly as reactions to Western dominance. Moscow historically supported secular Arab nationalist regimes (Syria, Iraq, Egypt) as counterweights to Western influence, and after 1991 it has selectively engaged with Islamist movements while opposing those it deems extremist. This perspective contributes a critique of Western intervention and a defense of state sovereignty; it occludes Russia's own imperial history and its instrumental use of ideological movements for geopolitical advantage.

Western: The Western perspective treats the post-Ottoman order through modernization theory and state-building frameworks: the problem is weak institutions, authoritarianism, and the failure to develop liberal democratic nation-states. It contributes institutional analysis, democratization agendas, and civil-society frameworks; it occludes the role of Western powers in creating and sustaining authoritarian regimes and in drawing the borders that made nation-state consolidation difficult, and it tends to treat transnational ideologies as obstacles to modernization rather than as responses to structural conditions.

UN: The UN perspective frames contestation through self-determination, decolonization, and human rights.

It emphasizes the right of peoples to choose their political arrangements and the illegitimacy of externally imposed solutions. It contributes normative frameworks and international law; it occludes the gap between legal sovereignty and effective self-determination, and its frameworks often assume a nation-state template that may not fit the region's social realities.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The 2011 uprisings as a crisis of the post-colonial state system

Bolded Causal Claim: The 2011 Arab uprisings were not merely protests against authoritarian rulers but a systemic crisis of the post-colonial state form in West Asia, exposing the exhaustion of the legitimacy formulas—nationalism, Islamism, rentierism, and coercion—that had sustained post-independence regimes, and triggering divergent trajectories of state collapse, authoritarian restoration, and civil war.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates at multiple levels. At the structural level, post-independence regimes had relied on an "authoritarian bargain" in which citizens exchanged political rights for economic security, nationalist pride, and stability. This bargain was sustained by rentier revenues (in the Gulf and oil states), by state-led development (in Egypt, Syria, Iraq), and by repression. By the 2000s, the bargain was eroding: demographic youth bulges (over 60 percent of the Arab population under 30), high unemployment, corruption, and the visible failure of state services undermined the economic pillar; the nationalist pillar was weakened by the stagnation of pan-Arab projects and the humiliation of the Arab-Israeli conflict; and the coercive pillar, while still formidable, faced new challenges from the diffusion of information via satellite television and social media, which reduced the state's monopoly on narrative. The trigger was the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia in December 2010, which catalyzed protests that toppled Ben Ali within weeks. The demonstration effect then spread the protests across the region—Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, and beyond—because the underlying conditions were shared. The mechanism of contagion was not merely imitation but the revelation that regimes were more fragile than assumed: the fall of Ben Ali and then Mubarak shattered the aura of invincibility that had deterred collective action. Regime responses then determined outcomes. Where regimes conceded quickly and the military withdrew support (Tunisia), transition occurred. Where regimes combined concession with repression and the military intervened (Egypt 2013), authoritarian restoration followed. Where regimes militarized the response and external actors intervened (Libya, Syria, Yemen), civil war and state collapse resulted. Where regimes offered preemptive reform and had greater distributive capacity (Morocco, Jordan), protests were contained. The uprisings thus functioned as a stress test of the post-colonial state's capacity to generate consent; where consent was absent and coercion insufficient or counterproductive, states fractured. The deeper mechanism is that the post-colonial state, built on external recognition and resource extraction rather than domestic institutional legitimacy, could not absorb a shock to its legitimating formulas without either transforming or collapsing.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism applies most strongly to Arab republics with weak institutionalization and semi-rentier or non-rentier economies (Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, Libya, Yemen). It applies less to Gulf monarchies, which possessed greater distributive capacity, dynastic legitimacy, and smaller populations, allowing them to contain protests through reform and co-optation (Bahrain being a partial exception, where sectarian dynamics complicated the picture). It applies differently to Turkey and Iran, which experienced their own protest waves (Gezi 2013, Green Movement 2009) but within different state structures and with different outcomes. The mechanism also requires a degree of media openness and transnational connectivity that was present in 2011 but not in earlier decades, which is why similar conditions in the 1980s or 1990s did not produce comparable uprisings.

Observable Implications: The mechanism implies: the rapid fall of long-entrenched rulers (Ben Ali after

23 years, Mubarak after 30); the spread of protests across multiple countries within months; the divergence of outcomes (Tunisian transition, Egyptian restoration, Syrian/Libyan/Yemeni civil war); the rise of ISIS in the vacuum of state collapse; massive refugee flows; the reassertion of authoritarianism in Egypt and elsewhere; and the internationalization of conflicts through external intervention (NATO in Libya, Russian and Iranian intervention in Syria, Saudi-led coalition in Yemen). It also implies that the uprisings would be followed by a "counter-revolution" as regimes and external actors moved to restore order, which is what occurred after 2013.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point sees the 2011 uprisings as part of a broader post-colonial crisis of the state, paralleling African experiences of "democratic transitions" and state fragility in the 1990s and 2000s. African scholarship illuminates this with particular force. Mamdani's analysis of the post-colonial state as a "bifurcated" structure—governing citizens through civil law and subjects through customary/communal law—captures the legitimacy deficit that the uprisings exposed: states that had never fully incorporated their populations as citizens could not generate consent when tested. Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics" describes how post-colonial states exercise power through the management of death and violence, a framework that illuminates the militarized responses in Syria, Libya, and Yemen. Bayart's "politics of the belly" explains how patronage networks, rather than institutional performance, sustained regimes, making them vulnerable when distributive capacity faltered. The African perspective highlights continuities that Western frameworks miss: the 2011 wave resembles African "second liberation" movements of the 1990s, and the subsequent authoritarian restoration in Egypt parallels African "democratic rollback" (Zimbabwe, Egypt's own trajectory). It also reveals that the uprisings were not simply demands for "democracy" in a liberal sense but for dignity (karama) and social justice, echoing African struggles against structural adjustment and authoritarianism. The African perspective further cautions against treating state collapse (Libya, Syria) as purely internal failure; it reflects the internationalization of post-colonial crises, as in Africa (Congo, Somalia), where external intervention and resource competition compound state fragility. What the African perspective reveals that others miss is the structural commonality: the post-colonial state in both regions is a "gatekeeper state" (Cooper) whose legitimacy depends on external recognition and resource extraction rather than domestic consent, and whose crisis is therefore predictable rather than exceptional. What it occludes is the specific role of sectarianism and the Arab-Israeli conflict in shaping West Asian outcomes, and the particular impact of oil wealth in cushioning some regimes.

Chinese: China views the uprisings with alarm, seeing them as evidence of the dangers of rapid political change and of Western intervention, particularly the NATO operation in Libya. Beijing's narrative emphasizes stability and gradual reform; it supports incumbent governments and opposes external regime change. This perspective contributes a stability-first framework and economic engagement without political conditionality; it occludes democratic aspirations and human rights abuses, and it tends to conflate all protest movements with threats to order.

Russian: Russia frames the uprisings as partly engineered by Western powers through "color revolution" techniques and opposes regime change, especially after the Libyan intervention, which Moscow views as a betrayal of the UN mandate. It supports the Assad government in Syria as a bulwark against chaos and extremism. This perspective contributes a sovereignty-based critique of intervention and a defense of state continuity; it occludes authoritarian repression and the agency of protesters, and it instrumentalizes the uprisings for geopolitical competition.

Western: The Western perspective oscillates between supporting democratic transitions (initially, in Tunisia

and Egypt) and prioritizing stability and security (later, especially after the rise of ISIS). It contributes human rights frameworks, democratization agendas, and intervention debates; it occludes the West's own role in sustaining authoritarian regimes and the consequences of intervention (Libya), and it tends to treat the uprisings as a demand for Western-style liberal democracy rather than for dignity and social justice.

UN: The UN perspective frames the uprisings through human rights, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), and humanitarian law. It emphasizes the protection of civilians and accountability for atrocities. It contributes normative standards and humanitarian frameworks; it occludes the political economy of intervention and the limits of international law in civil wars, and its frameworks often assume a state capacity and political will that collapsing states lack.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on the West Asian state system begins from a structural homology rather than a regional analogy: the modern states of West Asia and the modern states of Africa were produced by the same imperial technology — the colonial mandate and the protectorate — and they inherit the same foundational problem, namely the disjuncture between the territorial state and the social formations it claims to govern. From this standpoint, the West Asian state system is not a unique civilizational failure but one regional variant of a global colonial state-making project whose African counterpart is better documented in the scholarly record. The African perspective therefore does not treat Sykes-Picot as an exceptional sin; it treats it as one instance of a general practice of imperial cartography that also produced the Berlin Conference boundaries of 1884–85, the Anglo-French partition of West Africa, and the Italian and Belgian colonial borders of Central Africa. The lesson's central puzzle — why the post-Ottoman order proved so fragile — is, from this vantage, a special case of the broader puzzle of postcolonial state fragility that African scholarship has theorized for half a century.

The theoretical lineage begins with Fanon's analysis of the colonial state in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Fanon argued that the colonial state was not a state in the European sense — a rational-legal apparatus mediating between society and authority — but a "police state" whose function was the maintenance of racial hierarchy through violence. The postcolonial state, Fanon warned, risked becoming a "caricature" of the colonial state if national liberation stopped at political independence without social transformation. Applied to West Asia, Fanon's framework suggests that the mandate states (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Palestine) inherited not merely borders but a mode of rule: a state whose primary relationship to society was coercive, whose legitimacy was external (derived from the mandatory power and the League of Nations), and whose internal legitimacy was purchased through sectarian or tribal brokerage. The 2011 uprisings, on this reading, are a Fanonian moment: a revolt not merely against authoritarianism but against the postcolonial state's failure to become a state in the substantive sense — one that delivers dignity, recognition, and material welfare.

Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) provides the most precise mechanism. Mamdani argued that the colonial state in Africa was "bifurcated": it operated through direct rule in the urban centers (where citizens enjoyed civil rights) and indirect rule in the rural areas (where subjects were governed through "customary" authorities). This bifurcation produced a state that was simultaneously modern and pre-modern, and it meant that the postcolonial state inherited two incompatible logics of rule. The African vantage suggests that the mandate states of West Asia were similarly bifurcated: the mandatory powers (Britain and France) ruled the cities through direct administration and the countryside through tribal, sectarian, or dynastic intermediaries.

The Hashemite monarchies, the Alawite officer corps in Syria, the Maronite political dominance in Lebanon, and the tribal confederations of Iraq were not pre-modern survivals but colonial technologies of rule. The "artificiality" thesis — that borders drawn by Sykes-Picot caused the region's problems — is, on Mamdani's account, a misdiagnosis: the problem is not where the borders are but how the state rules across them. Borders can be made to work; modes of rule are harder to transform. This is the African perspective's central corrective to the Western "artificiality" discourse.

Bayart's *The State in Africa* (1993) adds the dimension of political economy. Bayart's concept of "extraversion" — the dependence of African states on external resources, whether colonial subsidies, Cold War aid, or commodity rents — maps directly onto the rentier state literature on the Gulf. The Gulf states are, in Bayart's terms, the limiting case of extraversion: states whose entire fiscal base is external (oil rents), whose ruling bargains are purchased with rent rather than taxation, and whose sovereignty is therefore structurally dependent on global commodity markets and the security guarantees of external powers. But Bayart's framework also applies to the non-oil states of West Asia (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon), which have historically depended on external aid, remittances, and strategic rents (Suez Canal revenues, US aid, Gulf remittances). The African perspective thus reveals that rentierism is not a Gulf pathology but a variant of a broader post-colonial condition: the state as a site of resource capture rather than social contract. Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) reinforces this: underdevelopment is not a natural state but an active process of extraction, and the West Asian states' apparent "failure" is, in part, the success of a global system that extracts their resources (oil) while leaving them with weak institutions.

Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism* (1965) provides the framework for understanding the gap between formal and substantive sovereignty. Nkrumah argued that political independence without economic independence was a "sham" — that the former colonial powers retained control through multinational corporations, military bases, and financial institutions. Applied to West Asia, Nkrumah's framework illuminates the mandate system's legacy: Iraq gained formal independence in 1932 but remained under British military and economic influence; Syria and Lebanon gained independence in the 1940s but remained within the French sphere; the Gulf states gained independence in the 1960s and 1970s but remained dependent on Western security guarantees and oil markets. The "post-colonial" state system of West Asia is, on this reading, a neo-colonial system: formally sovereign, structurally dependent.

Grovogui's *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) adds the international legal dimension. Grovogui argued that international law constructed a hierarchy of sovereignty in which European states were "sovereigns" and non-European states were "quasi-sovereigns" — granted formal recognition but denied substantive equality. The mandate system was the legal technology of this hierarchy: the League of Nations mandates were not colonies in name but were colonies in practice, and the "sacred trust of civilization" was a legal fiction that legitimized continued imperial control. The African perspective thus reveals that the West Asian state system's legitimacy crisis has roots in the international legal order itself: the states were born as "quasi-sovereigns," and their subsequent struggles for full sovereignty (against Western intervention, against Israeli occupation, against great-power manipulation) are struggles against a legal order that never fully recognized them as equals. This is a contribution the other perspectives cannot make, because they tend to treat the international legal order as a neutral framework rather than a historically constructed hierarchy.

Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) and Tamale's *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020) add the dimension of colonial categories. Oyěwùmí argued that colonialism imposed European categories — including gender, ethnicity, and "tribe" — on African societies that had organized social life differently. Ap-

plied to West Asia, this framework illuminates how the mandatory powers codified and rigidified sectarian identities: the French mandatory power's communalist policies in Lebanon (which institutionalized sectarian representation), the British use of tribal and sectarian intermediaries in Iraq, and the broader colonial practice of "divide and rule" that transformed fluid religious identities into fixed political categories. The 2011 uprisings, on this reading, were not simply "sectarian" conflicts waiting to happen; they were the explosion of categories that colonial and postcolonial states had constructed and instrumentalized. Tamale's decolonial feminism adds that the uprisings were also gendered: women played central roles in the protests (in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Yemen), and the subsequent authoritarian backlash and civil wars disproportionately targeted women's bodies and rights. The African feminist perspective thus reveals a dimension of the crisis that the Western "democracy vs. authoritarianism" framing and the UN "human rights" framing both occlude: the gendered nature of state violence and the gendered costs of state collapse.

Cabral's *Unity and Struggle* (1979) and Nyerere's *Ujamaa* (1968) provide the comparative dimension of regional integration. Cabral argued that national liberation required not just political independence but the creation of a new social order, and that this required class analysis and mass mobilization. Nyerere argued for African socialism and regional integration as alternatives to both capitalism and Soviet communism, and he was a key architect of the East African Community and the Organization of African Unity. Applied to West Asia, these frameworks suggest that pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism were not merely ideological projects but attempts to solve the problem of the small, weak, postcolonial state through regional unity — and that their failure (like the failure of pan-Africanism to achieve full economic integration) reflects the structural obstacles to regional integration in a world of sovereign states and great-power competition. The African perspective thus contributes a comparative lesson: regional integration is possible (the AU, ECOWAS, SADC demonstrate this) but requires political will, economic complementarity, and insulation from great-power manipulation — conditions that the West Asian state system has rarely enjoyed.

Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001) and "Necropolitics" (2003) add a final theoretical layer. Mbembe argued that the postcolonial state is characterized by a "commandement" — a mode of authority that operates through the private appropriation of public resources and the blurring of the public/private distinction. The postcolonial state, on this account, is not a failed Weberian state but a different kind of state: one that governs through "private indirect government" and the distribution of favors. Applied to West Asia, Mbembe's framework illuminates the "deep state" phenomena in Egypt, the sectarian patronage networks in Lebanon, and the tribal and familial networks that structure Gulf politics. Mbembe's "necropolitics" — the sovereign power to decide who lives and who dies — is visible in the West Asian state system's most extreme forms: the Assad regime's barrel bombs, the Saudi-led coalition's war in Yemen, the Israeli occupation of Palestine. The African perspective thus contributes a theory of state violence that is not reducible to "authoritarianism" or "state failure" but that recognizes the postcolonial state's distinctive mode of sovereignty.

Aning and Danso's work on African security governance adds a final dimension: the principle of "African solutions to African problems," which holds that regional organizations should take primary responsibility for regional security, with external powers in a supporting role. Applied to West Asia, this suggests that the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) should be the primary security actors, and that Western and Russian military interventions (in Iraq, Syria, Libya) have undermined rather than strengthened regional order. The African perspective thus contributes a normative stance: the West Asian state system's problems should be addressed by West Asian actors, not by external powers whose interventions have repeatedly made things worse.

What the African perspective occludes: it may understate the specific role of religion and sectarianism in

West Asia, which has no exact African parallel (though African states have religious dimensions, they are not typically organized around sectarian political identities in the same way). It may over-analogize: the Ottoman legacy is not identical to European colonialism (the Ottomans were a regional empire, not an overseas one, and their legacy includes institutions and cultural ties that European colonialism did not produce). It may not fully engage with the unique scale of oil rents in the Gulf, which creates a political economy without African parallel (though Nigeria and Angola are partial parallels). And it may, in its emphasis on structural and historical factors, understate the agency of West Asian actors and the genuine achievements of state-building in the region (Jordan, the UAE, Qatar). These occlusions are real, but they do not diminish the African perspective's central contribution: the recognition that the West Asian state system is not an exceptional failure but a regional variant of a global postcolonial condition, and that the theories developed to understand that condition in Africa are directly applicable to West Asia.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on the West Asian state system is shaped by three commitments: the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, peaceful coexistence), articulated at the 1955 Bandung Conference and enshrined in Chinese foreign policy; the priority of economic development and stability over political reform; and China's own experience of state-building and its self-image as a non-colonial power with historical ties to the region through the Silk Road. From this standpoint, the West Asian state system's problems are not primarily the result of artificial borders or colonial legacies but of external interference — particularly Western intervention — that has destabilized states and created power vacuums filled by extremism.

The Chinese perspective's central causal claim is that the 2011 uprisings and their aftermath were caused not by the internal failures of the postcolonial state but by external interference, particularly Western military intervention (Libya 2011) and covert support for regime change (Syria). China's abstention on UNSC Resolution 1973 (Libya) and its subsequent veto of Western-backed resolutions on Syria reflect this conviction: that the "responsibility to protect" is a Trojan horse for regime change, and that the collapse of the Libyan state (and the subsequent spread of weapons and fighters across the Sahel and West Asia) is the direct consequence of Western intervention. The Chinese perspective thus contributes a powerful corrective to the Western narrative: it insists that the cure (intervention) has been worse than the disease (authoritarianism), and that the West Asian state system's crisis is, in significant part, an iatrogenic condition produced by external powers.

On oil and rentierism, the Chinese perspective is pragmatic rather than normative. China is the world's largest importer of crude oil, and the Gulf states (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, Oman, the UAE) are critical suppliers. China's interest is in stable supply, not in political reform. The "China's Arab Policy Paper" (2016) emphasizes "win-win cooperation," infrastructure investment, and energy partnerships, and it explicitly avoids political conditionality. The Chinese perspective thus treats rentierism as a fact of the political economy, not a problem to be solved: the Gulf states' wealth is a source of stability (they can buy social peace) and of partnership (they have capital to invest in Chinese infrastructure). The Chinese vantage occludes the political consequences of rentierism — the absence of taxation, the weakness of representative institutions, the vulnerability to commodity price shocks — because these are seen as internal matters that do not affect China's core interests.

The Chinese perspective also draws on a historical narrative of non-colonial engagement. Unlike the Eu-

ropean powers, China did not colonize West Asia; its historical presence was commercial (the Silk Road) and cultural. This self-image supports China's claim to be a neutral, non-threatening partner — a claim that resonates with West Asian states seeking alternatives to Western dominance. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) extends this logic: infrastructure investment, port development, and energy partnerships that create mutual dependence without political conditionality. Yan Xuetong's work on Chinese strategic thought (2011) suggests that China's approach is rooted in a Confucian-inspired preference for stability and harmony over ideological transformation.

What the Chinese perspective contributes: a critique of Western interventionism that is empirically grounded (Libya's collapse, Syria's devastation); a model of economic partnership without political conditionality that appeals to authoritarian and semi-authoritarian states; and a reminder that the West Asian state system's problems cannot be solved by external powers, however well-intentioned. What it occludes: the political repression and human rights abuses that non-interference enables; the debt and dependency that BRI projects can create; the authoritarian complicity of supporting regimes that lack popular legitimacy; and the possibility that stability purchased through repression is not stability but deferred crisis. The Chinese perspective also tends to treat the 2011 uprisings as entirely externally driven, which underestimates the genuine domestic grievances (corruption, unemployment, dignity) that fueled them. Qin Yaqing's relational theory (2018) suggests that China's approach is rooted in a relational ontology that prioritizes harmony over justice — a philosophical commitment that can legitimate the status quo.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on the West Asian state system is shaped by the legacy of Soviet engagement with the region, the post-Soviet search for great-power status, and the Primakov doctrine of multipolarity. Russia views the West Asian state system through the lens of great-power competition: the region is a theater in which the US-led unipolar order is being challenged, and Russia's role is to defend state sovereignty, oppose Western intervention, and protect its own strategic and economic interests (energy, arms sales, naval access). The Russian perspective shares with the Chinese a commitment to non-interference and state sovereignty, but it is more explicitly geopolitical and more willing to use military force (as in Syria 2015).

The historical foundation is Soviet support for Arab nationalism and anti-colonial movements. The USSR backed Nasser's Egypt, the Ba'ath regimes in Syria and Iraq, the PLO, and various leftist movements. This legacy gives Russia credibility in the region as a power that supported Arab independence against Western imperialism. The post-Soviet period saw a retreat (Yeltsin), but Putin's Russia has re-engaged, driven by the perception that the US invasion of Iraq (2003) and the Arab uprisings (2011) created opportunities for Russian influence. The intervention in Syria (2015) — Russia's first major military operation outside the former Soviet space since the Cold War — was framed as defending the Syrian state against terrorism and Western-backed regime change, and it succeeded in preserving the Assad regime and securing Russian naval and air bases (Tartus, Hmeimim).

The Russian perspective's central causal claim is that the West Asian state system's crisis is the result of Western hubris: the US invasion of Iraq (2003) destroyed the regional balance, the Arab uprisings were exploited by Western powers and Gulf monarchies to overthrow regimes, and the result has been state collapse, terrorism, and humanitarian catastrophe. Russia's role, on this account, is to restore order by supporting sovereign states against both internal rebellion and external intervention. This framing is not merely rhetorical: it reflects a genuine Russian conviction that state sovereignty is the foundation of international order, and that the Western "responsibility to protect" is a destabilizing doctrine that has produced more harm than

good.

On oil and rentierism, Russia's perspective is shaped by its own status as a petrostate. Russia is the world's largest exporter of natural gas and a major oil producer; it understands the political economy of hydrocarbons from the inside. The Russian perspective does not critique rentierism as a governance failure; it treats it as a normal feature of resource-rich states. Russia's interest in the Gulf is in managing oil prices (through OPEC+ cooperation with Saudi Arabia), selling arms, and competing with the US for influence. The Russian perspective thus contributes an insider's understanding of the political economy of oil, but it occludes the governance and development consequences of rentierism because Russia itself is a rentier state.

What the Russian perspective contributes: a critique of Western interventionism that is backed by military action (Syria); a defense of state sovereignty that resonates with authoritarian regimes; and a multipolar framing that challenges US hegemony. What it occludes: the authoritarian nature of the regimes it supports (Assad's Syria); the human rights abuses committed by those regimes; the geopolitical self-interest behind the anti-imperialist rhetoric; and the possibility that supporting authoritarian stability merely defers and intensifies the underlying crisis. The Russian perspective also tends to treat all opposition to authoritarian regimes as Western-backed or terrorist, which erases the genuine domestic grievances that fueled the 2011 uprisings. Trenin's analysis (2016) of Russian foreign policy suggests that Russia's approach is driven by a combination of great-power ambition, security concerns, and a genuine belief in state sovereignty — but that it lacks a positive vision for the region beyond the preservation of the status quo.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on the West Asian state system is the most internally diverse of the five, spanning liberal internationalism, realism, and neoconservatism, but it shares certain common premises: that the state system is in crisis; that the crisis has both internal (governance failure, sectarianism, rentierism) and external (intervention, great-power competition) causes; and that Western powers have both interests and responsibilities in the region. The Western perspective is also the most self-critical, because the West's own role in constructing and sustaining the state system — through Sykes-Picot, the mandate system, Cold War alliances, and the 2003 Iraq invasion — is a central subject of Western scholarship.

The theoretical lineage includes Fromkin's *A Peace to End All Peace* (1989), which argued that the modern Middle East was created by the Great Powers at the Paris Peace Conference (1919) and that the resulting state system was inherently unstable because it did not correspond to the region's social and political realities. Hourani's *A History of the Arab Peoples* (1991) provided a more nuanced account, emphasizing the region's internal dynamics and the agency of Arab actors. Owen's *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (2004) analyzed the political economy of the state, including rentierism. Anderson's "The State in the Middle East" (1987) examined the "robustness" of Middle Eastern states — their ability to survive despite apparent weakness — and argued that the region's states were more durable than the "failed state" literature suggested.

The Western perspective's central causal claim is that the West Asian state system's crisis is the result of a combination of internal governance failures (authoritarianism, corruption, sectarianism, rentierism) and external shocks (the 2003 Iraq invasion, the Arab uprisings, great-power competition). The 2011 uprisings are interpreted as a crisis of legitimacy: populations demanding dignity, accountability, and economic opportunity from states that had failed to deliver. The Western response has been divided: liberal internationalists supported intervention (Libya 2011, Syria), realists opposed it (fearing state collapse and extremism), and neoconservatives supported regime change (Iraq 2003). The result has been policy incoherence: interven-

tion in Libya, non-intervention in Syria, support for authoritarian allies (Egypt, Saudi Arabia), and a general retreat from the "freedom agenda" of the 2000s.

On oil and rentierism, the Western perspective has produced the most extensive scholarship. The rentier state theory (Beblawi and Luciani, 1987) argues that states deriving a large share of revenue from external rents (oil) develop distinctive political dynamics: weak taxation, weak representation, strong state autonomy, and a "rentier mentality" that discourages productive economic activity. This framework has been applied extensively to the Gulf states and has influenced Western policy: the recognition that oil wealth sustains authoritarianism has led to debates about whether to promote diversification, governance reform, or democratization. The Carter Doctrine (1980) — that the US would use military force to protect its interests in the Gulf — reflects the Western perspective's core interest: ensuring the free flow of oil at reasonable prices.

What the Western perspective contributes: the most extensive empirical scholarship on the region; a self-critical tradition that acknowledges Western responsibility; and a set of policy debates (intervention vs. non-intervention, democracy promotion vs. stability) that, however flawed, engage seriously with the region's problems. What it occludes: the West's own role in sustaining authoritarian regimes (US support for Mubarak, Saudi Arabia, the Shah of Iran); the consequences of intervention (Iraq 2003, Libya 2011); the tendency to treat the uprisings as a demand for Western-style liberal democracy rather than for dignity and social justice; and the assumption that Western models of governance are universally applicable. The Western perspective also tends to treat "state failure" as a technical problem solvable by better governance, which may underestimate the structural and historical factors that the African and other perspectives emphasize.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on the West Asian state system is shaped by the organization's dual identity as both the inheritor of the mandate system (through the League of Nations' legacy) and the primary forum for decolonization, human rights, and collective security. The UN's engagement with the region spans the entire post-1945 period: the partition of Palestine (UNGA Resolution 181, 1947), the creation of Israel, the Arab-Israeli wars, the oil crises, the Iran-Iraq war, the Gulf War (1990-91), the sanctions regime on Iraq, the 2003 Iraq invasion (which the UN did not authorize), the 2011 Libya intervention (authorized by UNSC Resolution 1973), and the ongoing Syria conflict. The UN perspective is thus not a single viewpoint but a composite of legal frameworks, humanitarian mandates, and political compromises among member states.

The UN perspective's central causal claim is that the West Asian state system's crisis is a crisis of international order: the failure of the UN system to prevent conflict, protect civilians, and promote self-determination. The mandate system's legacy — the UN's predecessor, the League

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2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reconstructs mandates and borders as imperial statecraft; parallels African partition; highlights artificiality and anti-colonial legitimacy	May overstate border determinism; underweights local agency, oil, and institutional variation	Anti-colonial self-determination; borders should not legitimate domination	Mandate texts; African partition analogies; postcolonial state crises	Western institutionalist view that institutions and coalitions matter more than border lines
Chinese	Sovereignty/non-interference lens; frames Sykes-Picot as great-power collusion; supports decolonization	Downplays internal repression and regional power competition; economic interests	State sovereignty and non-intervention	Anti-colonial diplomacy; support for Arab states	UN/humanitarian view that sovereignty cannot shield mass atrocities
Russian	Anti-Western/imperial critique; support for Arab nationalism; exposes capitalist motives	Obscures Russian/Soviet great-power interests; reduces local complexity	Anti-hegemony and multipolarity	Soviet backing of Arab states; opposition to mandates	Western view that Russian policy also instrumentalizes regional conflicts
Western	Institutional and strategic analysis; distinguishes myth from actual border-making; explains variation	Can normalize imperial violence; underplays coercion and racial hierarchy	Order, stability, reform through institutions	Archival diplomatic history; state capacity comparisons	African/postcolonial view that "order" often means domination

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Legal/decolonization framework; mandates as trusteeship; self-determination norms	Retrospective; UN did not exist in 1919; often powerless	International law and human rights	League mandate texts; UN Charter; decolonization resolutions	Russian/Chinese view that UN is Western-dominated and selectively applied

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Levels of Analysis

At the individual level, the case turns on the agency and misjudgment of specific diplomats and leaders. Sir Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot negotiated a secret partition of Ottoman Arab provinces in 1916, producing a map shaped by imperial assumption rather than ethnographic knowledge. At Paris, Woodrow Wilson, David Lloyd George, Georges Clemenceau, and Faisal ibn Hussein pursued divergent aims: Wilsonian self-determination, British strategic and emerging oil interests, French security and Levantine claims, and Arab independence. British officials simultaneously promised Hussein an Arab kingdom, accepted Sykes-Picot zones, and endorsed a Jewish national home in Palestine through the Balfour Declaration. These contradictions were products of individual diplomacy under wartime uncertainty, and although Faisal and T. E. Lawrence exercised agency, power asymmetry prevented Arab leaders from enforcing promises.

At the state level, Britain and France acted as imperial states seeking territorial, strategic, and economic gains, while the Ottoman state's collapse created a vacuum. The mandate system converted military occupation into internationally legitimated administration: Britain took Iraq and Palestine/Transjordan, while France took Syria and Lebanon. State interests included control of routes to India, naval bases, and emerging oil concessions, especially the Mosul dispute. Borders were adjusted to strategic, sectarian, and resource concerns rather than communal boundaries, as seen in the enlargement of Lebanon, the creation of Transjordan, and the incorporation of Mosul into Iraq. State-level analysis explains much of the map, but it cannot fully explain why some mandates stabilized while others fractured.

At the systemic level, World War I destroyed the Ottoman order and reconfigured the international system. The League of Nations mandate system supplied a new legal vocabulary—tutelage toward self-government—while preserving imperial control. The Paris settlement was shaped by the wartime alliance system and by the Bolshevik publication of secret treaties, which discredited secret diplomacy and strengthened Wilsonian norms. Systemically, the collapse of one empire and the victory of others created a hierarchical order in which sovereignty was graded, with mandates described as territories "not yet able to stand by themselves." This hierarchy explains why Arab independence claims were subordinated to great-power security, though systemic analysis risks treating the Middle East as a passive object unless combined with local and transnational dynamics.

At the transnational level, Arab nationalism, Zionism, and pan-Islamism circulated across imperial borders before and after 1916. The Hussein-McMahon correspondence appealed to a transnational Arab identity,

while the Balfour Declaration mobilized Jewish transnational networks. After 1919, mandates became arenas for transnational contestation, as revolts in Iraq in 1920, Syria in 1925, and Palestine in 1936 linked local grievances to regional ideologies. Oil concessions, missionary networks, and diaspora communities also crossed borders. Transnational analysis shows that borders were immediately contested by movements that did not accept them, though it can overstate ideological coherence because many revolts were local and factional.

Mechanism

The central mechanism is imperial state construction through contradictory legitimation. First, wartime exigency produced overlapping promises to different constituencies: Arabs, Zionists, French officials, and British imperial strategists. Second, military victory allowed Britain and France to convert those promises into territorial control. Third, the League mandate system supplied legal form, reframing occupation as tutelage and deferring sovereignty. Fourth, borders were adjusted to strategic, sectarian, and resource logics, creating states whose populations did not neatly correspond to territorial units. Fifth, these states were institutionalized through colonial administration, local collaborators, and international recognition, making later revision costly. The mechanism is not that Sykes-Picot alone drew all borders; rather, it established the principle that great powers could partition and allocate territories, while later bargains such as San Remo in 1920 and the Cairo Conference in 1921 filled in the map. The result was a set of states whose legitimacy was contested from inception, providing a structural condition for later crises, including pan-Arabism, coups, sectarian politics, and the 2011 uprisings.

Perspective Reconstruction

African (primary): African scholarship on colonial statecraft treats Sykes-Picot as part of a wider imperial practice of partitioning territories and populations without consent. From this vantage, the mandate system resembles the civilizing mission and indirect rule analyzed in African contexts: external powers create states, empower intermediaries, and defer self-government indefinitely. The artificiality critique—familiar from debates over African borders—highlights that Middle Eastern states were also assembled from imperial convenience, producing mismatches between political boundaries and social geographies. Yet African perspectives also caution against border fetishism: Mamdani's argument that the colonial state's bifurcated power, not merely lines on a map, explains durable authoritarianism suggests that mandates created structures of rule that outlasted formal empire. Applied to the Middle East, this implies that Sykes-Picot's significance lies less in exact borders than in the institutionalization of externally controlled states, though this can underweight oil, Zionism, and sectarian politics.

Chinese: Chinese perspectives emphasize sovereignty and non-interference, reading Sykes-Picot as an illegitimate great-power bargain that violated self-determination. From this standpoint, mandates were colonialism under international legal cover, and the proper remedy is respect for territorial integrity and non-intervention. Chinese diplomacy historically supported Arab states' sovereignty and opposed Western military intervention, while pursuing economic partnerships rather than political restructuring. This perspective contributes a clear normative defense of postcolonial states against external partition, but it occludes internal authoritarianism and underplays transnational and sectarian dynamics.

Russian: Russian and Soviet perspectives frame Sykes-Picot as capitalist imperialism and great-power collusion against Arab self-determination. Soviet support for Arab nationalism, anti-Zionism, and state-led development positioned Moscow as an alternative patron, exposing Western hypocrisy in invoking self-determination while partitioning territories. This perspective highlights material and strategic motives behind

mandates and challenges Western claims to benevolent tutelage. However, it occludes Russia's own imperial and great-power interests and can reduce complex local politics to anti-imperial struggle.

Western: Western perspectives, especially diplomatic history, stress that Sykes-Picot was a secret wartime expedient, not a comprehensive blueprint, and that actual borders emerged through later negotiations, local resistance, and strategic recalculation. Scholars such as Fromkin emphasize contingency, misjudgment, and the gap between plans and outcomes, while Hourani situates the settlement in longer Ottoman and Arab political traditions. This perspective explains variation among mandates and warns against the artificial borders monocausal thesis. Its occlusion is a tendency to normalize imperial power by focusing on intentions and constraints, understating coercion, racial hierarchy, and the violence of occupation.

UN: The UN perspective is retrospective: the League mandate system is seen as a precursor to UN trusteeship, with mixed legacies. It emphasizes legal evolution from tutelage to self-determination, and frames the post-1945 order as an attempt to correct mandate-era abuses through decolonization and human rights. The UN view highlights that mandates created international obligations, not merely bilateral empire, and that their legitimacy was contested even at the time. Yet the UN did not exist in 1919, so this perspective risks anachronism and occludes power politics that limit enforcement of self-determination.

Explicit Adjudication

The African/postcolonial perspective best explains the case's central mechanism: the construction of states by external powers through contradictory promises and legal tutelage. It captures the legitimacy deficit that haunted the post-Ottoman order and connects Middle Eastern partition to a broader colonial pattern. However, it is incomplete if it treats borders as destiny; the Western diplomatic-historical perspective correctly shows that borders were revised, that local actors shaped outcomes, and that institutional choices mattered. The best explanation is therefore a synthesis: imperial construction created the structural conditions of contested legitimacy, while subsequent state-building, resource politics, and social coalitions determined which states endured or fractured. The Chinese and Russian perspectives add valuable normative critiques of intervention and hypocrisy but are less explanatory of the 1916-1919 process itself; the UN perspective is most useful for tracing legal legacies rather than causal origins. Thus, for this case, the African perspective has the strongest explanatory power at the level of origins, and the Western perspective has the strongest corrective power against determinism; neither alone is sufficient.

2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Mechanism identification.** Using the five key ideas, identify the causal mechanism linking the Ottoman mandate legacy to the 2011 legitimacy crisis. Specify whether the mechanism operates at the state, systemic, or transnational level of analysis, and state one observable implication that would falsify your claim.

2. **Rentierism vs. sectarianism.** Two explanations compete for the 2011 uprisings: rentier-state theory (Owen 2004) and sectarian-identity mobilization (L43). Adjudicate between them for the cases of Tunisia (non-rentier, non-sectarian) and Bahrain (rentier, sectarian). Which theory survives the comparison, and what scope condition must be added?

3. **African parallel.** Reconstruct the African perspective: how does the 2011 West Asian crisis illuminate the parallel construction of the African state system (Berlin Conference, mandate/trusteeship legacies)? What does the African vantage point reveal that the Western "state failure" framing occludes?

4. **Artificiality thesis test.** The Sykes-Picot "artificiality thesis" claims that externally drawn borders produced illegitimate states. Evaluate this claim against the evidence of which states collapsed (Libya, Syria, Yemen) versus which survived (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco). What does the pattern imply about the thesis's scope conditions?

5. **Rentier vulnerability ranking.** Using rentier-state indicators (hydrocarbon rents as share of GDP, state employment share, subsidy burden), rank the Gulf monarchies by vulnerability to a 2011-style legitimacy crisis. Identify the state that the model predicts should have been most vulnerable and explain why it was not.

6. **UN prescription.** From the UN perspective (mandate legacy plus decolonization framework), prescribe a response to a hypothetical 2025 legitimacy crisis in a rentier monarchy. State two falsifiers that would show your prescription failed.

MODEL ANSWER

The 2011 uprisings exposed a legitimacy crisis rooted in the post-colonial state system constructed after the Ottoman collapse. The mechanism runs through three linked stages. First, the mandate system (Fromkin 1989; Hourani 1991) installed states whose boundaries and institutions were designed for imperial convenience rather than indigenous political community, producing a structural deficit of legitimacy. Second, oil rents allowed ruling elites to substitute distribution for representation, creating what Owen (2004) identifies as rentier political economies in which the social contract is fiscal rather than participatory. Third, the 2011 shock tested this contract: where rents were sufficient and institutions cohesive, as in the Gulf monarchies, the system absorbed protest; where rents were thin or institutions brittle, as in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, it fractured. The mechanism operates primarily at the state level but is conditioned by systemic factors, including the regional diffusion of protest frames and transnational sectarian networks.

Adjudicating rentierism against sectarianism requires case comparison. Tunisia, lacking significant hydrocarbon rents and lacking a salient sectarian cleavage, still experienced the first and most consequential uprising, which suggests rentierism is sufficient but not necessary for crisis. Bahrain, by contrast, combined rentier wealth with sectarian polarization, yet survived through external Gulf Cooperation Council intervention, indicating that sectarianism can be instrumentalized by regimes rather than operating as an independent cause. The scope condition that must be added is that rentierism predicts vulnerability only where the fiscal contract is already eroding through demographic pressure, youth unemployment, or subsidy retrenchment, and where no external patron guarantees regime survival.

The African perspective reframes the crisis as a parallel instance of externally constructed state systems confronting legitimacy deficits. Just as African states inherited colonial boundaries and institutional forms that privileged extraction over representation, West Asian states inherited mandate structures. The African vantage point reveals what the Western "state failure" framing occludes: the problem is not the absence of a state but the presence of a state form designed for purposes other than popular sovereignty. Mamdani's (1996) distinction between citizen and subject, developed for the African case, travels to West Asia, since mandate states governed through differentiated legal categories that persist in contemporary citizenship regimes. The Western framing treats collapse as pathology; the African framing treats it as a predictable consequence of a particular mode of state construction.

The artificiality thesis fares poorly as a general explanation. If externally drawn borders caused illegitimacy, all mandate states should have been equally vulnerable. Yet Egypt and Morocco, states with equally artificial

origins, survived, while Libya and Syria, whose borders were also externally drawn, collapsed. The pattern suggests that border artificiality is a constant across the region and cannot explain variation in outcomes. What varies is institutional capacity, rent availability, and the presence of external patrons. The thesis retains limited validity: it explains why no state in the region enjoys deep historical legitimacy, but not why some collapsed in 2011 and others did not. Its scope condition is that it operates as a background condition rather than a triggering cause.

Rentier vulnerability ranking produces a counterintuitive result. By standard indicators, hydrocarbon rents as a share of GDP, state employment share, and subsidy burden, the Gulf monarchies appear highly vulnerable because their economies are undiversified and their populations are rent-dependent. Yet they were the most stable in 2011. The resolution lies in the distinction between rent availability and rent distribution: Gulf states possess sufficient rents to maintain the fiscal contract, and their small citizen populations make per-capita distribution affordable. The model predicts Saudi Arabia or Kuwait should have been most vulnerable due to large youth populations and sectarian fault lines; instead, Bahrain, smaller, more sectarian, and with thinner rents, was the site of sustained protest, contained only by Gulf Cooperation Council intervention. The falsifying observation is that rentier theory alone cannot predict which rentier state collapses without incorporating external patronage and sectarian demography.

From the United Nations perspective, the mandate legacy imposes a responsibility to support state capacity without reproducing imperial tutelage. A prescription for a 2025 legitimacy crisis in a rentier monarchy would emphasize transitional support for institutional reform rather than regime change, multilateral frameworks for subsidy reform that protect vulnerable populations, and avoidance of unilateral intervention that replicates mandate-era imposition. Two falsifiers apply: first, if reform support correlates with increased regime repression rather than liberalization, the prescription failed; second, if multilateral frameworks are captured by great-power interests, as occurred in the 2003 Iraq intervention, the United Nations framework has been instrumentalized and the prescription is void.

2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In 2024 a Gulf monarchy announces subsidy cuts and partial political liberalization in response to declining oil revenues. Protests erupt in the capital and in a Shia-majority eastern province. Regional powers offer competing mediation, and the United Nations Security Council debates a resolution. Your memo must assess whether this crisis is best explained by rentier-state theory, by sectarian mobilization, or by the mandate-legacy legitimacy deficit, and must prescribe a response.

(b) Required memo headings (use exactly these as prompts):

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking the announced reforms to the outbreak of protest, specifying the level of analysis and one falsifier.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and United Nations perspectives would each interpret the crisis, in three to five sentences per perspective.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one historical case from the post-Ottoman or African state-system experience that illuminates the present crisis, and state the limits of the analogy.
- **Falsifiers:** State two observable implications that would show your preferred explanation is wrong.

(c) Self-check: Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen next), and prescription (what should be done), and that no single sentence conflates two of these.

2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Which of the following best explains why some post-colonial West Asian states collapsed in 2011 while others survived, according to the lesson's adjudication?

A. Externally drawn borders under Sykes-Picot made all mandate states equally illegitimate and therefore equally likely to collapse. B. Rentierism is sufficient but not necessary for crisis; institutional capacity, rent availability, and external patronage explain the variation in outcomes. C. Sectarian identity mobilization was the primary driver across all cases, with rentierism playing only a minor role. D. The United Nations mandate framework provided enough legitimacy to prevent collapse in states that accepted its norms.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **A** is wrong because it confuses a background condition with a triggering cause. Border artificiality is constant across the region and cannot explain why Egypt and Morocco survived while Libya and Syria collapsed; it explains the absence of deep historical legitimacy, not variation in outcomes.
- **C** is wrong because it overstates sectarianism. The Tunisian case, which lacked a salient sectarian cleavage yet experienced the first and most consequential uprising, falsifies the claim that sectarian mobilization was primary across all cases; sectarianism is better understood as a resource regimes can instrumentalize.
- **D** is wrong because it misattributes legitimacy to the United Nations framework. The mandate system was an imperial instrument of control, not a source of popular legitimacy, and no evidence suggests that acceptance of its norms prevented collapse in 2011.
- **B** is correct because it captures the lesson's adjudication: rentierism predicts vulnerability where the fiscal contract erodes, but Tunisia shows it is not necessary, while Gulf survival shows rent availability and external patronage are decisive scope conditions.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — From Ottoman provinces to post-1920 political units (indicative; boundaries were contested and changed over time)

Late Ottoman unit (approx.)	Geography	Post-1920 outcome	Governing framework
Vilayet of Syria (with Lebanon, Palestine, Transjordan)	Greater Syria	French mandate Syria; French mandate Lebanon; British mandate Palestine/Transjordan	League of Nations mandate system
Vilayet of Aleppo	Northern Syria	French mandate Syria	League mandate
Vilayet of Beirut	Coastal Levant	Incorporated into French mandate Syria/Lebanon	League mandate
Vilayets of Baghdad, Basra, Mosul	Mesopotamia	British mandate Iraq	League mandate
Vilayet of Hejaz	Western Arabia	Hashemite kingdom, later Saudi consolidation	Sovereign/contested
Anatolian provinces	Turkey	Republic of Turkey	Sovereign (post-1923)

Late Ottoman unit (approx.)	Geography	Post-1920 outcome	Governing framework
Egypt (Ottoman province; British protectorate)	Nile Valley	British-protected Egypt, later independence	Protectorate/sovereign transition

Table 2 — Indicative hydrocarbon profile of West Asian and North African states (2020s, rounded/qualitative; not exact production statistics)

State/territory	Hydrocarbon role	Approx. global position	Rentier indicator (qualitative)
Saudi Arabia	Very high crude producer; OPEC leader	Top-tier producer	Very high rent dependence
Iraq	High crude producer; conflict-constrained	Major producer	High rent dependence
Iran	High producer; sanctions-constrained	Major producer	High rent dependence
UAE	High producer; diversified economy	Major producer	High but diversifying
Kuwait	High per-capita producer	Significant producer	Very high rent dependence
Qatar	Gas-dominant; LNG exporter	Major gas producer	Very high rent dependence
Oman	Medium producer; diversification push	Mid-level producer	Medium-high rent dependence
Libya	Medium producer; volatile output	Mid-level producer	High rent dependence
Algeria	Medium producer; gas exporter	Mid-level producer	Medium-high rent dependence
Egypt	Low-medium producer; mixed producer-importer	Lower-tier producer	Lower rent dependence

Table 3 — Rentier-state indicators and their interpretive limits

Indicator	What it measures	Typical high-rentier pattern	Key limitation
Hydrocarbon share of exports	External revenue concentration	Very high share	Ignores non-hydrocarbon services and remittances
Hydrocarbon share of government revenue	Fiscal dependence on rent	Very high share	Accounting conventions vary across states

Indicator	What it measures	Typical high-rentier pattern	Key limitation
State/public-sector employment share	State as distributor of rent	Large public payroll	Does not capture informal or military employment
Citizen taxation level	Fiscal contract between state and society	Low direct taxation	Indirect taxes and fees may be hidden
Subsidy and transfer burden	Rent distribution to population	Broad subsidies	Reform politics can trigger backlash
Sovereign wealth fund size	Intergenerational rent management	Large fund	Fund governance and transparency vary

Analysis Questions

1. **Trend:** From 1914 to 1946, how did the number and type of sovereign or quasi-sovereign units in the former Ottoman Arab provinces change? Does the shift from imperial provinces to mandates to independent states show fragmentation, centralization, or recombination, and what does that imply for the "artificial borders" debate?
2. **Level of analysis:** Is rentierism best explained at the state level (fiscal structure and regime type), the systemic level (oil markets, OPEC, and great-power demand), or the transnational level (corporate extraction, financial circuits, and labor migration)? Specify the mechanism that links your chosen level to regime stability or instability.
3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five):** How would the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each interpret (a) the 1920 border settlement and (b) the 2011 uprisings? Identify one contribution and one occlusion for each perspective.
4. **Interpretation:** Does hydrocarbon wealth stabilize or destabilize post-colonial states? Compare high-rent Gulf monarchies with lower-rent republics such as Egypt, Syria, or Iraq, and explain whether the difference is better explained by rent level, regime type, or external intervention.
5. **Limitation:** What data would be required to test the claim that "artificial borders cause conflict"? Identify at least three confounding variables (for example, regime type, oil location, Cold War alignment, or sectarian demography) and explain how they complicate causal inference.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Ottoman provinces to mandates" (hand-drawn map sketch)
What to draw: Draw a large rectangle labeled "Ottoman Arab provinces, 1914." Inside it, sketch five smaller boxes or irregular regions labeled "Syria," "Aleppo," "Beirut," "Mesopotamia (Baghdad/Basra/Mosul)," and "Hejaz/Palestine." Draw arrows from each box to a second row of boxes labeled "French mandate Syria," "French mandate Lebanon," "British mandate Iraq," "British mandate Palestine/Transjordan," and "Saudi/Hashemite successor states."
Labels to place: "vilayet," "mandate," "Sykes-Picot line (1916)," "League of Nations," "sovereignty deferred."

Perspective overlay to annotate: In the margin, write "African perspective: partition logic resembles colonial boundary-making elsewhere; 'artificiality' is not unique to the Middle East." Add a second note: "Western perspective: mandates as tutelage; UN perspective: mandate legacy as incomplete decolonization."

Visual 2 — "Rentier circuit" (hand-drawn flow diagram)
What to draw: Draw a circle labeled "Oil/Gas Rent." From it, draw arrows to four boxes: "State Revenue," "Public Employment," "Subsidies/Transfers," and "Sovereign Wealth Fund." Draw a dashed arrow from "State Revenue" back to "Regime Stability," and a dashed arrow from "Low Citizen Taxation" to "Weak Fiscal Contract." Place a small break symbol on the arrow between "Rent" and "Diversification" to show blockage.
Labels to place: "rentier state," "fiscal contract," "distribution," "diversification gap," "OPEC/systemic market."
Perspective overlay to annotate: Write "Chinese perspective: economic partnership and non-interference; state capacity matters more than regime type." Write "Russian perspective: sovereign choice; external pressure is the destabilizer." Write "Western perspective: rentierism as authoritarian bargain; reform as conditionality."

Visual 3 — "Crisis of the post-colonial state system, 1916–2011" (hand-drawn timeline)
What to draw: Draw a horizontal timeline from 1916 to 2011. Mark nodes: 1916 Sykes-Picot; 1919 Paris Peace Conference; 1920 mandates; 1945 UN/Arab League; 1956 Suez; 1967 war; 1979 Iranian revolution; 1991 Gulf War; 2003 Iraq War; 2011 uprisings. Above the timeline, draw a wavy line labeled "legitimacy of post-colonial state order." Below it, draw a wavy line labeled "contestation: pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, nationalism, sectarianism."
Labels to place: "mandate," "independence," "Nasserism," "oil shocks," "sanctions," "uprising."
Perspective overlay to annotate: Write "African perspective: crisis of the post-colonial state, not only Middle Eastern exceptionalism." Write "UN perspective: mandate legacy and decolonization unfinished." Write "Western perspective: state failure and intervention dilemma."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue	Notes
What is the central puzzle of Lesson 41?	How the modern West Asian state system was constructed from Ottoman collapse, how borders and oil shaped it, and why 2011 exposed a crisis of legitimacy. Sources: Fromkin (1989); Hourani (1991).
What did the Ottoman legacy leave behind?	Administrative provinces, millet/communal legacies, uneven centralization, and a region later reorganized by external powers. Source: Hourani (1991).
What was Sykes-Picot?	1916 Anglo-French agreement on spheres of influence; not a final border map by itself, but a symbol of externally imposed order. Source: Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916); Fromkin (1989).

Cue	Notes
What is the "artificiality thesis"?	Claim that Middle Eastern states are externally imposed and therefore lack natural legitimacy; must be tested against historical state formation elsewhere. Source: Anderson (1987).
What are the limits of the artificiality thesis?	Many states are historically constructed; borders alone do not explain regime stability or conflict. Source: Anderson (1987).
What is rentierism?	State reliance on external rent, especially hydrocarbons, rather than domestic taxation; affects state-society relations. Source: Owen (2004).
How does oil shape politics?	Oil concentrates revenue in the state, funds distribution, reduces taxation, and can strengthen authoritarian bargains while complicating diversification. Source: Owen (2004).
What contested the post-Ottoman order?	Pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, nationalism, and the nation-state competed to define political legitimacy. Source: Hourani (1991).
What was the 2011 crisis?	Uprisings challenged post-colonial regimes and revealed weaknesses in legitimacy, institutions, and regional order. Source: general post-2011 scholarship; not a single canonical citation.
How do the five perspectives differ?	African: parallel construction and critique of exceptionalism; Chinese: non-interference and partnership; Russian: sovereignty and anti-Western framing; Western: state failure and intervention; UN: mandate legacy and decolonization.
What is a key falsifier?	If border "artificiality" alone predicted conflict, all similarly constructed states would be equally unstable; they are not.
What cross-links matter?	L10 imperialism, L11 mandate system, L9 sovereignty, L42 Iran, L43 sectarianism, L44 proxy warfare, L46 hydrocarbons.

Summary (3–5 sentences): The modern West Asian state system emerged from Ottoman collapse and was reorganized through mandates, agreements, and later independence, not from a single map. Oil and rentierism then reshaped state-society relations by concentrating revenue and weakening fiscal contracts. The post-Ottoman order was contested by pan-Arab, pan-Islamic, and nationalist projects, and the 2011 uprisings exposed a crisis of legitimacy in that order. The African perspective is essential because it frames this as part of broader post-colonial state construction rather than Middle Eastern exceptionalism. Each of the five perspectives contributes a partial explanation and also occludes something important.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon:** The modern Middle East was not simply "drawn on a map" in one moment. It was built in layers: first the Ottoman Empire collapsed, then outside powers organized the region through mandates and agreements, then oil made some states very rich, and finally many of those states faced a legitimacy crisis in 2011. Borders matter, but they do not by themselves explain why some states survive and others fracture.

2. **Mark gaps:** I need to be careful not to say Sykes-Picot alone created all borders; it was one agreement among several. I also need to avoid treating rentierism as a universal law; it is a tendency with exceptions. I am less certain about exact oil-production rankings and should keep them qualitative unless verified.

3. **Reread verification:** Rechecking the canonical sources confirms that Fromkin emphasizes the construction of the modern Middle East after Ottoman collapse, Hourani stresses historical depth and ideological contestation, Anderson cautions against overusing the artificiality thesis, Owen links oil to political economy, and the Sykes-Picot Agreement itself was a wartime diplomatic arrangement rather than a complete settlement.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits:** Think of the region like a house built on an old foundation: the Ottoman foundation was removed, new walls were added by outside builders, oil money furnished some rooms lavishly, and 2011 revealed cracks in the structure. The analogy helps show layered construction, but it is limited because states are not houses: they have armies, ideologies, and transnational ties that a building metaphor cannot capture.

5. **Rewrite:** The West Asian state system is a layered post-imperial order: Ottoman administrative legacies were reorganized through mandates and diplomacy, oil rents transformed state-society bargains, and competing ideologies challenged the nation-state. The 2011 uprisings showed that legitimacy crises can expose the fragility of that order. No single factor—borders, oil, or ideology—explains outcomes; the explanation depends on level of analysis and perspective.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L41	definition	What is the "mandate system" in the post-Ottoman context?	The mandate system was the League of Nations framework under which former Ottoman territories were administered by Britain and France as "sacred trusts of civilisation," formalising imperial control behind a legal veneer of tutelage. It converted wartime conquest into internationally recognised authority.	African perspective: mandates are read as a template for later trusteeship and indirect rule, revealing continuity between Middle Eastern and African colonial state construction.
L41	mechanism	How did Sykes-Picot (1916) actually shape borders?	Sykes-Picot was a secret Anglo-French agreement dividing Ottoman Arab provinces into spheres of influence; its lines were later modified at San Remo and Lausanne, so borders emerged from bargaining among imperial powers, local elites, and the League, not from the agreement alone.	Western perspective treats Sykes-Picot as a founding sin; African perspective notes similar secret partitions (Berlin 1884-85) and warns against over-attributing causality to a single document.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L41	application	What is a "rentier state" and which Gulf states exemplify it?	A rentier state derives a large share of government revenue from external rent (oil) rather than domestic taxation, weakening the fiscal contract between state and society; Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE are classic cases.	Chinese perspective emphasises commercial partnership with rentier states; Russian perspective stresses sovereign resource control; both occlude questions of domestic accountability.
L41	comparison	How does the "artificiality thesis" differ from the "institutional path-dependence" view of Middle East borders?	The artificiality thesis claims borders are externally imposed and therefore illegitimate; path-dependence argues that even arbitrary lines generate constituencies, institutions, and identities that make them durable and meaningful over time.	Western and Arab nationalist traditions favour artificiality; African scholarship (Mamdani, Bayart) stresses how colonial lines become lived political realities.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L41	source	What does Fromkin (1989) argue about the making of the modern Middle East?	Fromkin argues that the modern Middle East was largely created by British and French decisions during and after WWI, with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire producing a new regional order shaped by great-power improvisation.	Western historiography; African readers note the parallel with Scramble-for-Africa narratives and the risk of erasing local agency.
L41	debate	Was pan-Arabism a failure of the nation-state or its precondition?	Pan-Arabism challenged the legitimacy of post-Ottoman nation-states by positing a single Arab nation; yet it also provided the ideological vocabulary through which those states consolidated, and its decline after 1967 entrenched the nation-state as the default unit.	Arab nationalist perspective; UN perspective reads pan-Arabism as a regional self-determination movement comparable to pan-Africanism.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L41	reconstruction	How does the African perspective reconstruct the "artificiality" debate?	African scholarship treats border artificiality as a universal colonial condition, not a Middle Eastern exception, and stresses that post-colonial states everywhere inherited arbitrary lines that became politically productive through elite bargaining and popular identification.	Primary perspective: Grovogui, Mamdani, Bayart; shows what Western "failed state" discourse occludes about state-making under constraint.
L41	occlusion	What does the rentier-state thesis occlude about Gulf politics?	The thesis foregrounds fiscal structure and predicts weak accountability, but it can occlude tribal and kinship networks, religious legitimacy, gendered citizenship, and the role of migrant labour in sustaining the social contract.	African perspective adds that rentierism parallels post-colonial resource states (Nigeria, Angola) where oil also distorts accountability.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L41	adjudication	How should one adjudicate between "state failure" and "state transformation" readings of the 2011 uprisings?	Evidence of institutional collapse in Libya, Syria, and Yemen supports failure; evidence of regime adaptation in Egypt, Tunisia, and the Gulf supports transformation; the better reading is that 2011 exposed variegated state capacities rather than a uniform collapse.	Western "state failure" framing vs. African "state transformation under constraint" framing; adjudication requires disaggregating cases.
L41	visual	What does a "before/after 1920" border map of the Middle East show?	It shows the shift from Ottoman provincial boundaries to League-mandated state borders, highlighting both continuity (some provincial lines) and rupture (new international borders, especially in Iraq, Syria, and Palestine).	UN perspective: maps as legal instruments of decolonisation; African perspective: maps as tools of partition comparable to African boundary commissions.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L41	mechanism	What mechanism links oil rents to authoritarian durability in the Gulf?	Oil rents fund patronage, security apparatuses, and welfare without taxation, reducing the need for representative institutions; the mechanism is fiscal (no taxation, no representation) mediated by coercive capacity and distributive legitimacy.	Russian perspective: sovereign resource control as legitimate; Western perspective: rents as corruption; African perspective: parallels with petro-states in Nigeria and Angola.
L41	application	How did the 2011 uprisings challenge the post-colonial state system?	They challenged the legitimacy of post-colonial regimes by mobilising cross-sectarian, cross-class demands for dignity and accountability, exposing the gap between formal sovereignty and popular sovereignty across the region.	UN perspective: popular sovereignty and human rights; African perspective: echoes of African "second liberation" movements.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L41	debate	Is "Sykes-Picot" a useful analytical category or a myth?	It is a useful shorthand for great-power partition but a myth if treated as the single cause of regional disorder; borders were renegotiated repeatedly (San Remo 1920, Lausanne 1923, local revolts), and agency of local actors mattered.	Western media often reifies Sykes-Picot; African and Russian perspectives stress local and great-power agency beyond one document.
L41	reconstruction	What does the UN perspective contribute to understanding mandate legacy?	The UN frames mandates as an early, flawed attempt at international trusteeship that evolved into decolonisation norms; it stresses legal continuity from League mandates to UN trust territories and self-determination.	UN perspective: legal-institutional; occludes the violence of mandate rule and the selectivity of decolonisation.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Concept / Claim	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence Basis	Gap to Close
Ottoman provincial boundaries vs. post-1920 state borders	0–100	Fromkin (1989); Hourani (1991)	Verify specific provincial lines (vilayets) and their correspondence to modern states
Sykes-Picot as cause vs. shorthand	0–100	Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916); Anderson (1987)	Check San Remo and Lausanne modifications

Concept / Claim	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence Basis	Gap to Close
Rentier-state mechanism (fiscal contract)	0–100	Owen (2004); Beblawi & Luciani (1987)	Compare Gulf cases with non-Gulf oil states (Iran, Iraq)
Artificiality thesis and its limits	0–100	Anderson (1987); Mamdani (1996)	Test with specific border disputes (Kuwait-Iraq, Western Sahara analogy)
2011 uprisings as crisis of post-colonial state system	0–100	Owen (2004); Bayart (2009)	Distinguish regime collapse (Libya, Syria) from regime adaptation (Egypt, Gulf)
African parallel state construction	0–100	Mamdani (1996); Grovogui (2006)	Map African mandate/trusteeship cases to Middle Eastern ones
Chinese non-interference in West Asia	0–100	General IR literature	Verify specific Chinese diplomatic positions 2011–2020
Russian sovereign-choice framing	0–100	General IR literature	Check Russian statements on Syria and Libya
UN mandate-to-decolonisation legal arc	0–100	UN Charter; League Covenant	Trace specific trust territories in Africa/Middle East

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you initially treat as the "default" or "neutral" view, and what evidence from the lesson destabilises that assumption?
2. Identify one mechanism you can now state with its scope conditions; identify one you still cannot. What is the specific missing evidence?
3. Where did your prior knowledge of "Sykes-Picot" come from (media, prior coursework, political discourse), and how does the lesson's adjudication change its analytical status?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Sykes-Picot drew all modern Middle East borders."	Sykes-Picot was a secret 1916 agreement modified by San Remo (1920) and Lausanne (1923); borders emerged from multi-actor bargaining, not one document.	Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916); Fromkin (1989)

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Rentier states are automatically authoritarian and unstable."	Rentierism weakens the fiscal contract but durability depends on coercive capacity, distributive legitimacy, and social structure; some rentier states have proven resilient.	Owen (2004); Beblawi & Luciani (1987)
"Middle East borders are uniquely artificial."	Colonial border artificiality is a global condition; African scholarship shows such lines become politically productive over time.	Mamdani (1996); Bayart (2009)
"The 2011 uprisings uniformly destroyed post-colonial states."	Outcomes varied: state collapse in Libya, Syria, Yemen; regime adaptation in Egypt, Tunisia, Gulf monarchies.	Owen (2004); Anderson (1987)
"Pan-Arabism failed because Arabs rejected unity."	Pan-Arabism was undermined by state-building interests of ruling elites and by the 1967 defeat, not simply popular rejection; it also shaped the nation-states it opposed.	Hourani (1991); Anderson (1987)
"Oil wealth guarantees regime survival."	Oil rents help but are mediated by institutional capacity, social coalitions, and external support; rentier states have faced serious challenges (Iran 1979, Iraq 2003).	Ross (2012); Owen (2004)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Mandate system; rentier state; artificiality thesis; pan-Arabism; post-colonial state crisis	Great-power partition → League mandates → state formation; oil rent → weak fiscal contract → authoritarian durability; border imposition → institutional path dependence; uprisings → legitimacy crisis → variegated outcomes	Fromkin (1989) — great-power creation of Middle East; Hourani (1991) — Arab political thought; Owen (2004) — state, power, and politics; Anderson (1987) — imagined communities and nationalism; Mamdani (1996) — citizen and subject; Bayart (2009) — politics of the belly	Sykes-Picot (1916); San Remo (1920); Lausanne (1923); Gulf rentier states (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE); 2011 uprisings (Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen); African parallels (Nigeria, Angola)	Artificiality vs. path dependence; state failure vs. state transformation; pan-Arabism as failure vs. precondition; rentierism as determinism vs. contingency	If borders showed no institutional persistence post-1920, artificiality thesis strengthened; if rentier states democratise without tax reform, fiscal-contract mechanism weakened; if 2011 produced uniform collapse, state-failure reading strengthened	L10 (imperialism); L11 (mandate system); L9 (sovereignty); L42 (Iran); L43 (sectarian); L44 (proxy warfare); L46 (hydrocarbons)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 20 min):** Re-read Section 2.2 and 2.3; redraw the before/after 1920 border map from memory; check against the Data Lab table.
- **R2 (Day 3, 30 min):** Reconstruct the five perspectives on Sykes-Picot in one paragraph each without notes; compare to Section 2.7.
- **R3 (Day 7, 45 min):** Write a 300-word memo applying the rentier-state mechanism to one Gulf state and one African petro-state; identify one falsifier.
- **R4 (Day 14, 60 min):** Complete the Problem Pair case (2011 uprisings) under timed conditions; grade against the model answer.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 min):** Full lesson re-synthesis: explain all five key ideas to an imaginary peer, then take the hinge question cold; log errors in Section 7.3.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can state the five key ideas in order without notes.
- ☐ I can distinguish the Sykes-Picot agreement from the San Remo and Lausanne settlements.
- ☐ I can define "rentier state" and give its fiscal mechanism.
- ☐ I can name at least three Gulf rentier states and one African parallel.
- ☐ I can explain the artificiality thesis and its strongest counterargument.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective on border artificiality in 3–5 sentences.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives in 3–5 sentences each.
- ☐ I can adjudicate between "state failure" and "state transformation" readings of 2011.
- ☐ I can identify scope conditions for the rentier-state mechanism.
- ☐ I can name at least two falsifiers for the rentier-state thesis.
- ☐ I have completed the Data Lab analysis questions.
- ☐ I have drawn or annotated at least one of the three visuals.
- ☐ I have filled in Cornell notes cues and summary.
- ☐ I have completed the Feynman compression steps.
- ☐ I have reviewed all flashcards at least once.
- ☐ I have scored my confidence audit and logged at least one error.
- ☐ I can link this lesson to L10, L11, L9, L42, L43, L44, and L46.
- ☐ I can answer the hinge question and diagnose each distractor.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Ottoman legacy and mandate construction - Fromkin, D. (1989). *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East*. Henry Holt. - Hourani, A. (1991). *A History of the Arab Peoples*. Harvard University Press.

Borders, Sykes-Picot, and artificiality - Anderson, B. (1987). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Verso. - Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916). (Primary document.)

Oil, rentierism, and political economy - Owen, R. (2004). *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge. - Beblawi, H. and Luciani, G. (eds.) (1987). *The Rentier State*. Croom Helm.

Post-Ottoman order and contestation - Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press. - Bayart, J.-F. (2009). *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. Polity.

African parallel state construction and critique - Grovogui, S. (2006). *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions*. Palgrave Macmillan. - Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press.

End of Lesson 41. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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43. The Iranian State: Velayat-e Faqih and Strategic Logic

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 42: The Iranian State: Velayat-e Faqih and Strategic Logic
Module	Module 7: West Asia and Iranian Geopolitics
Prerequisites	L41 (West Asia state system), L7 (ontological security)
Interleaved links	Forward to L43 (sectarian), L44 (proxy warfare), L45 (nuclear)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, visuals, flashcards, memo exercise
Bloom ceiling	Analyze, evaluate, and create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is not whether the Islamic Republic of Iran is "revolutionary" or "pragmatic"—those labels are too thin to carry explanatory weight—but how a state can sustain a constitutional order built on clerical guardianship while simultaneously operating as a strategically calculating actor in a hostile regional and international environment. Since 1979, Iran has combined a political theology that locates sovereignty in the jurist-guardian with institutions that look, from the outside, like a conventional security state: parallel military forces, intelligence networks, economic conglomerates, and diplomatic bargaining. The puzzle is therefore mechanistic: what institutional and ideological arrangements allow revolutionary claims to be converted into durable state capacity, and under what conditions do those same arrangements generate vulnerability? The question matters because Iran is not merely a case of authoritarian resilience; it is a test of whether revolutionary ideology can be routinized without being emptied of content, and whether a state under sustained sanctions can convert isolation into strategic depth. The lesson treats the Islamic Republic as a political system whose logic must be reconstructed from its own categories—Velayat-e Faqih, the Guardian Council, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the Basij, and the resistance economy—rather than as a deviation from a presumed Western liberal template.

This lesson sits at the intersection of three prior threads in the curriculum. Lesson 41 on the West Asian state system established that regional order is shaped by colonial borders, rentier political economies, sectarian geopolitics, and great-power penetration; Iran's state must be read against that regional field, not as an isolated unit. Lesson 7 on ontological security established that states seek continuity of self-identity and may treat threats to identity as existential even when material survival is not immediately at stake; this is essential for understanding why the Islamic Republic frames external pressure not only as a security problem but as an assault on its revolutionary selfhood. The forward links to Lessons 43–45 mean that this lesson is deliberately foundational: sectarian geopolitics, proxy warfare, and nuclear bargaining all presuppose an accurate model of the Iranian state's decision-making architecture. If one misidentifies where authority lies—between the Supreme Leader, the president, the IRGC, the clerical establishment, and elected institutions—then every subsequent judgment about escalation, deterrence, or diplomacy will be distorted. The lesson therefore begins with institutional mapping before moving to strategic interpretation.

By the end of the lesson, the student should be able to perform four operations that are often conflated in public debate. First, description: specify the formal and informal institutions of the Islamic Republic, including

the Supreme Leader, Guardian Council, Assembly of Experts, president, parliament, IRGC, Artesh, Basij, and the judiciary, and explain how they interact. Second, explanation: identify mechanisms through which these institutions produce outcomes such as sanctions resilience, regional influence, or domestic repression. Third, prediction: state scope conditions under which a given mechanism is likely to hold or fail, for example when oil revenues collapse, when protests cross class lines, or when succession uncertainty rises. Fourth, prescription: evaluate policy options without confusing analytic claims with normative commitments. The lesson's assessment logic is built around this distinction; a strong memo will not merely assert that the regime is "fragile" or "stable" but will specify the evidence, level of analysis, and falsifiers that would change the conclusion.

The theoretical stakes are high because Iran exposes the limits of several standard frameworks. Liberal institutionalism struggles to explain durable cooperation under sanctions; realism struggles to explain why a state with formidable conventional vulnerabilities invests in ideological export and proxy networks; constructivism can explain identity but risks circularity if every policy is read back into "revolutionary identity." The lesson therefore adopts a mechanism-based approach: it asks how Velayat-e Faqih shapes incentives, how parallel security institutions solve or create coordination problems, how defensive realism and revolutionary ideology are combined rather than treated as alternatives, how the resistance economy and smuggling networks convert pressure into adaptation, and how Persian nationalism, Shia identity, and martyrdom politics supply both legitimacy and mobilization. Each key idea is presented with scope conditions and counterarguments, because the same institution can be stabilizing under one set of conditions and destabilizing under another.

A central methodological commitment is that the African perspective is not an afterthought but a primary vantage point. African scholarship on revolutionary states, sovereignty norms, and post-colonial statecraft—ranging from Nkrumah's and Nyerere's reflections on self-determination to later analyses of parallel power structures and external intervention—reveals dimensions that Western, Chinese, Russian, and UN frameworks often occlude. In particular, the African vantage highlights how a state can be simultaneously anti-imperial and internally hierarchical, how sovereignty claims can be both emancipatory and disciplinary, and how external sanctions can strengthen rather than weaken nationalist narratives. This does not mean treating Iran as an African case; it means using African theoretical resources to ask questions that Eurocentric IR often suppresses, such as who defines "legitimacy," whose security is being secured, and how revolutionary states manage the tension between mass mobilization and institutional control.

Finally, the lesson is explicit about evidence limits. Public opinion data on Iran are politically sensitive and methodologically contested; GAMAAN surveys, for example, provide valuable but not definitive insight into attitudes toward the regime, compulsory hijab, and political alternatives. Economic data are distorted by sanctions evasion, multiple exchange rates, and opaque IRGC-linked enterprises. Strategic intentions are inferred from behavior and rhetoric, not from transparent deliberation. The student is therefore expected to treat all claims as provisional and to specify falsifiers. The lesson's central question can be stated as follows: under what conditions does Velayat-e Faqih generate strategic capacity rather than paralysis, and when does the Islamic Republic's combination of ideological legitimacy and coercive capacity begin to decouple? Answering that question requires moving beyond the binary of "regime change" versus "regime stability" toward a nuanced account of institutional adaptation, elite cohesion, social contract erosion, and regional opportunity structures.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. From L41, what is the difference between a state's formal sovereignty and its effective capacity in a rentier political economy?
2. From L41, how do colonial borders in West Asia complicate the alignment of state boundaries with national identities?
3. From L7, define ontological security and explain why a state might prioritize identity continuity over short-term material gain.
4. From L7, how can external recognition or misrecognition affect a state's sense of self?
5. From earlier work on levels of analysis, what is the difference between an individual-level and a systemic-level explanation of foreign policy?
6. From earlier work on sanctions, what is the difference between coercive pressure and strategic strangulation, and why does the distinction matter?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. How does Velayat-e Faqih distribute authority among the Supreme Leader, elected institutions, and clerical bodies?
2. What functions do the IRGC, Artesh, and Basij perform, and how does their coexistence shape civil-military relations?
3. Is Iran's regional behavior better explained by defensive realism, revolutionary ideology, or a combination whose weights vary by issue?
4. Do the 2009 Green Movement and 2022 Mahsa Amini protests demonstrate a legitimacy crisis, a policy crisis, or a succession crisis?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Velayat-e Faqih**: doctrine of guardianship of the Islamic jurist; in Iran, the Supreme Leader's overarching authority over state and society, justified by Twelver Shia jurisprudence and revolutionary ideology.
- **Marja'-e Taqlid**: senior Shia cleric emulated by followers; a source of religious authority that can exist independently of state office.
- **Guardian Council**: body of clerics and jurists that vets legislation and candidates, guarding conformity with Islamic law and the constitution.
- **IRGC**: parallel military-security institution created after 1979 to protect the revolution; controls missile, naval, Quds Force, and extensive economic interests.
- **Artesh**: conventional armed forces; professional military with a more limited political role than the IRGC.
- **Basij**: paramilitary mobilization network embedded in society; used for internal security, social control, and wartime mobilization.
- **Resistance economy**: policy framework emphasizing self-sufficiency, sanctions evasion, and reduced vulnerability to external economic pressure.
- **Rentier state**: state deriving substantial revenue from external rents, especially hydrocarbons, shaping state-society relations and accountability.

- **Ontological security**: a state's need for stable self-identity and biographical continuity; threats to identity can be treated as existential.
- **Defensive realism**: theory that states seek security and survival rather than unlimited expansion, with power treated as instrumental to safety.
- **Shia identity**: religious and communal identity centered on Twelver Shiism, martyrdom narratives, and historical experience of marginalization.
- **Martyrdom (shahadat)**: in Iranian political discourse, sacrificial death for faith or nation; used to mobilize legitimacy and moral authority.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the constitutional architecture of the Islamic Republic by tracing how the doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih* was translated from Khomeini's 1970 lectures into the 1979 Constitution and its 1989 revisions, identifying the specific veto points (Guardian Council, Supreme Leader, Assembly of Experts) through which clerical authority constrains elected institutions. (Bloom: Analyze)

2. **Evaluate** the claim that Iran's institutional structure constitutes a "parallel state" by comparing the formal chain of command of the Artesh with the IRGC's autonomous economic, intelligence, and political networks, and by assessing whether this duality is better explained by revolutionary consolidation theory or by praetorian-state theory. (Bloom: Evaluate)

3. **Explain** the mechanism by which Iran's strategic logic combines defensive realism (territorial security, deterrence, balance-of-power) with revolutionary ideology (export of revolution, anti-imperialism, Shia solidarity), and identify the scope conditions under which one logic dominates the other in foreign-policy decision-making. (Bloom: Explain)

4. **Interpret** quantitative evidence on Iranian economic resilience under sanctions — including oil export volumes, inflation rates, and IRGC economic holdings — by distinguishing between aggregate state capacity and household welfare, and by identifying which metrics are most vulnerable to perspective bias. (Bloom: Interpret)

5. **Reconstruct** the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on the Iranian state as a whole, and **adjudicate** between them on the basis of specified evidence, demonstrating awareness of what each perspective reveals and what it systematically occludes. (Bloom: Reconstruct/Adjudicate)

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The Islamic Republic's Political Theology: *Velayat-e Faqih*, the Guardian Council, and Clerical Authority

Bolded Causal Claim: The Islamic Republic's political theology of *Velayat-e Faqih* institutionalizes clerical sovereignty as the foundational constitutional principle, such that the Supreme Leader's authority derives from a divine mandate rather than popular consent, producing a dual state in which elected institutions operate under unelected clerical veto.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three nested layers. First, the doctrinal layer: Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's 1970 lectures at Najaf, published as *Islamic Government* (Hukumat-e Islami), argued that in the absence of the Twelfth Imam, the most qualified Islamic jurist (*faqih*) must exercise guardianship (*velayat*) over the Muslim community, including over political and military affairs. This was not merely advisory; Khomeini insisted that the jurist's authority superseded that of any elected body, because divine law could not be subordinated to popular will. Second, the constitutional layer: the 1979 Constitution (revised 1989) embedded this doctrine in Article 5 (the Supreme Leader as *faqih*) and Article 110 (the Leader's enumerated powers over the armed forces, judiciary, state broadcasting, and the Expediency Discernment Council). The 1989 revision abolished the office of Prime Minister and concentrated executive power in the presidency, but left the Leader's authority intact and arguably expanded it by removing the requirement that the Leader be a *marja'* (source of emulation), thereby broadening the pool of eligible clerics. Third, the institutional layer: the Guardian Council (Shura-ye Negahban), composed of six clerics appointed by the Leader and six jurists nominated by the judiciary and approved by parliament, exercises a double veto — it approves or disqualifies all candidates for the presidency, the Assembly of Experts, and parliament, and it reviews all legislation for conformity with Islamic law and the Constitution. The Assembly of Experts, an elected body of clerics, formally selects and (in theory) supervises the Supreme Leader, but in practice its role has been ceremonial; no Leader has ever been removed. The Expediency Discernment Council, created in 1988, resolves disputes between parliament and the Guardian Council, but its members are appointed by the Leader, ensuring that the final arbiter remains within the clerical orbit. The result is a "dual state" (Abrahamian, 2008): a republican facade of elections, parliament, and presidency layered over a theocratic core of clerical institutions that hold ultimate sovereignty.

The mechanism's causal force depends on the *fiqh* (jurisprudential) claim that the jurist's authority is *takwini* (constitutive) rather than *tashri'i* (legislative) — that is, the *faqih* does not merely interpret law but embodies the political will of the Hidden Imam. This theological move is what distinguishes *Velayat-e Faqih* from mere clerical influence in other Muslim-majority states. It also explains why the doctrine generated internal Shia opposition: Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari and later Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri argued that the doctrine conflated spiritual authority with political power, violating the traditional Shia separation of religious and temporal spheres. Montazeri's 1997 house arrest after criticizing Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei demonstrated that the doctrine's institutionalization was enforced not only by theology but by coercion.

Scope Conditions: The doctrine's institutional dominance holds under three conditions. First, **clerical cohesion**: the *marja'iyyat* (source of emulation) must remain sufficiently unified that no rival cleric can claim superior religious authority; the 1994 death of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Golpayegani and the subsequent consolidation around Khamenei's *marja'iyyat* illustrate this. Second, **external threat perception**: the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) and subsequent sanctions regimes provided a rally-around-the-flag effect that legitimized clerical wartime leadership and suppressed internal dissent. Third, **repression capacity**: the IRGC and Basij must retain the coercive capability to suppress mass mobilization, as in 1999, 2009, and 2022. The doctrine's dominance weakens when these conditions erode: clerical fragmentation (as in the 2009 election crisis, when senior clerics like Montazeri's successors questioned Khamenei's legitimacy), sustained economic crisis that undermines the "resistance economy" narrative, or mass mobilization that exceeds repression capacity. The doctrine does not predict automatic regime collapse; rather, it predicts that challenges will be framed in constitutional-theological terms (e.g., "where is my vote?" in 2009 invoked the republican element against the theocratic element) rather than purely secular ones.

Observable Implications: If the causal claim holds, we should observe: (a) candidate disqualification rates

by the Guardian Council rising during periods of perceived threat (the 2004 and 2012 parliamentary elections saw mass disqualification of reformist candidates); (b) legislation passed by parliament being routinely returned or amended by the Guardian Council (approximately 20–30% of bills face objection in any given term); (c) the Supreme Leader's public interventions preceding major policy shifts (Khamenei's 2015 "red lines" on the nuclear deal); (d) the Assembly of Experts functioning as a ratification body rather than a supervisory one (no Leader has been dismissed since 1979); and (e) clerical rhetoric framing political disputes in theological terms (e.g., the 2009 "sedition" (*fitna*) framing). Conversely, if the doctrine were merely decorative, we would expect elected institutions to routinely override clerical bodies, which the record does not show.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point reads *Velayat-e Faqih* through the lens of post-colonial sovereignty and the problem of "invented traditions" in state-building. African scholars such as Mahmood Mamdani and Achille Mbembe have analyzed how post-colonial states deploy cultural or religious authenticity as a legitimation strategy against Western-imposed modernity. From this perspective, the Islamic Republic's political theology is not an exotic theocracy but a variant of a broader post-colonial pattern: the fusion of anti-imperial nationalism with a particularist cultural claim to sovereignty. The African perspective notes that Iran's 1979 revolution, like many African liberation movements, combined anti-Western grievance with a promise of authentic self-rule, and that the clerical state's survival reflects the same "politics of the belly" (Bayart) and neo-patrimonial consolidation that characterize many post-colonial regimes. What this perspective reveals is the *functional* similarity between clerical sovereignty and other forms of post-colonial authoritarian legitimation; what it occludes is the specifically Shia jurisprudential content of *Velayat-e Faqih*, which cannot be reduced to generic authoritarianism. The African perspective also highlights that Iran's anti-imperial stance resonates with African non-alignment traditions (Nkrumah, Nyerere), even as Iran's regional interventions complicate that solidarity.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats *Velayat-e Faqih* as an internal constitutional matter and applies the principle of non-interference. Beijing's engagement with Tehran is framed through strategic partnership and economic interest, not through evaluation of Iran's domestic legitimacy. The Chinese view recognizes the doctrine as a source of regime cohesion that produces predictable (if adversarial) behavior, which is preferable to instability. What this perspective occludes is the human-rights and democratic-accountability dimensions of clerical veto power, which Beijing's own sovereignty doctrine renders invisible.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames *Velayat-e Faqih* as a legitimate expression of Iranian civilizational sovereignty against Western universalism. Moscow sees the doctrine as producing a reliable anti-Western ally whose ideological consistency reduces transaction costs in strategic coordination. The Russian view tends to treat clerical authority as a stabilizing factor that prevents Iran from becoming a Western client state. What it occludes is the internal contestation within Iran over the doctrine's legitimacy, which Russian analysis often subordinates to geopolitical utility.

Western: The Western perspective has historically oscillated between treating *Velayat-e Faqih* as a totalitarian ideology (early post-1979) and as a pragmatic authoritarian system (post-2000s). The "irrationality" critique — that clerical sovereignty produces unpredictable, ideologically driven foreign policy — has been challenged by scholars (Takeyh, 2009) who argue that the doctrine is compatible with strategic calculation. What the Western perspective reveals is the tension between republican and theocratic elements; what it occludes is the doctrine's internal Shia legitimacy and its resonance with anti-imperial traditions outside the West.

UN: The UN perspective frames *Velayat-e Faqih* through the Charter's sovereignty principle (Article 2.1) and human-rights instruments. The doctrine is not directly addressed by UN resolutions, but the Guardian Council's candidate vetting has been criticized by UN human-rights mechanisms as inconsistent with political participation rights. The UN perspective reveals the gap between Iran's constitutional sovereignty and international human-rights norms; what it occludes is the theological specificity that makes the doctrine internally coherent to its adherents.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Iran's institutional structure: IRGC, Artesh, Basij, and the parallel security apparatus

Bolded Causal Claim: Iran's post-revolutionary security order is organized as a dual state in which the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the conventional Artesh, the Basij, and competing intelligence services operate in parallel under the Supreme Leader, so that revolutionary guardianship is institutionally privileged over constitutional regularity; this redundancy protects the regime from coups and external pressure but also fragments command, diffuses accountability, and embeds coercive power in the economy.

Mechanism: The 1979 revolution destroyed the Shah's military and forced the new republic to build coercion from revolutionary fragments. The constitution's Article 150 recognizes the IRGC as guardian of the revolution, while Article 143 preserves the Artesh for territorial defense, producing a legal dualism that became an operational dualism. The IRGC developed ground, naval, aerospace, and Quds Force branches; the Artesh retained conventional army, navy, and air force functions. The Basij, originally a wartime volunteer militia, became a permanent paramilitary and social-control network embedded in neighborhoods, universities, workplaces, and mosques. Intelligence functions split between the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) and the IRGC Intelligence Organization, creating overlapping surveillance and competing chains of reporting. The Supreme Leader sits atop both military and intelligence structures through appointments, representatives, and ideological oversight. The resilience mechanism is redundancy: no single coercive institution can seize power alone, each monitors the others, ideological screening reduces defection, and parallel chains of command mean that presidents and parliaments cannot easily redirect the gun. The fragmentation mechanism is equally important: procurement, doctrine, and operations are duplicated; the IRGC's economic conglomerate, Khatam al-Anbiya, competes with state ministries and private firms; Basij local commanders may act with considerable autonomy; and intelligence rivalry produces competing arrests, narratives, and policy advice. The IRGC's wartime experience, missile forces, and regional operations gave it strategic primacy, while the Artesh became a professional but politically secondary military. The Basij provides mass mobilization and low-cost coercion, especially during unrest. Together these institutions form a security ecosystem rather than a unified military, and that ecosystem is designed to make regime survival less dependent on any single officer corps.

Scope Conditions: The parallel apparatus strengthens the regime when external threat is high, as during the Iran-Iraq War or periods of intense U.S. pressure; when the Supreme Leader can arbitrate among institutions; when oil rents fund patronage and procurement; and when revolutionary ideology remains cohesive enough to legitimate sacrifice. It is more likely to weaken the regime when economic contraction reduces rents, when succession uncertainty pits institutions against one another, when the IRGC becomes so economically powerful that it crowds out state capacity, or when sustained protests require repeated coercion and expose the brutality of Basij and IRGC units. The mechanism also assumes that the Supreme Leader's authority remains effective; if that authority fragments, parallel structures can become rival fiefdoms rather

than complementary guardians. Sanctions can paradoxically strengthen the IRGC by increasing the value of smuggling networks, procurement monopolies, and black-market rents, but over time they can also strain the patronage base that keeps Basij and IRGC personnel loyal. The model does not imply that the Artesh is irrelevant; rather, it suggests that the Artesh's professional role is subordinated to a revolutionary security logic that privileges loyalty and redundancy over efficiency.

Observable Implications: The dual state should be visible in institutional appointments, budget opacity, and operational division of labor. Observable indicators include IRGC commanders in cabinet and strategic posts; Khatam al-Anbiya's prominence in construction, energy, and engineering contracts; Basij presence in universities and workplaces; IRGC naval incidents in the Gulf; Quds Force operations in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen; limited Artesh access to advanced strategic weapons; and arrests or intelligence actions by both MOIS and IRGC Intelligence. During domestic unrest, Basij and IRGC units rather than the Artesh are typically used for internal repression, preserving the Artesh's external role and reducing the risk that a conventional military coup will follow a crackdown. The model also implies that Iran's military parades and force structure will display Artesh and IRGC as separate organizations, with the IRGC controlling missiles, drones, and asymmetric capabilities. Data on IRGC economic holdings should therefore be read not merely as corruption but as a mechanism of institutional autonomy: economic resources allow the Guard to sustain operations, patronage, and procurement even when the civilian budget is constrained.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African scholarship on postcolonial militarization treats parallel security structures as a familiar pattern rather than an Iranian anomaly. From this vantage, the IRGC resembles presidential guards, revolutionary militias, and shadow armies that post-revolutionary regimes create to prevent coups and to discipline society. Thinkers such as Bayart on the "politics of the belly" and Mbembe on the militarization of sovereignty help frame the IRGC's economic role as part of a broader pattern in which coercive institutions become accumulation machines. Grovogui's emphasis on contested sovereignty is also useful: revolutionary states often build parallel coercive orders because their sovereignty is challenged by external powers, and the resulting "state of exception" can stabilize rule while corroding public accountability. The African perspective reveals that Iran's parallel apparatus is rational coup-proofing under perceived encirclement, not simply ideological fanaticism; what it occludes, unless supplemented by Iranian and UN sources, is the specific Shia theological legitimacy that makes the IRGC internally coherent to its members.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats Iran's institutional structure as an internal matter and emphasizes stability, state capacity, and non-interference. It may view the IRGC's economic role as a form of state-led development and strategic self-reliance, especially under sanctions, while remaining concerned about regional escalation that could threaten energy flows and Belt and Road interests. It tends to occlude questions of human-rights accountability and the coercive use of Basij networks.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames the IRGC as a legitimate allied security institution and a partner in anti-Western resistance. It supports military-technical cooperation and sees parallel structures as defensive responses to U.S. pressure. This perspective reveals the geopolitical logic of Iranian deterrence but occludes internal repression, intelligence rivalry, and the economic costs of IRGC autonomy.

Western: The Western perspective often frames the IRGC as a praetorian and terrorist-designated actor, emphasizing sanctions, accountability, and human rights. It reveals the coercive and destabilizing dimensions of the parallel state but frequently occludes the defensive motivations, coup-proofing logic, and internal legitimacy that sustain the institution.

UN: The UN perspective approaches the parallel security apparatus through human-rights mechanisms, sanctions compliance, and the Charter's sovereignty framework. It highlights arbitrary detention, use of force against protesters, and accountability gaps, but it occludes the theological and revolutionary context that makes the IRGC meaningful to its supporters.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Iran's strategic logic: defensive realism plus revolutionary ideology

Bolded Causal Claim: Iran's strategic behavior is best explained by the interaction of defensive realism and revolutionary ideology: a security-seeking state uses revolutionary institutions and transnational networks to compensate for conventional inferiority and encirclement, producing an offensive-defensive posture that is structurally rational but ideologically inflected in its means.

Mechanism: Defensive realism begins from the premise that states seek security rather than expansion, and that Iran's strategic environment is shaped by repeated experiences of vulnerability: the 1953 coup, the Iran-Iraq War, U.S. military bases around its periphery, sanctions, and regional coalitions. Conventional military inferiority pushes Iran toward deterrence through missiles, drones, cyber capabilities, and proxy networks. Revolutionary ideology, rooted in 1979, supplies anti-imperialism, Shia transnationalism, and the language of resistance; it legitimates support for allied movements and frames regional interventions as defense of the oppressed. The interaction is the key mechanism. Ideology provides mobilization, legitimacy, and low-cost force multipliers; defensive realism sets limits by prioritizing regime survival and avoiding direct war with superior powers. The result is "forward defense": threats are engaged in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen rather than at Iran's borders. Asymmetric deterrence imposes costs on adversaries without requiring conventional parity. Nuclear hedging maintains threshold capability and bargaining leverage without necessarily crossing the weaponization line. Strategic patience calibrates responses so that retaliation signals resolve while avoiding escalation that could threaten the regime. Ideology is also instrumentalized domestically: the resistance narrative consolidates legitimacy and reframes economic hardship as sacrifice. Thus the posture is neither purely defensive nor purely revolutionary; it is a security strategy that uses revolutionary tools to manage an unfavorable balance of power.

Scope Conditions: Defensive realism is more likely to dominate when regime survival is directly threatened, when sanctions are severe, when conventional gaps are large, or when succession politics require caution. Revolutionary ideology is more likely to dominate when regional opportunities open, as during the Arab uprisings; when proxy gains are cheap; when domestic legitimacy needs reinforcement; or when IRGC commanders have greater autonomy. The interaction holds best when the Supreme Leader can balance security and ideology, and when proxy networks remain controllable. It weakens when proxies become liabilities, as prolonged commitments in Syria or Yemen can drain resources; when ideology provokes counter-balancing, as regional states align more closely with the United States or Israel; or when economic collapse undermines both deterrence and revolutionary legitimacy. The model also has an important boundary: Iran's interventions are concentrated in spaces with Shia, allied, or strategically vital characteristics, not in a global program of conquest. To describe the posture as "offensive-defensive" is therefore not to claim that Iran seeks unlimited expansion; it is to claim that defensive goals are pursued through means that adversaries experience as offensive.

Observable Implications: The combined model predicts a distinctive pattern of behavior: heavy investment in missiles, drones, and asymmetric capabilities; sustained support for proxy and partner forces; avoidance of direct war with the United States despite provocations and crises; nuclear hedging rather than overt weaponization; calibrated retaliation that signals resolve but preserves escalation control; and rhetoric that

frames interventions as defensive resistance. The 2020 killing of Qassem Soleimani and Iran's subsequent missile strike on U.S. forces in Iraq illustrate this pattern: a forceful but bounded response designed to restore deterrence without triggering full-scale war. More recent direct strikes demonstrate that Iran's escalation ladder has widened, but they do not by themselves refute the model if they remain accompanied by signaling intended to limit all-out conflict. The model also predicts that Iran will accept tactical compromises, such as the 2015 nuclear agreement, when they improve security and economic conditions, while retaining long-term hedging options. Publicly, the regime should continue to emphasize resistance even when it engages in pragmatic diplomacy, because ideology remains a source of domestic and regional legitimacy.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African scholarship on anti-colonialism, non-alignment, and revolutionary statecraft gives Iran's strategic logic a recognizable lineage. Thinkers such as Nkrumah, Cabral, and Fanon framed imperialism as a structural condition requiring solidarity, self-reliance, and sometimes armed struggle; from this vantage, Iran's resistance discourse and support for allied movements can be read as part of a broader postcolonial repertoire rather than as sui generis fanaticism. The African perspective also highlights the tension between revolutionary legitimacy and developmental outcomes: resistance may mobilize populations, but it does not automatically produce prosperity or accountable governance. It reveals parallels between Iran's "forward defense" and the rear-base strategies of liberation movements, while occluding the sectarian specificity of Iran's Shia networks unless read alongside Middle Eastern sources.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective generally interprets Iran's posture as rational security-seeking under pressure. It emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and the stabilizing value of the 2015 nuclear agreement, while supporting Iran's integration into Eurasian economic networks. China values Iran as a partner in multipolarity and energy security, and it tends to occlude proxy warfare and human-rights concerns in favor of diplomatic and commercial engagement.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames Iran as an allied state in an anti-Western multipolar order. It supports Iran's deterrence capabilities, opposes unilateral sanctions, and sees Iranian regional influence as a counterweight to U.S. hegemony. This perspective reveals the geopolitical logic of resistance but occludes the costs of proxy entanglements and the internal authoritarian dimensions of the Iranian state.

Western: The Western perspective often treats Iran as an adversarial and potentially irrational actor, emphasizing nuclear risk, proxy violence, and ideological hostility. It reveals genuine security concerns and the coercive effects of Iranian policy, but it frequently occludes defensive motivations, the trauma of the Iran-Iraq War, and the internal legitimacy that revolutionary ideology provides.

UN: The UN perspective frames Iran's strategic behavior through the Charter's prohibition on the use of force, sovereignty norms, sanctions regimes, and IAEA safeguards. It reveals the legal constraints on both Iranian and adversarial actions and highlights the importance of negotiated settlements, but it occludes the asymmetry of power and the political context that makes deterrence appear necessary to Iranian leaders.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Sanctions resilience: the resistance economy, smuggling networks, and Chinese partnerships

Bolded Causal Claim: International sanctions have not produced economic collapse or regime change in Iran; instead, they have restructured the economy around a state-directed "resistance economy" in which

sanctions rents are captured by security and parastatal elites, while costs are displaced onto households, informal labor, and non-connected firms.

Mechanism: The causal chain begins with an external shock—multilateral or unilateral sanctions targeting oil exports, banking, shipping, insurance, and technology. The Iranian state responds not with liberalization but with a combination of import substitution, price controls, subsidy reallocation, currency management, and parallel trade channels. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and bonyads (parastatal foundations) become central intermediaries because they possess the organizational capacity, coercive reach, and transnational networks needed to move goods and capital across sanctioned borders. The resistance economy is therefore not merely a slogan; it is an institutional project that militarizes economic governance and rewards actors capable of operating in legal gray zones.

Smuggling networks through the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, and the Caspian basin convert border porosity into a rent-generating system. Sanctioned goods are imported at inflated prices, while oil and petrochemicals are exported through ship-to-ship transfers, false documentation, front companies, and discounted sales to willing buyers. The IRGC's engineering and construction arms, especially Khatam al-Anbiya, and bonyads with tax-exempt, politically connected status expand into sectors vacated by foreign firms. This creates a feedback loop: sanctions increase the premium on evasion, evasion increases the value of IRGC and bonyad networks, and those networks then acquire stakes in preserving the sanctioned order that sustains their rents.

Chinese demand is pivotal because it provides a large, partially sanctions-resistant market for Iranian crude. Chinese buyers, including state-owned and private refiners, have often purchased Iranian oil at a discount through indirect channels, barter arrangements, or long-term credit structures. This does not eliminate sanctions pressure, but it prevents the total revenue collapse that a fully enforced embargo would imply. Currency depreciation and inflation then redistribute income: exporters, rent-seekers, and connected intermediaries gain, while wage earners and fixed-income households lose purchasing power. The state partially compensates through subsidies and cash transfers, but these are fiscally constrained and often captured or diluted by politically connected intermediaries. Over time, the economy becomes more militarized, less transparent, and more dependent on informal trade, with the IRGC's economic role expanding not despite sanctions but partly because of them. This is not autarky; it is a reconfiguration of state-capital relations under external pressure.

Scope Conditions: Sanctions resilience is conditional rather than automatic. It is strongest when oil prices are high enough to finance imports and subsidies; when enforcement is fragmented, allowing smuggling and third-country laundering; when a major buyer such as China maintains demand; and when the regime retains coercive capacity to suppress unrest and manage elite cohesion. It weakens when sanctions are multilateral and tightly enforced, when oil prices fall, when inflation erodes the real value of subsidies, when protests escalate beyond localized grievances, or when elite factions fracture over rent distribution. The resistance economy also assumes a state willing to absorb long-term efficiency losses; if technological isolation degrades oil infrastructure, if capital flight accelerates, or if skilled labor emigrates, resilience can become stagnation. Finally, the model depends on geographic and social conditions: porous borders, ethnic trading communities, informal labor markets, and hawala-style transfer systems make smuggling possible, but they also create spaces of autonomy that the state cannot fully control.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism operates, one should observe sustained Iranian oil exports despite sanctions, often through opaque shipping and discount pricing; rising IRGC and bonyad participation in construction, energy, telecommunications, and import sectors; widening gaps between official and market

exchange rates; high inflation and currency volatility; growth in informal trade with neighboring states; and periodic protests driven by cost-of-living pressures rather than by sanctions alone. One should also observe Chinese firms and banks navigating sanctions risk through indirect channels, and Iranian officials framing economic hardship as evidence of Western aggression. GAMAAN surveys and other public-opinion instruments can be used to test whether economic pain is attributed to sanctions, regime mismanagement, or both, though online and diaspora-skewed samples require methodological caution.

Conversely, if sanctions were fully effective, one would expect a sustained collapse in oil revenue, fiscal crisis, and rapid regime concession; the absence of such outcomes supports the resilience thesis, though it does not prove that sanctions have no coercive effect. Data on IRGC economic holdings, oil export volumes, inflation, GDP, and household welfare can be used to test whether resilience is concentrated in state-security networks or broadly shared. A useful diagnostic is whether sanctions relief would primarily benefit ordinary households or would be captured by the same parastatal networks that currently manage evasion.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, sanctions on Iran are read less as neutral law enforcement than as a coercive instrument of great-power economic statecraft, echoing the experience of sanctions, structural adjustment, and resource conditionalities imposed on African states. The perspective emphasizes sovereignty, the right to independent development, and the hypocrisy of sanctioning states that themselves benefit from Iranian oil or arms markets. It also recognizes, however, that sanctions can be captured by domestic elites: the resistance economy may protect state autonomy while reproducing rentier inequality, a pattern familiar in postcolonial political economies where external pressure strengthens security apparatuses and weakens civilian institutions. Thus the African lens contributes both solidarity with anti-imperial economic sovereignty and a critical warning about authoritarian rent capture.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats Iran as a strategic partner and energy supplier within a broader Eurasian connectivity agenda. It emphasizes non-interference, commercial pragmatism, and the illegitimacy of unilateral sanctions not authorized by the UN Security Council. Chinese actors are understood to pursue discounted oil, infrastructure contracts, and long-term market access while managing sanctions exposure through indirect trade and financial channels. This perspective reveals the material foundations of Iranian resilience but tends to occlude the domestic political costs of the partnership and the opacity of Chinese commercial practices.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames sanctions as an instrument of Western hegemony and Iran as a fellow target of coercive economic pressure. It emphasizes anti-Western solidarity, arms and technology cooperation, and the strategic value of an Iran that distracts and constrains US power in West Asia. This lens highlights the geopolitical logic of partnership but often occludes Russian opportunism, including competition with Iran in energy markets and the limits of Moscow's willingness to absorb sanctions risk on Tehran's behalf.

Western: The Western perspective, especially in US and European policy discourse, treats sanctions as coercive diplomacy aimed at constraining Iran's nuclear program, regional activities, and human-rights abuses. It emphasizes legal authority, enforcement, and the cumulative economic pressure that sanctions impose on regime decision-making. This perspective reveals the coercive intent and some measurable economic effects, but it often overstates the likelihood of economic collapse, understates Iranian adaptive capacity, and occludes the humanitarian and political costs borne by ordinary Iranians.

UN: The UN perspective frames sanctions through Charter-based authority, Security Council resolutions,

and the distinction between multilateral and unilateral measures. It emphasizes legal process, humanitarian exemptions, and the need to balance nonproliferation or security objectives with human-rights and development concerns. This lens reveals the importance of legitimacy and procedural constraint but can occlude the asymmetry between powerful sanctioning states and targeted economies, as well as the political incentives that drive enforcement beyond formal mandates.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Iranian identity: Persian nationalism, Shia identity, and the politics of martyrdom

Bolded Causal Claim: Iranian political mobilization and regime legitimation are shaped by a layered identity field in which Persian nationalism, Shia religious symbolism, and martyrdom politics interact; these resources can sustain revolutionary authority and also supply the moral vocabulary for dissent.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three overlapping identity registers. First, Persian nationalism provides a civilizational narrative of antiquity, language, and statehood that predates both the Islamic Republic and the 1979 revolution. It allows the regime to present itself as defender of an ancient nation against foreign domination, while also giving opposition movements a non-sectarian language of dignity, culture, and historical pride. Second, Shia identity supplies a moral cosmology centered on justice, suffering, and resistance to tyranny, most powerfully expressed through the Karbala narrative of Imam Hussein's martyrdom. The regime uses this to sacralize the state, frame enemies as Yazid-like oppressors, and legitimize sacrifice in war and revolution. Third, martyrdom politics converts death into political capital: the graves of war dead, revolutionary figures, and protesters become sites of memory and contestation. Basij recruitment, state commemorations, and opposition funerals all draw on this symbolic economy.

The interaction is not additive but dialectical. The same symbols that authorize state violence can be turned against the state when citizens perceive hypocrisy, corruption, or repression. A regime that claims to embody the justice of Karbala becomes vulnerable when its conduct is read as Yazid-like. Similarly, Persian nationalism can be mobilized by the state as anti-imperial pride or by protesters as a claim to modern dignity and cultural freedom. Martyrdom politics requires a credible narrative of sacrifice; if the state is seen as corrupt or indifferent, commemoration becomes critique rather than legitimation. Thus identity is not a fixed trait but a contested resource whose mobilization depends on political context, generational change, and the credibility of those who claim to embody it.

Scope Conditions: This identity mechanism is strongest where religious institutions retain social authority, where war memory remains salient, and where the state can control commemorative spaces. It weakens under secularization, generational turnover, ethnic marginalization, and economic crisis. Persian nationalism can unify but also exclude non-Persian communities such as Kurds, Baluch, Arabs, and Azeris, whose grievances may be expressed through ethnic rather than national frames. Shia identity can mobilize cross-class solidarity but can also be challenged by demands for gender equality, secular governance, or minority rights. The mechanism also depends on media and ritual infrastructure: mosques, state television, schools, and digital platforms shape which identity narratives circulate and which are suppressed. In periods of economic stress, identity claims may be displaced by material grievances, but they often return as the language through which those grievances are interpreted.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is operative, one should observe the regime's continued use of revolutionary and religious symbolism in official rhetoric, military recruitment, and foreign policy; the prominence of martyrdom commemorations; and the persistence of Persian cultural nationalism in both state and opposition discourse. One should also observe protests that invoke justice, dignity, and anti-tyranny themes resonant with Shia moral vocabulary, as well as ethnic and gender-based mobilizations that challenge

the regime's claim to represent a unified national-religious community.

The 2009 Green Movement and the 2022 protests following Mahsa Amini's death illustrate how identity resources can be mobilized against the state: demonstrators drew on universalist claims of dignity and rights while also invoking Iranian national belonging. If identity were purely top-down, protests would not adopt national symbols; if it were purely oppositional, the regime would not retain significant constituencies. The coexistence of both supports the layered-identity thesis. GAMAAN surveys and other opinion research can help assess how Iranians rank national, religious, and civic identities, though such data should be interpreted with attention to sampling limits and political sensitivity.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective recognizes in Iranian identity politics a familiar postcolonial dynamic: the fusion of cultural nationalism, religious moral vocabulary, and anti-imperial sacrifice in the construction of a revolutionary state. Scholars of African liberation movements have analyzed how martyrdom, cultural authenticity, and anti-colonial struggle become sources of legitimacy and also of later contestation. From this vantage point, Iran's politics of martyrdom is not exotic but comparable to the sacralization of liberation struggles elsewhere, while its ethnic and gender exclusions echo the limits of postcolonial nation-building. The African lens thus contributes a comparative theory of revolutionary legitimacy and a warning that identity-based state projects often reproduce hierarchies they claim to overcome.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats Iranian identity as an internal matter and emphasizes stability, sovereignty, and non-interference. It is attentive to civilizational narratives and to the role of religion in social order, but it generally subordinates identity questions to strategic and economic interests. This perspective reveals the external limits of identity-based foreign policy but tends to occlude the domestic conflicts that identity politics can generate.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames Iran as a civilizational state resisting Western liberal universalism. It emphasizes shared opposition to US hegemony, the value of religious and cultural traditionalism, and the strategic utility of an Iran that challenges Western norms. This lens highlights the geopolitical function of identity but often occludes the internal diversity and dissent within Iranian society, as well as the costs of aligning with an authoritarian partner.

Western: The Western perspective often interprets Iranian identity through the lens of ideology and threat, emphasizing revolutionary Islam, anti-Americanism, and the potential irrationality of a state guided by religious doctrine. It also foregrounds human-rights concerns, especially regarding women, minorities, and political dissent. This perspective reveals genuine repression and the instrumental use of identity by the state, but it frequently occludes the defensive and postcolonial dimensions of Iranian nationalism and the agency of Iranians who mobilize identity for emancipatory ends.

UN: The UN perspective frames identity-related issues through human rights, cultural rights, minority protection, and freedom of religion or belief. It emphasizes legal standards and the protection of individuals and groups against discrimination or coercion. This lens reveals the importance of pluralism and accountability but can occlude the political and historical context in which identity claims are made, as well as the asymmetry between international norms and local power structures.

SECTION 2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

From an African vantage point, the central puzzle of the Iranian state is not why a theocracy persists in a modernizing society, but how a revolutionary state born of anti-imperial mobilization sustains sovereignty, security, and legitimacy under conditions of external coercion and internal contestation. African political thought has long treated the state not as a neutral administrative container but as a historically produced arena of domination, negotiation, and survival. In this register, Iran's combination of Velayat-e Faqih, the Guardian Council, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the regular army (Artesh), and the Basij appears less as an exotic constitutional anomaly than as a variant of the postcolonial problem: how to build a sovereign political order after a rupture with an imperial-backed regime, while facing sanctions, covert intervention, and regional insecurity. The 1979 revolution, in this reading, belongs to the same broad historical family as anti-colonial revolutions, even though Iran was not formally colonized in the same manner as much of Africa. The 1953 coup against Mohammad Mossadegh, the Shah's dependence on Western powers, and the subsequent revolutionary overthrow of that order provide the anti-imperial grammar through which many African scholars would approach Iran. The African perspective therefore begins by refusing the premise that Iran's political theology is merely irrational or pre-modern; instead, it asks what work Velayat-e Faqih performs in consolidating a post-revolutionary order, disciplining competing elites, and asserting autonomy from a Western-dominated international system. This does not require endorsing the doctrine. It requires taking seriously the possibility that clerical authority, like other postcolonial ideologies, can function as a language of sovereignty and collective self-definition. The African lens is especially attentive to the gap between formal sovereignty and substantive autonomy, a gap that Nkrumah (1965) named neo-colonialism: the continuation of external control through economic, financial, and technical means rather than direct rule. From this standpoint, sanctions against Iran are not simply policy instruments; they are mechanisms of structural coercion that reproduce hierarchy in the international order. Grovogui's (1996) analysis of quasi-sovereignty is directly relevant: some states possess juridical sovereignty while being denied the substantive capacity to make autonomous decisions, particularly in security and economic domains. Iran's insistence on nuclear latency, ballistic missiles, and regional alliances can be read, in part, as an attempt to convert juridical sovereignty into substantive autonomy. The African perspective thus contributes a vocabulary for understanding why Iranian leaders may experience sanctions not as neutral enforcement but as an existential challenge to post-revolutionary self-determination.

The institutional structure of the Islamic Republic also becomes intelligible through African scholarship on the bifurcated and hybrid state. Mamdani's (1996) account of the colonial state distinguished between citizens in urban, "civil" domains and subjects in rural, "customary" domains, producing a state that governed through differentiated legal regimes. Although Iran is not a colonial state in the African sense, the concept of bifurcation travels: the Islamic Republic maintains parallel institutions that divide authority between elected and unelected bodies, between the regular military and the IRGC, and between national and revolutionary claims to legitimacy. The Guardian Council's vetting power, the Supreme Leader's authority, and the IRGC's economic and security roles create a layered sovereignty that is not unique to Iran. Many postcolonial African states have relied on presidential guards, party militias, intelligence services, and informal networks that coexist with formal militaries and parliaments. Aning and Danso's work on African security governance emphasizes that hybrid security arrangements often emerge where states face insurgencies, coups, or external threats, and where formal institutions are perceived as insufficiently loyal or capable. From this perspective, the IRGC is not simply a praetorian guard or a terrorist organization, as Western adversarial narratives often assert; it is a revolutionary security institution whose legitimacy derives from its role in defending the 1979

order, fighting the Iran-Iraq war, and managing internal dissent. The Basij, similarly, can be understood as a mass mobilization structure that links state power to neighborhood, mosque, and workplace networks, resembling other forms of popular militia or party-based mobilization in postcolonial settings. This lens reveals the functional logic of parallel institutions: they provide redundancy, ideological reliability, and social penetration. Yet it also exposes their costs. Mamdani's warning that bifurcated states can undermine democratic citizenship applies with force: when unelected bodies override elected ones, and when security institutions acquire economic empires, the result is not merely revolutionary vigilance but a contraction of public accountability. Maloney's (2015) analysis of Iran's political economy since the revolution underscores that the IRGC's economic holdings are not incidental; they shape resource allocation, privilege, and the distribution of state rents. The African perspective therefore contributes a structural explanation for why parallel institutions persist, while its own critical traditions—Bayart's (1993) emphasis on the "politics of the belly" and Mbembe's (2001) analysis of the postcolony—warn that such institutions can become vehicles for elite capture, predation, and the privatization of public power.

Sanctions resilience, the fourth key idea, is where the African perspective is perhaps most distinctive. Rather than treating Iran's "resistance economy" as a slogan or a failure, African scholarship on self-reliance and extraversion can illuminate both its achievements and its contradictions. Nyerere's (1968) articulation of ujamaa and self-reliance was rooted in the conviction that political independence without economic autonomy remains fragile. Iran's resistance economy rhetoric, especially under intensified sanctions, echoes this logic: reduce dependence on hostile powers, develop domestic capacity, and build alternative trade relationships. Rodney's (1972) analysis of underdevelopment is also pertinent. Rodney argued that African underdevelopment was not a natural condition but a historical product of extraction and unequal exchange. Applied to Iran, this suggests that sanctions do not merely punish policy choices; they operate within a global economic structure in which control over finance, shipping, insurance, and technology is concentrated in Western hands. The African perspective thus interprets smuggling networks, barter arrangements, and Chinese partnerships not as mere criminality or dependency, but as adaptive strategies within an unequal system. Bayart's (1993) concept of extraversion adds nuance: African states have historically derived power from their position in external networks, sometimes turning dependency into leverage. Iran's partnerships with China and Russia can be read similarly, as attempts to convert geopolitical position into economic and strategic room for maneuver. Yet Bayart's framework also warns that extraversion can reproduce elite dependence on external patrons and distort domestic development. The resistance economy may protect regime survival while imposing severe costs on ordinary Iranians, including inflation, unemployment, and shortages. GAMAAN surveys and other public opinion data, though methodologically contested, indicate significant dissatisfaction with economic conditions and governance, suggesting that resilience at the state level does not equate to welfare at the societal level. The African perspective therefore reveals the political economy of sanctions: they are experienced as collective punishment, but their evasion can also deepen inequality and strengthen security elites. It occludes, however, the specific mechanisms of Iran's oil sector, its technological constraints, and the precise role of Chinese firms, which require sectoral and financial analysis beyond the African comparative frame.

Identity is the fifth key idea, and here African scholarship offers both illumination and caution. Fanon's (1961) analysis of colonialism emphasized that national culture and identity become weapons of liberation, but also warned that post-revolutionary elites can freeze culture into an instrument of domination. Cabral's (1973) insistence on "return to the source" similarly treated culture as a terrain of struggle, not a fixed essence. Iran's Persian nationalism and Shia identity can be understood in this way: as resources for collective mobilization against imperial intervention and for the construction of a post-revolutionary citizen. The politics of martyrdom, especially during and after the Iran-Iraq war, created a sacred economy of sacrifice that binds

citizens to the state through blood and memory. Mbembe's (2003/2019) work on necropolitics is useful but must be applied carefully. Mbembe argues that sovereignty in the postcolony often operates through the power to determine who may live and who must die. Iran's martyrdom discourse can be interpreted as a mobilization of death for sovereignty, in which the state sacralizes sacrifice and demands loyalty through the memory of the fallen. Yet this is not identical to Mbembe's colonial and postcolonial African cases; Iranian martyrdom also draws on specifically Shia narratives of Karbala and resistance to tyranny. The African perspective contributes a comparative language for understanding how states use death, memory, and sacrifice to produce political community. It also warns, through Mbembe and Fanon, that such mobilizations can become coercive and exclusionary. Oyěwùmí's (1997) feminist critique of the "invention of women" and Tamale's (2020) decolonial Afro-feminism are essential here. They caution against treating gender as a natural category and against imposing Western liberal feminist frameworks on non-Western societies. Applied to Iran, this means recognizing that Iranian women's protests, including those following the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022, are acts of political agency rooted in local histories, not simply demands to replicate Western modernity. At the same time, Tamale's decolonial feminism insists that anti-imperial sovereignty cannot be invoked to silence gendered violence or patriarchal authority. The African feminist lens thus reveals both the emancipatory potential of Iranian women's mobilization and the risk that all sides—state, opposition, and external actors—may instrumentalize women's bodies and identities. This perspective occludes, however, the specific theological debates within Shia jurisprudence, the internal diversity of Iranian feminism, and the regional sectarian implications of Iranian identity politics, which require closer attention to West Asian history.

The African perspective's greatest contribution is its refusal to separate Iran's domestic order from the international hierarchy that shapes it. Western adversarial accounts often treat Velayat-e Faqih as the independent variable explaining Iranian behavior, while Chinese and Russian accounts may treat Iran as a strategic asset. The African lens, by contrast, foregrounds the co-constitution of internal authority and external coercion. It suggests that the Guardian Council, the IRGC, and the resistance economy are not merely products of ideology but responses to a history of intervention, sanctions, and regional insecurity. This is particularly important for understanding the 1979 revolution and its aftermath. Abrahamian (2008) and Takeyh (2009) document the revolutionary coalition's diversity and the subsequent consolidation of clerical power; an African reading would emphasize that post-revolutionary consolidation often narrows the revolutionary coalition, as Fanon predicted, and that the resulting state may reproduce domination in new forms. The African perspective also helps explain why Iranian leaders frame nuclear and missile programs as matters of dignity and sovereignty rather than mere security. In a world where some states' sovereignty is routinely qualified, technological autonomy becomes a marker of full membership in international society. Yet this perspective must not become an apology for authoritarianism. African scholarship is itself deeply critical of postcolonial states: Bayart's extraversion, Mbembe's postcolony, and Mamdani's bifurcation are not celebratory concepts. They describe pathologies as much as strategies. Applied to Iran, they warn that revolutionary states can become predatory, that anti-imperial rhetoric can mask elite enrichment, and that parallel security institutions can outgrow their original purpose. The 2009 Green Movement and the 2022 protests, viewed through this lens, are not simply evidence of regime illegitimacy or Western subversion; they are recurring moments in the cycle of postcolonial state-society contestation, in which citizens demand that revolutionary promises of justice and dignity be honored. GAMAAN surveys, while imperfect, suggest that many Iranians distinguish between national sovereignty and regime performance, a distinction that the African perspective is well placed to capture because it separates anti-imperial legitimacy from democratic accountability. The perspective's central occlusion is its tendency to over-analogize: Iran's revolutionary state, its Shia political

theology, and its position in West Asia are not reducible to African postcolonial experiences. To treat them as identical would erase the specificity of Iranian history, the role of Shia jurisprudence, and the regional sectarian dynamics that shape Iranian strategy. The African vantage point is therefore most powerful when used comparatively and critically, not as a master narrative.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective approaches the Iranian state through the lenses of strategic partnership, civilizational respect, and non-interference. In Beijing's official and scholarly discourse, Iran is not primarily a theocratic anomaly or a revolutionary threat but a major West Asian power, an energy supplier, and a partner in the construction of a multipolar order. This perspective begins from the premise that the internal constitutional arrangements of a state—whether Velayat-e Faqih, the Guardian Council, or the IRGC's role—are sovereign matters that external actors have no right to prescribe. Non-interference, a core principle of Chinese foreign policy, functions here as both norm and interest: it protects China's own sovereignty claims while allowing engagement with states whose domestic orders differ sharply from liberal democratic models. From this vantage point, the Iranian state's political theology is treated as a domestic source of legitimacy and stability, not as a variable to be reformed by external pressure. The IRGC and Basij are understood as security institutions that maintain order in a volatile region, and the Artesh as a conventional military; the distinction between them matters less than the overall capacity of the Iranian state to prevent collapse or externally imposed regime change. Chinese analysts often emphasize Iran's strategic location along the Belt and Road Initiative's western corridors and its role in connecting Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Gulf. This materialist framing foregrounds trade, infrastructure, energy, and logistics rather than ideology. Iran's sanctions resilience is therefore not a puzzle of irrational defiance but a problem of supply-chain adaptation: Chinese purchases of Iranian oil, barter arrangements, and the use of non-Western financial channels sustain a relationship that both sides find valuable. The resistance economy is seen as a rational, if costly, strategy of autonomy under coercion, and Chinese partnerships are framed as South-South cooperation rather than dependency. This perspective contributes an important corrective to Western narratives by showing that Iran is not isolated; it has major-power relationships that dilute the impact of unilateral sanctions and provide diplomatic cover in multilateral forums. It also highlights the agency of the Iranian state in negotiating these relationships, rather than treating Iran as merely a passive target of pressure.

Yet the Chinese perspective also has significant occlusions. Its commitment to non-interference can flatten internal political dynamics, treating the 2009 Green Movement and the 2022 protests as domestic disturbances rather than indicators of a legitimacy crisis. It tends to understate the human rights implications of Velayat-e Faqih, the Guardian Council's exclusionary vetting, and the IRGC's economic and coercive power. Because China's own strategic interests favor stability and continuity, this lens may overestimate the resilience of the Islamic Republic and underestimate the depth of societal discontent captured, however imperfectly, by GAMAAN surveys. It also occludes the regional consequences of Iranian strategy: support for allied militias, missile proliferation, and sectarian mobilization may be treated as sovereign security policy rather than as sources of instability for neighboring states. The Chinese perspective is strongest when explaining the material and diplomatic dimensions of Iran's survival under sanctions; it is weakest when assessing the normative and legitimacy dimensions of the Iranian state. Its strategic logic is essentially defensive-realist from Beijing's point of view: Iran balances against US hegemony, and China benefits from a multipolar West Asia in which no single power dominates. But this can lead to an instrumental view of Iran as a partner of convenience rather than a society undergoing profound internal contestation. In sum, the Chinese lens reveals the geopolitical economy of Iranian resilience and the limits of Western coercion, while occluding the internal fractures and regional externalities that other perspectives foreground.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective frames Iran as an allied or quasi-allied state in a broader anti-Western and multipolar project. Moscow's view is shaped by its own experience of sanctions, its perception of NATO expansion, and its interest in preventing any single power from dominating West Asia. From this standpoint, the Iranian state's revolutionary ideology is less important than its geopolitical function: Iran is a counterweight to US influence, a partner in energy and arms markets, and a node in a network of states resisting Western hegemony. Velayat-e Faqih is treated as an internal matter, and the IRGC is assessed primarily through its strategic capabilities rather than its domestic role. Russian analysts often emphasize Iran's defensive realism: its missile program, regional alliances, and nuclear hedging are interpreted as responses to encirclement, the 1953 coup, the Iran-Iraq war, and decades of sanctions. This perspective contributes a historical memory of intervention that resonates with Iranian narratives and challenges Western claims of Iranian irrationality. It also highlights the practical dimensions of sanctions resilience: Russia and Iran share techniques of import substitution, alternative payment systems, and parallel trade networks. The resistance economy is thus seen not as autarky but as a form of strategic adaptation within a hostile international environment. Identity, in the Russian framing, is often subordinated to civilizational partnership: Iran is a historic Eurasian power with which Russia shares interests in stability, non-interference, and resistance to liberal internationalism. Shia identity may be acknowledged but is not central; Persian nationalism is treated as a source of state cohesion rather than a sectarian project.

The occlusions of the Russian perspective are substantial. Its anti-Western framing can lead to an overestimation of ideological convergence between Moscow and Tehran. Russia and Iran have divergent interests in Syria, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and energy markets; their partnership is better described as a marriage of convenience than as an alliance of values. The Russian lens tends to understate the internal legitimacy crisis suggested by the 2009 and 2022 protests, and it may treat Iranian society as a passive object of state control. It also occludes the sectarian and regional dimensions of Iranian strategy, particularly the impact of Iran's network of allied militias on neighboring states. By framing Iran primarily as an anti-Western asset, Russian analysis risks ignoring the ways in which Iranian power projection generates insecurity among Arab states and Israel, thereby fueling arms races and proxy conflicts. Furthermore, the Russian perspective's emphasis on state sovereignty can obscure the gendered and ethnic dimensions of Iranian politics, including the grievances of women and minorities that surfaced in recent protests. Its strongest contribution is to expose the double standards of Western sanctions policy and to provide a geopolitical context for Iranian defensive behavior; its weakest is its tendency to instrumentalize Iran and to overlook the fragility of a revolutionary state whose legitimacy is contested from within. In adjudicating between perspectives, the Russian view is most useful for understanding the strategic logic of Iran's external alignments, but it must be supplemented by attention to internal Iranian politics and regional security dilemmas.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective, particularly in US and European policy discourse, frames the Iranian state as an adversarial, revisionist power whose behavior is driven by a combination of revolutionary ideology and strategic ambition. Velayat-e Faqih is treated not merely as a domestic constitutional doctrine but as the source of an expansionist and non-negotiable worldview. The Supreme Leader, the Guardian Council, and the IRGC are seen as a parallel power structure that undermines democratic accountability and channels resources toward regional militancy. This perspective emphasizes Iran's support for armed non-state actors, its missile program, its nuclear opacity, and its human rights record. Strategic logic is interpreted through a mix of offensive and defensive realism: Iran is said to exploit regional instability to expand its

influence, while also responding to genuine security fears. The "irrationality" critique—often implicit rather than explicit—suggests that a state governed by clerical authority may not respond to standard deterrence or cost-benefit calculations. This critique has been challenged by scholars such as Takeyh (2009), who argue that Iranian behavior is more pragmatic and strategically calculating than ideological caricatures suggest, but it remains influential in policy circles. Sanctions resilience is acknowledged but framed as temporary and brittle: maximum pressure is expected to erode the resistance economy, expose elite corruption, and generate popular discontent. Abrahamian (2008) and Maloney (2015) provide more nuanced accounts of Iran's political economy and revolutionary history, yet policy discourse often compresses these complexities into a narrative of rogue-state behavior. The Western perspective contributes a necessary focus on repression, nuclear risk, and regional destabilization. It documents the IRGC's role in suppressing dissent, the Guardian Council's exclusion of reformist candidates, and the state's treatment of women and minorities. It also insists on the importance of human rights and non-proliferation norms, which other perspectives may subordinate to sovereignty or strategy.

However, the Western perspective's occlusions are equally significant. Its adversarial framing often underweights the historical roots of Iranian insecurity, including the 1953 coup, the Iran-Iraq war, and decades of sanctions. By treating Velayat-e Faqih as the primary cause of Iranian behavior, it risks ignoring the defensive and postcolonial dimensions of Iranian nationalism. The "irrationality" critique can function as an ethnocentric device that denies Iranian leaders strategic agency and rationality. It may also overstate the coherence of Iranian strategy, treating a complex, factionalized state as a unitary actor. On sanctions, Western analysis frequently underestimates the adaptability of Iranian networks and the humanitarian costs of economic pressure. GAMAAN surveys complicate the assumption that sanctions will straightforwardly produce regime change: they suggest deep dissatisfaction with governance, but also significant attachment to national sovereignty and resistance to foreign intervention. The Western perspective is strongest in identifying the coercive and illiberal features of the Islamic Republic and the risks of its regional policies; it is weakest when it treats these features as self-explanatory and ignores the international context that shapes Iranian choices. A rigorous adjudication requires distinguishing between the Islamic Republic's genuine repression and the strategic exaggeration of threat that can justify coercive policies with their own human costs. The Western lens therefore remains indispensable but must be corrected by historical and comparative perspectives that take Iranian sovereignty claims seriously.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective frames the Iranian state through the Charter system, international law, non-proliferation, human rights, and humanitarian protection. In this view, sovereignty is not absolute but qualified by obligations under the UN Charter, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, IAEA safeguards agreements, and international human rights law. Velayat-e Faqih and the Guardian Council are internal constitutional arrangements, but their operation is assessed against standards of political participation, freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, and gender equality. The IRGC and Basij are not judged by their revolutionary legitimacy but by their compliance with international humanitarian law and human rights norms. Strategic logic is evaluated through the lens of collective security: Iran's security concerns are legitimate, but its pursuit of nuclear capability, missile development, and regional alliances must be reconciled with non-proliferation and the security of other states. Sanctions are understood as enforcement measures when authorized by the Security Council, but unilateral sanctions raise questions of legality, proportionality, and humanitarian impact. The UN perspective thus contributes a legal and institutional framework that can mediate between adversarial and defensive narratives. It insists that coercion must have a legal basis and that civilian populations must be protected from excessive harm. On identity, the UN lens emphasizes minority rights, cultural

rights, and freedom of religion or belief, including the rights of Sunni minorities, Kurds, Baluch, Arabs, and religious minorities such as Baha'is. It also foregrounds gender equality and the protection of women from discrimination and violence. This perspective reveals the importance of legal standards and multilateral accountability, and it provides mechanisms—IAEA inspections, human rights reporting, humanitarian exemptions—through which Iranian behavior can be monitored and constrained without necessarily resorting to force.

Yet the UN perspective has its own occlusions. The Security Council's structure reflects power asymmetries that can undermine the legitimacy of sanctions and enforcement, particularly when permanent members have divergent interests. The IAEA's technical mandate can become politicized, and its findings may be interpreted through geopolitical lenses. Human rights mechanisms often lack enforcement power, and their reports may be dismissed by states as Western-biased. The UN perspective can also be overly legalistic, treating political conflicts as compliance problems and underestimating the historical and strategic contexts that drive Iranian behavior. Sanctions, even when multilaterally authorized, can have severe humanitarian consequences that legal exemptions do not fully mitigate. The UN lens may occlude the ways in which sanctions strengthen security elites and weaken civil society, a dynamic that GAMAAN-type surveys and economic data can illuminate. On identity, its universalist categories may not capture the specific political meanings of Persian nationalism, Shia martyrdom, or revolutionary citizenship. Nevertheless, the UN perspective remains essential because it provides a shared vocabulary of sovereignty, rights, and security that all other perspectives must engage. It is strongest in establishing normative boundaries and humanitarian safeguards; it is weakest in resolving power asymmetries and enforcing compliance. In the case of Iran, it offers a framework for managing nuclear risk and protecting civilians, but it cannot by itself resolve the deeper contest between revolutionary sovereignty and international order.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reconstructs Iran as a postcolonial sovereignty rupture and anti-imperial state; highlights external patronage, popular legitimacy, and the dangers of militarized revolutionary consolidation	May understate clerical authoritarianism, sectarian regional effects, and IRGC institutional power	Revolutionary self-determination, anti-domination, and Global South sovereignty	Shah's dependence on US/UK support; mass mobilization; post-revolutionary sovereignty claims	Western/Russian: ideology, regime survival, and power politics, not only anti-imperialism, drove outcomes
Chinese	Pragmatic non-interference; long-term strategic partnership; economic resilience under sanctions	Domestic repression, human rights, and revolutionary export	Sovereignty, stability, mutual benefit, and multipolarity	Oil trade, infrastructure cooperation, long-term strategic agreements	Western: partnership empowers a destabilizing and proliferating actor
Russian	Anti-Western alignment; arms, energy, and diplomatic cooperation; multipolar resistance	Democratic deficits, regional escalation, and dependence on Tehran	Great-power balance and resistance to US hegemony	Syria cooperation, arms transfers, diplomatic cover at the UN	UN/Western: undermines Charter norms, nonproliferation, and regional stability
Western	Alliance history; security dilemma; nuclear and proxy concerns; human rights advocacy	Domestic grievances against the Shah; legitimacy of anti-imperial claims	Liberal order, nonproliferation, human rights, and alliance credibility	Hostage crisis, proxy attacks, nuclear program, sanctions architecture	African: treats a US-backed autocracy as the natural or legitimate order

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Charter framework, sanctions, IAEA verification, humanitarian and legal boundaries	Power asymmetries, enforcement gaps, and political selectivity	Sovereignty plus international security, rights, and nonproliferation	Security Council resolutions, IAEA reports, diplomatic frameworks	Russian/Chinese: enforcement is Western-dominated and selectively applied

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 1979 Islamic Revolution — how the Shah's overthrow produced the Islamic Republic and reshaped regional order.

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the revolution was shaped by the Shah's declining health and indecisive leadership, Ayatollah Khomeini's charismatic authority and exile sermons, President Carter's human rights rhetoric, and the hesitation of senior military commanders. At the state level, the Pahlavi regime combined rapid modernization with coercive repression, oil-rentier financing, SAVAK surveillance, and a narrow social base, while revolutionary actors mobilized bazaar merchants, clerics, students, workers, and urban poor through mosques and neighborhood networks. At the systemic level, the Cold War made Iran a US pillar state, the 1973 oil shock altered fiscal expectations, Soviet intervention in Afghanistan heightened regional insecurity, and Arab monarchies watched the collapse of a fellow authoritarian regime with alarm. At the transnational level, clerical networks linking Najaf and Qom, diaspora activism, global oil markets, international media coverage, and transnational human-rights norms all influenced both the revolution's mobilization and its international reception.

Mechanism. The revolution succeeded through a chain rather than a single uprising: economic grievance and political exclusion produced a cross-class coalition; the Shah's coercive apparatus lost coherence as strikes, protests, and elite defections accumulated; the military's February 1979 neutrality removed the regime's final coercive backstop; and Khomeini's ideological framing through *Velayat-e Faqih* supplied a unifying alternative to both liberal constitutionalism and leftist revolution. The provisional government of Mehdi Bazargan was then outmaneuvered by revolutionary committees, clerical institutions, and the emerging Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which captured the coercive and administrative remnants of the state. The 1979–1981 hostage crisis radicalized the revolution, marginalized moderates, and consolidated clerical control, while the 1980 Iraqi invasion militarized the new republic and fused regime survival with national defense. Regionally, Iran shifted from a US-aligned pillar to a revolutionary adversary; Gulf monarchies perceived an existential threat of ideological export; the United States moved toward containment; and the Iran-Iraq War entrenched a security architecture in which Iran's revolutionary identity became inseparable from its strategic posture. The result was not merely a change of regime but a reordering of West Asian politics around an adversarial, ideologically charged, and institutionally militarized Islamic Republic.

Perspective reconstruction. From an African vantage, the 1979 revolution is best read as a postcolonial rup-

ture in which a Western-backed monarch was overthrown by a coalition claiming popular sovereignty against external domination. Scholars such as Grovogui and Mamdani would emphasize that the Shah's regime was sustained by imperial patronage and coercive modernization, so its collapse exposed the fragility of externally anchored states. Bayart's notion of extraversion helps explain how Pahlavi Iran was inserted into Western security and economic networks, while the revolutionary state sought to reorient authority inward. Yet African observers would also warn that revolutionary sovereignty can harden into new authoritarian forms, especially when clerical and military institutions monopolize power. The case therefore illustrates both the emancipatory promise and the institutional dangers of anti-imperial revolution in the Global South. Beijing viewed the revolution through pragmatic non-interference: the fall of a US ally created opportunities for engagement without endorsing Iran's ideology. China later built a strategic partnership based on energy and infrastructure, treating Iran as a sovereign actor in a multipolar order. This perspective captures material interests but tends to occlude domestic repression and regional escalation. It also assumes that economic interdependence can stabilize a revolutionary state. Moscow initially feared Islamist contagion but soon found Iran useful as an anti-American force. Russian policy later framed Tehran as a partner in resisting Western hegemony, especially in Syria and energy politics. This lens highlights great-power balancing but underplays Iran's autonomous revolutionary agenda. It also risks treating Iran as an instrument rather than a sovereign actor with its own strategic logic. The Western perspective centers on the loss of a modernizing ally and the subsequent security threat posed by a revolutionary, anti-American state. It explains US hostility, sanctions, and alliance with Gulf monarchies, but often treats the revolution as irrational or purely ideological. This occludes the domestic grievances and anti-imperial claims that mobilized Iranians against the Shah. It is strongest on alliance politics and weakest on Iranian legitimacy. The UN perspective frames 1979 through Charter principles: sovereignty, non-intervention, and the prohibition on the use of force. The hostage crisis violated diplomatic immunity, while later sanctions and IAEA processes sought to manage nuclear risk. This provides a shared normative vocabulary but struggles with enforcement and power asymmetry. It is strongest on legal boundaries and weakest on resolving revolutionary legitimacy.

Explicit adjudication. Taken together, the African/postcolonial perspective best explains the revolutionary rupture because it captures the anti-imperial and sovereignty claims that Western and Russian accounts reduce to ideology or power politics. However, it underexplains the clerical capture of the state, the institutional role of the IRGC, and the regional security spiral that followed. A full explanation requires combining the African lens on sovereignty with state-level institutional analysis and systemic security-dilemma theory.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Case: Compare the 2009 Green Movement and the 2022 protests following the death of Mahsa Amini. Does the Islamic Republic face a legitimacy crisis, or are these better understood as recurring episodes of authoritarian contention?

Tasks

1. Define the difference between a legitimacy crisis, a political crisis, and a revolutionary situation, and apply each concept to 2009 and 2022.
2. Map both protest waves across the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—and identify which level best explains diffusion and repression.
3. Compare the triggering mechanisms: the disputed 2009 presidential election and elite fracture versus

the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini in morality-police custody and gendered public-order enforcement.
4. Audit the evidence: identify three findings that would support a legitimacy-crisis interpretation and three that would support a resilient-authoritarianism interpretation, using GAMAAN opinion data, electoral participation trends, IRGC cohesion, and sanctions-era economic performance.
5. Test the 1979 analogue: which necessary conditions for revolution are absent today (clerical defection, unified opposition, military fracture, external shock), and which are present (economic grievance, youth alienation, women's mobilization)?
6. Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN interpretations of the protests, then adjudicate whether the regime's central problem is legitimacy, capacity, or both.

MODEL ANSWER

The question should be reframed before it is answered: legitimacy is not a binary condition, and the Islamic Republic has never rested on a single source of authority. It combines revolutionary, electoral, religious, and nationalist claims, so a crisis occurs when one of those claims is visibly contradicted by practice rather than when all authority collapses. On that standard, 2009 and 2022 are not the same kind of event. The Green Movement emerged from a disputed presidential election and was led, at least initially, by reformist elites who demanded that the republican promise be honored. Its vocabulary remained constitutional: votes should be counted, institutions should function, and the Supreme Leader should arbitrate rather than predecide. That made 2009 a crisis of electoral legitimacy and of intra-elite trust, but not necessarily a crisis of the regime's foundational right to rule. The state responded with repression, house arrests, and the consolidation of principlist control, while the IRGC and Basij remained cohesive. The movement lacked a unified alternative state project, and no major clerical or military faction defected. In Weberian terms, belief in the regime's legitimacy was damaged among urban, educated, and reformist constituencies, but the regime retained both coercive capacity and a plausible claim to revolutionary continuity.

The 2022 protests were different in both trigger and social composition. The death of Mahsa Amini in morality-police custody turned a specific incident of gendered state violence into a national uprising that linked compulsory hijab, police impunity, and the broader authority of Velayat-e Faqih. The slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" challenged not merely an election result but the cultural and theological grammar of the state. The protests were geographically dispersed and socially heterogeneous, involving women, students, workers, ethnic minorities, and segments of the middle class. That breadth matters because it suggests a challenge to ideological legitimacy rather than a narrow policy grievance. Yet breadth alone does not make a revolution. The protests still lacked durable national leadership, a unified opposition platform, and, crucially, fractures within the coercive apparatus. The state's response—internet restrictions, arrests, executions, and localized repression—demonstrated that capacity remained intact even where legitimacy was visibly contested.

Evidence must therefore be weighed rather than counted. GAMAAN surveys have repeatedly found substantial dissatisfaction with the political system and declining attachment to clerical rule and compulsory hijab among significant segments of the population, which supports the legitimacy-crisis reading. Declining participation in some electoral contests and the visible alienation of younger cohorts point in the same direction. But the resilient-authoritarianism reading is also strong: the IRGC remains cohesive, the Artesh has not fractured, elite factions have not produced a rival center of power, and the "resistance economy" plus Chinese partnerships have allowed oil exports and state revenue to recover partially despite sanctions. Economic grievance is real, but grievance without organizational dual power does not by itself produce regime change. The African perspective is especially useful here because it treats the Islamic Republic as a post-revolutionary sovereignty project whose legitimacy derives partly from anti-imperial autonomy and

mass mobilization; from that vantage, the protests are not simply a demand for liberal transition but a contest over who now embodies the revolutionary promise of justice and dignity. That perspective highlights distributional and gendered grievances that Western "regime change" narratives often flatten. The Chinese perspective emphasizes stability, non-interference, and partnership, treating protests as an internal matter and occluding rights-based claims. The Russian perspective frames Iran as an allied anti-Western state and risks reducing domestic dissent to external manipulation. The Western perspective often overreads protest waves as imminent collapse and applies an "irrationality" critique to the regime, occluding its social bases and adaptive capacity. The UN perspective centers rights, due process, sanctions, and the IAEA framework, which can illuminate accountability but may underweight geopolitical context.

The 1979 analogue clarifies the gap between crisis and revolution. In 1979, the Shah faced a broad coalition that included clerics, bazaar merchants, leftists, and nationalists; the military fractured; the United States withdrew support; and Khomeini provided a unifying symbolic authority. None of those conditions is fully present today. The opposition is fragmented, the security apparatus remains loyal, and no external patron has abandoned the regime. What is present—economic pressure, youth alienation, women's mobilization, and declining ideological attachment—is serious but insufficient without elite defection and coercive fracture.

Adjudication: the Islamic Republic faces a chronic legitimacy deficit that becomes acute during protest waves, particularly around gendered state violence and electoral manipulation. It is not, on current evidence, a revolutionary crisis, because capacity and elite cohesion remain intact. The regime's problem is therefore both legitimacy and capacity, but in different registers: legitimacy is eroding in cultural and generational terms, while capacity remains robust in coercive and economic terms. The scope condition for a genuine crisis is the convergence of mass mobilization with elite fracture and security-force defection; absent that convergence, protests are likely to be contained, even as the underlying legitimacy deficit deepens.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Case description: In 2024, following the death of President Ebrahim Raisi, Iran held snap presidential elections amid low turnout, continued sanctions pressure, regional escalation, and public debate over compulsory hijab enforcement. Analysts disagreed over whether the outcome demonstrated regime adaptability and managed succession or revealed a deepening legitimacy deficit among younger and urban voters. Your memo should assess this episode using the frameworks developed in this lesson.

Required memo headings (respond to each as a prompt):

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking the leadership transition, electoral process, coercive capacity, and public legitimacy; specify what would have to change for the outcome to indicate systemic crisis rather than managed adaptation.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would interpret the 2024 transition, and identify what each perspective reveals and occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the 2024 transition with at least one earlier episode—such as 1979, 2009, or 2022—and state which similarities are superficial and which are structurally meaningful.
- **Falsifiers:** List three observable developments that would falsify your main conclusion, and specify the evidence that would be required to claim falsification.

Self-check: Did you distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in your memo?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which evidence pattern would most strongly support the claim that Iran's 2022 protests constituted a legitimacy crisis of the Islamic Republic rather than a contained cycle of authoritarian protest?

A. Large protests occurred, but the IRGC remained cohesive and no elite faction defected.
B. Protests were geographically widespread and included women, youth, workers, and ethnic minorities, while surveys showed declining attachment to Velayat-e Faqih and compulsory hijab; yet the state retained coercive capacity.
C. Western governments condemned the crackdown and imposed additional sanctions.
D. Protest slogans focused exclusively on economic grievances and demanded only wage increases.

Distractor diagnosis:

- **A** is wrong because cohesion of the IRGC and absence of elite defection are evidence of retained capacity; they support a contained-protest or resilient-authoritarianism reading, not a legitimacy crisis.

- **C** is wrong because external condemnation and sanctions measure international reaction, not domestic belief in the regime's right to rule; they cannot by themselves establish a legitimacy crisis.

- **D** is wrong because exclusively economic demands would indicate a routine distributional protest cycle rather than a challenge to the ideological and theological foundations of the state.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Iranian Crude Oil Exports, 2010–2024 (million barrels per day, approximate)

Year	Exports (mbd)	Principal driver
2010	2.3	Pre-sanctions baseline
2012	1.5	EU/US sanctions bite
2015	1.1	Maximum pre-JCPOA pressure
2017	2.1	JCPOA relief
2019	0.5	"Maximum pressure" campaign
2021	1.0	Partial Biden-era easing
2023	1.5	Chinese purchases via shadow fleet
2024	1.6	Continued Chinese demand

Source: OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin; U.S. EIA; Kpler tanker-tracking estimates. Figures are approximate and vary by methodology.

Table 2 — Inflation, GDP Growth, and Unemployment (approximate annual figures)

Year	Inflation (%)	GDP growth (%)	Unemployment (%)
2010	10	6.2	11
2012	31	–6.8	12
2015	14	0.9	11
2018	31	–4.8	12
2020	36	–5.0	11
2022	49	3.8	9
2024	35	4.0	8

Source: World Bank; IMF; Statistical Center of Iran. Approximate; official Iranian figures are contested.

Table 3 — Public Opinion on the Islamic Republic (GAMAAN surveys, selected indicators)

Indicator	2022 (post-Mahsa Amini)	2023
Support Islamic Republic	15%	18%
Oppose / want systemic change	77%	74%
Neutral / no opinion	8%	8%
Trust in IRGC	12%	14%
Trust in Artesh (regular army)	58%	55%

Source: GAMAAN (Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran) online surveys. Internet-based sampling skews urban and younger; margins of error apply.

Table 4 — IRGC Economic Footprint (estimates, contested)

Sector	Estimated IRGC-affiliated position
Construction / engineering (Khatam al-Anbiya)	Dominant in large state projects
Telecommunications	Significant (via Mobin Trust)
Energy / petrochemicals	Substantial
Banking / finance	Growing
Overall GDP share (estimates)	20–30% (various, unaudited)

Source: Maloney (2015); Ehteshami (2017); journalistic estimates. No audited transparency; figures are contested.

Five Analysis Questions

1. **Trend.** Describe the trend in Iranian oil exports between 2010 and 2024. What does the 2019 trough and the 2023–24 recovery indicate about the effectiveness and limits of unilateral U.S. sanctions?

2. **Level of analysis.** At which level of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational) does the GAMAAN data on regime support primarily operate, and what does it fail to capture about regime durability?
3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** How would the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each read the 2022 Mahsa Amini protests and the regime's response? Identify one contribution and one occlusion per perspective.
4. **Interpretation.** Does the combination of high inflation, recovered oil exports, and low regime support indicate a "legitimacy crisis" or "authoritarian resilience"? Adjudicate using the data and specify the mechanism.
5. **Limitation.** What are the methodological limitations of GAMAAN online surveys and of IRGC economic-share estimates, and how do these limitations constrain the inferences a researcher can draw?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Concentric Circles of the Iranian State"

What to draw: Five concentric circles on a large sheet, centered on a small innermost circle. Use a compass or freehand; label each ring.

- **Center circle (smallest):** "Velayat-e Faqih — Supreme Leader (Khamenei)." Shade dark.
- **Ring 1 (inner):** "Guardian Council" and "Assembly of Experts" — label as vetting and succession bodies.
- **Ring 2:** "IRGC" with two sub-labels: "Quds Force (external)" and "Basij (domestic mobilization)."
- **Ring 3:** "Artesh (regular army)," "Bonyads (parastatal foundations)," "Judiciary."
- **Ring 4 (outermost):** "Elected institutions — President, Majlis (parliament)."

Arrows: Draw arrows from Ring 4 inward labeled "policy execution"; arrows from Ring 1 outward labeled "veto / disqualification." Draw a dashed arrow from Ring 2 to Ring 4 labeled "parallel power."

Perspective overlay (annotate in margins): - African (primary): "Parallel revolutionary state — sovereignty defended through dual structure." - Chinese: "Stable partner; non-interference in internal rings." - Russian: "Anti-Western ally; IRGC as reliable interlocutor." - Western: "Theocratic authoritarianism; IRGC as spoiler." - UN: "Sanctions target Ring 2; Charter questions on coercion."

Visual 2 — "Sanctions Resilience Pipeline"

What to draw: A horizontal flowchart with three columns: Inputs → Process → Outputs.

- **Inputs (left, three boxes):** "Oil exports (shadow fleet)," "Chinese purchases (yuan/barter)," "Resistance economy (domestic production)."
- **Process (middle, two boxes):** "IRGC smuggling networks (Khatam al-Anbiya, ports)" and "Bonyad distribution (subsidies, welfare)."
- **Outputs (right, three boxes):** "Regime survival," "Inflation (30–50%)," "Welfare compression for poor/middle class."

Arrows: Thick arrows from inputs to process; thin arrows from process to outputs. Add a feedback loop arrow from "Regime survival" back to "IRGC networks" labeled "patronage."

Perspective overlay (annotate): - African: "Sovereignty under economic coercion; resistance as anti-imperial practice." - Chinese: "Market opportunity; non-interference preserved." - Russian: "Proof of Western overreach; validates multipolarity." - Western: "Sanctions leakage; need for secondary sanctions." - UN: "Humanitarian impact; Charter proportionality debate."

Visual 3 — "Identity Triangle"

What to draw: An equilateral triangle. At each vertex place a labeled circle:

- **Top vertex:** "Persian nationalism (pre-Islamic, linguistic, territorial)."
- **Bottom-left vertex:** "Shia identity (Twelver, clerical, revolutionary)."
- **Bottom-right vertex:** "Politics of martyrdom (Karbala, Iran-Iraq War, Qasem Soleimani)."

Center of triangle: "Iranian state legitimacy (contested)."

Edges: Label each edge with a tension: - Top–bottom-left: "Secular vs. clerical" - Top–bottom-right: "Ethnic vs. universalist" - Bottom-left–bottom-right: "Clerical authority vs. popular sacrifice"

Perspective overlay (annotate outside triangle): - African: "Identity as resource for sovereignty and resistance." - Chinese: "Internal matter; stability preferred." - Russian: "Shared anti-Western civilizational framing." - Western: "Ideology as source of irrationality critique." - UN: "Minority rights; cultural rights under Charter."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (Question / Prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is Velayat-e Faqih?	Doctrine of "Guardianship of the Jurist"; Khomeini's 1970 lectures; Supreme Leader holds ultimate authority over state. Source: Abrahamian (2008).
What is the Guardian Council?	12-member body (6 clerics + 6 jurists) vetting candidates and legislation; veto power over parliament. Source: Takeyh (2009).
What is the IRGC?	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps; parallel military; Quds Force (external), Basij (domestic). Source: Maloney (2015).
How does Artesh differ from IRGC?	Artesh = regular army; professional, less ideological; IRGC = revolutionary, ideological, economic actor. Source: Ehteshami (2017).
What is the "resistance economy"?	Khamenei's 2012 concept; domestic production, sanctions circumvention, self-reliance. Source: Maloney (2015).
What is the bonyad system?	Parastatal foundations (e.g., Mostazafan) controlling assets; welfare + patronage + IRGC links. Source: Ehteshami (2017).

Cue (Question / Prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is defensive realism in Iran's strategy?	Survival-focused, threat-perception driven; proxy networks as deterrence. Source: Takeyh (2009).
What is the "irrationality critique"?	Western claim that ideology makes Iran unpredictable; counter: strategic rationality within ideological frame. Source: Maloney (2015).
What do GAMAAN surveys show?	Low regime support (15–18%), high opposition (74–77%); urban/online skew. Source: GAMAAN surveys.
What is the African perspective on Iran?	Parallel revolutionary state; sovereignty norms; anti-imperial solidarity; occludes internal repression. Source: Grovogui; Mbembe (general).
What is the Chinese perspective?	Strategic partnership; non-interference; oil purchases; 25-year cooperation agreement. Source: Ehteshami (2017).
What is the Russian perspective?	Allied state; anti-Western framing; Syria cooperation; S-400/defense ties. Source: Takeyh (2009).

Summary (3–5 sentences): The Iranian state is organized around Velayat-e Faqih, concentrating authority in the Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council while maintaining a parallel IRGC security apparatus alongside elected institutions. Its strategic logic combines defensive realism with revolutionary ideology, producing proxy networks and a resistance economy that has partially insulated it from sanctions. Identity politics weave Persian nationalism, Shia clericalism, and martyrdom into a contested legitimacy project. Data show recovered oil exports alongside high inflation and low regime support, suggesting resilience and fragility coexist. Each of the five perspectives captures part of this picture while occluding others.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Iran is run by a religious leader who has final say over everything, backed by a special military force that also controls big businesses. The country faces heavy sanctions but keeps selling oil to China and makes things at home to survive. Most Iranians, according to online surveys, do not support the government, yet the government has not collapsed. The state mixes Persian pride, Shia religion, and stories of sacrifice to justify its rule.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. I am unsure how much of the IRGC's economic power is accurately measured; the 20–30% GDP figure is unaudited. I am also unsure whether low GAMAAN support translates into organized opposition capacity, since the surveys are online and urban-skewed. I have not fully resolved whether "defensive realism" or "ideological expansionism" better explains Iran's regional behavior.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading Maloney (2015) and Ehteshami (2017) confirms that the IRGC's economic role is substantial but opaque, and that the resistance economy is a deliberate strategy, not merely improvisation. Abrahamian (2008) confirms the clerical structure's origins in Khomeini's theory. GAMAAN data confirm low support but with sampling caveats. The gap on opposition capacity remains; no source

resolves it definitively.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. Iran resembles a fortress with a moat: the IRGC and Basij are the walls, oil sales to China are the supply line, and the resistance economy is the granary. The analogy captures resilience but breaks down on legitimacy: a fortress does not need popular consent, whereas the Islamic Republic's ideology claims popular and divine mandate, and the GAMAAN data suggest that claim is contested. The analogy also cannot capture the transnational Shia network.

Step 5 — Rewrite. The Iranian state is a theocratic-republican hybrid whose survival rests on a dual security apparatus (IRGC/Artesh), a resistance economy partially shielded by Chinese oil purchases, and an identity narrative blending Persian nationalism, Shia clericalism, and martyrdom. Sanctions have hurt the economy (high inflation, GDP volatility) but have not collapsed the regime, partly because the IRGC controls key economic nodes and distributes patronage. Public opinion data indicate low regime support, especially among urban youth, yet organized opposition remains fragmented. Whether this constitutes a "legitimacy crisis" depends on whether one measures legitimacy by popular consent (Western/GAMAAN reading) or by institutional and coercive capacity (state-centric reading). The African perspective adds that Iran's experience of sanctions and revolutionary state-building resonates with post-colonial sovereignty struggles, while occluding internal repression; the Chinese perspective treats Iran as a stable partner; the Russian as an anti-Western ally; the Western as an adversarial theocracy; and the UN as a sanctions and Charter problem.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Definition	What is Velayat-e Faqih?	Velayat-e Faqih is the doctrine that a qualified Islamic jurist holds guardianship over the Islamic state and its population, giving clerical authority a constitutional role beyond advisory religious guidance. In Iran it was institutionalized after 1979 through the Supreme Leader, Guardian Council, and related bodies. It fuses religious legitimacy with state sovereignty rather than separating them. Its scope remains contested even within Shiism.	African perspective: parallels postcolonial fusion of liberation legitimacy with state authority, but warns against unaccountable guardianship.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Mechanism	How does the Guardian Council shape political choice?	The Guardian Council vets candidates, reviews legislation for conformity with Islamic law and the constitution, and supervises elections. This creates dual gatekeeping: popular elections occur within boundaries set by clerical-legal review. It can disqualify reformist or dissident candidates, shaping the menu of political choice. The mechanism converts electoral competition into managed pluralism.	Western perspective treats this as authoritarian filtering; UN perspective sees tension with free and fair election norms.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Mechanism	Why is the IRGC more than a conventional military?	The IRGC is a parallel military-security institution created to protect the revolution, not merely territory, with land, naval, aerospace, and Quds Force components. It also holds extensive economic assets and political influence, making it a hybrid actor. Its mandate links regime survival to regional deterrence. This blurs the line between defense, ideology, and commerce.	Russian perspective values it as an anti-Western balancer; African perspective notes parallel security apparatuses in post-revolutionary states.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Comparison	How do the Artesh and IRGC differ?	The Artesh is the conventional national army oriented toward territorial defense, while the IRGC is a revolutionary guard with ideological, political, and economic roles. The Artesh generally lacks the IRGC's parallel command and patronage networks. This dual structure prevents any single military institution from monopolizing coercive power. It also complicates civilian control and accountability.	Chinese perspective emphasizes institutional stability; Western perspective sees fragmented coercion.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Source	What does Abrahamian (2008) contribute to understanding Iran?	Abrahamian (2008) frames modern Iran through social and political history, emphasizing how revolutionary mobilization, class alliances, and state-building shaped the Islamic Republic. His work cautions against reducing Iran to theology or geopolitics alone. It highlights continuities between pre- and post-revolutionary state structures. This supports a historically grounded, not purely ideological, analysis.	African perspective: useful for comparing revolutionary state formation across postcolonial contexts.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Debate	Is Iran best explained by defensive realism or revolutionary ideology?	Defensive realism explains Iran's behavior as security-seeking under encirclement, sanctions, and regime-change threats. Revolutionary ideology explains its support for allied movements and anti-status-quo rhetoric. The two are not mutually exclusive: ideology can function as a tool of deterrence and regime legitimacy. Adjudication requires separating capability-building from rhetorical commitments.	Russian perspective stresses anti-Western solidarity; Western perspective often overstates ideology.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Reconstruction	How does China frame its partnership with Iran?	China's perspective emphasizes strategic partnership, energy security, and non-interference, treating Iran as a sovereign state and market. It generally opposes unilateral sanctions and supports diplomatic engagement. This view contributes economic alternatives but can occlude domestic repression and proxy warfare. It frames Iran as a node in multipolar order-building.	Chinese perspective: partnership and non-interference; African perspective shares sovereignty concerns but questions great-power instrumentalization.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Occlusion	What does the Western "irrationality" critique occlude?	The "irrationality" critique portrays Iran's leadership as driven by apocalyptic ideology rather than cost-benefit calculation. This occludes evidence of strategic patience, bargaining, and survival-oriented behavior. It can justify coercive policies by denying adversary rationality. A better approach tests claims against observable decisions and constraints.	Western perspective's blind spot; African perspective warns against dehumanizing adversaries.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Adjudication	Do the 2022 protests prove a legitimacy crisis?	The 2022 Mahsa Amini protests revealed deep grievances over gender, policing, and economic conditions, but did not by themselves demonstrate imminent regime collapse. GAMAAN surveys suggest significant dissatisfaction and declining trust, yet the state retained coercive capacity and elite cohesion. A legitimacy crisis is therefore partial and contested, not a simple binary. Evidence must distinguish protest intensity from institutional breakdown.	UN perspective focuses on rights violations; African perspective asks whether protest translates into alternative state capacity.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Visual	How should the resistance economy be visualized?	The resistance economy concept refers to policies aimed at reducing vulnerability to sanctions through domestic production, import substitution, and alternative trade routes. Visualizing it requires showing formal state programs alongside informal smuggling and China-linked trade. The gap between official rhetoric and household welfare is analytically important. It is a resilience strategy, not autarky.	African perspective: compares with sanctions-busting and informal economies in sanctioned states.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Mechanism	What role does the Basij play in social control?	The Basij is a paramilitary volunteer militia mobilized for social control, ideological policing, and crisis response. It extends state reach into neighborhoods, universities, and workplaces. Its role in suppressing protests illustrates how revolutionary institutions penetrate civil society. It is both a coercive and socialization mechanism.	Western perspective sees repression; UN perspective sees rights concerns.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Definition	What is the resistance economy?	The resistance economy is an Iranian policy framework for sanctions resilience, emphasizing self-reliance, domestic manufacturing, and reduced dependence on Western markets. It does not eliminate external trade but redirects it toward partners such as China and Russia. Its success is uneven across sectors and households. It is best treated as a strategic narrative and policy bundle.	Chinese perspective: opportunity for partnership; African perspective: sovereignty under economic coercion.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Application	How should GAMAAN surveys be used?	GAMAAN surveys provide evidence on Iranian public attitudes toward the regime, religion, and protests, often showing lower support than official narratives claim. They are valuable but face methodological constraints, including online sampling and self-censorship. They should be triangulated with behavior, repression data, and elite signals. They measure sentiment, not revolutionary capacity.	UN perspective: rights-relevant data; Western perspective: legitimacy indicator.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L42	Comparison	What does the African perspective add to Iran analysis?	The African perspective compares Iran's revolutionary state to postcolonial states where liberation movements became governing parties and security apparatuses. The parallel highlights how revolutionary legitimacy can coexist with authoritarian consolidation. It also warns against assuming Western categories of "failed" or "rogue" state. Differences in religion, geopolitics, and sanctions exposure remain significant.	African perspective primary: reveals what Western adversarial framing occludes.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100)

Competency	Self-rated confidence (0-100)	Target (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Priority gap
Define Velayat-e Faqih and the Guardian Council's role		85	Can distinguish jurist guardianship from conventional theocracy	Conflating religious authority with unchecked personal rule
Map IRGC, Artesh, and Basij functions		85	Can explain parallel coercion and regime protection	Treating all forces as one military hierarchy

Competency	Self-rated confidence (0-100)	Target (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Priority gap
Explain defensive realism plus revolutionary ideology		90	Can separate security-seeking from rhetorical commitments	Overattributing behavior to ideology alone
Analyze sanctions resilience and resistance economy		85	Can link policy rhetoric to smuggling, oil, and household welfare	Assuming sanctions either fully succeed or fully fail
Interpret GAMAAN and public-opinion data		80	Can state sampling limits and triangulate with behavior	Converting sentiment into regime-collapse prediction
Reconstruct all five perspectives		90	Can steel-man each tradition without caricature	Neglecting African or UN vantage points
Apply the four levels of analysis		85	Can move between individual, state, systemic, and transnational	Fixating on one level
Adjudicate the legitimacy-crisis question		90	Can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, prescription	Treating protests as sufficient evidence of collapse

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. **Which evidence would change your view that Iran behaves as a strategically rational actor?**
   Suggested reflection: Identify one observable decision—such as nuclear bargaining, proxy restraint, or sanctions adaptation—that would falsify the rationality claim, and state what would count as ideology overriding cost-benefit calculation.

2. **Which perspective did you most neglect when reconstructing the 1979 revolution?**
   Suggested reflection: Compare your first reconstruction with the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN accounts; note which tradition's contribution or occlusion you initially missed.

3. **What is the difference between describing protest size and explaining regime durability?**
   Suggested reflection: Separate empirical observation (numbers, repression, economic indicators) from causal explanation (elite cohesion, coercive capacity, alternative institutions) and from prediction (col-

lapse, reform, or stalemate).

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Velayat-e Faqih means clerics rule without institutions	It is constitutionalized through specific bodies such as the Supreme Leader, Guardian Council, and related offices	Abrahamian (2008); Takeyh (2009)
The IRGC is only a military force	It is a parallel security, political, and economic actor with revolutionary mandate	Takeyh (2009); Maloney (2015)
Iran is purely ideologically driven	Defensive realism and regime survival interact with revolutionary ideology	Ehteshami (2017); Takeyh (2009)
Sanctions have completely crippled Iran	Resistance-economy policies, smuggling, and China-linked trade create uneven resilience	Maloney (2015); GAMAAN surveys
Large protests prove imminent regime collapse	Protest intensity must be weighed against coercive capacity, elite cohesion, and lack of alternative state capacity	GAMAAN surveys; Ehteshami (2017)
The Western view is only adversarial	Western scholarship and policy include engagement, deterrence, and rights-based debates	Takeyh (2009); Maloney (2015)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Velayat-e Faqih; Guardian Council; clerical authority	Jurist guardianship; candidate vetting; legislation review	Abrahamian (2008); Takeyh (2009)	1979 Islamic Revolution	Clerical authority vs popular sovereignty	Evidence of clerical powerlessness or purely symbolic religious role	L43 sectarian politics; L45 nuclear

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
IRGC; Artesh; Basij; parallel security apparatus	Revolutionary protection; dual military structure; neighborhood social control	Takeyh (2009)	Post-1979 institutional consolidation	Parallel coercion vs civilian control	Evidence of unified command under civilian authority	L44 proxy warfare
Defensive realism plus revolutionary ideology	Security-seeking; deterrence; support for allied movements	Ehteshami (2017); Takeyh (2009)	Iran-Iraq War; regional proxy networks	Rationality vs ideological irrationality	Repeated self-destructive decisions ignoring survival	L41 West Asian state system
Resistance economy; smuggling; Chinese partnerships	Import substitution; sanctions evasion; redirected trade	Maloney (2015)	Iranian oil exports 2010-2024; inflation and GDP data	Sanctions efficacy vs resilience	Sustained collapse of oil revenue and essential imports	L45 nuclear negotiations
Persian nationalism; Shia identity; martyrdom politics	Identity mobilization; regime legitimation; grievance framing	Abrahamian (2008); Ehteshami (2017)	2009 Green Movement; 2022 Mahsa Amini protests	Identity vs class/material explanations	Evidence that identity rhetoric has no mobilizing effect	L43 sectarian; L7 ontological security
Five perspectives on Iran	Steel-manning; occlusion analysis; adjudication	Abrahamian; Takeyh; Ehteshami; Maloney; GAMAAN	GAMAAN public-opinion surveys	Adversarial vs multipolar framing	A perspective that cannot identify its own blind spot	L41-L45 module arc

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Review	Timing	Concrete action
R1	Same day, 20-30 minutes	Re-read all flashcards, redraw the resistance-economy visual from memory, and write one sentence stating the core mechanism of Velayat-e Faqih.

Review	Timing	Concrete action
R2	24-48 hours	Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives from memory, then compare against notes and mark one neglected insight.
R3	1 week	Re-analyze the IRGC, oil-export, inflation/GDP, and GAMAAN data tables; update the error log with one new misconception.
R4	1 month	Apply the lesson to a new case, such as Iran-Saudi normalization or a sanctions episode, using all four levels of analysis and all five perspectives.
R5	3 months	Write a full independent memo from scratch on whether the Islamic Republic faces a legitimacy crisis, then check it against the falsifiers and adjudication criteria.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define Velayat-e Faqih without conflating it with generic theocracy.
- ☐ I can explain the Guardian Council's vetting and review functions.
- ☐ I can distinguish the IRGC, Artesh, and Basij by mandate and structure.
- ☐ I can explain why the IRGC is a hybrid military-economic-political actor.
- ☐ I can state Iran's strategic logic as defensive realism plus revolutionary ideology.
- ☐ I can identify the strongest counterargument to the "irrationality" critique.
- ☐ I can explain the resistance economy and its limits.
- ☐ I can interpret Iranian oil-export and inflation/GDP data with appropriate caution.
- ☐ I can summarize what GAMAAN surveys show and their methodological limits.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary, not an add-on.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives fairly.
- ☐ I can compare the five perspectives using contribution, occlusion, stance, evidence, and objection.
- ☐ I can apply individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels of analysis to the 1979 revolution.
- ☐ I can adjudicate whether the 2009 and 2022 protests indicate a legitimacy crisis.
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in my memo.
- ☐ I have recorded at least one misconception and correction in the error log.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Sub-theme	Source	Use
Political theology and revolutionary state formation	Abrahamian, E. (1982). *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Princeton University Press.	Historical context for pre- and post-revolutionary state structures.
Political theology and modern Iranian history	Abrahamian, E. (2008). *A History of Modern Iran*. Cambridge University Press.	Social and political history of the Islamic Republic.
IRGC and strategic logic	Takeyh, R. (2009). *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*. Oxford University Press.	Institutional and strategic analysis of the revolutionary state.
Strategic logic and transition	Ehteshami, A. (2017). *Iran: Stuck in Transition?* Routledge.	Defensive realism, ideology, and political change.
Sanctions and political economy	Maloney, S. (2015). *Iran's Political Economy since the Revolution*. Cambridge University Press.	Resistance economy, sanctions resilience, and state-society relations.
Public opinion and legitimacy	GAMAAN survey waves (2020). Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran.	Attitudes toward regime, religion, and political change.
Public opinion and protest politics	GAMAAN survey waves (2022). Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran.	Sentiment during and after the Mahsa Amini protests.
Public opinion and regime support	GAMAAN survey waves (2023/2024). Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran.	Changing trust, dissatisfaction, and methodological limits.

End of Lesson 42. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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44. The Sectarian Security Dilemma and the Axis of Resistance

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 43 — The Sectarian Security Dilemma and the Axis of Resistance
Module	Module 7: West Asia and Iranian Geopolitics
Prerequisites	L42 (Iran), L23 (asymmetric warfare), L41 (West Asia state system)

Field	Value
Interleaved links	Forward to L44 (proxy warfare), L45 (nuclear), L50 (non-state actors)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, worked example, problem pair, flashcards, visuals
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple to state and extraordinarily difficult to resolve: under what conditions does sectarian identity become the organizing logic of interstate and transnational security competition, and when is it merely the vocabulary through which material, strategic, and regime-survival interests are pursued? The West Asian regional order is routinely described in sectarian terms—a "Shia crescent" stretching from Iran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon, confronting a Sunni bloc anchored by Saudi Arabia and the Gulf monarchies, with Israel and Turkey occupying ambiguous positions. This description is not false, but it is dangerously incomplete. It risks reifying identities that are politically constructed, treating as primordial what is in fact produced by competition, and mistaking the language of conflict for its cause. The lesson's first task is to hold this tension open rather than resolve it prematurely. The second task is to analyze the Axis of Resistance—Iran's network of allied state and non-state actors—not as a fixed alliance system but as a dynamic security architecture whose coherence, limits, and internal contradictions must be traced through mechanism rather than assumed from ideology.

The lesson sits at a critical junction in the curriculum. It draws on L41's analysis of the West Asian state system as a multipolar, oil-dependent, externally penetrated order lacking a stable hegemon; on L42's treatment of Iran as a revolutionary state whose ideology and national interest are in permanent, productive tension; and on L23's framework for asymmetric warfare, in which weaker actors exploit the vulnerabilities of stronger ones through indirect, deniable, and cost-imposing strategies. It prepares the ground for L44 on proxy warfare, L45 on nuclear proliferation and deterrence, and L50 on non-state actors as autonomous security agents. The student who masters this lesson should be able to move fluidly across levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—without collapsing one into another, and to recognize when an explanation that works at one level fails at another.

The scholarly stakes are high and genuinely contested. Vali Nasr's 2006 argument that the Iraq war unleashed a Shia revival and a Sunni backlash gave academic respectability to the view that sectarian identity had become the master cleavage of regional politics. Nasr's claim was not that sect was primordial but that the collapse of the Iraqi state removed the coercive lid that had suppressed sectarian mobilization, allowing identity to become politically salient in ways that reshaped alliances, threat perceptions, and state strategies. This is a defensible and important argument. But it has been challenged by scholars who warn against "sectarianization"—the process by which political actors construct, amplify, and instrumentalize sectarian categories for strategic gain. Haddad's 2018 work on the politics of sectarianism in the Arab world insists that the relevant question is not "why are Sunnis and Shias fighting?" but "who benefits from framing the conflict in sectarian terms, and through what institutional mechanisms does that framing be-

come self-fulfilling?" Wehrey's 2018 analysis of Saudi-Iranian rivalry similarly cautions against reducing a complex geopolitical competition to religious identity, noting that both states have historically cooperated when interests aligned and that domestic political legitimation, not theology, drives much of the sectarian rhetoric. Juneau's 2020 work on Iran's regional strategy emphasizes the material and strategic logic of the Axis of Resistance—deterrence, forward defense, and regime survival—while acknowledging that ideology provides the connective tissue that makes the network resilient. Crisis Group reports on Iran and the Gulf provide granular, field-based documentation of how these dynamics play out in specific theaters. The lesson adjudicates among these positions not by declaring a winner but by specifying the scope conditions under which each holds.

The African perspective is not a regional add-on to this analysis; it is the lens that reveals what the other four perspectives systematically obscure. African states and societies have extensive experience with the instrumentalization of identity—ethnic, religious, regional, and communal—by elites competing for control of the state and its resources. The African scholarly tradition, from Fanon's analysis of colonial identity construction through Mamdani's work on the politicization of ethnicity, Bayart's "politics of the belly," and Grovogui's critique of international order as a racialized and civilizational project, provides theoretical resources that are directly applicable to the West Asian case. The key insight is this: the sectarian security dilemma is not a clash between two pre-existing communities but a political process in which states and non-state actors produce the very identities they claim to defend. The African vantage point foregrounds the agency of political entrepreneurs, the role of external powers in freezing and weaponizing identity categories, and the possibility that "communities of fear" are manufactured rather than discovered. This does not mean that identity is infinitely malleable or that material interests explain everything; it means that the relationship between identity and interest is itself a political variable, and that the analyst who treats identity as fixed has already taken sides in the conflict.

What the student will be able to do after mastering this lesson is substantial and specific. First, reconstruct five distinct perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on the sectarian security dilemma and the Axis of Resistance, steel-manning each from within its own premises. Second, apply four levels of analysis to any case, identifying which level explains what and where explanations break down. Third, distinguish description from explanation, prediction, and prescription—a discipline that prevents the common error of treating a compelling narrative as a causal account. Fourth, evaluate competing theories against evidence, specifying falsifiers and scope conditions. Fifth, produce an independent analytical memo that demonstrates all of the above. The lesson is demanding because the subject is genuinely difficult: the same evidence can support multiple interpretations, and the stakes of getting it wrong—whether in policy or in scholarship—are high.

A final methodological caution frames everything that follows. The mere co-occurrence of sectarian identity and violent conflict does not establish causation. Correlation is not mechanism. The analyst must trace decision-making processes, resource flows, rhetorical strategies, and institutional pathways to determine how identity becomes salient, for whom, and with what effects. Where such tracing is impossible—because of secrecy, denial, or the absence of documentation—the honest response is to mark the claim as unverified rather than to fill the gap with assumption. This discipline is especially important in a domain where conspiracy theories, propaganda, and genuine uncertainty are densely intertwined. The lesson models this discipline throughout: every claim is tied to a mechanism, every mechanism to scope conditions, every theory to its strongest counterargument.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer the following questions from memory before reading further. Do not look up answers. The purpose is to activate prior knowledge and identify gaps.

1. From L41 (West Asia state system): What structural features of the West Asian state system—multipolarity, external penetration, resource dependence—make it prone to security dilemmas, and how does the absence of a regional hegemon shape threat perception?
2. From L42 (Iran): How does the Islamic Republic reconcile its revolutionary ideology with its national interests, and what instruments does it use to project influence beyond its borders?
3. From L23 (asymmetric warfare): Define asymmetric warfare and explain how a weaker actor can impose costs on a stronger one without matching its conventional capabilities.
4. From L41: What role do oil rents and water scarcity play in shaping state capacity and regional competition in West Asia?
5. From L42: What is the "forward defense" doctrine, and how does it relate to Iran's perception of its strategic environment?
6. From L23: How does the presence of non-state actors complicate traditional deterrence theory, which assumes rational state actors with clear chains of command?

1.2 Orientation Questions

These questions frame the lesson's central puzzles. Hold them in mind as you read; you will return to them in the problem pair and independent memo.

1. Is the Saudi-Iranian rivalry fundamentally sectarian in nature, or is sectarianism the available vocabulary through which a geopolitical, regime-security, and status competition is expressed? What evidence would distinguish these two hypotheses?
2. Does the Axis of Resistance constitute a coherent alliance with shared objectives and command structures, or a loose network of convenience bound by overlapping but distinct interests? What would a "coherent alliance" look like in terms of observable behavior?
3. How does the sectarian security dilemma differ from the classic interstate security dilemma described by Herz and Jervis? Does the addition of identity make the dilemma more or less tractable?
4. What would falsify the claim that sectarian identity is merely instrumental—that is, what evidence would demonstrate that sectarian attachments have causal force independent of elite manipulation?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

The following terms will be used throughout the lesson. These are provisional definitions; refine them as you encounter the concepts in context.

- **Sectarianization**: The process by which political actors construct, amplify, and institutionalize sectarian categories as salient bases for political mobilization and conflict. Distinct from "sectarianism" as a pre-existing attitude; emphasizes agency and construction. (Haddad, 2018)
- **Security dilemma**: A situation in which measures taken by one state to increase its security are perceived as threatening by another, prompting countermeasures that leave both less secure. In its sectarian variant, identity-based mobilization by one actor is read as existential threat by another.

- **Axis of Resistance**: Iran's network of allied state and non-state actors—including Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis in Yemen, Iraqi Shia militias, and Hamas in Palestine—united by opposition to US and Israeli regional dominance and by varying degrees of alignment with Iranian strategic objectives.
- **Shia Crescent**: A geopolitical concept describing a contiguous arc of Shia-majority or Shia-influenced states and populations from Iran through Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Functions as both an analytical category and a rhetorical device; its "reality" is contested.
- **Proxy warfare**: The use of third parties—states, militias, or other non-state actors—to conduct military operations on behalf of a principal, providing plausible deniability and cost reduction. (See L44 for full treatment.)
- **Instrumentalization**: The strategic use of identity categories by political elites to mobilize support, justify policy, and delegitimize opponents, without necessarily believing in the identity's primordial significance.
- **Deep structure (of identity)**: The argument that sectarian or communal identities have autonomous causal force rooted in history, theology, and social organization, independent of elite manipulation. Contrasts with instrumentalization.
- **Rapprochement**: The re-establishment of diplomatic and strategic relations between previously hostile states. The 2023 Saudi-Iran agreement brokered by China is the central case.
- **Deterrence by punishment**: A strategy of threatening unacceptable costs to an adversary in response to aggression, as opposed to deterrence by denial (preventing the adversary from achieving its objectives). Iran's Axis of Resistance is often analyzed as a punishment mechanism.
- **Communal identity**: A sense of belonging to a religious, ethnic, or sectarian community that may or may not be politically mobilized. The gap between communal identity and political sectarianism is a key analytical distinction.
- **Transnationalism**: Political, social, and military activity that crosses state borders, including the operation of non-state actors like Hezbollah and the Houthis across multiple national contexts.
- **Asymmetric retaliation**: A response to aggression that exploits the adversary's vulnerabilities through indirect, deniable, or unconventional means rather than symmetric conventional force. Central to the Axis of Resistance's operational logic.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Explain** the historical trajectory of Saudi-Iranian rivalry from the 1979 Iranian Revolution through the 2023 Beijing-brokered rapprochement, identifying the structural shifts in regime type, regional order, and threat perception that transformed a manageable bilateral competition into a region-wide sectarianized security dilemma.

2. **Analyze** the causal mechanisms through which defensive measures by one rival are interpreted as offensive threats by the other, applying the security dilemma framework to the Gulf and Levant and specifying the conditions under which sectarian identity becomes a mobilizing resource rather than a latent social fact.

3. **Evaluate** competing claims about the "Shia Crescent" — as empirical geopolitical description, as Iranian strategic doctrine, and as Saudi/Israeli rhetorical construction — and adjudicate which components are verifiable and which are politically performative.
4. **Compare** the five major interpretive traditions (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on the Axis of Resistance, identifying what each framework renders visible and what it systematically occludes, and defend a reasoned judgment about which framework best explains a given case.
5. **Synthesize** the distinction between instrumentalization and deep structure in sectarian politics, applying it to the 2019 Aramco attack and the 2023 rapprochement, and produce a falsifiable prediction about whether the Beijing agreement will endure under specified conditions.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The Saudi-Iranian Rivalry: From the 1979 Revolution to the 2023 Beijing-Brokered Rapprochement

Bolded Causal Claim: The Saudi-Iranian rivalry is not an ancient sectarian feud but a modern, state-driven competition that was sectarianized after 1979, when the Iranian Revolution replaced a secularizing, Western-aligned monarchy with a revolutionary republic that claimed pan-Islamic and pan-Shia leadership, thereby converting a manageable bilateral contest over Gulf hegemony into an existential, identity-laden security dilemma that structured regional politics for four decades.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three linked transformations. First, the 1979 revolution eliminated the Pahlavi state's role as the Gulf's Western-aligned gendarme and replaced it with a regime whose legitimacy rested on exporting revolution and championing the oppressed (mostazafin), including Shia communities in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, Bahrain, Iraq, and Lebanon. This was not merely a change in foreign policy orientation; it was a change in the ontological basis of the state, from dynastic-national to ideological-transnational. Second, the Saudi monarchy, whose legitimacy derived from custodianship of the Two Holy Mosques and from a Wahhabi clerical establishment that defined Shia Islam as heterodox, interpreted Iranian revolutionary rhetoric as a direct threat to its domestic order and to its regional standing. The mechanism here is threat perception amplification: the same Iranian statements that Tehran framed as solidarity with the oppressed were read in Riyadh as subversion of the Saudi state and its Gulf allies. Third, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) locked both states into a militarized rivalry in which each side armed proxies, cultivated sectarian constituencies, and securitized identity. The war's outcome — Iran's survival despite international isolation — convinced Tehran that asymmetric, proxy-based deterrence was essential, while convincing Riyadh that containment of Iran required American security guarantees and, later, a network of Sunni-aligned states. Over the subsequent decades, this rivalry became self-reinforcing: each Iranian gain (Hezbollah's consolidation in Lebanon after 2006, the post-2003 Iraqi state's Shia-majority character, the Houthi takeover of Sana'a in 2014) was read in Riyadh as evidence of an encircling "Shia Crescent," while each Saudi move (support for Saddam Hussein during the war, the 2015 Yemen intervention, the 2017 Qatar blockade) was read in Tehran as American-backed encirclement. The 2023 Beijing-brokered rapprochement did not dissolve this structure; it suspended it. The mechanism of suspension was mutual exhaustion and Chinese economic leverage: both states faced fiscal constraints (Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 financing needs, Iran's sanctions-strangled economy), both had failed to achieve decisive victories in Yemen and Syria, and both calculated that a diplomatic pause would yield economic dividends. China's role was not merely mediatory; it was structural, offering a non-Western framework that allowed both parties to save face and to frame the agreement as multipolar rather than as capitulation to American pressure.

Scope Conditions: The rivalry-as-security-dilemma framework applies most strongly under three conditions: (a) when both states possess asymmetric capabilities and cannot achieve decisive military victory, producing a stalemate that incentivizes proxy competition; (b) when domestic legitimacy in each state is partially tied to sectarian or ideological identity, making concession costly; and (c) when an external great power (the United States) is present but unreliable, creating incentives for both states to hedge through regional balancing. The framework applies less well when the rivalry is driven primarily by resource competition (oil market share) or by pure geopolitical balancing without identity content, as in the pre-1979 period when Iran and Saudi Arabia, despite being rivals, cooperated within the Nixon Doctrine's "twin pillars" framework. It also applies less well when one side achieves clear dominance, which would convert the dilemma into a hierarchy rather than a security competition. The 2023 rapprochement tests these scope conditions: if it endures, it suggests that economic exhaustion and great-power mediation can override identity-based rivalry; if it collapses, it confirms that the underlying security dilemma remains structurally intact.

Observable Implications: If the rivalry is genuinely a sectarianized security dilemma rather than a primordial religious conflict, we should observe several patterns. First, periods of reduced threat perception should produce rapid de-escalation regardless of theological differences — as occurred in the 1990s under Rafsanjani and Khatami, when Iran and Saudi Arabia cooperated on OPEC and regional stability. Second, the rivalry should intensify when third parties (the United States, Israel) are perceived as tilting the balance, and should moderate when those parties are distracted or withdrawn. Third, proxy groups should exhibit agency and interests distinct from their patrons, sometimes escalating beyond patron control (as the Houthis did in 2019) or pursuing local agendas (as Hezbollah does in Lebanon). Fourth, the 2023 rapprochement should produce measurable reductions in proxy attacks, diplomatic normalization (embassy reopenings, prisoner exchanges, economic agreements), and rhetorical de-escalation — but not necessarily the dismantling of proxy networks, which would indicate a tactical pause rather than strategic transformation. Observable indicators of collapse would include renewed attacks on Saudi or Iranian targets, the reactivation of dormant proxy cells, and the resumption of sectarian rhetoric in state media.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective reconstructs the Saudi-Iranian rivalry through the lens of post-colonial state formation and the instrumentalization of identity by ruling elites. Drawing on Mamdani's analysis of the colonial state's bifurcated structure and Bayart's concept of the "politics of the belly," African scholars would read both Riyadh and Tehran as post-colonial states whose ruling elites deploy sectarian identity as a resource for domestic legitimation and regional influence, much as African post-colonial elites deployed ethnicity. The African vantage point reveals what the Western and UN frameworks occlude: that the rivalry is not primarily about religion but about the political economy of state survival in a region where colonial borders created weak states and where external powers have historically intervened to shape outcomes. The African perspective also highlights the parallel between the Gulf's sectarian security dilemma and the African Great Lakes' ethnic security dilemmas, where defensive mobilization by one group is read as existential threat by another. What this perspective risks occluding is the genuine ideological content of the Iranian revolutionary project, which cannot be reduced to elite instrumentalization; Fanon's and Cabral's insights on liberation movements suggest that revolutionary ideology has autonomous force even when captured by state elites.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames the rivalry as a destabilizing competition that threatens energy security and the Belt and Road Initiative, and interprets the 2023 rapprochement as a vindication of Chinese mediation and multipolar diplomacy. Beijing's reading emphasizes that both states are partners in a non-

Western international order and that their reconciliation serves Chinese interests in stable oil flows and in demonstrating that the United States is not the indispensable mediator in the Middle East. This perspective contributes the insight that great-power competition shapes regional rivalries and that mediation can be a tool of strategic positioning. It occludes, however, the depth of the identity-based and proxy dimensions of the rivalry, treating them as manageable through state-to-state diplomacy and economic incentives.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames the rivalry within a multipolar, anti-Western narrative, emphasizing that both Iran and Saudi Arabia are sovereign states resisting American hegemony and that their reconciliation weakens the US-led order. Moscow's reading highlights the failures of American policy in the region and presents Russia as a stabilizing power through its military presence in Syria and its energy diplomacy. This perspective contributes the insight that the rivalry is embedded in great-power competition and that American withdrawal creates space for regional accommodation. It occludes the extent to which Russia benefits from continued tension (which sustains demand for Russian arms and energy) and the limits of Russian leverage over either party.

Western: The Western perspective, dominant in US and European policy circles, frames the rivalry as Iranian expansionism versus Saudi defensive interests, with Iran as the primary destabilizer through its proxy network and nuclear program. This reading emphasizes the Axis of Resistance as an Iranian imperial project and treats Saudi Arabia as a status quo power requiring American protection. It contributes detailed intelligence and military analysis of proxy capabilities and Iranian command structures. It occludes, however, the extent to which Saudi actions (the Yemen war, support for Sunni militias in Syria and Iraq) are equally destabilizing, and it tends to treat sectarian identity as a primordial driver rather than a politically constructed resource.

UN: The UN perspective frames the rivalry through the lens of international law, civilian protection, and mediation, emphasizing cross-border attacks, humanitarian crises (Yemen, Syria), and the need for inclusive political settlements. This reading contributes normative standards and institutional mechanisms for de-escalation. It occludes, however, the power asymmetries that make UN mediation dependent on great-power backing and the extent to which UN frameworks are instrumentalized by member states for partisan ends.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — The 'Shia Crescent': Reality and Rhetorical Construction

Bolded Causal Claim: The "Shia Crescent" denotes both a real, Iran-facilitated network of Shia-identified political-military actors stretching from Tehran through Baghdad, Damascus, and Beirut (and, more loosely, Sana'a) and a rhetorical construction that reifies contingent alliances into a civilizational bloc; the concept's analytical value depends entirely on whether it is deployed as an empirical map of influence or as an ideological frame that naturalizes sectarian conflict.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates on two levels. At the material level, Iran's post-1979 revolutionary foreign policy invested in building cross-border networks of Shia political-military actors: the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force cultivated Hezbollah in Lebanon from 1982, supported the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) and its Badr Brigade during the Iran-Iraq War, and later deepened ties with Iraqi militias after 2003; in Syria, Iran backed the Assad regime's survival after 2011; and in Yemen, Iranian support for the Houthis grew from the mid-2010s. These ties are real, sustained, and involve funding, training, weapons transfers, and ideological coordination. At the discursive level, King Abdullah II of Jordan's 2004 coinage of "Shia Crescent" (hilal shi'i) transformed this contin-

gent set of alliances into a seemingly natural sectarian geography. The term's circulation in Arab, Western, and Israeli media and policy discourse created a feedback loop: the label shaped threat perception, which shaped policy (Saudi counter-mobilization, US "surge" rhetoric, Israeli strikes), which in turn deepened the very polarization the label described. Vali Nasr's 2006 analysis of the "Shia Revival" captured the demographic and political awakening of Shia communities after the US invasion of Iraq, but the popularization of the "Crescent" concept went further, converting demographic shifts into a geopolitical threat narrative. The mechanism is thus dialectical: material Iranian influence provides the substrate; discursive reification provides the accelerant.

Scope Conditions: The concept retains empirical purchase where three conditions hold: (a) Iran provides sustained, substantial material support to an actor; (b) that actor's identity and interests are substantially aligned with Tehran's strategic priorities; and (c) the relationship is durable across leadership changes. Hezbollah in Lebanon meets all three; the Houthis meet (a) partially and (b) weakly, given their rootedness in Yemeni grievances and Zaydi (not Twelver) Shia identity; Hamas, a Sunni Islamist movement, meets none of the identity criteria yet is included in the "Axis of Resistance," which exposes the sectarian framing as analytically inadequate. The concept loses purchase—and becomes actively misleading—when it is used to imply a unified command structure, a shared ideology, or a single decision-making center. It also fails when applied to Shia communities as such: the majority of Arab Shia are not aligned with Iran, and their political behavior is shaped by local contexts (Iraqi Shia politics, Bahraini opposition, Lebanese confessionalism) rather than Tehran's directives. The scope condition, in short, is that the "Crescent" is a map of Iranian influence networks, not a map of Shia identity.

Observable Implications: If the "Shia Crescent" is primarily a real bloc, we should observe coordinated military operations, shared command and control, policy alignment on core issues (Israel, US presence, Saudi Arabia), and rapid Iranian ability to redirect allied forces. If it is primarily rhetorical, we should observe divergent interests, local autonomy, public disagreements, and the instrumental use of the label by rivals to justify their own policies. The evidence is mixed in ways that favor the second reading for the bloc-as-a-whole while confirming the first for specific dyads. Hezbollah's subordination to Iranian strategic priorities is well-documented (its intervention in Syria at Iran's behest, its role in regional deterrence). Iraqi Shia militias (Hashd al-Shaabi factions) show more autonomy, with some factions (Kata'ib Hezbollah) closely aligned and others (Sadrists) fiercely independent. The Houthis pursue a Yemeni agenda that frequently diverges from Tehran's preferences. Hamas's inclusion in the "Axis" despite its Sunni identity and its own agency (including the October 7, 2023 attack, which Iran did not direct) further undermines the sectarian framing. Crisis Group reports on Iran and the Gulf consistently note that Iranian influence is real but overstated by rivals, and that the "Shia Crescent" discourse itself fuels the security dilemma it purports to describe. The observable implication for analysts is that the label should be used descriptively for specific influence relationships, not as a civilizational category.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage treats the "Shia Crescent" as a case study in the political construction and reification of identity categories—a process African scholarship has analyzed extensively in the context of ethnicity and "tribalism." Mahmood Mamdani's argument in *Citizen and Subject* (1996) that colonial powers "defined and ruled" through customary categories, and that postcolonial states inherited these reified identities, provides a direct parallel: the "Shia Crescent" discourse imposes a sectarian grid on complex political realities, much as colonial ethnography imposed tribal grids on African societies. Jean-François Bayart's concept of "extraversion"—the way African elites leverage external recognition and resources—illuminates

how regional actors (Saudi Arabia, Iran) and external powers (US, Israel) instrumentalize sectarian identity for strategic gain. Achille Mbembe's analysis of how colonial and postcolonial power operates through the production of "difference" and the management of populations suggests that the "Crescent" discourse functions as a technology of rule: it renders certain populations legible as threats, justifying intervention, surveillance, and violence. Siba Grovogui's critique of international relations theory's Eurocentrism—its tendency to treat Western categories as universal—applies directly: the "Shia Crescent" is a Western/Arab elite category that obscures the agency of local actors and the material drivers (state weakness, resource competition, foreign intervention) of conflict. The African perspective also draws on the continent's own experience with proxy warfare during the Cold War, when superpowers armed factions along ethnic and religious lines, producing conflicts that were then narrated as "ancient hatreds." The lesson is that sectarian categories are not primordial facts but political achievements, and that the "Crescent" discourse, by treating them as natural, forecloses the possibility of cross-sectarian political coalitions. What this vantage reveals that others miss is the extent to which the discourse itself is an instrument of power: it is not merely a description of reality but a performative act that produces the very sectarianization it claims to observe.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective approaches the "Shia Crescent" through the lens of non-interference and developmental stability, treating sectarian framing as a destabilizing discourse that complicates regional order. Beijing's official position emphasizes state sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Chinese analysts tend to view the "Crescent" concept as an externally imposed category that exacerbates divisions. China's interest in the concept is primarily economic: sectarian conflict threatens energy supplies and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments. Chinese scholarship and policy discourse often frame the issue as one of "extremism" and "terrorism" rather than sectarian geopolitics, aligning with Beijing's domestic narrative. This perspective contributes a focus on economic interdependence as a stabilizing force and a skepticism toward identity-based explanations of conflict. It occludes, however, the extent to which China's own partnerships (with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel) are shaped by the very sectarian dynamics it downplays, and it tends to treat state actors as unitary rational actors, understating the role of non-state networks.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames the "Shia Crescent" within a multipolar, anti-Western narrative, treating Iranian influence as a legitimate counterweight to US hegemony and Saudi/Western dominance. Moscow's alliance with Tehran (especially in Syria) and its engagement with Shia militias in Iraq reflect a pragmatic acceptance of Iranian regional power. Russian analysts often critique the "Shia Crescent" concept as a Western/Israeli construct designed to justify intervention and contain Iran. This perspective contributes a counter-hegemonic framing that highlights Western double standards and the legitimacy of Iranian security concerns. It occludes, however, the extent to which Russia's own interventions (Syria) have deepened sectarian polarization, and it tends to minimize the agency and suffering of local populations caught in proxy conflicts.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in US and Israeli policy discourse, has often treated the "Shia Crescent" as a real and threatening geopolitical formation, framing Iranian influence as expansionist and destabilizing. This reading emphasizes Iran's material support for proxies, its ballistic missile program, and its challenge to the US-led regional order. It contributes detailed intelligence assessments and a focus on state-level deterrence. It occludes, however, the extent to which Western interventions (Iraq 2003) created the conditions for Iranian influence, and it tends to reify sectarian identity as a primordial driver rather than a politically constructed resource, as Haddad (2018) and Wehrey (2018) have argued.

UN: The UN perspective frames the issue through international law, civilian protection, and the need for inclusive political settlements, emphasizing that sectarian framing undermines national cohesion and fuels

humanitarian crises. UN reports on Syria, Yemen, and Iraq highlight how sectarianization of conflict harms civilians and obstructs peace processes. This reading contributes normative standards and institutional mechanisms for de-escalation. It occludes, however, the power asymmetries that make UN frameworks dependent on member-state backing and the extent to which UN categories (e.g., "minorities") can themselves reify sectarian identities.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The Axis of Resistance: Hezbollah, the Houthis, Iraqi Shia militias, and Hamas

Bolded Causal Claim: The "Axis of Resistance" is a real but loose network of Iran-aligned actors whose operational coordination varies dramatically by dyad; it is best understood not as a unified command structure but as a hub-and-spoke system in which Tehran provides resources and strategic direction while local actors retain significant autonomy, with the network's coherence depending on shared opposition to US/Israeli/Saudi regional order rather than on sectarian identity per se.

Mechanism: The mechanism is hub-and-spoke: Iran (primarily via the IRGC Quds Force) sits at the center, providing funding, training, weapons, intelligence, and strategic coordination; spokes include Hezbollah (Lebanon), the Houthis (Yemen), Iraqi Shia militias (Hashd al-Shaabi factions, especially Kata'ib Hezbollah and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq), and—despite its Sunni identity—Hamas (Gaza). The network's coherence derives from shared opposition to the US-led regional order, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, not from sectarian identity: Hamas's inclusion demonstrates that the "Axis" is politically defined, not sectarian. Coordination occurs through bilateral channels, joint operations (e.g., the 2023-2024 multi-front pressure on Israel), and shared media narratives, but there is no unified command. The mechanism includes "forward defense": Iran projects power through proxies to deter attacks on its own territory, creating strategic depth. Juneau (2020) emphasizes that Iran's proxy strategy is driven by regime insecurity and the need to deter superior conventional forces (US, Israel), not by expansionist ideology alone. The mechanism also includes "resistance economy" elements: smuggling, sanctions evasion, and local resource extraction sustain proxy operations.

Scope Conditions: The Axis model holds where: (a) Iran has sustained access to an actor (geographic proximity, shared borders, or permissive environments); (b) the actor faces a common enemy (US, Israel, Saudi Arabia); (c) material incentives align (funding, weapons, political support); and (d) local grievances provide recruitment base. It weakens where local actors prioritize national agendas over Tehran's (Houthis' Yemen focus, Sadrists' Iraqi nationalism), where sectarian identity diverges (Hamas), or where external pressure disrupts supply lines. The model is also scope-limited by Iran's own resource constraints: sanctions limit the scale of support, and Tehran must prioritize among proxies.

Observable Implications: If the Axis is a unified command, we should observe synchronized attacks, shared targeting, and rapid Iranian ability to halt or redirect operations. If it is hub-and-spoke with autonomy, we should observe divergent timing, local initiative, and occasional public disagreements. Evidence favors the latter: the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack was not directed by Iran (per US intelligence assessments); Hezbollah's escalation in 2023-2024 was calibrated, not automatic; Houthi Red Sea attacks served Yemeni/Houthi interests as much as Iranian strategy; Iraqi militia attacks on US forces in 2023-2024 were partially suspended after Iranian pressure (suggesting Tehran can modulate but not fully control). Crisis Group reports note that Iran's influence is real but that proxies have their own agendas, and that the "Axis" label, like the "Shia Crescent," can overstate coherence.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage illuminates the Axis of Resistance through the lens of liberation-movement networks and the politics of solidarity across borders. African scholarship on pan-Africanism, anti-colonial solidarity, and the Non-Aligned Movement provides a framework for understanding how states and movements build transnational alliances around shared opposition to dominant powers. Kwame Nkrumah's concept of "neo-colonialism" and his advocacy for continental unity against external domination resonate with the Axis's self-framing as resistance to US/Israeli/Saudi hegemony. Amílcar Cabral's emphasis on the "weapon of theory" and the need for political clarity in liberation struggles applies: the Axis's coherence depends on a shared political narrative (resistance to occupation and hegemony) rather than on sectarian identity. Frantz Fanon's analysis of how colonialism produces reactive violence and how liberation movements navigate the tension between national and international solidarity is directly relevant: the Axis actors are simultaneously national movements (Hezbollah as Lebanese, Houthis as Yemeni) and transnational resistance actors, and their behavior reflects this duality. The African perspective also draws on the continent's experience with proxy warfare during the Cold War, when superpowers armed local factions, producing conflicts that were narrated as ideological but driven by local grievances. What the African vantage reveals that others miss is the extent to which the Axis is a response to perceived imperial domination, not merely an instrument of Iranian expansion: treating it solely as Iranian proxy network (Western view) or as civilizational threat (sectarian view) obscures the genuine grievances (occupation, sanctions, intervention) that motivate participation. It also highlights the risk of "extraversion" (Bayart): Axis actors may leverage Iranian support for local ends, just as African elites leveraged Cold War patronage. The African perspective thus reframes the Axis from a security threat to a symptom of unresolved regional grievances and asymmetric power.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames the Axis through the lens of state sovereignty and non-interference, treating non-state armed groups as destabilizing but emphasizing that their roots lie in unresolved conflicts (Palestine, occupation, intervention). Beijing's engagement with Iran and its mediation efforts (e.g., 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement) reflect a preference for diplomatic solutions over military containment. Chinese analysts tend to view the Axis as a consequence of regional disorder rather than its cause, and emphasize economic development as the antidote. This perspective contributes a focus on root causes and a skepticism toward military solutions. It occludes, however, the extent to which China's own economic interests (energy, BRI) depend on the very order the Axis challenges, and it understates the agency and ideology of Axis actors.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats the Axis as a legitimate counterweight to US hegemony and a partner in multipolar order-building. Moscow's military cooperation with Iran and Hezbollah in Syria reflects a pragmatic alliance of convenience against Western-backed forces. Russian analysts frame the Axis as "resistance" to unipolar dominance, aligning with Russia's own anti-Western narrative. This perspective contributes a counter-hegemonic framing and highlights Western double standards. It occludes, however, the extent to which Russia's own interventions have deepened sectarian polarization and civilian suffering, and it tends to minimize the agency of local populations.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly US and Israeli, frames the Axis as an Iranian proxy network and a primary security threat, emphasizing Iran's material support, the network's military capabilities, and its role in regional destabilization. This reading contributes detailed intelligence and a focus on deterrence and containment. It occludes, however, the extent to which Western interventions (Iraq 2003, support for Saudi Arabia in Yemen) created conditions for Axis growth, and it tends to treat Axis actors as Iranian puppets rather than as actors with their own grievances and agency, as Juneau (2020) and Crisis Group reports caution.

UN: The UN perspective frames the Axis through international humanitarian law and civilian protection,

emphasizing the harm caused by proxy warfare to civilians in Lebanon, Yemen, Gaza, and Iraq. UN reports highlight cross-border attacks, violations of sovereignty, and the need for political settlements. This reading contributes normative standards and documentation of civilian harm. It occludes, however, the power asymmetries that make UN action dependent on great-power consensus and the extent to which UN frameworks are instrumentalized by member states.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The Sectarian Security Dilemma: How Defensive Measures Appear Offensive to Rivals

Bolded Causal Claim: In West Asia, the sectarian security dilemma operates when defensive measures taken by one sectarian-aligned actor—arming co-religionist militias, fortifying borders, acquiring ballistic missiles, or deepening alliances—are interpreted by rivals as offensive threats, generating reciprocal escalation that neither side initially sought and that is amplified by identity-based threat perception.

Mechanism: The classical security dilemma, formalized by Jervis (1978), rests on two variables: the distinguishability of offensive from defensive capabilities, and the offense-defense balance. When states cannot distinguish defensive from offensive postures, and when offense is perceived to dominate, mutual fear drives arms racing even among status-quo powers. The sectarian variant adds a third variable: identity-based threat inflation. In West Asia, Saudi Arabia and Iran do not merely compete for power; they compete as guardians of rival sectarian communities. When Iran arms Hezbollah or supports Iraqi Shia militias, Tehran frames these as defensive measures against Sunni extremism and US encirclement; Riyadh reads the same measures as encirclement and subversion of Sunni-majority states. Conversely, Saudi support for Sunni rebels in Syria or for the Yemeni government against the Houthis is framed in Riyadh as state sovereignty and stability; Tehran reads it as anti-Shia aggression. The mechanism is a feedback loop: each defensive step confirms the rival's worst fears, deepening mistrust and justifying further buildup. Posen's (1993) analysis of the security dilemma and ethnic conflict extends this logic to communal groups, showing how mobilization for protection becomes indistinguishable from preparation for aggression. In the sectarian case, the indistinguishability is structural: a missile battery defending a Shia shrine can strike a Sunni capital; a militia protecting a community can project power across borders. Communication channels are weak, intelligence is politicized, and identity markers override material calculation, so the spiral model dominates over the deterrence model.

Scope Conditions: The sectarian security dilemma is most acute under four conditions: (1) mutual uncertainty about intentions, where neither side can credibly signal restraint; (2) offensive-defensive indistinguishability, where capabilities serve both purposes; (3) identity-based threat perception that trumps material interest, so that even cooperative gestures are read as deception; and (4) weak or absent institutionalized communication, whether diplomatic hotlines or arms-control regimes. It is attenuated where states share a superordinate identity, where third-party mediation is trusted, or where military capabilities are transparently defensive, such as clearly demarcated border fortifications. It is also weaker when one side achieves clear dominance, converting a dilemma into a hierarchy, though dominance itself may provoke balancing. The dilemma is not automatic: it requires elite choices to frame security in sectarian terms, and it can be dampened by cross-sectarian coalitions or by external guarantees.

Observable Implications: If the sectarian security dilemma is operating, we should observe reciprocal military buildup in the Gulf and Levant; expansion of proxy forces on both sides; preemptive or preventive strikes, including the 2019 Aramco attack, the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, and Israeli strikes on Iranian

positions in Syria; diplomatic freezes punctuated by crisis; arms racing in missile and drone capabilities; and rhetoric that frames the rival's defensive measures as existential threats. We should also observe variation: the dilemma intensifies during regional crises such as the Syrian civil war and the Yemen war, and attenuates during détente, as in the 2023 Beijing rapprochement. A key test is whether de-escalation measures by one side reduce or increase the other's threat perception; under the dilemma, even concessions may be read as tactical.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage treats the sectarian security dilemma not as a Middle Eastern anomaly but as a variant of a broader pattern in which identity becomes the currency of security competition. African scholarship on ethnic and communal security dilemmas—Mamdani's (1996) analysis of how colonial indirect rule hardened ethnic categories into political identities, and Mbembe's (2001) work on the militarization of identity—suggests that the dilemma is often manufactured rather than discovered. From this perspective, the Saudi-Iranian rivalry is not simply two states fearing each other; it is two regimes instrumentalizing sectarian identity to consolidate domestic legitimacy and externalize internal contradictions. The African experience with ethnic security dilemmas, from Nigeria's Middle Belt to Sudan's north-south divide, reveals that defensive mobilization by one community routinely appears as aggression to another, and that external patrons, whether colonial or Cold War, often amplified these spirals. What the African vantage adds is a focus on the domestic political economy of the dilemma: regimes use sectarian threat perception to justify repression, military spending, and the suspension of democratic accountability. Grovogui's (2006) critique of international order as a racialized and hierarchical system further suggests that the sectarian security dilemma is embedded in a global structure that privileges certain states' security claims over others. The African perspective thus sees the dilemma as partly endogenous to regime type and partly exogenous to global hierarchy, and it warns against treating sectarian identity as a primordial given rather than a political achievement.

Chinese: China frames the sectarian security dilemma as a manageable security problem amenable to dialogue and economic interdependence. Beijing's mediation of the 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement reflects a view that the dilemma is driven by misperception and lack of communication rather than by irreconcilable identity conflict. Chinese analysis emphasizes non-interference and the stabilizing effects of trade and infrastructure investment. This perspective contributes a practical diplomatic toolkit but occludes the depth of identity-based threat perception and the domestic political functions of sectarian mobilization.

Russian: Russia frames the dilemma as a product of Western hegemony and unipolar interventionism, arguing that US policies—from the 2003 Iraq invasion to support for Saudi Arabia—destroyed regional balances and created vacuums filled by sectarian actors. Moscow's anti-Western framing treats the dilemma as externally imposed and sees multipolarity as the remedy. This contributes a structural critique of great-power responsibility but occludes Russian and Iranian agency in fueling sectarian competition.

Western: Western analysis, particularly in US and European policy circles, tends to frame the dilemma through Iranian expansionism: Iran's support for proxies is treated as the primary driver, with Saudi and Gulf responses as reactive and defensive. This perspective contributes detailed intelligence on Iranian networks and a focus on deterrence. It occludes, however, the extent to which Western interventions and arms sales have shaped the regional security environment, and it risks treating Saudi actions as purely defensive.

UN: The UN perspective frames the sectarian security dilemma through international humanitarian law and civilian protection, emphasizing the harm to civilians from proxy warfare and cross-border attacks. UN

reports document violations of sovereignty and call for political settlements and confidence-building measures. This contributes normative standards and empirical documentation of civilian harm. It occludes the power asymmetries that make UN action dependent on great-power consensus and the extent to which UN frameworks are instrumentalized by member states.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The Politics of Sectarian Identity: Instrumentalization versus Deep Structure

Bolded Causal Claim: Sectarian identity in West Asia is neither a primordial given nor a mere elite fabrication; it is a politically constructed and historically deepened structure that elites instrumentalize, and the balance between deep structure and instrumentalization varies by state, regime, and historical moment.

Mechanism: The debate over sectarianism's nature has two poles. Primordialist or essentialist accounts treat Sunni-Shia division as an ancient, theological fault line that inevitably generates conflict. Instrumentalist accounts treat sectarianism as a tool elites deploy to mobilize support, justify repression, and externalize blame. The scholarly consensus, reflected in Haddad (2018), Wehrey (2018), and Nasr (2006), rejects both extremes. Haddad argues that sectarianism is not an age-old hatred but a modern political construction, shaped by state-building, colonialism, and Cold War competition; yet he insists it has acquired real social and institutional depth through decades of political practice. Nasr's (2006) Shia revival thesis holds that Shia identity has become a genuine political and social force, rooted in clerical networks, religious endowments, and communal memory, not merely an elite invention. Wehrey (2018) pushes further, arguing that sectarianism is overemphasized in Western analysis and that cross-cutting identities—class, tribe, nationality, ideology—remain significant, so that sectarian mobilization is contingent rather than automatic. The mechanism is dialectical: elites instrumentalize sectarian identity because there is pre-existing social material to exploit; repeated instrumentalization deepens the structure, making future mobilization easier. State capacity mediates: strong states can suppress or channel sectarian identity, as in Ba'athist Iraq or Pahlavi Iran, while weak or collapsing states allow identity entrepreneurs to fill institutional vacuums, as in post-2003 Iraq or post-2011 Syria. External patrons amplify the process: Iranian and Saudi funding of religious institutions, media, and militias deepens sectarian infrastructure. Juneau (2020) notes that Iran's regional policy relies on pre-existing Shia networks but also actively cultivates them, blurring the line between responding to deep structure and creating it. The result is a feedback loop in which instrumentalization and deep structure co-produce each other.

Scope Conditions: Instrumentalization dominates where regimes face legitimacy crises, where state institutions are weak or collapsing, and where external patrons fund sectarian entrepreneurs. Deep structure dominates where religious institutions are autonomous and well-resourced, where sectarian identity is embedded in law, education, and personal status codes, as in Lebanon's confessional system or Bahrain's discriminatory practices, and where historical grievances are institutionalized in collective memory. The two interact dynamically: deep structure makes instrumentalization effective, while instrumentalization deepens structure over time. The balance also varies by issue: sectarian identity may be highly salient in security and foreign policy while cross-cutting in economic or local politics. The scope condition most often neglected is generational change: younger cohorts may be less attached to sectarian identity where education and media diversify, or more radicalized where conflict socializes them.

Observable Implications: If the instrumentalization-deep structure thesis holds, we should observe sectarian rhetoric spiking during political crises, elections, and external threats; cross-sectarian coalitions forming when material interests align, as in some Iraqi or Lebanese protests; identity salience fluctuating with state capacity and external threat; religious institutions showing varying degrees of autonomy from state con-

trol; and survey evidence showing sectarian identity is important but rarely the sole or primary identity. We should also observe path dependence: once sectarian institutions are built, they persist even when elite incentives change, and de-sectarianization requires sustained institutional reform, not just elite restraint. A key test is whether reducing external intervention reduces sectarian mobilization; if deep structure dominates, mobilization persists; if instrumentalization dominates, it declines.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage is indispensable for dissolving the false binary between instrumentalization and deep structure. African scholarship on ethnicity and identity—Mamdani (1996) on how colonial indirect rule constructed ethnic subjects; Bayart (1993) on the politics of the belly and the instrumentalization of ethnicity by postcolonial elites; Rodney (1972) on how underdevelopment and class structure shaped communal identities; Fanon (1963) on the colonial construction of identity and its psychological depth; Nkrumah (1965) on neocolonialism's use of ethnic division; Nyerere (1968) on ujamaa and the deliberate construction of national over ethnic identity; Cabral (1973) on culture as both weapon and terrain of struggle; Oyěwùmí (1997) on how gender and identity categories are epistemologically constructed; Tamale (2020) on African feminism and the politics of identity; and Aning and Danso (2012) on African security governance—collectively demonstrates that identity is always both constructed and lived, both elite tool and social reality. From this perspective, asking whether sectarianism is real or instrumentalized misposes the question. African experience shows that colonial and postcolonial states routinely produced ethnic and religious categories through censuses, indirect rule, and patronage, and that these categories then acquired genuine social depth through education, marriage, and political mobilization. The African vantage reveals what Western and Middle Eastern analyses often miss: the question is not whether identity is deep or instrumental but who controls the means of identity production—states, clerics, parties, or external patrons—and how identity categories are institutionalized in law, bureaucracy, and resource distribution. Mbembe's (2001) concept of commandment and Grovogui's (2006) critique of international order as hierarchical and racialized further suggest that sectarian identity in West Asia is embedded in a global system that privileges certain identities and states. The African perspective thus reframes the debate: sectarianism is a political technology whose effectiveness depends on pre-existing social infrastructure, and dismantling it requires not just elite restraint but institutional transformation and the redistribution of the means of identity production.

Chinese: China tends to treat sectarian identity as a manageable social variable whose salience can be reduced through economic development, education, and state-led modernization. Beijing's domestic experience with ethnic management and its emphasis on non-interference shape a view that external powers should not exploit identity divisions. This perspective contributes a developmental optimism and a focus on state capacity but occludes the historical depth of sectarian institutions and the ways in which state-led modernization can itself deepen identity grievances.

Russian: Russia frames sectarian identity as largely a product of Western intervention and unipolar destabilization, arguing that the 2003 Iraq invasion and support for regime change created the conditions for sectarian mobilization. Moscow's anti-Western framing treats sectarianism as externally imposed rather than endogenous. This contributes a structural critique of great-power responsibility but occludes Russian and Iranian agency in cultivating sectarian networks and the genuine social depth of religious identity.

Western: Western analysis often treats sectarianism as an obstacle to modernization and democratization, with a tendency to see it as either primordial in popular discourse or as elite manipulation in academic discourse. Policy prescriptions frequently emphasize secular governance, civil society, and cross-sectarian institution-building. This contributes attention to institutional design and civil society but occludes the ways

in which Western interventions have shaped sectarian dynamics and the genuine social meaning of religious identity for communities.

UN: The UN perspective frames sectarian identity through human rights and minority protection, emphasizing the rights of religious and ethnic communities and the need for inclusive governance. UN frameworks treat sectarian discrimination as a human rights violation and promote intercommunal dialogue. This contributes normative standards and a focus on protection. It occludes, however, the political economy of identity production and the extent to which UN categories of minority and community can reify the very identities they seek to manage.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on the sectarian security dilemma in West Asia begins from a position of structural familiarity rather than geographic distance. African states and societies have lived through the very dynamics that the West Asian sectarian security dilemma names: the instrumentalization of identity by political elites, the hardening of communal boundaries under external intervention, the transformation of defensive mobilization into perceived threat, and the use of proxy actors to project power while avoiding direct confrontation. The African perspective therefore does not treat sectarianism in West Asia as an exotic pathology of religious difference; it reads it as a variant of a more general political syndrome in which identity becomes the currency of security competition.

Drawing on Mahmood Mamdani's analysis of the colonial state in Africa, the African perspective emphasizes that identities which appear primordial are in fact politically produced. Mamdani's distinction between "citizen" and "subject" in the colonial state shows how colonial rule governed through "customary" authority, fixing fluid communities into administratively legible ethnic and religious categories. The parallel to West Asia is direct: the sectarian categories that now structure the Saudi-Iranian rivalry were not simply waiting to be activated; they were produced and hardened through decades of state-building, external intervention, and regional competition. Vali Nasr's account of the Shia revival after 1979, read through this lens, is not merely a story of religious awakening but of political mobilization in which a previously subordinated community acquires institutional voice and regional patrons. The African perspective thus insists that the "Shia Crescent" is not a natural bloc but a political construction whose coherence depends on the very rivalry that names it.

Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and the Manichean world of the settler colony provides a second theoretical resource. Fanon argued that colonialism produces a world divided into zones, and that the colonized subject is forced into an identity defined by the colonizer's gaze. Applied to West Asia, this suggests that the sectarian framing of regional politics is partly an artifact of external powers—Western, and to some extent Russian and Chinese—whose security architectures require legible categories of friend and enemy. The African perspective notes that the "Axis of Resistance" is itself a label produced by adversaries; it bundles Hezbollah, the Houthis, Iraqi Shia militias, and Hamas into a single category that obscures their distinct local grievances, national contexts, and political projects. Fanon's insistence on the concrete, lived experience of the colonized against abstract categorization thus becomes a methodological caution: the analyst must recover the specific political economy of each actor rather than subsuming them under a sectarian master narrative.

Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics—the subjugation of life to the power of death—offers a third lens. Mbembe's work on the postcolony and on the contemporary world of borders, camps, and targeted killing

illuminates the material violence that the sectarian security dilemma produces. The 2019 Aramco attack, the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen, and the Israeli strikes on Hezbollah and Iranian assets in Syria are not merely strategic moves in a rivalry; they are exercises of sovereign power over populations whose lives are rendered expendable. The African perspective, drawing on Mbembe, refuses to treat these as abstract security dilemmas and insists on the bodily reality of the violence. This is particularly important because the sectarian framing can sanitize violence: when an attack is described as "sectarian," it becomes a clash of identities rather than a political act with specific perpetrators and victims.

Jean-François Bayart's concept of the "politics of the belly" and his analysis of "extraversion"—the ways in which African states and elites have historically relied on external resources and recognition to maintain domestic power—provides a fourth resource. Bayart's framework suggests that the Saudi-Iranian rivalry is not simply a bilateral competition but a system in which both states extravert their domestic legitimation needs into regional arenas. Saudi Arabia's projection of Sunni leadership and Iran's projection of revolutionary Shia identity are, on this reading, strategies of domestic regime consolidation as much as regional security policies. The African perspective thus redirects attention from the religious content of the rivalry to its political function: identity is the medium through which states secure resources, legitimacy, and survival. This parallels Bayart's analysis of how African rulers have used ethnic and religious mobilization to manage access to state resources.

Walter Rodney's historical materialism and his analysis of how external powers underdeveloped Africa provide a fifth resource. Rodney's insistence that the international system is structured by unequal power relations, and that apparent local conflicts are often expressions of global structures, leads the African perspective to situate the West Asian sectarian security dilemma within the broader architecture of global power. The United States' security guarantees to Saudi Arabia, its sanctions on Iran, and its military presence in the Gulf are not neutral background conditions; they are constitutive of the rivalry. The African perspective, informed by Rodney, is skeptical of accounts that treat the Saudi-Iranian rivalry as a self-contained regional dynamic. It insists on the role of external great powers in creating the conditions under which sectarian identity becomes salient.

The African perspective also draws on the continent's own diplomatic experience. The African Union's emphasis on non-indifference, its mediation efforts in conflicts from Sudan to the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the historical experience of the Organization of African Unity's non-interference doctrine all inform an African reading of the 2023 China-brokered Saudi-Iran rapprochement. African states have long experience with externally brokered peace agreements that address symptoms rather than structures; the African perspective is therefore cautious about reading the Beijing rapprochement as a genuine strategic shift. It asks whether the agreement addresses the underlying security dilemma or merely manages its symptoms, and it notes that African experience suggests the latter is more common. The African perspective also values the principle of African solutions to African problems, and by extension is attentive to the question of who mediates and whose interests the mediation serves. China's role as broker is read not as neutral but as an expression of Chinese strategic interests, much as African states have historically been wary of external mediation that serves the mediator's interests.

What does the African perspective contribute that the other four cannot? First, it provides a theory of identity production that is not dependent on the specific theology of Sunni-Shia relations. By treating sectarian identity as politically constructed through state-building and external intervention, it avoids the trap of reifying religious categories. Second, it insists on the material and bodily reality of violence, resisting the abstraction of the security dilemma into a game-theoretic exercise. Third, it situates the regional rivalry within

global structures of power, drawing on Rodney and Fanon to show how external intervention constitutes the very identities it claims to manage. Fourth, it brings a skepticism born of experience with externally brokered agreements and proxy conflicts, which tempers both Western alarmism about Iranian expansionism and Chinese triumphalism about mediation.

What does the African perspective occlude? It risks underestimating the genuine theological and communal content of sectarian identity. Not all sectarian mobilization is elite manipulation; communities have real grievances, real memories of persecution, and real attachments to religious institutions. The African perspective's emphasis on instrumentalization can slide into a reductionism that treats religious identity as epiphenomenal. It also risks overextending analogies: the colonial state in Africa and the post-revolutionary state in Iran are not the same, and the specific dynamics of Shia jurisprudence, the marja'iyya, and the Iranian revolutionary ideology have no direct African parallel. Finally, the African perspective's focus on external power can obscure the agency of regional actors, who are not merely puppets of global structures but pursue their own strategies with considerable autonomy.

The African perspective thus offers a powerful corrective to both Western and regional narratives, but it must be held in tension with attention to the specific content of religious identity and the agency of regional actors. Its greatest contribution is methodological: it teaches the analyst to ask who benefits from the sectarian framing, how identities are produced rather than discovered, and whose bodies bear the cost of the security dilemma.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on the West Asian sectarian security dilemma is shaped by three strategic imperatives: energy security, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the pursuit of a multipolar international order in which China plays a central mediating role. China is the largest importer of Gulf oil and has deep economic ties with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, which means it has a material interest in regional stability that transcends the sectarian divide. This economic interdependence is the foundation of the Chinese perspective: stability is not a normative preference but a commercial necessity.

The Chinese perspective treats the Saudi-Iranian rivalry as a manageable competition that has been exacerbated by external—primarily American—intervention. From this vantage point, the United States' "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, its security guarantees to Saudi Arabia, and its military presence in the Gulf have deepened the security dilemma by signaling to each side that the other is backed by an external power. China's own approach, by contrast, is framed as non-interfering and development-oriented: it engages both states economically without taking sides in their ideological or sectarian competition. The 2023 Beijing-brokered rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran is presented as the vindication of this approach, demonstrating that patient diplomacy and economic incentives can achieve what military pressure cannot.

The Chinese perspective also frames the rivalry through the lens of multipolarity. It views the West Asian security order as historically dominated by the United States and sees the emergence of alternative power centers—including China, Russia, and regional actors—as a positive development. The Axis of Resistance is not treated as a unified threat but as a set of actors whose relationships with Iran are diverse and whose local grievances must be understood on their own terms. China's strategic partnership with Iran, signed in 2021, and its deepening economic ties with Saudi Arabia are presented as complementary rather than contradictory, reflecting a pragmatic approach that prioritizes state-to-state relations over ideological alignment.

What does the Chinese perspective contribute? It provides an alternative to the Western framing of the rivalry

as a contest between Iranian expansionism and Saudi self-defense, emphasizing instead the role of external powers in exacerbating tensions. It also highlights the economic dimensions of regional order, drawing attention to the ways in which trade, investment, and infrastructure can create incentives for de-escalation. The mediation success of 2023 is a genuine contribution, demonstrating that a power with economic stakes in both sides can broker agreements that traditional security guarantors cannot.

What does it occlude? The Chinese perspective tends to understate the depth of the security dilemma and the genuine fears that drive both sides. By framing the rivalry primarily as a product of American intervention, it risks ignoring the autonomous agency of Saudi and Iranian leaders and the real security threats they perceive. It also occludes the human rights and civilian protection dimensions of regional conflicts, particularly in Yemen, where Chinese economic interests have led to a studied neutrality that avoids condemning either side. Finally, the Chinese perspective's emphasis on non-interference can serve as a rhetorical cover for prioritizing commercial interests over political accountability, a tension that becomes visible when Chinese investments are threatened by instability.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on the West Asian sectarian security dilemma is organized around three themes: multipolarity, anti-Westernism, and the management of regional order through great-power concert. Russia views the Middle East as a theater in which American unipolarity is being challenged, and it sees the Saudi-Iranian rivalry as both a problem to be managed and an opportunity to expand Russian influence. Russia's military intervention in Syria, its partnership with Iran, and its careful cultivation of Saudi Arabia reflect a strategy of positioning itself as an indispensable actor in regional security.

The Russian perspective treats sectarian identity as a tool of political mobilization rather than a primordial force, but it does so with a cynical instrumentalism that differs from the African perspective's structural analysis. Russian analysts tend to view sectarian rhetoric as a convenient language for states to justify their interests, and they are skeptical of claims that the rivalry is driven by religious ideology. This skepticism is partly self-serving: by denying the religious content of the conflict, Russia can justify its own alliances with both Shia Iran and Sunni states without appearing inconsistent. The Russian perspective thus contributes a realist reading that strips away ideological pretense, but it does so in a way that serves Russian strategic interests.

Russia's approach to the Axis of Resistance is pragmatic. It has cooperated with Iran and Hezbollah in Syria while maintaining relations with Israel and the Gulf states. This balancing act reflects Russia's broader strategy of maximizing its leverage by being indispensable to all sides. The Russian perspective frames this not as opportunism but as a necessary response to a region in which no single power can impose order. It argues that the American attempt to build a regional order around Saudi Arabia and Israel has failed, and that a more inclusive concert involving Iran, Russia, and other powers is required.

The Russian perspective also emphasizes the destabilizing effects of external intervention, particularly American and Israeli military actions. It frames the 2019 Aramco attack and similar incidents as consequences of a security environment in which states and non-state actors lack legitimate channels for addressing grievances. Russia's mediation efforts, including its participation in the Astana process on Syria, are presented as models of inclusive diplomacy that the West has failed to replicate.

What does the Russian perspective contribute? It provides a critique of Western hegemony that is shared by many regional actors, and it highlights the ways in which American security guarantees have distorted the regional balance. It also draws attention to the role of non-state actors as legitimate political forces rather

than mere proxies, a framing that challenges the Western tendency to reduce Hezbollah and the Houthis to Iranian instruments.

What does it occlude? The Russian perspective's anti-Western framing can obscure the genuine security concerns of regional states and the real threats posed by Iranian-backed militias. Its emphasis on multipolarity can serve as a cover for Russian self-interest, particularly in Syria, where Russian intervention has been driven by the desire to preserve a client regime rather than by a principled commitment to inclusive order. The Russian perspective also tends to understate the human costs of its own interventions and those of its partners, and it has little to say about civilian protection or human rights. Finally, its cynical treatment of sectarian identity risks ignoring the real communal grievances that drive mobilization, much as the African perspective risks reductionism but without the African perspective's attention to structural violence.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on the West Asian sectarian security dilemma is dominated by the framing of Iranian expansionism and the need to contain it. This framing, which became particularly prominent after the 2003 Iraq War and the rise of the "Shia Crescent" discourse, treats Iran as the primary driver of regional instability and the Axis of Resistance as a network of Iranian proxies designed to project power and threaten American allies. The Western perspective is not monolithic—it includes realist, liberal, and neoconservative variants—but it shares a common emphasis on the threat posed by Iran and the need for a regional order anchored in American security guarantees.

Vali Nasr's 2006 analysis of the Shia revival is a key text in this tradition, though Nasr himself is more nuanced than many who cite him. Nasr argued that the rise of Shia power in Iraq, Lebanon, and Iran represented a fundamental shift in the regional balance, and that the United States needed to engage with this new reality rather than simply contain it. However, much Western policy discourse has simplified Nasr's argument into a narrative of Iranian expansionism, treating the Shia Crescent as a coherent geopolitical project rather than a contingent alignment of interests. Haddad's 2018 critique of sectarianism as an analytical category is partly a response to this Western tendency to reify sectarian identity into a geopolitical bloc.

The Western perspective contributes a focus on state behavior and strategic interaction. It treats the Saudi-Iranian rivalry as a classic security dilemma in which each side's defensive measures are perceived as offensive by the other, and it emphasizes the role of arms races, proxy conflicts, and alliance politics in escalating tensions. The 2019 Aramco attack is read through this lens as an Iranian-orchestrated escalation designed to demonstrate the vulnerability of Saudi oil infrastructure and to pressure the United States. Wehrey's 2018 analysis of sectarianism and power in the Middle East, and Juneau's 2020 work on Iran's foreign policy, provide more sophisticated versions of this perspective, emphasizing the interplay between domestic politics, regional competition, and great-power involvement.

The Western perspective also includes a strong normative dimension, particularly in its liberal variant. This variant emphasizes human rights, democratic governance, and the protection of minorities, and it views sectarian discrimination as a violation of these principles. The UN's human rights frameworks are often invoked in Western policy discourse, though the Western perspective tends to be selective in its application, emphasizing Iranian human rights abuses while downplaying those of allied states.

What does the Western perspective contribute? It provides a detailed account of state behavior and strategic interaction, and it has generated extensive empirical research on proxy warfare, arms transfers, and alliance politics. It also maintains a focus on the agency of regional actors, treating Saudi Arabia and Iran as strategic actors with their own interests rather than as puppets of global structures. Crisis Group reports on Iran and

the Gulf provide a more balanced version of this perspective, emphasizing the need for dialogue and de-escalation.

What does it occlude? The Western perspective's framing of Iranian expansionism can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, justifying policies that deepen the security dilemma. By treating the Axis of Resistance as a unified Iranian project, it obscures the local grievances and autonomous agency of Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iraqi militias. It also tends to understate the role of Western interventions—in Iraq, Libya, and Syria—in creating the conditions for sectarian mobilization. The Western perspective's selective application of human rights norms undermines its credibility and can be read as hypocrisy by regional actors. Finally, its emphasis on containment can preclude engagement with Iran, foreclosing diplomatic options that might reduce tensions.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on the West Asian sectarian security dilemma is organized around three pillars: international law, human rights, and mediation. The UN treats cross-border attacks, proxy warfare, and sectarian violence as violations of international law and threats to international peace and security. It emphasizes the protection of civilians, the rights of religious and ethnic minorities, and the need for inclusive governance as foundations of sustainable peace. The UN's approach is normative and procedural: it seeks to establish rules, monitor compliance, and facilitate dialogue.

The UN perspective on the Saudi-Iranian rivalry emphasizes the destabilizing effects of proxy conflicts and the need for regional dialogue. UN Security Council resolutions on Yemen, Syria, and Iraq reflect this framing, treating these conflicts as threats to international peace that require collective action. The UN's mediation efforts, including the work of special envoys in Yemen and Syria, are presented as contributions to de-escalation, though their effectiveness has been limited by the lack of great-power consensus and the reluctance of regional actors to compromise.

The UN perspective on sectarian identity is framed through the lens of minority rights and non-discrimination. UN human rights bodies have documented sectarian discrimination in various West Asian states and have called for legal reforms and inclusive governance. This framing treats sectarian identity as a protected characteristic and sectarian violence as a human rights violation. It contributes normative standards and a focus on protection, but it can reify the very identities it seeks to manage by treating "communities" as fixed units.

The UN perspective on the 2023 rapprochement is cautiously optimistic, welcoming any reduction in tensions while emphasizing the need for implementation and the inclusion of affected populations. The UN's humanitarian agencies are acutely aware that diplomatic agreements between states do not automatically improve conditions for civilians, and the UN perspective insists on the need for humanitarian access, civilian protection, and accountability for violations.

What does the UN perspective contribute? It provides a normative framework that transcends the strategic interests of great powers, and it maintains a focus on civilian protection and human rights that other perspectives often neglect. Its mediation efforts, while limited, have created channels for dialogue that might otherwise not exist. The UN's data collection and reporting on conflicts provide an empirical foundation for policy debates.

What does it occlude? The UN perspective's reliance on state consent limits its ability to address the root causes of conflicts, particularly when states are themselves the perpetrators of sectarian violence. Its human rights framing can be depoliticized, treating sectarianism as a matter of discrimination rather than a product of political competition and external intervention. The UN's institutional structure, which gives great powers

veto power in the Security Council, means that its actions are often constrained by the very rivalries it seeks to manage. Finally, the UN perspective's emphasis on dialogue and consensus can be inadequate in the face of actors who view violence as a legitimate tool of politics.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reveals sectarianism as an instrumentalized political technology of state survival and external manipulation; draws parallels to African post-colonial statecraft in which identity is mobilized for regime security; centers the agency of local actors rather than great-power scripts	May underweight the genuine ideational and theological content of sectarian identity for believers; risks overemphasizing instrumentalization at the expense of lived religious experience	Anti-imperial sovereignty and emancipatory statecraft; sectarian framing is a technology of domination to be dismantled	Parallel between African post-colonial manipulation of ethnic and religious identity for regime survival and Gulf state sectarian instrumentalization; Mbembe's necropolitics; Mamdani's citizen/subject distinction	Western: Iranian revolutionary ideology and Saudi Wahhabism carry genuine transnational religious content that cannot be reduced to instrumentalization

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Demonstrates that great-power mediation can de-escalate regional rivalries without military intervention; frames stability as precondition for economic development and BRI connectivity	Obscures human rights abuses and sectarian repression by both Saudi Arabia and Iran; treats stability as order rather than justice	Non-interference, development-first, multipolar stability	2023 Beijing-brokered Saudi-Iran rapprochement; China as largest buyer of both countries' oil	Western: mediation without accountability rewards authoritarian regimes and ignores civilian suffering
Russian	Highlights US retrenchment and the decline of unipolarity; positions Russia as indispensable broker (Syria, Iran); frames Western intervention as source of regional disorder	Ignores Russian complicity in Syrian sectarian violence and its own arms sales; presents multipolarity as neutral when it serves Russian interests	Multipolarity, anti-hegemonism, state sovereignty	Russian military intervention in Syria (2015); Astana process; arms sales to Iran	African: Russian "multipolarity" reproduces great-power domination under new management rather than emancipating the Global South

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Documents Iranian proxy network expansion and ballistic missile proliferation; provides intelligence and military support to Gulf allies; frames deterrence as stabilizing	Understates Western complicity in regional instability (2003 Iraq invasion, arms sales); treats Saudi interests as synonymous with regional order	Containment of Iranian expansionism, alliance management, counterterrorism	US intelligence assessments of Iranian weapons transfers; Saudi defense spending data; Houthi missile capabilities	UN: containment framing escalates rather than resolves the security dilemma and undermines civilian protection
UN	Provides empirical documentation of attacks (Panel of Experts on Yemen); mediates ceasefires; frames civilian protection and humanitarian access as priorities	Reliance on state consent limits addressing root causes; Security Council veto constrains action; human rights framing can depoliticize sectarianism	International law, civilian protection, multilateral mediation	UN Panel of Experts reports on Yemen; UN mediation in Yemen; humanitarian appeals	African: UN frameworks reproduce colonial hierarchies of knowledge and power, treating West Asian states as objects of management rather than agents of their own security

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2019 Saudi Aramco Attack and the Regional Security Dilemma

On 14 September 2019, a swarm of drones and cruise missiles struck Saudi Aramco's Abqaiq processing facility and Khurais oil field, temporarily halving Saudi oil production — roughly 5.7 million barrels per day, about five percent of global supply. The Houthi movement in Yemen claimed responsibility, framing the strike as retaliation for the Saudi-led coalition's war in Yemen. The United States and Saudi Arabia attributed the attack to Iran, citing the weapons' origin and trajectory. The incident did not trigger direct US military retaliation; instead, Washington deployed additional troops and air-defense assets to Saudi Arabia, and Riyadh accelerated diplomatic feelers toward Tehran that would culminate in the March 2023 Beijing-brokered rapprochement. The attack thus functioned as a shock that reconfigured the regional security dilemma rather than as a discrete battle.

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the decision-making of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei shaped the response: MBS faced a choice between escalation and restraint, while Khamenei's calculus weighed the deterrent value of proxy capability against the risk of direct confrontation. At the state level, Saudi Arabia's vulnerability as a rentier state dependent on a single commodity and a handful of processing nodes became visible; Iran's state strategy of "forward defense" through allied non-state actors was tested. At the systemic level, the attack occurred within a multipolar transition in which US security guarantees were perceived as eroding, Gulf states were diversifying security partnerships, and China was emerging as an economic mediator. At the transnational level, the strike linked the Yemen war, the Iran-Saudi rivalry, global oil markets, and the Houthi movement's claim to represent Yemeni sovereignty against foreign intervention.

Mechanism. The mechanism is the sectarian security dilemma operating through proxy capability and infrastructure vulnerability. Saudi Arabia's air-defense architecture, optimized against conventional state threats, proved unable to intercept low-flying drones and cruise missiles launched from multiple vectors. The attack demonstrated that Iran's "Axis of Resistance" could impose costs on Saudi Arabia without crossing the threshold of direct state-on-state war, thereby exploiting the ambiguity between state and non-state attribution. This ambiguity is the engine of the dilemma: Saudi defensive measures — air-defense upgrades, coalition warfare in Yemen, alignment with the United States — were read by Tehran as offensive encirclement, while Iranian proxy support was read by Riyadh as existential threat. The Aramco strike intensified both readings simultaneously. It also revealed a feedback loop: the more Saudi Arabia invested in defense, the more Iran invested in asymmetric offset, and vice versa, with each side's security-seeking behavior reducing the other's security. The absence of US retaliation further signaled that the external guarantor's commitment was conditional, accelerating Saudi Arabia's interest in de-escalation with Iran and in diversifying security partners.

Perspective reconstruction. From an African vantage point, the Aramco attack illuminates how peripheral states and non-state actors can leverage the rivalries of regional powers to assert agency, much as African liberation movements once exploited Cold War competition. The Houthi claim of responsibility, whether fully accurate or not, asserts a Yemeni sovereignty narrative against Saudi intervention, paralleling African anti-colonial claims to self-determination against external domination. The attack also reveals the instrumentalization of sectarian identity: the "Shia Crescent" framing that justified Saudi intervention in Yemen is, on this reading, a technology of state survival that masks resource and geopolitical competition, much as ethnic and religious identities were mobilized in post-colonial African statecraft to legitimate authoritarian rule. African scholarship — from Fanon's analysis of colonial violence to Mamdani's critique of the bifurcated state — suggests that the security dilemma is not merely a structural condition but a product of historically constituted hierarchies of power in which some states are treated as sovereign and others as arenas. The African perspective thus asks who benefits from framing the conflict as sectarian: the answer, it argues, is regimes on both sides that consolidate domestic authority through external threat construction. What this perspective may occlude is the genuine material and ideational stakes for Yemeni civilians caught between Houthi governance and Saudi bombardment.

The Chinese perspective reads the attack as evidence of the fragility of a regional order dependent on US security guarantees and as an opportunity for Beijing to position itself as a stabilizing mediator. China's interest in uninterrupted oil flows — it is the largest buyer of both Saudi and Iranian crude — makes de-escalation a commercial imperative, and the 2023 rapprochement is presented as proof that development-first diplomacy can succeed where military containment fails. This perspective occludes the human rights dimensions of both Saudi and Iranian conduct and treats stability as synonymous with order.

The Russian perspective frames the attack within a narrative of US retrenchment and multipolar transition, arguing that Washington's hesitation to retaliate exposed the hollowness of American security commitments and validated Russia's role as an alternative broker. Moscow's arms sales to Iran and its intervention in Syria are presented as stabilizing counterweights to Western hegemony. This perspective occludes Russian complicity in Syrian sectarian violence and its own interest in prolonging regional instability to weaken US influence.

The Western perspective, particularly the US and Saudi framing, attributes the attack to Iranian state direction and treats it as evidence of Tehran's expansionist strategy through the Axis of Resistance. It emphasizes intelligence assessments of weapons origin and trajectory, and frames the response as deterrence and alliance reassurance. This perspective occludes Western complicity in regional instability — including the 2003 Iraq invasion that reshaped the sectarian landscape — and tends to treat Saudi interests as synonymous with regional order.

The UN perspective documents the attack through the Panel of Experts on Yemen, which found that the Houthis lacked the capability to launch such a strike from Yemeni territory and that evidence pointed to Iran. It frames the incident within international humanitarian law and civilian protection, emphasizing the Yemeni civilian toll of the broader conflict. This perspective occludes the political economy of the rivalry and the agency of regional actors, and its reliance on state consent limits its ability to address root causes.

Adjudication. The Western perspective best explains the material mechanics of the attack — weapons origin, state attribution, and the proxy network's operational capacity — because it is grounded in intelligence assessments and the documented structure of the Axis of Resistance. However, it misses the structural and historical dimensions that the African perspective supplies: the attack was not merely an Iranian offensive operation but a moment in a security dilemma constituted by decades of mutual threat construction, external intervention, and the instrumentalization of sectarian identity. The Western framing's tendency to treat Saudi interests as regional order and to understate Western complicity in producing the conditions for rivalry limits its explanatory power. The African perspective, while strongest on historical constitution and agency, risks underweighting the genuine ideational content of sectarian identity and the material reality of Iranian proxy capabilities. A synthesis would hold that the Aramco attack was simultaneously an Iranian proxy operation (Western), a product of a structurally constituted security dilemma (systemic), and an assertion of Yemeni agency within a historically hierarchical regional order (African) — with the Chinese and Russian perspectives best explaining the subsequent diplomatic realignment rather than the attack itself.

2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. Define the 2023 Beijing-brokered Saudi-Iran rapprochement in operational terms: identify what changed (diplomatic relations, embassy reopening, security and economic dialogue) and what did not (proxy networks, unresolved conflicts in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq).

2. Reconstruct the Saudi, Iranian, and Chinese perspectives on why the agreement was signed, using the five-perspective framework and noting what each reading foregrounds and occludes.

3. Apply the sectarian security dilemma: explain how normalization can be interpreted by hardliners in each state as either reducing threat or creating vulnerability.

4. Assess the Axis of Resistance after March 2023: identify which groups' behavior changed and which did not, and distinguish correlation from causation.

5. Specify falsifiers: list three observable developments over twenty-four months that would support a "genuine strategic shift" and three that would support "tactical rebalancing."

6. Adjudicate: write a bounded conclusion that avoids both "peace breakthrough" and "pure deception" extremes.

Model answer (continuous prose): The 2023 Beijing-brokered rapprochement is best understood as a tactical rebalancing that opened a limited strategic possibility, not as a resolution of the Saudi-Iranian rivalry. Operationally, the agreement restored diplomatic relations, reopened embassies, and created channels for security and economic dialogue; it did not dismantle proxy networks or settle the regional conflicts through which the rivalry is fought. From the Saudi perspective, the deal reduced immediate escalation risks, protected economic transformation plans, and allowed Riyadh to manage Yemen and maritime security without a direct Iranian front; from the Iranian perspective, it eased diplomatic isolation, legitimized Tehran's regional role, and created space for economic relief under sanctions pressure. China's perspective emphasized mediation success, energy security, and a strategic partnership narrative that presents Beijing as a stabilizing alternative to US-centric security architectures. Russia framed the deal within multipolarity and anti-Western realignment, while Western analysts often read it as Iranian tactical relief or Saudi hedging; the UN perspective treated it as a welcome but incomplete confidence-building measure requiring follow-through on cross-border attacks and civilian protection. The sectarian security dilemma explains why normalization did not end competition. Saudi defensive measures—missile defense, Gulf coalition building, support for Sunni-aligned actors—have long appeared to Tehran as encirclement; Iranian support for Hezbollah, Iraqi militias, and the Houthis appears to Riyadh as revolutionary expansion. The rapprochement changed the diplomatic register but not the structural condition: each side still interprets the other's security-seeking as threatening. Consequently, the Axis of Resistance remained active after March 2023. Hezbollah retained its arsenal and political role in Lebanon; Iraqi militias continued to pressure US and Gulf interests; the Houthis maintained capabilities that later shaped Red Sea dynamics. The absence of immediate proxy disarmament does not prove bad faith—disarmament was not in the agreement—but it does show that the deal's scope was diplomatic, not transformative. A genuine strategic shift would require observable proxy de-escalation: sustained reduction in cross-border attacks, verifiable constraints on arms transfers, and negotiated settlements in Yemen or Lebanon that both capitals endorse. Tactical rebalancing is supported by continued proxy activity, rhetorical escalation during crises, and economic engagement without security reciprocity. The evidence to date is mixed but leans tactical: diplomatic normalization advanced while regional arenas remained contested. The strongest counterargument is that diplomacy often precedes security change; the 1979–2023 rivalry itself shows long cycles. Yet without mechanism-level change in how each state secures itself through non-state allies, the rapprochement remains a managed pause. The bounded verdict: it is a real diplomatic achievement and a tactical rebalancing, with strategic potential contingent on proxy restraint and reciprocal verification.

2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: In late 2023 and 2024, Houthi attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea followed the Gaza war, prompting US and UK strikes and raising insurance and trade costs. Saudi Arabia, which had normalized diplomatic relations with Iran in March 2023, faced pressure to protect shipping

lanes without direct entanglement, while Iran denied operational control over the Houthis but benefited from pressure on Western and Gulf interests. The episode tested whether the rapprochement could absorb proxy escalation, whether Gulf states would securitize maritime routes independently, and whether African littoral states along the Red Sea and Horn of Africa would be treated as security stakeholders or merely as geographic backdrop. It also raised questions about civilian protection, freedom of navigation, and the legitimacy of cross-border force.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

Mechanism: Identify the causal chain linking the Gaza war, Houthi maritime attacks, US/UK strikes, and Saudi-Iranian diplomatic constraints; specify which links are structural and which are contingent.
Perspective reconstruction: Reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of the crisis, including what each foregrounds and occludes.
Historical analogue: Compare the episode to one earlier case (for example, the 1980s Tanker War or the 2019 Aramco attack) and state the limits of the analogy.
Falsifiers: List observable evidence that would refute your central claim about whether the rapprochement survived proxy escalation.

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what is likely next), and prescription (what should be done), and avoid letting prescription masquerade as explanation?

2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Which statement best captures the sectarian security dilemma in the Saudi-Iranian rivalry?

A. Sectarian identity is primordial, so conflict is inevitable regardless of state policy.
B. Each state's defensive support for co-religionists abroad is interpreted by the rival as offensive encirclement, producing escalation even without aggressive intent.
C. The dilemma is caused primarily by UN mediation failures.
D. China's economic partnerships have resolved the security competition.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses:
- A: treats sectarian identity as deep structure rather than examining its instrumentalization; ignores scope conditions and policy variation.
- C: overstates the UN's causal role; UN mediation responds to, rather than generates, the dilemma.
- D: conflates economic interdependence with security resolution; trade ties do not automatically dismantle proxy competition.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. Selected attributed proxy and cross-border incidents, 2015–2023 (illustrative, not exhaustive)

Date	Actor (attributed/claimed)	Target / Location	Method	Attribution / Claim	Source
2015–present	Houthi forces (Ansar Allah)	Saudi border regions; later UAE	Ballistic missiles, drones, cruise missiles	Claimed by Houthis; Saudi/UAE attribute Iranian enabling	Crisis Group Gulf reports
14 Sep 2019	Houthi claim; US/Saudi attribution to Iran	Abqaiq and Khurais oil facilities, Saudi Arabia	Drone and cruise-missile swarm	Houthi claim; US/Saudi attribution to Iran	Crisis Group; Wehrey (2018) context
3 Jan 2020	United States	Qassem Soleimani convoy, Baghdad	Airstrike	US claim of imminent threat	Crisis Group Iran reports
8 Jan 2020	Iran (IRGC)	Ain al-Asad air base, Iraq	Ballistic missiles	Iranian state claim	Crisis Group Iran reports
17 Jan 2022	Houthi forces	Abu Dhabi, UAE	Missile and drone attack	Houthi claim	Crisis Group Gulf reports
2021–2023	Iraqi Shia militia factions	US and coalition positions in Iraq/Syria	Rockets, drones, IEDs	Claimed by factions; attributed to Iran-aligned networks	Crisis Group Iraq reports

Table 2. Military expenditure, selected states (SIPRI, latest available approximate figures)

State	Military expenditure (USD billions, approx.)	Share of GDP (approx.)	Notes
Saudi Arabia	75.0 (2022)	7.4%	Highest in Middle East; large procurement and personnel costs
United Arab Emirates	22.8 (recent SIPRI estimate)	~5.0%	High per-capita spending; advanced procurement
Qatar	15.4 (recent SIPRI estimate)	~7.0%	Rapid post-2017 buildup
Kuwait	8.2 (recent SIPRI estimate)	~5.1%	Smaller force, high equipment intensity

State	Military expenditure (USD billions, approx.)	Share of GDP (approx.)	Notes
Iran	10.3 (recent SIPRI estimate)	~2.5%	Lower absolute spending; higher reliance on proxies and asymmetric tools
Israel	23.4 (recent SIPRI estimate)	~4.5%	Regional comparator, not Gulf state

Figures are rounded approximations from SIPRI military expenditure data; percentages vary by SIPRI year and national accounting method. Use for ordinal comparison, not exact budgeting.

Table 3. Publicly cited estimates of Iranian support to allied groups (highly uncertain)

Group	Estimated support	Type of support	Evidentiary status
Hezbollah	Up to roughly $700 million annually in some US estimates	Funding, weapons, training, political backing	Public estimate; not independently auditable

Estimates are politically contested, often derived from intelligence claims, and should be treated as ranges rather than verified budgets.

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Using Tables 1 and 2, describe the trend in (a) the frequency, geographic reach, and precision of attributed proxy or cross-border attacks, and (b) Gulf defense spending from 2015 to 2023. Which variable changed more sharply, and what does that asymmetry imply about whether the regional security dilemma is driven more by offensive opportunity or defensive fear?
2. **Level of analysis.** Are the patterns in Table 1 best explained at the individual level (leader ideology and threat perception), the state level (regime survival and territorial security), the systemic level (balance of power and polarity), or the transnational level (sectarian networks and non-state armed groups)? Defend one level as primary, identify the strongest evidence for it, and specify what evidence would falsify your choice.
3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would read Tables 1–3. Which perspective best explains the 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement as a durable shift rather than a tactical pause, and which perspective is most directly challenged by the spending and support data?
4. **Interpretation.** Do the data support the claim that Iranian support (Table 3) is the primary driver of proxy attacks (Table 1), or do they equally support a security-dilemma interpretation in which Gulf military buildup (Table 2) is partly endogenous to perceived Iranian threat? Specify the causal test you would need to distinguish external sponsorship from reciprocal escalation.

5. **Limitation.** What are the three most serious limitations of these data—attribution uncertainty, hidden or in-kind transfers, and definitional ambiguity in "defense spending"—and how would each limitation bias conclusions about escalation, restraint, or the balance of power?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Sectarian Security Dilemma Spiral"

Draw a large circle in the center of the page, labeled **"Regional Security Dilemma"** in bold. Inside the circle, draw a tight spiral beginning at a small inner dot labeled **"Regime Survival Fear."** From the inner dot, draw four curved arrows moving outward along the spiral, each arrow representing one escalation move. Label the arrows, in order: **"Defensive Mobilization," "Proxy Support," "Retaliatory Strike,"** and **"Existential Threat Narrative."** The final arrow should curve back toward the inner dot, showing feedback. Use two colors: red for Saudi/Gulf moves and green for Iranian/Axis moves, alternating along the spiral. Place small case labels beside the arrows: **"Yemen," "Lebanon," "Iraq,"** and **"Aramco 2019."** Around the outer edge of the circle, draw five small rectangular boxes, one for each perspective, with short annotations: **African:** "instrumentalization of identity"; **Chinese:** "mediation opportunity"; **Russian:** "multipolar counterweight"; **Western:** "containment and deterrence"; **UN:** "civilian harm and cross-border law."** The visual teaches that the dilemma is not a single action but a recursive interpretation loop: each defensive move is read as offensive by the rival.

Visual 2 — "Axis of Resistance as Network, Not Hierarchy"

Draw Tehran as a central hexagon labeled **"Iran / IRGC-QF."** Around it, draw five circles: **"Hezbollah," "Houthis (Ansar Allah)," "Iraqi PMF Factions," "Hamas,"** and **"Palestinian Islamic Jihad."** Connect Tehran to each circle with two kinds of lines: solid lines labeled **"material support"** (funding, weapons, training) and dashed lines labeled **"local agency"** (domestic grievances, autonomous decision-making, electoral or militia politics). Add a second, lighter cluster on the right labeled **"Saudi/Gulf Counter-Network"** with nodes for **"Saudi Arabia," "UAE," "Bahrain,"** and **"US/UK support."** Draw dashed cross-cluster arrows labeled **"rivalry," "deterrence,"** and **"proxy competition."** Add a legend: solid line = resource flow; dashed line = political autonomy or rivalry. Perspective overlay: place small tags near the Tehran hub: **Western:** "command and control"; **African:** "fragmented sovereignty"; **Chinese:** "non-state complexity"; **Russian:** "anti-hegemonic alignment"; **UN:** "accountability gap."** The visual teaches that the Axis is better understood as a variable-geometry network than as a chain of command.

Visual 3 — "Escalation Ladder of the 2019 Aramco Attack"

Draw a staircase rising from bottom left to top right. Each step is a horizontal bar with a label. Step 1 (bottom): **"Houthi claim of responsibility."** Step 2: **"Drone/cruise-missile strike on Abqaiq and Khurais."** Step 3: **"Disruption of roughly 5% of global oil supply."** Step 4: **"US/Saudi attribution to Iran."** Step 5: **"Saudi and UAE restraint; no direct state-on-state war."** Step 6 (top): **"2023 China-brokered Saudi-Iran rapprochement."** Draw upward arrows between steps labeled **"escalation pressure."** Draw downward or sideways arrows labeled **"restraint," "attribution ambiguity,"** and **"diplomatic off-ramp."** Add a vertical side column labeled **"Competing Readings":** red text for **"offensive Iranian expansion,"** green text for **"defensive deterrence,"** blue text for **"proxy autonomy,"** and black text for **"civilian/economic vulnerability."** Perspective overlay: small boxes at the top: **African:** "state capacity and resource vulnerability"; **Chinese:** "mediation window"; **Russian:** "US retrenchment"; **Western:** "deterrence failure";

UN: "protection of civilian infrastructure."** The visual teaches that the same event can be an escalation, a warning, or a restraint signal depending on the interpretive frame.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the sectarian security dilemma?	A regional feedback loop in which defensive mobilization by one side is interpreted as existential threat by the other, producing proxy support, retaliation, and narrative escalation. Mechanism: perception → mobilization → counter-mobilization → hardened identity. Source log: Nasr (2006); Haddad (2018); Wehrey (2018).
What happened in 1979?	Iranian Revolution transformed Iran from US-aligned monarchy to revolutionary republic; Saudi Arabia and Gulf monarchies read it as ideological and security threat. Source log: Nasr (2006); Crisis Group Iran reports.
Is the "Shia Crescent" real?	It is partly a geopolitical description of Iranian-linked networks and partly a rhetorical construction that can overstate coherence, religious unity, and Iranian control. Source log: Haddad (2018); Wehrey (2018).
What is the Axis of Resistance?	A variable network of Iran-aligned actors—Hezbollah, Houthis, Iraqi Shia militias, Hamas/PIJ—linked by material support and shared opposition to US/Israeli/Saudi regional order, but with significant local autonomy. Source log: Juneau (2020); Crisis Group.
How did Aramco 2019 matter?	It exposed vulnerability of critical energy infrastructure, raised attribution ambiguity, and showed that high-impact proxy attacks need not trigger direct interstate war. Source log: Crisis Group Gulf reports; Wehrey (2018).
What do Gulf defense budgets show?	High absolute and relative spending reflects threat perception, procurement cycles, and regime security; spending is a signal as well as a capability. Source log: SIPRI data; Juneau (2020).
What do Iranian support estimates show?	Public estimates suggest sustained but uneven support; they are contested, fragmented, and not auditable. Source log: Crisis Group; US public estimates.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is instrumentalization?	Political elites use sectarian identity to mobilize constituencies, justify alliances, and frame rivals as existential threats; identity becomes a tool of statecraft. Source log: Haddad (2018); Mamdani (general statecraft parallel).
What is deep structure?	Sectarian identities may also have social, communal, and historical depth that cannot be reduced to elite manipulation. Source log: Haddad (2018); Nasr (2006).
How does the African perspective reframe this?	It treats sectarianism as one form of identity instrumentalization within a state system marked by weak sovereignty, external intervention, and resource politics; parallels include proxy competition and communal mobilization in African conflicts. Source log: Grovogui; Mbembe; Mamdani.
How does China frame the rivalry?	As a regional instability problem manageable through mediation, economic integration, and non-interference; the 2023 rapprochement is presented as diplomatic success. Source log: Chinese foreign ministry statements; Crisis Group.
How does the UN frame it?	Through cross-border attack prohibitions, civilian protection, humanitarian access, and mediation; legal accountability is often weaker than geopolitical bargaining. Source log: UN Security Council resolutions; Crisis Group.

Summary (3–5 sentences). The Saudi-Iranian rivalry is best understood as a recursive security dilemma in which defensive measures, proxy support, and identity narratives are mutually interpreted as threats. The "Shia Crescent" and "Axis of Resistance" are partly real networks and partly rhetorical constructions that exaggerate coherence and obscure local agency. Data on attacks, defense spending, and Iranian support show persistent escalation pressure but cannot settle causation because attribution and hidden transfers remain opaque. The African perspective is especially useful because it foregrounds instrumentalization, state weakness, and external intervention rather than treating sectarian identity as a primordial cause.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon.
Imagine two neighbors who each buy a stronger lock because they fear the other. Each lock makes the other more afraid, so each adds cameras, then guards, then pays local gangs to watch the street. Soon both say, "I am only defending myself," but the street is more dangerous than before. In West Asia, Saudi Arabia and Iran are the neighbors, and the "locks and guards" include missiles, militias, and sectarian language. The 2019

attack on Saudi oil facilities was like a gang throwing a brick through a window: it hurt the house, proved the guards were weak, but did not start a full war. The 2023 deal brokered by China was like both neighbors agreeing to talk, not because they suddenly trust each other, but because the street fight had become too costly.

Step 2 — Mark gaps.
My simple version hides four things. First, it treats Saudi Arabia and Iran as two unitary actors, when each contains factions, clerical networks, security services, and economic interests. Second, it makes sectarian identity sound like a costume leaders put on, when for many communities it is a lived social reality. Third, it understates the role of the United States, Israel, and other external powers in shaping threat perceptions. Fourth, it cannot explain why some attacks escalate into crises while others are absorbed; the difference depends on attribution, oil markets, domestic politics, and alliance commitments.

Step 3 — Reread verification.
Returning to the sources, the mechanism is not merely "fear causes arms." Nasr (2006) emphasizes that the 1979 revolution changed Iran's regional role and made sectarian identity politically salient. Haddad (2018) warns against treating sectarianism as either pure primordial hatred or pure elite manipulation; it is constructed, but construction has real social effects. Wehrey (2018) shows how the "Shia Crescent" can become a self-fulfilling security narrative. Juneau (2020) highlights that Iranian support is significant but does not amount to full control over allied groups. Crisis Group reports repeatedly stress attribution ambiguity, civilian vulnerability, and the gap between military pressure and political settlement. The simple neighbor story therefore needs the added clause: fear is filtered through ideology, institutions, and incomplete information.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits.
The neighbor analogy works for the security dilemma: defensive measures can be read as offensive, and reciprocal fear can produce escalation without either side wanting war. It fails in four ways. It cannot capture the transnational character of militias that operate across borders. It cannot represent the religious and historical depth of sectarian identity. It cannot model great-power intervention, especially US military presence and Chinese economic diplomacy. It also cannot represent the 2023 rapprochement accurately, because neighbors can move away, whereas Saudi Arabia and Iran remain locked into the same regional system and must manage rivalry rather than escape it.

Step 5 — Rewrite.
The Saudi-Iranian rivalry is a regional security dilemma amplified by sectarian narratives, proxy networks, and asymmetric capabilities. Iran's support for Hezbollah, the Houthis, Iraqi militias, and Palestinian groups gives it reach beyond its conventional military power, while Saudi Arabia and its partners respond through high defense spending, coalition warfare, and diplomatic alignment with the United States. Each side's defensive measures are read by the other as offensive expansion, especially when attacks such as Aramco 2019 expose critical infrastructure vulnerability. The "Shia Crescent" and "Axis of Resistance" are useful but dangerous labels: they describe real networks, but they can exaggerate Iranian control and turn political competition into civilizational conflict. The 2023 China-brokered rapprochement reduced immediate escalation risk, yet it did not resolve the underlying competition over regional order, state sovereignty, and identity politics. A rigorous analysis must therefore distinguish description of networks, explanation of escalation, prediction of restraint, and prescription for diplomacy, while remaining alert to the limits of available data.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L43	definition	What is the sectarian security dilemma?	A situation in which measures taken by one sect-coded actor to protect its community or regime are read by rivals as offensive threats, prompting countermeasures that deepen mutual insecurity. It is not reducible to ancient hatred; it is produced by political competition under weak trust.	African: parallels to instrumentalized communal security in postcolonial states.
L43	mechanism	How does defensive sectarian mobilization become offensive in perception?	Actors signal resolve through militias, alliances, or sectarian rhetoric; rivals cannot distinguish defense from expansion, especially under information asymmetry and prior enmity. The result is an action-reaction spiral.	Western: often reads Iranian mobilization as inherently expansionist.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L43	comparison	Is the “Shia Crescent” primarily a description or a political construct?	It can describe real networks of Shia political actors from Iran to Lebanon, but as a singular bloc it is a rhetorical construction that flattens local grievances and state interests. The concept’s power lies in making diverse actors appear coordinated.	Chinese: cautions against bloc language that hardens identities.
L43	application	What did the 2019 Aramco attack reveal about the regional security dilemma?	The strike showed that proxy-attributed force could impose high costs on a major oil producer while allowing plausible deniability, intensifying Saudi threat perception and demands for deterrence. It also exposed gaps in air defense and the difficulty of calibrated response.	Russian: highlights vulnerability of Western-aligned energy infrastructure.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L43	source	What is Vali Nasr's (2006) core contribution?	Nasr argued that the Shia revival and sectarian political mobilization would reshape Middle Eastern order after Iraq, emphasizing identity as a political force rather than only theology. His thesis is influential but risks overpredicting sectarian determinism.	African: useful but must be tested against local political economy.
L43	debate	Instrumentalization or deep structure: which better explains sectarian politics?	Instrumentalization stresses elite manipulation of identity for power; deep structure stresses durable social, institutional, and memory-based cleavages. Most cases require both: elites activate identities that have real historical and institutional anchors.	UN: supports conflict-sensitive, non-essentialist policy.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L43	reconstruction	How does the African perspective reframe the Axis of Resistance?	It treats sectarian alignment as one layer of a broader postcolonial problem of externalized security, weak state capacity, and elite legitimation, rather than as a civilizational bloc. This foregrounds domestic political economy and historical intervention.	African primary: reveals occlusions in civilizational framing.
L43	occlusion	What does the Western perspective often occlude in this rivalry?	It often foregrounds Iranian expansionism and regime ideology while underweighting Saudi agency, domestic legitimation needs, and the security effects of Western military interventions. This can make containment appear as the only rational policy.	Western: containment bias.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L43	adjudication	How should one adjudicate the 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement?	Evidence of genuine shift includes restored diplomacy and reduced public escalation; evidence of tactical rebalancing includes continued proxy competition and unresolved regional files. The best reading is conditional: a managed de-escalation, not a strategic reconciliation.	Chinese: mediation success but not alliance.
L43	visual	What should an "Axis of Resistance" map annotate?	It should show nodes and ties to Iran, but also annotate funding, command autonomy, local grievances, and points of friction. Without autonomy and friction, the map overstates coherence.	UN: warns against monolithic actor assumptions.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L43	definition	What is the Axis of Resistance?	A loose Iran-linked network of state and non-state actors sharing opposition to US, Israeli, and Saudi influence, with varying degrees of coordination, ideology, and autonomy. It is not a unified command structure.	Russian: multipolar counterweight narrative.
L43	mechanism	Why does proxy support create commitment problems?	Patrons gain deniability and leverage, but proxies may pursue local agendas, escalate beyond patron intent, or become costly liabilities. This makes control partial and retaliation risky.	Western: emphasizes deterrence dilemmas.
L43	comparison	Saudi Arabia vs Iran: rivalry drivers	The rivalry combines regime security, sectarian identity, regional hegemony, and external alliance politics; neither state is driven by sectarian identity alone. Reducing it to Sunni-Shia theology misses strategic and domestic drivers.	African: avoids civilizational reductionism.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L43	source	What do Crisis Group Iran and Gulf reports contribute?	They provide granular, field-informed analysis of escalation risks, sanctions effects, and diplomatic openings, often stressing unintended consequences and the need for de-escalation. They are policy-oriented rather than theory-building.	UN: supports mediation and civilian protection.
L43	application	How do Gulf defense spending trends matter?	Rising defense spending signals threat perception and procurement cycles, but spending alone does not measure effectiveness, alliance dependence, or escalation control. It must be read alongside doctrine and proxy activity.	Chinese: notes arms-race risks.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit (score each 0–100)

Competency	Self-score (0–100)	Evidence of mastery	Gap to close
Defining the sectarian security dilemma			
Tracing the mechanism from defense to perceived offense			
Distinguishing Shia Crescent reality from rhetoric			
Mapping Axis actors and their autonomy			
Reconstructing all five perspectives			
Adjudicating the 2023 rapprochement			

Competency	Self-score (0–100)	Evidence of mastery	Gap to close
Analyzing the 2019 Aramco attack			
Interpreting proxy and defense-spending data			
Designing falsifiers			

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which perspective did you reconstruct least charitably, and what evidence would force you to revise it?
2. Which of your claims is most vulnerable to the instrumentalization-versus-deep-structure critique?
3. Did you keep description, explanation, prediction, and prescription separate in your memo?

7.3 Error-log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Sectarian conflict is ancient and theological.	It is politically activated and institutionally mediated; theology alone rarely causes war.	Haddad (2018); Nasr (2006)
The Axis of Resistance is a unified army.	It is a loose network with autonomous local agendas and partial patron control.	Crisis Group Iran and Gulf reports
The 2023 rapprochement ended the rivalry.	Diplomatic normalization coexists with proxy competition and unresolved regional files.	Crisis Group Iran and Gulf reports
The Shia Crescent is an objective bloc.	It is partly descriptive and partly rhetorical; local actors have distinct interests.	Wehrey (2018); Haddad (2018)
Higher defense spending equals greater security.	Spending reflects perception and procurement, not necessarily effectiveness or stability.	Data lab trends
Western containment is a neutral reading of the region.	It is a strategic stance with distributional and escalation consequences.	African perspective; Juneau (2020)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Sectarian security dilemma	Defensive mobilization read as offensive; action-reaction spiral	Security dilemma; Nasr (2006)	2019 Aramco attack	Ancient hatred vs political activation	Evidence that purely defensive intent reduces rival mobilization	L42, L44
Saudi-Iran rivalry	Regime security, hegemony, identity, alliance politics	Mabon (2016); Gause (2014)	1979 revolution to 2023 Beijing rapprochement	Strategic shift vs tactical rebalancing	Sustained proxy de-escalation after 2023	L41, L45
Shia Crescent	Network description plus rhetorical bloc construction	Haddad (2018); Wehrey (2018)	Iran-Lebanon-Iraq-Yemen linkages	Reality vs construct	Local actors defecting from Iranian preferences	L50
Axis of Resistance	Proxy support, deniability, commitment problems	Juneau (2020); Crisis Group	Hezbollah, Houthis, Iraqi militias, Hamas	Coherent bloc vs loose network	Demonstrated proxy autonomy causing patron costs	L23, L44
Sectarian identity politics	Instrumentalization and deep structure interact	Haddad (2018); Mamdani (2004) (comparative)	Elite mobilization in Gulf and Levant	Instrumentalization vs deep structure	Identity salience declines when institutions deliver	L42
Data interpretation	Defense spending and proxy attacks as indicators	Crisis Group reports	Gulf defense spending; attack datasets	Perception vs capability	Spending rises while attacks fall	L41

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 0, 30 minutes):** Re-read all flashcards and redraw the Axis of Resistance map from memory, annotating autonomy and friction.
- **R2 (Day 2, 45 minutes):** Reconstruct all five perspectives in writing, then compare against the lesson's perspective matrix.

- **R3 (Day 7, 60 minutes):** Re-analyze the 2019 Aramco attack using individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels of analysis.
- **R4 (Day 14, 60 minutes):** Update the 2023 rapprochement memo with one new piece of evidence and one new falsifier.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 minutes):** Complete a timed practice set: hinge question, data-lab questions, and a short perspective reconstruction.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define the sectarian security dilemma.
☐ I can trace the mechanism from defensive mobilization to perceived offense.
☐ I can distinguish the Shia Crescent as reality and as rhetoric.
☐ I can map Axis actors and their autonomy.
☐ I can compare all five perspectives.
☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary and most developed.
☐ I can adjudicate the 2023 rapprochement as shift or rebalancing.
☐ I can analyze the 2019 Aramco attack.
☐ I can interpret proxy and defense-spending data.
☐ I can design falsifiers for my claims.
☐ I can avoid conflating description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I can identify what each perspective occludes.
☐ I can use canonical sources accurately.
☐ I can answer the hinge question.
☐ I can complete Cornell notes.
☐ I can follow the spaced-review schedule.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- **Saudi-Iran rivalry:** Nasr (2006); Mabon (2016); Gause (2014).
- **Sectarianism and identity:** Haddad (2018); Wehrey (2018).
- **Axis of Resistance and proxies:** Juneau (2020); International Crisis Group, Iran and Gulf reports.
- **Regional order and conflict:** Lynch (2016).
- **Postcolonial and comparative parallels:** Mamdani (2004).
- **Mediation and de-escalation:** International Crisis Group, Iran and Gulf reports.
- **Security dilemma and deterrence:** Gause (2014); Juneau (2020).
- **Data and regional military trends:** International Crisis Group, Iran and Gulf reports.

End of Lesson 43. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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45. Proxy Warfare and Chokepoint Geopolitics

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 44 — Proxy Warfare and Chokepoint Geopolitics
Module	Module 7: West Asia and Iranian Geopolitics
Prerequisites	L23 (asymmetric warfare), L25 (maritime security), L43 (sectarianism and identity politics)
Interleaved links	Forward to L45 (nuclear), L46 (hydrocarbons), L48 (Indo-Pacific chokepoints)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, visual anchors, flashcards, memo practice
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create (adjudicate competing explanations; design falsifiers)
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple: how did a non-state militia operating from one of the world's poorest countries force a restructuring of global shipping lanes, trigger a multinational naval coalition, and impose measurable costs on economies thousands of miles away? The Houthi attacks on commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb strait from late 2023 onward are not merely a regional skirmish. They constitute a case study in how proxy warfare, maritime geography, and the securitization of commerce interact to convert local political violence into global economic leverage. The lesson asks you to hold three analytical problems in tension simultaneously: the principal-agent dynamics through which Iran delegates violence to non-state partners while managing their autonomy; the physical geography of chokepoints that amplifies small disruptions into systemic shocks; and the political process by which a maritime incident becomes a security crisis demanding military response. Each of these problems has its own theoretical lineage, its own scope conditions, and its own strongest counterargument. Mastering the lesson means learning to move between them without collapsing one into another.

This lesson sits at a critical junction in the curriculum. It builds directly on L23, where you studied asymmetric warfare and the principal-agent problems inherent in delegating violence to non-state actors; on L25, where you examined maritime security, freedom of navigation, and the legal architecture of the sea; and on L43, where you analyzed sectarianism and identity politics as mobilizing frameworks in West Asia. It also prepares the ground for L45 on nuclear geopolitics, where Iran's proxy network and chokepoint leverage must be understood as complements to, not substitutes for, nuclear deterrence; for L46 on hydrocarbons, where energy transit volumes through Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb make maritime security an energy-security question; and for L48 on Indo-Pacific chokepoints, where the analytical framework developed here travels to the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. The lesson is therefore both integrative and generative: it synthesizes prior modules and supplies tools for subsequent ones.

The theoretical lineage you need spans several traditions. Principal-agent theory, developed in economics and political science to explain delegation under information asymmetry, has been applied to proxy warfare by scholars such as Andrew Mumford, who treats proxy war as a form of indirect intervention in which the

principal seeks to achieve strategic objectives while minimizing costs and risks, but at the price of reduced control over the agent. The chokepoint literature draws on classical strategic thought about maritime geography and on more recent work on supply-chain vulnerability and critical infrastructure. Securitization theory, associated with the Copenhagen School, explains how an issue is moved from normal politics to emergency politics through speech acts and institutional framing. These traditions do not always agree. Principal-agent theory tends to treat proxy autonomy as a problem of control; securitization theory treats the crisis framing as partly constructed; and maritime strategic thought treats geography as a hard constraint. The lesson requires you to adjudicate among them rather than choose one.

The African perspective is not an add-on to this lesson; it is the lens that reveals what the other four perspectives systematically underweight. For African states and societies, Red Sea disruptions are not primarily a question of great-power naval competition or of Western freedom-of-navigation norms. They are a question of import costs, food security, port revenues, and the fragility of trade-dependent development strategies. Egypt's Suez Canal revenues, Sudan's and Ethiopia's access to global markets, Djibouti's port economy, and the cost of grain imports across the Horn of Africa all move with shipping volumes through Bab el-Mandeb. African scholarship on extraversion, on the political economy of external dependence, and on the ways in which global systems extract value from African territories provides a vocabulary for understanding why a chokepoint crisis in West Asia lands hardest on African consumers and workers. The African vantage also exposes a blind spot in Western and UN framings: the assumption that restoring "normal" shipping is a neutral technical objective, when for many African economies "normal" already meant structurally disadvantageous terms of trade. Reconstructing the African perspective from within means taking seriously the argument that chokepoint security is inseparable from questions of economic sovereignty and equitable global commerce.

What you will be able to do after mastering this lesson is substantial and specific. You will be able to specify the mechanism by which a principal delegates violence to a proxy and the conditions under which the proxy gains autonomy; to map the physical and institutional vulnerabilities of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and comparable chokepoints; to reconstruct how each of the five perspectives frames the Red Sea crisis and identify what each contributes and occludes; to adjudicate between competing explanations of the same event using evidence rather than assertion; and to produce a policy memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription. You will also be able to identify falsifiers: evidence that would weaken or refute each major claim, so that your analysis is not merely plausible but testable.

A final methodological note. This lesson insists on level-of-analysis discipline. The Houthi attacks can be analyzed at the individual level (leadership decisions, ideological commitments), the state level (Iranian strategy, Saudi and Emirati responses, Yemeni fragmentation), the systemic level (great-power competition, global trade architecture), and the transnational level (shipping networks, insurance markets, diaspora finance, humanitarian supply chains). Each level generates different explanations and different predictions. Conflating them produces incoherent analysis. Throughout the lesson, you should ask which level a given claim operates on and whether the evidence offered actually supports a claim at that level. The worked example and problem pair are designed to make this discipline habitual rather than optional.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer each question from memory before consulting notes. The purpose is to activate prior knowledge and to identify gaps.

1. From L23 (asymmetric warfare): What is the principal-agent problem, and why does it become acute when a state delegates violence to a non-state actor rather than to its own armed forces?
2. From L23: Name two mechanisms by which a principal can attempt to control a proxy's behavior, and one reason each mechanism commonly fails in practice.
3. From L25 (maritime security): What is the legal status of transit passage through international straits under UNCLOS, and how does it differ from innocent passage through territorial waters?
4. From L25: Why are chokepoints such as Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb considered "systemic" vulnerabilities rather than merely local geographic features?
5. From L43 (sectarianism): How can sectarian identity function as both a mobilizing resource and a constraint on a proxy's strategic autonomy?
6. From L43: What is the difference between a sectarian narrative used for domestic legitimation and one used for transnational alliance-building, and why does the distinction matter for proxy warfare?

1.2 Orientation Questions

These questions frame the lesson's central puzzle. You need not answer them fully now; return to them after completing the lesson.

1. If Iran did not order the Houthi Red Sea attacks, in what sense can they still be understood as an Iranian strategic success? If Iran did order them, what does the subsequent difficulty of stopping them reveal about delegation?
2. Why did a multinational naval response not immediately restore pre-crisis shipping volumes, and what does this imply about the limits of sea control against dispersed, low-cost attackers?
3. How does the Red Sea crisis look different when analyzed from the perspective of an African grain-importing state rather than from the perspective of a Western naval power?
4. What evidence would convince you that the Houthi attacks were primarily driven by Yemeni domestic politics rather than by regional proxy dynamics?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Provisional definitions to be refined during the lesson. Each term will be revisited in context.

- **Proxy warfare**: The use of a third party by a state or non-state principal to conduct violence or coercion while the principal retains plausible deniability and avoids direct costs. The definition is contested; some scholars restrict it to interstate delegation, others include non-state principals.
- **Principal-agent problem**: The difficulty a principal faces in ensuring that an agent acts in the principal's interest when the agent has superior information and independent preferences. In proxy warfare, the agent may pursue its own agenda, escalate beyond the principal's intent, or become difficult to restrain.
- **Delegation**: The transfer of authority or task execution from a principal to an agent. In strategic studies, delegation is rarely complete; it is better understood as a spectrum of control ranging from

tight command to loose sponsorship.

- **Autonomy (proxy)**: The degree to which a proxy actor can set its own objectives, choose its own methods, and act without prior authorization. Autonomy is not the opposite of control; the two coexist in variable combinations.
- **Chokepoint**: A narrow maritime passage through which a large share of global trade or energy transit must pass, such that disruption at that point has disproportionate systemic effects. Chokepoints are defined by geography but activated by politics.
- **Bab el-Mandeb**: The strait connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden, approximately 26 kilometers wide at its narrowest, through which a substantial share of Europe-Asia container traffic and energy shipments pass.
- **Strait of Hormuz**: The narrow passage between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, through which roughly one-fifth of global petroleum liquids consumption transits. It is the world's most important energy chokepoint.
- **Securitization**: The process by which an issue is framed as an existential threat requiring emergency measures beyond normal political procedures. In maritime contexts, securitization transforms commercial shipping disruptions into security crises justifying naval deployment.
- **Freedom of navigation**: The principle, codified in UNCLOS, that ships enjoy the right of transit through international straits and high seas. It is invoked by naval powers as both a legal norm and a strategic interest.
- **War risk premium**: The additional cost charged by marine insurers for vessels transiting high-risk areas. It is a market-based indicator of perceived threat and a mechanism by which maritime insecurity is priced into global trade.
- **Ansar Allah (the Houthis)**: A Zaydi Shia political-military movement originating in northern Yemen, which seized Sana'a in 2014 and has since controlled much of northern Yemen. It is aligned with but not controlled by Iran.
- **Multinational naval task force**: A coalition of warships from multiple states deployed to protect commercial shipping, conduct interdiction, or deter attacks. Such task forces raise questions of command unity, rules of engagement, and burden-sharing.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. **Explain** the principal-agent logic of proxy warfare, distinguishing delegation from autonomy and identifying the monitoring, selection, and incentive mechanisms that principals use to control proxies, as well as the conditions under which proxies defect, escalate beyond principal intent, or become self-sustaining political actors. (Bloom: Understand/Explain)

2. **Analyze** the Levantine theater—specifically the Hezbollah-Israel dynamic and the Syrian civil war's multi-sided proxy competition—through principal-agent theory, identifying where Iran's delegation strategies succeeded in creating durable leverage and where proxy autonomy produced outcomes Tehran did not intend. (Bloom: Analyze)

3. **Evaluate** the Houthi Red Sea shipping crisis (2023–present) as a case of maritime asymmetric proxy

warfare, assessing how a non-state actor leveraged chokepoint geography to disrupt global commerce, compel multinational naval intervention, and reshape insurance and routing markets. (Bloom: Evaluate)

4. **Compare** the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on proxy warfare and chokepoint geopolitics, identifying what each reveals and occludes about the relationship between regional conflict, non-state agency, and global supply-chain vulnerability. (Bloom: Compare/Analyze)
5. **Synthesize** the securitization of maritime chokepoints—Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Red Sea—into a coherent framework linking principal-agent proxy dynamics to global economic governance, and produce a falsifiable prediction about escalation thresholds and principal-agent breakdown. (Bloom: Synthesize/Create)

These objectives build on the asymmetric-warfare foundations of Lesson 23, the maritime-security frameworks of Lesson 25, and the sectarian-politics analysis of Lesson 43. They prepare the student for Lesson 45 (nuclear proliferation), Lesson 46 (hydrocarbon geopolitics), and Lesson 48 (Indo-Pacific chokepoints) by establishing the analytical vocabulary—delegation, autonomy, chokepoint vulnerability, securitization—through which later lessons examine state behavior under constraint.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Proxy warfare: principal-agent theory, delegation, and autonomy

Bolded Causal Claim: Proxy warfare is best understood not as a cheap substitute for direct state conflict but as a principal-agent relationship in which a state delegates coercive capacity to a non-state actor, and the resulting autonomy of the proxy—shaped by information asymmetry, divergent preferences, and independent resource bases—determines whether escalation is contained, spirals beyond principal intent, or produces a self-sustaining political actor that the principal can no longer control.

Mechanism: The theoretical lineage runs from economics through political science to strategic studies. Stephen Ross (1973) and Bengt Holmström (1979) formalized the principal-agent problem: a principal delegates a task to an agent whose actions the principal cannot perfectly observe, creating two pathologies. Adverse selection occurs when the principal cannot distinguish high-quality from low-quality agents before contracting; moral hazard occurs when the agent, once contracted, takes risks or shirks in ways the principal cannot fully monitor. Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991) translated this into political science, showing how legislators delegate to bureaucracies and executives. Salehyan (2010) and Mumford (2013) extended the framework to armed conflict, defining proxy warfare as the indirect engagement of a third party in a conflict through a surrogate force. Mumford's definition emphasizes that proxy warfare involves "the indirect engagement of a third party in a conflict through a surrogate force," and that the surrogate retains some degree of operational autonomy.

The mechanism operates through four channels. First, delegation: the principal (typically a state) transfers resources—funding, weapons, training, intelligence, or political cover—to an agent (typically a non-state armed group) because direct intervention is too costly, too risky, or domestically unsustainable. The principal's motivation is not merely cost-saving but also plausible deniability: by operating through a surrogate, the principal can influence outcomes while avoiding the reputational and legal costs of direct action. Second, monitoring: the principal attempts to observe and constrain the agent's behavior through embedded advisors, financial conditionality, intelligence sharing, and threats of support withdrawal. Monitoring is always im-

perfect because the agent operates in a local environment the principal does not fully understand. Third, incentive alignment: the principal designs rewards (continued funding, political recognition, territorial concessions) and punishments (aid cutoff, exposure, abandonment) to shape agent behavior. Fourth, autonomy: the agent's independent resource base—local legitimacy, territorial control, alternative funding streams, ideological commitment—generates a capacity for action that exceeds the principal's intent. Autonomy is not a malfunction of the proxy relationship; it is its constitutive feature. A proxy with zero autonomy is merely a puppet, and puppets are ineffective in complex local environments.

The critical causal claim is that autonomy, not principal intent, drives escalation dynamics. When the agent's survival interests, ideological commitments, or local political calculations diverge from the principal's strategic goals, the agent may initiate actions—attacks on third parties, territorial expansion, rhetorical escalation—that the principal did not authorize and may not desire. The principal then faces a dilemma: abandon the proxy (losing influence and credibility) or support it (risking unwanted escalation). This is the "blowback" mechanism that Mumford identifies as central to proxy warfare's dangers. Juneau (2020), analyzing Iran's proxy network, demonstrates that Tehran's relationships with Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, and Iraqi militias are characterized by varying degrees of autonomy, and that Iran's influence is greatest where it provides unique resources (funding, weapons) and weakest where proxies have independent revenue or popular legitimacy.

The mechanism also includes a temporal dimension. Proxy relationships often begin as tightly controlled delegations and evolve toward greater agent autonomy as the agent develops independent capabilities. This trajectory—delegation → capacity-building → autonomy → potential defection—is observable in multiple cases and is not an aberration but a predictable consequence of successful proxy empowerment.

Scope Conditions: Principal-agent proxy warfare is most likely to emerge and persist under four conditions. First, the principal faces high costs or risks of direct military intervention (domestic political constraints, geographic distance, fear of escalation). Second, the agent possesses local legitimacy, territorial knowledge, and operational capacity that the principal lacks. Third, information asymmetry between principal and agent is high but not total—the principal must know enough to select and monitor the agent, but not so much as to eliminate the agent's comparative advantage. Fourth, the principal can credibly threaten to withdraw support, giving it leverage over the agent's behavior. The framework fails or requires modification when the agent becomes financially self-sufficient (reducing principal leverage), when the agent's ideology is non-negotiable (reducing incentive alignment), or when the principal's reputation costs of association with the agent exceed the benefits of delegation. The framework also struggles to explain cases where the "principal" is not a single state but a diffuse network of funders, or where the "agent" is a state itself (state-to-state proxy relationships, as in the Iran-Syria alliance).

Observable Implications: If the principal-agent framework is correct, several patterns should be observable. (1) Proxy attacks should cluster at times when the principal is diplomatically constrained or domestically distracted, suggesting agent-initiated rather than principal-directed action. (2) The principal should provide resources but not operational command, creating a gap between capability and control. (3) Escalation spirals should follow proxy actions that trigger retaliation against the principal's interests, forcing the principal to choose between abandonment and unwanted confrontation. (4) The proxy's public rhetoric should sometimes diverge from the principal's diplomatic posture, signaling autonomy. (5) Principal leverage should decline as the agent develops independent funding, territorial control, or popular legitimacy. (6) Proxy relationships should exhibit "drift"—gradual divergence of interests over time—as the agent's local priorities reshape its strategic calculus.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point reconstructs proxy warfare not as a West Asian anomaly but as a structural feature of the international order whose genealogy runs through colonial indirect rule. African scholarship—from Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism through Mamdani's work on indirect rule and the bifurcated state, Rodney's underdevelopment thesis, and Bayart's "politics of the belly"—reveals that the delegation of violence to local intermediaries is not a modern strategic innovation but a technique of imperial governance with deep roots in African history. European colonial powers delegated coercion to chiefs, militias, and local strongmen; post-colonial states inherited this architecture, and Cold War superpowers replicated it in Angola, Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and elsewhere. From this perspective, principal-agent theory, developed in Western economics, obscures the colonial genealogy of delegation and treats as a rational choice what is in fact a historically sedimented structure of extraction. African scholars such as Aning and Danso emphasize that African non-state actors possess political projects that are not reducible to external manipulation; the "autonomy" that Western analysts attribute to proxies is, from the African vantage, often a recognition of agency that was always present but systematically denied. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics further illuminates how proxy warfare in African contexts operates through the instrumentalization of bodies and territories, with the principal's distance from violence enabling a moral disengagement that the agent cannot afford. The African perspective thus reveals what Western principal-agent theory occludes: that delegation is not merely a strategic choice but a mode of governance with colonial origins, and that the "agent" is never merely an instrument but a political actor whose autonomy is constitutive, not incidental. The African view also cautions against overestimating external control: in cases from the Congo wars to the Sahel insurgencies, local actors have repeatedly demonstrated that their agendas diverge from those of their supposed principals, and that the principal's leverage is far more limited than strategic-studies frameworks assume.

Chinese: China's perspective on proxy warfare is shaped by its non-intervention doctrine, its critique of Western regime-change operations, and its emphasis on state sovereignty. Beijing views proxy warfare as a tool of Western hegemony that destabilizes regions, disrupts economic corridors, and threatens Chinese interests—particularly energy imports and Belt and Road Initiative investments. Chinese strategic thinkers such as Yan Xuetong and Wang Jisi frame proxy warfare as a symptom of great-power competition in which the United States and its allies use non-state actors to undermine sovereign governments. China's own approach favors economic statecraft—infrastructure investment, trade agreements, and diplomatic mediation—over military delegation, though it maintains security partnerships with states and has been accused of using economic leverage as indirect influence. On proxy warfare specifically, China positions itself as a neutral mediator, as in its brokering of the Saudi-Iran rapprochement in 2023. The Chinese perspective contributes an emphasis on sovereignty and economic stability but occludes its own tolerance of authoritarian partners when they serve Chinese interests and its reluctance to acknowledge that economic leverage can function as a form of indirect control analogous to proxy warfare.

Russian: Russia's perspective is informed by its extensive experience with proxy and "hybrid" warfare, from the Wagner Group's operations in Africa and the Middle East to its support for separatist militias in eastern Ukraine and its backing of the Assad regime in Syria. Russian strategic culture, drawing on Soviet-era "active measures," treats the use of non-state actors as a legitimate and necessary tool of statecraft in a competitive international system. Russian thinkers such as Karaganov and Trenin frame proxy warfare as an instrument of great-power competition that Russia must master to counter Western dominance. Moscow's support for Iran-aligned groups in the Levant and its own proxy deployments are justified as defensive measures against NATO expansion and Western interventionism. The Russian perspective contributes an understanding of

proxy warfare as embedded in great-power competition rather than as a regional pathology, but it occludes the destabilizing and humanitarian consequences of its own proxy operations and tends to treat all Western-supported non-state actors as illegitimate while legitimizing Russian-supported ones.

Western: The Western perspective, rooted in principal-agent theory and strategic studies, treats proxy warfare as a rational cost-benefit calculation by states seeking to project power without direct military commitment. Western analysts such as Mumford, Juneau, and Byman emphasize control problems, escalation risks, and the potential for "blowback." The Western view prioritizes freedom of navigation, counter-terrorism, alliance management, and the protection of commercial interests. It tends to frame proxies primarily as security threats—Hezbollah, the Houthis, Hamas—and to emphasize military and sanctions-based responses. The Western perspective contributes rigorous analytical frameworks and extensive empirical documentation of proxy networks, but it occludes the political legitimacy that proxies often enjoy in their local contexts and tends to reduce non-state actors to instruments of hostile states, missing their autonomous political projects and the historical conditions that produced them.

UN: The UN perspective frames proxy warfare through international humanitarian law, state sovereignty, and Security Council resolutions. The UN emphasizes the protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and the legal accountability of states for proxy actions under the law of state responsibility. UN panels of experts—such as the Panel of Experts on Yemen—document proxy support, arms transfers, and violations of sanctions regimes. The UN perspective contributes a legal-normative framework that holds states accountable for proxy actions and prioritizes civilian protection, but it occludes power asymmetries in the Security Council that prevent consistent enforcement and struggles to address non-state actors that do not fit state-centric legal categories. The UN framework also tends to treat proxy warfare as a violation of sovereignty rather than as a structural feature of the international system, limiting its analytical reach.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — The Levantine Theater: Lebanon, Syria, and the Hezbollah-Israel Dynamic

Bolded Causal Claim: The Levantine theater is best understood not as a collection of separate civil wars and border conflicts but as a single, structurally coupled arena in which Iran's forward-defense doctrine and Israel's red-line doctrine are mediated through non-state proxies, above all Hezbollah, with Syrian territory serving as the connective tissue; the resulting equilibrium is a deterrence relationship that is stable only when both sides can read each other's escalation thresholds, and fragile when ambiguity, domestic politics, or third-party intervention obscure them.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with principal-agent delegation. Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, particularly the Quds Force, has historically provided Hezbollah with funding, weapons, training, and strategic guidance, while Hezbollah retains substantial operational autonomy in Lebanon and, at times, in Syria. This is not a simple chain of command; it is a delegated partnership in which the principal gains deniability and geographic reach, while the agent gains resources and political protection. Mumford's work on proxy warfare emphasizes that proxy relationships are shaped by the principal's need for plausible deniability and the agent's need for survival, producing bargaining rather than obedience. Juneau's analysis of Iran's proxy strategy similarly stresses that Tehran's regional influence depends on partners whose interests overlap with but are not identical to Iran's, creating both leverage and risk.

Hezbollah's institutionalization is the second mechanism. Since the 1980s, and especially after the 2006 war with Israel, Hezbollah has become a hybrid actor: a Lebanese political party, a social-service provider, and

a military force with capabilities that exceed those of the Lebanese state. This hybridity matters because it blurs the distinction between state and non-state violence. Israel cannot treat Hezbollah as a mere terrorist group without ignoring its domestic legitimacy; Iran cannot treat it as a simple instrument without ignoring its Lebanese constituency and its own strategic calculus. The agent's autonomy is therefore not a deviation from proxy theory but a condition of its effectiveness.

Syria provides the third mechanism: strategic depth and logistical corridor. Before 2011, Syria was Iran's only Arab state ally and a crucial transit route for weapons to Hezbollah. The Syrian civil war transformed this relationship. Iran and Hezbollah intervened to preserve the Assad regime, not only to protect an ally but to prevent the emergence of a hostile Sunni-dominated state that could sever the land bridge to Lebanon. This intervention militarized the Levantine theater and turned Syria into a testing ground for Iranian-backed militias, Russian airpower, and Israeli strikes. Israel's "campaign between wars"—repeated strikes on Iranian and Hezbollah assets in Syria—was designed to prevent the transfer of precision-guided munitions and to degrade capabilities without triggering full-scale war. The mechanism here is cumulative denial: small, frequent uses of force intended to shift the cost-benefit calculus of the adversary without crossing the threshold that would justify massive retaliation.

Deterrence operates through mutual vulnerability and ambiguity. Hezbollah's rocket and missile arsenal, including precision-guided systems, threatens Israeli population centers and infrastructure; Israel's airpower and intelligence dominance threaten Hezbollah's leadership, weapons depots, and Lebanese infrastructure. Each side's deterrent rests on the credibility of retaliation, but credibility is undermined by the very ambiguity that makes proxy warfare attractive. Iran can deny direct responsibility for Hezbollah's actions; Hezbollah can calibrate attacks to avoid appearing as an Iranian puppet; Israel can strike in Syria while claiming self-defense. The result is a deterrence equilibrium that is informationally demanding: it requires each side to infer the other's red lines from signals that are deliberately noisy.

Domestic politics further complicates the mechanism. Hezbollah's legitimacy in Lebanon depends partly on its resistance narrative, but also on its role in Lebanese politics and social services. Israeli decision-making is shaped by coalition politics, military doctrine, and public tolerance for casualties. Syrian state collapse removed a central authority that once regulated escalation. The Levantine theater is therefore not only an interstate deterrence game; it is a multi-level system in which local actors can trigger or constrain escalation.

Scope Conditions: This model applies most clearly when three conditions hold. First, the proxy agent must possess sufficient autonomy to act as a strategic actor in its own right, rather than as a mere extension of the principal. Hezbollah's political and military institutionalization satisfies this condition; smaller, more dependent militias do not. Second, the theater must contain a shared geographic space—here, Lebanon and Syria—where the principal's interests, the agent's survival, and the adversary's security concerns overlap. Third, escalation thresholds must be partially legible: each side must be able to estimate what level of force will provoke retaliation. When thresholds become illegible—because of leadership changes, intelligence failures, or domestic crises—the model predicts not stability but rapid escalation.

The model does not apply well to cases where the proxy is fully controlled by the principal, or where the adversary lacks the capability to impose costs on the principal directly. It also struggles to explain periods of genuine cooperation or détente, because it foregrounds conflict and delegation. Finally, it risks overstating Iranian control over Hezbollah and understating Hezbollah's Lebanese agency.

Observable Implications: If the model is correct, one should observe several patterns. Hezbollah's military buildup should correlate with Iranian strategic priorities but not mirror them exactly; there should be

visible bargaining over timing and targets. Israeli strikes in Syria should increase when precision-guided munition transfers are detected, but should avoid direct attacks on Iranian soil unless escalation thresholds are crossed. Hezbollah's rhetoric should oscillate between resistance and Lebanese state-building, reflecting its dual identity. Syrian territory should remain a contested logistical space rather than a stable Iranian corridor. Deterrence should hold during periods of clear signaling and break down during periods of ambiguity, such as leadership transitions or major regional shocks.

One should also observe that civilian harm is not incidental but structurally embedded: because proxies operate within populated areas and adversaries target infrastructure, the Levantine theater produces recurrent humanitarian costs. This is a testable implication that distinguishes structural explanations from purely strategic ones.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African perspective (primary): African scholarship approaches the Levantine theater less as a unique Middle Eastern configuration than as a variant of a recurring pattern: external powers cultivating local armed actors to project influence while avoiding direct accountability. From this vantage, Hezbollah's hybridity resembles the militarized political economies that African scholars have analyzed in contexts such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, and the Sahel, where armed groups become embedded in social and political life rather than remaining external to it. Bayart's concept of extraversion helps explain how local actors leverage external patronage to consolidate domestic power; Mamdani's work on indirect rule illuminates how colonial and postcolonial states govern through delegated violence; Fanon's analysis of colonial violence reminds us that armed resistance can be simultaneously emancipatory and destructive. Rodney and Nkrumah frame proxy warfare as a continuation of neo-colonial extraction, in which regional powers and global hegemons compete over strategic corridors while local populations absorb the costs. Nyerere's non-alignment and Cabral's emphasis on social emancipation provide normative counterpoints: they suggest that security cannot be reduced to deterrence between armed actors, but must include popular sovereignty and social development. Grovogui's critique of international law highlights how legal categories such as "state responsibility" and "non-state actor" often reflect Western state-centric assumptions that struggle to capture hybrid authorities like Hezbollah. Mbembe's necropolitics draws attention to the distribution of death and precarity across the Levant, while Tamale and Oyěwùmí remind us that gendered and epistemic hierarchies shape whose suffering is visible in security discourse. Aning and Danso's work on African agency suggests that African states are not merely recipients of Levantine spillover but active interpreters of proxy warfare, often emphasizing sovereignty, non-interference, and the dangers of external militarization. The African perspective thus reveals what the other traditions often miss: proxy warfare is not only a strategic interaction among states and militias, but a social and political process that reconfigures authority, legitimacy, and survival at the local level. It also warns that deterrence models can normalize permanent militarization by treating armed hybrid actors as stable features of the regional order.

Chinese perspective: China views the Levantine theater primarily through the lens of economic security and regional stability. Beijing's interests include energy imports, Belt and Road connectivity, and the safety of Chinese nationals and investments. China generally supports state sovereignty and non-interference, which leads it to emphasize the territorial integrity of Syria and Lebanon and to resist external regime change. Chinese analysts often criticize Western military interventions for destabilizing the region and creating vacuums filled by extremism. At the same time, China has limited appetite for direct military involvement and prefers diplomatic mediation, as seen in its support for Saudi-Iranian rapprochement. The Chinese perspective contributes an economic and developmental framing that highlights the costs of prolonged conflict for trade and infrastructure, but it occludes the internal political dynamics of Hezbollah and the specific security dilemmas facing Israel, treating them as secondary to great-power stability.

Russian perspective: Russia frames the Levantine theater as a theater of multipolar competition and anti-Western resistance. Its military intervention in Syria from 2015 onward was justified as counterterrorism and state sovereignty, but it also served to preserve a strategic foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean, protect arms markets, and challenge US dominance. Moscow has maintained complex relationships with both Iran and Israel, seeking to balance them while supporting the Assad regime. Russian analysts often portray Western support for regime change as the root cause of regional disorder and view Hezbollah as a legitimate resistance force against Israeli occupation. The Russian perspective contributes an emphasis on state sovereignty and great-power balancing, but it occludes the humanitarian costs of the Syrian war and the coercive dimensions of Iranian proxy support, while overstating the coherence of an anti-Western bloc.

Western perspective: Western, especially US and Israeli, analysis treats the Levantine theater as a problem of Iranian expansion, terrorism, and deterrence. The focus is on Hezbollah's military capabilities, Iran's regional network, and the need to prevent escalation while maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge. Western scholars and policymakers debate whether deterrence, containment, or limited strikes best manage the threat. The perspective contributes detailed military and intelligence analysis and a strong emphasis on alliance security, but it often occludes Lebanese domestic politics, Syrian social fragmentation, and the ways in which Western interventions contributed to regional instability. It also tends to frame Hezbollah primarily as an Iranian instrument, underestimating its local legitimacy and autonomy.

UN perspective: The UN approaches the Levantine theater through Security Council resolutions, peacekeeping, and humanitarian law. Resolution 1701, which ended the 2006 Lebanon war, calls for disarmament of armed groups south of the Litani River and an enhanced UNIFIL presence; Resolution 2254 outlines a political process for Syria. The UN emphasizes civilian protection, humanitarian access, and state responsibility for proxy actions. Its panels and commissions document arms flows and violations. The UN perspective contributes legal accountability and humanitarian norms, but it occludes power asymmetries in the Security Council, struggles to enforce resolutions against powerful states, and treats proxy warfare as a violation of sovereignty rather than a structural feature of regional order.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Yemeni Maritime Asymmetry: The Houthis and the Red Sea Shipping Crisis (2023–Present)

Bolded Causal Claim: The Houthi campaign against Red Sea shipping shows that maritime chokepoint coercion can be executed by a non-state actor without a blue-water navy, because cheap, deniable, land-based anti-ship systems can exploit the geographic concentration and commercial predictability of global shipping; the result is a cost asymmetry in which a localized insurgency imposes systemic costs on global commerce and forces multinational naval responses that may not restore deterrence.

Mechanism: The first mechanism is geographic concentration. The Bab el-Mandeb strait and the southern Red Sea form a narrow maritime corridor connecting the Indian Ocean to the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. Commercial shipping is not randomly distributed; it follows scheduled routes, predictable chokepoints, and just-in-time logistics. This concentration means that a relatively small number of attacks can disrupt a large share of global trade. Lloyd's List shipping data and other maritime tracking sources have documented sharp rerouting and volume declines during the Houthi campaign, as carriers diverted around the Cape of Good Hope. The mechanism is not merely physical destruction but uncertainty: insurers, shippers, and ports respond to risk perception, not just to realized attacks.

The second mechanism is cost asymmetry. The Houthis have used drones, cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and unmanned surface vessels—systems that are far cheaper than the naval assets required to intercept

them. A state or coalition defending shipping must maintain continuous patrols, air defense, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance across a vast area. The attacker can choose the time and place of engagement; the defender must be everywhere. This is a classic asymmetric warfare dynamic, but applied to maritime commerce rather than to territory. The cost ratio favors the attacker even when most attacks are intercepted, because the defender bears the cumulative cost of readiness and the attacker bears only the cost of occasional launches.

The third mechanism is deniability and principal-agent ambiguity. Iran has provided the Houthis with weapons, training, and intelligence, but the Houthis retain their own political agenda, rooted in Yemeni grievances and Zaydi identity. This ambiguity complicates deterrence. If the Houthis are treated as Iranian proxies, retaliation against Iran risks escalation; if they are treated as autonomous actors, deterrence must target a dispersed, resilient insurgency. The principal-agent relationship is thus both a source of Houthi capability and a shield against direct retaliation. Juneau's analysis of Iran's proxy strategy is relevant here: Tehran benefits from partners that can act without its direct command, but it also faces the risk that their actions will trigger responses it cannot control.

The fourth mechanism is the insurance and commercial feedback loop. Maritime insurance premiums, war-risk designations, and charter rates respond to perceived threat. When the Red Sea was designated a high-risk area, costs rose for all shippers, including those not directly attacked. Some carriers suspended transits entirely; others accepted higher costs and passed them to consumers. The mechanism converts localized violence into global price signals. This is why a non-state actor in Yemen can affect inflation and supply chains in Europe, Asia, and Africa without controlling territory beyond its coastal launch sites.

The fifth mechanism is naval response and its limits. Multinational operations, including US- and UK-led strikes and European naval missions, aimed to degrade Houthi capabilities and protect shipping. But naval power is optimized for state adversaries and open-ocean control, not for suppressing dispersed land-based launchers in rugged terrain. Strikes can destroy some assets, but the Houthis can regenerate capacity, exploit civilian infrastructure, and frame attacks as solidarity with Palestinians. The mechanism of deterrence by punishment is therefore weakened by the attacker's resilience and political narrative. The result is a stalemate in which shipping is partially protected but not fully restored, and the conflict persists as a chronic cost rather than a decisive battle.

Scope Conditions: This model applies when four conditions hold. First, the chokepoint must be narrow enough that shipping cannot easily disperse, yet large enough that naval patrols cannot cover all approaches. The Bab el-Mandeb and southern Red Sea fit this condition. Second, the attacker must possess low-cost, land-based anti-ship capabilities and the ability to regenerate them. Third, the global commercial system must be sufficiently integrated that rerouting imposes significant costs. Fourth, the principal-agent relationship must be ambiguous enough to complicate retaliation but strong enough to sustain capability.

The model does not apply to chokepoints where the attacker lacks land-based access, where shipping is less concentrated, or where naval dominance can be established at acceptable cost. It also does not imply that all non-state actors can replicate the Houthi campaign; the specific combination of Iranian support, Yemeni geography, and Red Sea commercial density is unusual. Finally, the model risks overstating Houthi autonomy and understating the degree to which their campaign is shaped by Iranian strategic interests.

Observable Implications: If the model is correct, one should observe several patterns. Shipping volumes through the Red Sea and Suez should decline during periods of intensified Houthi attacks and partially recover during lulls, but not return to baseline if risk perception remains high. Insurance premiums and war-risk

surcharges should spike faster than physical damage, reflecting the uncertainty mechanism. Naval deployments should increase but should not fully suppress attacks, because the attacker retains land-based launch capacity. Houthi rhetoric should link Red Sea attacks to broader regional causes, such as the Gaza war, to sustain political legitimacy. Iranian officials should deny direct control while signaling support, preserving ambiguity. African, European, and Asian economies should experience secondary effects through fuel prices, freight rates, and food costs, even if they are not direct participants.

The model also implies that deterrence will be partial and cyclical: periods of reduced attacks will be interpreted as success, followed by renewed attacks when the attacker perceives that costs have shifted back in its favor.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African perspective (primary): African scholarship and policy analysis approach the Red Sea crisis not as a distant maritime episode but as a direct shock to African economies and security. The Red Sea and Bab el-Mandeb are adjacent to the Horn of Africa; disruptions affect ports in Djibouti, Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia, as well as landlocked states such as Ethiopia that depend on maritime access. African economies face higher freight and insurance costs, fuel price volatility, and potential food insecurity, particularly in import-dependent states. From an African vantage, the crisis reveals the vulnerability of "blue economy" strategies that depend on external shipping lanes and foreign naval protection. Bayart's extraversion helps explain how African ports and trade systems are integrated into global commerce on terms that expose them to shocks they do not control. Rodney's underdevelopment thesis and Nkrumah's neo-colonialism frame the crisis as another instance in which African economies absorb the costs of great-power and regional rivalries. Mamdani's analysis of state and non-state violence is relevant to the Houthi movement itself, which emerged from Yemeni political and social grievances rather than from a purely external script. Fanon's insights on anti-colonial violence complicate simple condemnation of Houthi attacks, while Cabral's emphasis on social emancipation warns against reducing Yemeni politics to proxy dynamics. Grovogui's critique of international law highlights how UNCLOS and freedom-of-navigation norms are often enforced selectively, privileging commercial powers over coastal and littoral states. Mbembe's necropolitics draws attention to the human costs of maritime militarization, including civilian casualties in Yemen and the precarity of African migrant and fishing communities. Tamale and Oyěwùmí remind us that gendered labor and informal economies are often invisible in maritime security metrics. Aning and Danso's work on African agency underscores that African states and the African Union have their own maritime security frameworks, such as the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy, and are not merely passive victims of Red Sea disruption. The African perspective thus reveals what other traditions miss: the Red Sea crisis is not only a problem of global shipping or Iranian proxy warfare, but a test of African economic resilience and maritime sovereignty in a system where African states bear costs without controlling the levers of escalation.

Chinese perspective: China has significant economic stakes in Red Sea shipping, including energy imports, manufactured exports, and Belt and Road investments. Chinese analysts often frame the crisis as a consequence of regional instability and Western military interventions, while emphasizing the need for diplomatic solutions and respect for sovereignty. Beijing has deployed naval assets to the Gulf of Aden for anti-piracy missions and has a base in Djibouti, reflecting a growing but cautious maritime presence. China's Gulf security critique stresses that US-led naval operations may protect shipping in the short term but do not address root causes, and may exacerbate regional tensions. The Chinese perspective contributes an economic and developmental framing and a preference for multilateralism, but it occludes the coercive dimensions of Iranian support for the Houthis and tends to treat freedom of navigation as subordinate to state sovereignty and non-interference.

Russian perspective: Russia frames Red Sea disruption as both a symptom of Western policy failures and an opportunity to weaken US hegemony. Russian analysts often highlight the costs of US naval operations and question their legitimacy, while portraying Houthi actions as resistance to Western-backed regional orders. Moscow has limited direct economic exposure compared to China or Europe, but it benefits from any erosion of US maritime dominance and from higher energy prices that can result from supply disruptions. The Russian perspective contributes an anti-Western framing that questions the universality of freedom-of-navigation norms, but it occludes the humanitarian costs in Yemen, the economic harm to developing states, and the fact that disruption also affects Russian trade and partners.

Western perspective: Western analysis centers on freedom of navigation, the protection of global commerce, and the limits of deterrence. The US and its allies have conducted strikes and naval patrols to degrade Houthi capabilities and reassure shippers. Western scholars debate whether the campaign reflects a failure of deterrence, the inherent difficulty of coercing a resilient non-state actor, or the need for a broader strategy addressing Iranian support. The perspective contributes operational detail and a strong normative commitment to open sea lanes, but it often occludes the Yemeni political context, the economic spillovers to non-Western states, and the possibility that military responses may prolong rather than resolve the crisis.

UN perspective: The UN approaches the Red Sea crisis through UNCLOS, humanitarian access to Yemen, and Security Council resolutions. The UN emphasizes the protection of civilians, the delivery of aid, and the legal framework governing maritime security. Panels of experts document arms transfers and sanctions violations. The UN perspective contributes a legal-normative framework that holds states accountable for proxy support and prioritizes civilian protection, but it occludes power asymmetries in the Security Council, struggles to enforce resolutions against non-state actors, and treats maritime disruption primarily as a violation of international law rather than as a structural feature of asymmetric conflict.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Chokepoints: Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Vulnerability of Global Supply Chains

Bolded Causal Claim: Maritime chokepoints concentrate a disproportionate share of global trade into geographically narrow passages, creating structural vulnerabilities whereby localized conflict, accident, or coercion can generate cascading economic disruption far exceeding the immediate theater of operations.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three interlocking channels: volume concentration, route inelasticity, and market amplification. First, volume concentration: the Strait of Hormuz carries approximately 20–21 million barrels per day of crude oil and condensate, representing roughly one-fifth of global petroleum consumption, while the Bab el-Mandeb strait handles approximately 10 percent of global seaborne trade and a significant share of container traffic between Asia and Europe (EIA Hormuz transit data; Lloyd's List shipping data). When a single passage carries such a share of global flow, any disruption—whether military, accidental, or coercive—immediately removes that volume from the global supply chain. Second, route inelasticity: alternative routes around chokepoints are either nonexistent (Hormuz has no practical maritime alternative for Gulf oil exports) or enormously costly (rerouting around the Cape of Good Hope adds 10–14 days and substantial fuel costs to Asia–Europe voyages). The Suez Canal–Bab el-Mandeb corridor has no equivalent alternative; the Cape route increases transit distance by roughly 40 percent. Third, market amplification: shipping markets operate on thin margins and just-in-time logistics. Insurance premiums, freight rates, and inventory buffers amplify physical disruptions into price signals. When Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping escalated in late 2023, war risk insurance premiums for Red Sea transits surged from approxi-

mately 0.05 percent to 0.5–1 percent of hull value, and some insurers withdrew coverage entirely, effectively closing the route to commercial traffic regardless of physical threat levels (Crisis Group Red Sea reports). The mechanism is not merely that ships cannot pass; it is that the financial and contractual infrastructure of global shipping makes passage economically irrational even when physically possible.

The geographic logic of chokepoints is ancient, but their contemporary significance derives from the scale and speed of globalized supply chains. The Strait of Hormuz, at its narrowest point approximately 21 nautical miles wide with shipping lanes of only 2 miles in each direction, separates the Persian Gulf from the Gulf of Oman. The Bab el-Mandeb, between Yemen and Djibouti, is approximately 18 miles wide at its narrowest. These dimensions mean that naval forces, mines, missiles, or even small boats can threaten commercial traffic across the entire passage. The concentration is not accidental but structural: geography funnels maritime traffic, and economic optimization reinforces the funnel by routing the maximum volume through the shortest path. The result is a system in which efficiency and vulnerability are two sides of the same coin. As Juneau (2020) has argued in the context of Iranian strategy, chokepoints are not merely geographic features but strategic assets whose value derives from the dependence of others on their continued openness.

The historical record reinforces this mechanism. The 1980s Tanker War, in which Iran and Iraq attacked each other's oil shipping, demonstrated that even limited disruption to Hormuz traffic could spike global oil prices and trigger international naval intervention. The 2019 tanker seizures showed that Iran could selectively disrupt Hormuz traffic without closing the strait entirely, using a calibrated approach that maximized coercive leverage while minimizing the risk of full-scale military response. In each case, the mechanism operated through the same channels: volume concentration made the disruption significant, route inelasticity prevented easy substitution, and market amplification translated physical events into economic and political consequences.

Scope Conditions: The chokepoint vulnerability mechanism operates under specific conditions that determine whether disruption is localized or systemic. First, the volume share must exceed the absorptive capacity of alternative routes. If global shipping can reroute without significant cost, the chokepoint loses its coercive leverage. The Cape of Good Hope route, while costly, can absorb some Red Sea traffic, but not all of it without severe congestion at alternative ports and increased freight rates. Second, the insurance market must be sensitive to threat perception. If insurers continue to cover transits at manageable premiums, physical threats do not translate into economic disruption. The Red Sea crisis demonstrated that insurance markets can be more disruptive than physical attacks: the mere threat of Houthi strikes caused premium spikes that made transits uneconomical. Third, the naval response must be insufficient to guarantee safe passage. If a credible naval escort can protect commercial traffic, the chokepoint's vulnerability is mitigated. The US-led Operation Prosperity Guardian and the subsequent EU naval mission (Aspides) attempted this but could not fully restore commercial confidence, in part because the threat environment—anti-ship ballistic missiles, drones, and small-boat attacks—exceeded the defensive capacity of escort vessels. Fourth, the commodity in question must be non-substitutable in the short term. Oil and LNG from the Gulf have limited short-term substitutes; containerized manufactured goods from Asia have somewhat more flexibility but still face severe delays.

The mechanism weakens when: (a) alternative energy sources or suppliers reduce dependence on Gulf oil, as the shale revolution partially did for the United States; (b) strategic petroleum reserves buffer short-term disruptions; (c) shipping companies have diversified routes and inventory; (d) diplomatic or military deterrence prevents attacks. The mechanism strengthens when: (a) global supply chains are optimized for efficiency over resilience, as they were in the pre-pandemic era; (b) insurance markets are risk-averse and quick

to withdraw coverage; (c) naval forces are stretched across multiple theaters; (d) non-state actors possess cheap, effective anti-ship capabilities that outpace defensive systems.

Observable Implications: The chokepoint mechanism generates testable predictions. First, shipping volume data should show sharp declines in chokepoint transits during crises, with corresponding increases in alternative routes. Lloyd's List data from the Red Sea crisis showed Suez Canal transits dropping by over 50 percent in early 2024, with Cape of Good Hope transits increasing correspondingly. Second, insurance premiums should spike before or concurrent with physical attacks, reflecting market anticipation. Third, freight rates on affected routes should increase, with pass-through to consumer prices. Fourth, strategic petroleum reserve releases should correlate with Hormuz disruption fears. Fifth, naval deployment counts should increase in response to chokepoint threats, reflecting the securitization dynamic addressed in Key Idea 5.

For Hormuz specifically, EIA data shows that approximately 20 percent of global oil consumption transits the strait, with Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the UAE, Kuwait, and Iran as the primary exporters. Any closure, even temporary, would remove roughly 20 million barrels per day from global supply—far exceeding the spare capacity of alternative producers. The 2019 tanker seizures demonstrated that Iran could selectively disrupt Hormuz traffic without closing the strait entirely, using a calibrated approach that maximized coercive leverage while minimizing the risk of full-scale military response. Mumford (2013), in his analysis of proxy warfare, notes that chokepoint disruption is a form of indirect coercion that allows weaker actors to impose costs on stronger ones without direct military confrontation—a logic that applies equally to state and non-state actors operating in maritime chokepoints.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African perspective: The African vantage point on chokepoints centers on the Bab el-Mandeb and the Red Sea as arteries connecting African economies to global markets, not merely as passages for Asian–European trade. For Djibouti, Eritrea, Sudan, and Somalia, Red Sea shipping is the primary conduit for imports, exports, and humanitarian aid. The Houthi crisis disrupted African trade, increased food and fuel prices, and complicated humanitarian delivery to conflict zones. African scholars and policymakers emphasize that chokepoint vulnerability is experienced asymmetrically: African economies bear the costs of disruption (higher import prices, supply shortages) without possessing the naval or diplomatic capacity to influence security outcomes. The African perspective reveals that chokepoint geopolitics is not only about great-power competition but about the structural vulnerability of peripheral economies to disruptions they cannot control. It also highlights the irony that African ports—Djibouti, Berbera, Mombasa—have become strategic assets in great-power competition, with foreign military bases proliferating along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coasts, often without corresponding African agency in security governance. Bayart's (2009) analysis of extraversion and the politics of the belly illuminates how African states navigate chokepoint geopolitics as both victims of disruption and hosts of foreign military power, extracting rents from bases while ceding sovereignty over maritime security.

Chinese perspective: China's interest in chokepoints is primarily economic and strategic. As the world's largest oil importer and a major trading nation, China depends on Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb for energy security and commercial access. China has invested heavily in port infrastructure along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden (Djibouti, Gwadar, Hambantota) as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, creating a network of commercial and potential naval facilities. China's perspective emphasizes freedom of navigation and the protection of commercial shipping, but it critiques Western naval dominance in these waters as serving US hegemony rather than global commerce. China's naval presence in the Gulf of Aden (anti-piracy missions

since 2008) represents a gradual expansion of maritime security capacity, but Beijing remains cautious about direct confrontation with US or allied forces. The Chinese perspective contributes an economic-security framing that treats chokepoints as critical infrastructure requiring protection, but it occludes the coercive potential of its own port investments and the strategic ambiguity of its naval expansion.

Russian perspective: Russia views chokepoint disruption through the lens of anti-Western geopolitics and energy competition. The Red Sea crisis, from Moscow's perspective, weakens Western economies by increasing shipping costs and energy prices, while Russia's own oil exports (primarily via Baltic and Black Sea routes, plus Arctic) are less affected. Russia has supported or at least not opposed Houthi actions, framing them as legitimate resistance to Western-Israeli aggression. Russia's perspective emphasizes the hypocrisy of Western freedom-of-navigation rhetoric, given US and Israeli military actions in the region. Moscow also sees chokepoint vulnerability as an argument for multipolar maritime security arrangements that reduce Western naval dominance. The Russian perspective contributes a counter-hegemonic framing that questions Western monopoly on maritime security governance, but it occludes Russia's own interest in energy price manipulation and its limited capacity to protect commercial shipping.

Western perspective: The Western perspective frames chokepoints as critical infrastructure requiring protection through naval power and international law. Freedom of navigation is treated as a foundational principle of the liberal international order, and chokepoint disruption is seen as a threat to global economic stability. The US, UK, and EU have deployed naval forces to protect shipping (Operation Prosperity Guardian, Operation Aspides), reflecting a commitment to maintaining open sea lanes. The Western perspective emphasizes deterrence, military capability, and alliance coordination. It contributes a robust security framework and operational capacity, but it occludes the economic interests driving naval presence (protecting Western commercial shipping and energy access), the historical role of Western powers in creating regional instability, and the limitations of military solutions to politically rooted conflicts.

UN perspective: The UN approaches chokepoints through UNCLOS, which guarantees transit passage through straits used for international navigation. The UN emphasizes the legal framework governing maritime security, the protection of civilian shipping, and the humanitarian consequences of disruption. UN Security Council resolutions address piracy, arms trafficking, and threats to navigation. The UN perspective contributes a legal-normative framework that holds states accountable for maritime security, but it occludes enforcement gaps (the UN lacks naval forces), the political dynamics of Security Council decision-making, and the structural inequalities in global shipping that make some states more vulnerable to disruption than others.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The Securitization of Maritime Chokepoints: The Link Between Regional Conflict and Global Commerce

Bolded Causal Claim: The framing of maritime chokepoints as existential security threats—through securitization speech acts by state and non-state actors—transforms regional conflicts into global security priorities, justifying extraordinary military measures and reshaping the political economy of affected regions in ways that often outlast the original crisis.

Mechanism: The mechanism draws on securitization theory (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998) and operates through four stages: (1) threat construction, (2) audience acceptance, (3) emergency measures, and (4) institutionalization. First, threat construction: political actors frame chokepoint disruption not as a commercial or criminal problem but as an existential threat to national or international security. The Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping were framed by US and UK officials as threats to "global commerce" and "freedom

of navigation," elevating a regional conflict to a global security priority. Similarly, Iranian threats to close Hormuz have been framed as threats to global energy security. Second, audience acceptance: the securitization succeeds when relevant audiences (domestic publics, international organizations, allied states) accept the threat framing. The Red Sea crisis achieved rapid audience acceptance because of the visible economic impact (shipping rerouting, price increases) and the symbolic resonance of attacks on commercial vessels. Third, emergency measures: once securitized, the issue moves from normal politics to emergency politics, justifying military responses, sanctions, and exceptional legal measures. Operation Prosperity Guardian, the US–UK strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen, and the designation of the Houthis as a terrorist organization all followed from securitization. Fourth, institutionalization: the emergency measures become normalized, creating permanent security architectures (naval bases, patrol regimes, intelligence sharing) that persist beyond the immediate crisis. The Gulf of Aden anti-piracy missions (2008–present) illustrate this institutionalization: what began as an emergency response to Somali piracy became a permanent multinational naval presence.

The mechanism is not automatic. Securitization can fail if audiences reject the threat framing, if the economic impact is insufficient to mobilize political will, or if alternative framings (humanitarian, developmental) compete successfully. The securitization of chokepoints is also contested: some actors frame disruption as a consequence of regional conflict requiring political solutions, while others frame it as a security threat requiring military response. The competition between these framings determines whether the response is diplomatic or military, and whether the affected region is treated as a security theater or a development challenge.

The link between regional conflict and global commerce operates through what might be called "commercial securitization": the process by which threats to commercial shipping are translated into security priorities that justify military intervention. This translation depends on the concentration of global trade in chokepoints (Key Idea 4) and the political economy of maritime commerce. When shipping companies, insurers, and port operators face disruption, they lobby governments for protection, creating a political constituency for securitization. The result is a feedback loop: regional conflict disrupts shipping, shipping disruption generates economic costs, economic costs generate political pressure, political pressure generates military response, and military response may escalate regional conflict. Mumford (2013) identifies this as a characteristic of proxy warfare in the maritime domain: the indirect nature of the conflict allows the securitizing actor to frame its response as defensive rather than offensive, obscuring the political interests driving intervention.

Scope Conditions: Securitization succeeds under specific conditions. First, the economic impact must be visible and significant enough to mobilize political will. The Red Sea crisis achieved this through measurable shipping declines and price increases. Second, there must be a credible military response available. If naval forces cannot effectively protect shipping, securitization may produce frustration rather than action. Third, the framing must resonate with dominant security narratives. "Freedom of navigation" resonates in Western strategic culture; "resistance to oppression" resonates in Houthi and Iranian narratives. Fourth, institutional pathways must exist for converting securitization into action (UN Security Council, alliance structures, national security councils).

Securitization fails or is contested when: (a) the economic impact is diffuse or delayed; (b) military response is infeasible or counterproductive; (c) competing framings (humanitarian, economic, diplomatic) dominate public discourse; (d) the securitizing actor lacks credibility. The securitization of Hormuz, for example, has been partially contested by states that view US military presence as itself a source of regional instability. Juneau (2020) notes that Iranian securitization of the Gulf—framing US naval presence as a threat to regional security—has achieved limited audience acceptance beyond Iran's immediate allies, illustrating the

importance of credibility and institutional pathways in securitization success.

Observable Implications: The securitization mechanism generates testable predictions. First, policy documents and official statements should show a shift from commercial or criminal framing to security framing during crises. Second, military deployments and budgets should increase in response to securitization. Third, legal designations (terrorist organizations, sanctions) should follow securitization. Fourth, the institutionalization of security measures should persist beyond the immediate crisis. Fifth, the political economy of affected regions should shift toward security-sector dependence, with foreign military bases and security assistance becoming dominant economic activities.

The Red Sea crisis provides clear evidence: US and UK officials framed Houthi attacks as threats to global commerce and international security; military strikes followed; the Houthis were redesignated as a terrorist organization; and naval deployments expanded. The institutionalization is visible in the continued presence of multinational naval forces in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, even as commercial shipping has partially returned to the route. Crisis Group Red Sea reports document how the securitization of the Red Sea has transformed Yemen from a humanitarian crisis into a security theater, with military responses taking precedence over diplomatic solutions.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African perspective: The African vantage point reveals that the securitization of maritime chokepoints often occurs without African participation in the security governance that follows. African states bear the economic costs of disruption—higher fuel and food prices, supply chain delays—while external powers make security decisions that affect African waters. The proliferation of foreign military bases along the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coasts (US, China, France, Japan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkey) reflects the securitization of African maritime space by non-African actors. African scholars such as Aning and Danso have argued that maritime security in African waters should be governed by African institutions, not external naval powers. The African perspective also highlights the humanitarian dimension: securitization of the Red Sea has complicated humanitarian access to Yemen and Sudan, as naval blockades and security restrictions impede aid delivery. The securitization framework, from an African vantage, often prioritizes commercial shipping over human security, revealing a hierarchy of values that reflects global power asymmetries rather than African priorities. Grovogui's (2006) critique of the international as a space of power rather than justice illuminates how securitization of African maritime space serves external interests while marginalizing African agency. Mamdani's (2009) analysis of the politics of naming—how "terrorism" and "security" are deployed to justify intervention—resonates with African critiques of securitization as a discourse that legitimizes external military presence in African waters.

Chinese perspective: China's approach to the securitization of chokepoints is ambivalent. Beijing benefits from the US-led security architecture that protects its commercial shipping, but it resents the political leverage this gives Washington. China has been reluctant to join US-led military operations (such as Operation Prosperity Guardian) that might be seen as supporting US hegemony, while simultaneously conducting its own naval patrols. China's perspective emphasizes economic security over military security: the protection of trade routes is framed as a commercial necessity, not a military mission. Beijing has criticized the US–UK strikes on Yemen as escalation that worsens regional instability. The Chinese perspective contributes a commercial-security framing that prioritizes trade protection over military confrontation, but it occludes China's own strategic interest in maintaining access to Gulf energy and its growing naval capacity to protect that access independently.

Russian perspective: Russia frames the securitization of chokepoints as a Western pretext for military intervention and regional dominance. Moscow has criticized US and UK strikes on Yemen as violations of sovereignty and escalation that worsens the humanitarian crisis. Russia's perspective emphasizes that securitization serves Western interests—protecting Israeli shipping, maintaining US naval dominance—rather than global commerce. Russia has also used the crisis to argue for multipolar maritime security, proposing that regional states rather than Western powers should govern maritime security. The Russian perspective contributes a critique of Western securitization as self-serving, but it occludes Russia's own interest in energy price increases resulting from disruption and its limited capacity to offer alternative security arrangements.

Western perspective: The Western perspective treats the securitization of chokepoints as a necessary response to threats to the global economy and the liberal international order. Freedom of navigation is framed as a public good that requires military protection. The Western perspective emphasizes the legitimacy of military response to attacks on commercial shipping, the importance of alliance coordination, and the need for sustained naval presence. It contributes operational capacity and a legal framework (UNCLOS, self-defense), but it occludes the economic interests driving securitization, the historical role of Western military intervention in creating regional instability, and the possibility that military responses may prolong rather than resolve crises.

UN perspective: The UN approaches the securitization of chokepoints through the lens of international law, humanitarian protection, and Security Council authority. The UN emphasizes that maritime security measures must comply with international law, protect civilian populations, and not exacerbate humanitarian crises. UN Security Council resolutions on Yemen and maritime security provide a legal framework for international action. The UN perspective contributes a normative framework that constrains unilateral military action and prioritizes civilian protection, but it occludes the power asymmetries in Security Council decision-making, the difficulty of enforcing resolutions against non-state actors, and the tension between security measures and humanitarian access.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on proxy warfare and chokepoint geopolitics begins not with the Strait of Hormuz or the Bab el-Mandeb as abstract nodes in a global shipping network, but with the fact that the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden are African littorals. Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and, across the water, Yemen form a single maritime space in which African populations, ports, fisheries, and trade routes are directly exposed to the consequences of West Asian proxy conflict. From this position, the central puzzle of the lesson is not simply how a non-state actor can disrupt global commerce, but how a regional war fought partly through proxies becomes embedded in African political economies, African state fragility, and African struggles over sovereignty. The African perspective therefore treats chokepoints as lived spaces rather than as technical bottlenecks: they are places where global power is exercised, where African states bargain for rents, and where ordinary people absorb the costs of militarization.

This perspective is rooted in a long tradition of African political thought that reads international order from the standpoint of historical extraction and unequal sovereignty. Rodney's (1972) analysis of how Europe underdeveloped Africa provides the foundational claim that external powers structure African economies for export and dependency, so that disruptions in global shipping are not neutral market events but shocks transmitted through already unequal trade relationships. Nkrumah's (1965) theory of neocolonialism adds

the political mechanism: formal independence does not end external control when foreign military bases, port concessions, debt, and security partnerships allow great and regional powers to shape African state behavior. Fanon's (1961) insistence that colonial violence is not an aberration but a constitutive feature of the colonial order helps explain why militarized chokepoints can be normalized as "security," even when they reproduce insecurity for coastal communities. Mamdani's (1996) citizen-and-subject thesis shows how colonial states bifurcated authority, producing durable patterns in which some populations are governed through customary or indirect rule while others are incorporated as citizens; in the maritime domain, this can mean that coastal communities experience port militarization and foreign basing as extensions of an exclusionary state rather than as protection. Bayart's work on extraversion explains how African political elites may convert external dependence into domestic power, turning foreign security partnerships, port rents, and aid into resources for regime survival. Mbembe's (2001, 2003) analyses of the postcolony and necropolitics highlight how violence, commandement, and the management of death become routinized in spaces where sovereignty is fragmented and external actors hold decisive coercive capacity. Grovogui's critique of Eurocentric sovereignty reminds us that African contributions to international law and to alternative conceptions of order are often erased when "freedom of navigation" is treated as a self-evident Western norm rather than as a historically contested legal and political achievement.

Applied to proxy warfare, this theoretical lineage yields a distinctive mechanism. Proxy war in West Asia and the Horn of Africa is not merely a principal-agent relationship between Iran and the Houthis, or between Gulf states and their clients; it is also a process through which African states are drawn into external security architectures. Regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Qatar, and Iran compete for influence in Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Yemen, using ports, military bases, training missions, and economic leverage. African governments, facing fiscal constraints and security threats, may accept these arrangements as sources of revenue or protection. The result is a form of extraverted security governance in which African sovereignty is performed through flags, coast guards, and port authorities, while decisive strategic choices are shaped by external patrons. The Bab el-Mandeb therefore becomes a site of layered sovereignty: Yemeni, Djiboutian, Eritrean, Somali, and international actors all claim authority, but the capacity to enforce maritime order is unevenly distributed and often outsourced.

The African perspective also reframes the Houthi Red Sea crisis as a problem of spillover and unequal vulnerability. When shipping is rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope, African economies face higher freight costs, longer delivery times, and increased insurance premiums. For import-dependent states, this translates into food and fuel price inflation, fiscal pressure, and potential social unrest. Ports that handle transshipment may experience congestion or revenue shifts, while smaller ports may be bypassed. The crisis also affects African maritime livelihoods: fishing communities, artisanal traders, and coastal workers face heightened militarization, restricted access to fishing grounds, and the risk of being caught in naval operations. Refugee and displacement pressures can intensify when conflict in Yemen intersects with drought, poverty, and state fragility in the Horn. In this view, the disruption of global shipping is not an abstract efficiency loss; it is a redistribution of risk toward populations with the least capacity to absorb it.

At the same time, the African perspective insists on African agency and on the existence of African maritime governance initiatives that are often invisible in Western or great-power accounts. The African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy, the Lomé Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa, the Djibouti Code of Conduct and its Jeddah Amendment, the Yaoundé Code of Conduct, and regional mechanisms associated with IGAD all represent attempts to frame maritime security as a development and sovereignty issue rather than solely a counter-piracy or freedom-of-navigation issue. These initiatives emphasize capacity building, information sharing, and the protection of African maritime resources. They

also reflect a normative claim: African coastal states have rights over their exclusive economic zones and continental shelves, and maritime security should serve African development rather than external power projection. From this standpoint, foreign naval deployments in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden are not automatically illegitimate, but they are legitimate only insofar as they respect African sovereignty, coordinate with African institutions, and do not displace local capacity.

The African perspective contributes something the other four cannot fully provide: a historically grounded critique of the claim that maritime security is a neutral public good. It shows that "freedom of navigation" has often been intertwined with imperial access, gunboat diplomacy, and the protection of commercial routes that benefit external powers more than African populations. It also reveals the gendered and social dimensions of maritime insecurity that are frequently absent from strategic analyses. Tamale's decolonial feminist legal scholarship and Oyěwùmí's (1997) critique of colonial categories remind us that security discourses often universalize male, militarized, and state-centric experiences while obscuring how women, informal traders, and marginalized communities experience port militarization, displacement, and economic shock. An African feminist lens does not deny the reality of Houthi attacks or piracy; it asks who is counted as a security subject, whose livelihoods are protected, and whose are sacrificed in the name of global commerce.

The perspective also illuminates the limits of proxy-war models that focus only on Iran-Houthi relations. African scholarship on the postcolony suggests that proxy relationships are not simply top-down chains of command; they are negotiated, contested, and embedded in local political economies. The Houthis are not merely Iranian agents, and African host states are not merely passive platforms. Local actors extract rents, resist, accommodate, or redirect external projects. This means that interventions aimed at "cutting off" a proxy may fail if they ignore the local political economy that sustains the actor. Similarly, naval strikes or sanctions may weaken a group's capacity without resolving the grievances, state collapse, or regional rivalries that produced it.

Yet the African perspective has its own occlusions. It can overstate the continuity between colonial and contemporary forms of external power, sometimes understating the agency of African elites who actively invite foreign bases and security partnerships for their own strategic reasons. It may also romanticize pan-African solidarity or regional integration, underplaying intra-African rivalries, border disputes, and competing port projects that shape maritime politics. The perspective sometimes lacks granular data on shipping volumes, insurance markets, and naval operations, relying more on structural critique than on operational detail. It may be less equipped to adjudicate between specific tactical options, such as whether a particular naval escort mission reduces attacks or merely displaces them. There is also a risk of treating all foreign military presence as neocolonial, which can obscure cases where African states genuinely request assistance against piracy, trafficking, or terrorism. Finally, because African scholarship often emphasizes historical injustice and structural inequality, it may understate the extent to which African economies also benefit from global trade and from the security of chokepoints.

Even with these limits, the African perspective is indispensable because it reframes the lesson's central topic from a problem of global supply-chain vulnerability into a problem of unequal sovereignty. It asks not only how to keep ships moving, but who pays for maritime order, who controls the ports and bases that enforce it, and whether the security of global commerce can be reconciled with the security of African coastal communities. In doing so, it reveals that proxy warfare and chokepoint geopolitics are not external to Africa; they are constitutive of the contemporary African political condition.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

China's perspective on proxy warfare and chokepoint geopolitics is shaped by its position as a manufacturing and trading power whose economic model depends on the uninterrupted flow of energy, raw materials, and manufactured goods through maritime chokepoints. From Beijing's vantage, the Red Sea, Suez Canal, Bab el-Mandeb, and Strait of Hormuz are not primarily military theaters; they are arteries of development. China's Belt and Road Initiative, its port investments, and its commercial shipping interests make maritime stability a core economic interest. At the same time, China's strategic culture emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and the primacy of development over military coercion. This produces a distinctive approach: China supports maritime security insofar as it protects commerce, but it is skeptical of Western-led military coalitions that it perceives as instruments of hegemony.

The Chinese perspective contributes a critique of the securitization of chokepoints. It argues that framing maritime routes primarily through military threat inflates the role of naval power and underestimates the economic and political roots of instability. Beijing often presents Western sanctions, interventions, and regime-change policies as sources of regional disorder, including in Yemen and the Gulf. In this reading, the Houthi attacks are not simply an act of Iranian proxy aggression; they are also a symptom of unresolved conflict, humanitarian catastrophe, and perceived Western complicity in regional wars. China's Gulf security critique therefore stresses that sustainable maritime security requires political settlement, economic development, and respect for state sovereignty rather than open-ended naval patrols. This aligns with China's broader preference for "collective security" and multilateral frameworks over unilateral or alliance-based military action.

China also has practical maritime security experience. Since 2008, the People's Liberation Army Navy has conducted escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia, initially in response to piracy. The establishment of China's first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017 reflects both a commitment to protecting Chinese interests and a recognition that China cannot rely indefinitely on other powers for maritime security. Yet Beijing has generally avoided joining US-led coalitions such as Operation Prosperity Guardian, preferring to protect its own shipping through national or UN-authorized mechanisms. This reflects a strategic calculation: participation in Western-led operations could entangle China in conflicts that do not serve its interests, while independent escorts preserve autonomy and signal great-power status without assuming responsibility for regional order.

The Chinese perspective is not purely pacifist or disengaged. It accepts that naval power is necessary to protect commercial interests, and it has invested heavily in port infrastructure across the Indian Ocean and Red Sea. However, it tends to frame these investments as development and connectivity rather than as military expansion. This framing can obscure the strategic implications of port access, dual-use infrastructure, and long-term influence. It also tends to understate China's dependence on the US Navy's broader role in securing global sea lanes, even as Beijing criticizes US hegemony. In the Red Sea crisis, China's commercial interests have been directly affected, yet its response has been cautious, emphasizing de-escalation and diplomatic engagement rather than military contribution to multinational strikes.

The strongest contribution of the Chinese perspective is its insistence that maritime security cannot be separated from economic development and political legitimacy. It highlights how Western military responses may protect shipping in the short term while failing to address the grievances, state collapse, and regional rivalries that generate threats. Its occlusion lies in its reluctance to acknowledge China's own strategic ambitions, its tendency to attribute regional instability primarily to Western actions, and its limited willingness to bear the costs of collective security. It also struggles to reconcile its non-interference doctrine with the reality that Chinese economic presence itself shapes local politics and security dynamics.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

Russia's perspective on proxy warfare and chokepoint geopolitics is filtered through its broader opposition to Western unipolarity and its emphasis on multipolarity, sovereignty, and great-power equality. Moscow does not have the same direct commercial dependence on Red Sea shipping as China, but it has significant interests in energy markets, Mediterranean access, and the strategic weakening of US-led maritime dominance. From the Russian vantage, chokepoint crises are not only regional security problems; they are opportunities to expose the contradictions of the Western-led order and to advance an alternative vision of international relations in which no single power monopolizes maritime security.

The Russian perspective frames Western naval responses to Houthi attacks and other maritime threats as evidence of militarized hegemony rather than neutral public-goods provision. Moscow frequently criticizes US and allied military operations as violations of sovereignty, selective applications of international law, and sources of escalation. In this narrative, "freedom of navigation" functions as a legitimizing discourse for sustained Western military presence in strategically vital waterways. Russia's own experience with sanctions and confrontation with the West reinforces its tendency to interpret maritime security initiatives through the lens of geopolitical competition. It often aligns rhetorically with calls for political settlement, respect for territorial integrity, and non-interference, while attributing regional instability to Western interventions, including in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

Russia's practical engagement with maritime chokepoints is more limited but not negligible. It maintains a naval facility at Tartus in Syria, giving it a Mediterranean foothold, and it has sought to expand its influence in the Red Sea and Horn of Africa through diplomatic and security partnerships. Russian private military companies and arms relationships have been present in parts of Africa, though these activities are often opaque and contested. Moscow also benefits economically from disruptions that raise energy prices, given its role as a major oil and gas exporter, though this benefit must be weighed against the risks of broader instability and sanctions. Russia's strategic partnership with Iran adds another layer: while not a formal alliance, the relationship gives Moscow an interest in resisting Western pressure on Tehran and in framing US maritime coercion as illegitimate.

The Russian perspective contributes a valuable critique of double standards in maritime security. It highlights how Western powers invoke international law to justify naval operations while exempting themselves from constraints when convenient. It also insists that regional conflicts require political solutions rather than purely military management. This can be a useful counterweight to technocratic approaches that treat chokepoints as engineering problems. However, the perspective is heavily shaped by Russia's own geopolitical grievances and by its desire to weaken Western influence. It often occludes Russia's violations of sovereignty, its use of force in Ukraine, and its own opportunistic exploitation of instability. It also tends to understate the genuine security dilemma faced by commercial shipping and the legitimacy of defensive naval operations under international law.

The strongest objection to the Russian perspective is that its anti-Western framing can become a substitute for analysis. By attributing most maritime insecurity to Western hegemony, it risks ignoring the agency of regional actors, the internal dynamics of proxy relationships, and the real threats posed by non-state violence. Its contribution is therefore most useful when treated as a corrective to Western self-certainty, not as a comprehensive theory of maritime order. It reminds analysts that the language of "freedom of navigation" is politically constructed and that maritime security institutions can serve power as well as commerce.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on proxy warfare and chokepoint geopolitics is anchored in the idea of a rules-based maritime order, freedom of navigation, and the protection of global commerce. From this vantage, chokepoints such as Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, and the Suez Canal are critical infrastructure of the global economy, and their disruption by state or non-state actors constitutes a threat not only to Western interests but to international trade as a whole. The United States, the United Kingdom, France, and other European actors have historically provided naval power to secure sea lanes, and they view this role as a public good that underwrites global prosperity. In the Red Sea crisis, this perspective manifested in multinational naval operations, strikes against Houthi targets, and efforts to reassure commercial shipping and insurance markets.

The Western perspective offers a clear mechanism: deterrence and denial. Naval presence, escort missions, intelligence sharing, and precision strikes are intended to raise the cost of attacks, protect commercial vessels, and signal resolve to both state sponsors and non-state actors. The underlying assumption is that maritime insecurity is partly a problem of insufficient credible force and that robust military response can restore deterrence. This perspective also emphasizes legal frameworks, including UNCLOS, customary international law, and Security Council resolutions, as sources of legitimacy for defensive action. It treats Iran's support for proxies and the Houthis' attacks on shipping as violations of international norms that require a firm response.

The Western perspective contributes operational detail and a focus on the practical challenges of protecting global supply chains. It highlights the importance of insurance markets, shipping rerouting, naval logistics, and multinational coordination. It also recognizes, at least in some analyses, the limits of deterrence: non-state actors may be willing to absorb costs, may adapt tactically, and may exploit the asymmetry between their cheap drones and missiles and expensive naval interceptors. The "limits of deterrence" theme is particularly important because it acknowledges that military force alone may not resolve conflicts rooted in political grievances, state collapse, and regional rivalries. Western analysts have increasingly debated whether naval responses can be sustained financially and politically, and whether they risk escalation with Iran or further radicalization in Yemen.

However, the Western perspective has significant occlusions. It can treat maritime security as a technical and military problem, underweighting the political and economic grievances that produce proxy violence. It often presents Western naval power as neutral and benevolent, obscuring its historical association with imperialism and its contemporary role in protecting unequal global trade structures. It may also understate the civilian costs of strikes and the humanitarian consequences of militarizing already fragile regions. The perspective can be selective in its application of international law, condemning adversaries' violations while justifying its own military actions through broad interpretations of self-defense. Finally, it may overestimate the willingness of allies and commercial actors to bear the costs of prolonged naval operations, as seen in debates over burden-sharing in Red Sea missions.

The strongest version of the Western perspective does not deny these limits. It argues that, despite its imperfections, a rules-based maritime order backed by credible naval power is preferable to a vacuum in which non-state actors and regional powers can coerce global commerce. It sees freedom of navigation as a foundational norm that enables trade, development, and humanitarian access. Its weakness is that it often struggles to connect maritime security to the deeper political settlements required to end proxy wars, and it can mistake the management of symptoms for the resolution of causes.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The United Nations approaches the securitization of chokepoints through the lenses of international law,

humanitarian protection, and Security Council authority. From this vantage, maritime security is not simply a matter of naval power or commercial efficiency; it is a legal and normative problem requiring compliance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, respect for sovereignty, protection of civilians, and adherence to Security Council mandates. The UN emphasizes that measures taken in response to maritime threats must be proportionate, legally grounded, and attentive to humanitarian consequences, particularly in contexts such as Yemen where conflict has produced severe civilian suffering.

The UN perspective contributes a framework for legitimizing and constraining international action. Security Council resolutions on Yemen and maritime security provide a legal basis for arms embargoes, sanctions, and calls for de-escalation. UNCLOS establishes navigational rights and duties, including transit passage through straits used for international navigation, while also recognizing coastal state rights. The UN's humanitarian agencies highlight how naval blockades, port restrictions, and militarization can impede access to food, fuel, and medical supplies. In the Red Sea crisis, this perspective stresses that protecting shipping must not come at the expense of humanitarian access to Yemen or of civilian protection in coastal areas.

The UN perspective also foregrounds mediation and political settlement. Rather than treating chokepoint insecurity as a purely military problem, it emphasizes negotiated ceasefires, inclusive political processes, and the implementation of prior agreements. This reflects the UN's institutional mandate to prevent and resolve conflict, not merely to manage its symptoms. The UN can convene states, provide legal expertise, and coordinate humanitarian response, even when it lacks independent enforcement capacity. In this sense, it offers a necessary counterweight to unilateral or coalition military action by insisting that maritime security be embedded in broader political and humanitarian frameworks.

The UN perspective's occlusions are structural. The Security Council is subject to great-power politics, and resolutions may be shaped by the interests of permanent members rather than by neutral legal principles. Enforcement against non-state actors is difficult, especially when they operate in fragmented states or enjoy external support. The UN also faces a tension between security measures and humanitarian access: naval inspections, blockades, and militarized zones can protect commerce while complicating aid delivery. Furthermore, the UN's reliance on member states for implementation means that its norms are only as effective as the political will of powerful actors. It may produce resolutions that express international consensus but fail to change behavior on the ground.

The strongest contribution of the UN perspective is its insistence that maritime security must be lawful, proportionate, and humanitarian. It provides a vocabulary for evaluating naval responses and for holding powerful actors accountable to international norms. Its weakness is that it can become procedural, focusing on resolutions and legal categories while struggling to address the power asymmetries and proxy relationships that drive conflict. Nevertheless, without the UN perspective, maritime security debates risk collapsing into pure power politics, with little attention to civilian protection, legal legitimacy, or the long-term political settlements required to stabilize chokepoints.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers littoral and hinterland costs, non-state agency, and the asymmetry by which global shipping risk is socialized onto poorer economies	Can understate naval deterrence, insurance pricing, and legal frameworks for protecting shipping	Maritime security must be judged by distributional justice and African economic vulnerability	Rerouting costs and spillovers to Egypt, Djibouti, Sudan, Ethiopia, and wider food/fuel prices (Lloyd's List data; Crisis Group Red Sea reports)	Western: without naval escorts and collective defense, commercial freedom and humanitarian access collapse
Chinese	Highlights economic damage, Gulf energy security, and the dangers of militarizing a commercial artery	Tends to downplay Houthi agency and Iranian proxy ties; may treat security as an infrastructure problem	Stability through commerce, non-intervention, and negotiated regional order	Trade and energy volumes through Red Sea/Suez routes; Gulf import dependence	African: commercial framing ignores disproportionate African costs; Western: underestimates coercive intent
Russian	Frames disruption as symptom of Western-led order failure and regional interventionism; emphasizes multipolar critique	Risks excusing attacks on civilian shipping; obscures humanitarian and legal stakes	Anti-hegemonic, multipolar, Western culpability	Western naval interventions and selective enforcement of maritime norms	UN: rhetoric undermines lawful maritime norms and civilian protection
Western	Explains operational response, freedom of navigation, deterrence, and alliance coordination	Overstates controllability; underweights African costs and Houthi local agency	Open seas, rules-based order, collective defense	Multinational naval deployments, rerouting data, insurance spikes	African: naval response externalizes costs and risks escalation

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Provides legal and humanitarian framework: UNCLOS, Security Council resolutions, proportionality, civilian protection	Proceduralism; struggles with power asymmetries and proxy coercion	Lawful, proportionate, humanitarian maritime security	UNCLOS, Security Council resolutions, humanitarian access constraints in Yemen	Western: legalism may be too slow for coercive maritime threats

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The Houthi Red Sea shipping attacks of 2023–2025 provide a worked example of how a non-state actor can convert a maritime chokepoint into coercive leverage and force a multinational naval response. Beginning in late 2023, Houthi forces in Yemen attacked commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, using drones, anti-ship missiles, unmanned surface vessels, and small-boat tactics. The attacks did not require control of the sea; they required only enough uncertainty to make commercial transit uninsurable or unprofitable. The result was large-scale rerouting around the Cape of Good Hope, higher insurance and freight costs, and the deployment of multinational naval forces. The case is best understood not as a conventional naval battle but as an asymmetric contest over risk, geography, and the political economy of global shipping.

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the case turns on Houthi leadership, local Yemeni grievances, ideological framing, and the agency of commanders such as Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. The Houthis are not merely an Iranian instrument; they possess their own political project, territorial base, and decision-making autonomy, even where Iranian support matters. At the state level, the case involves the collapse of Yemeni state authority, the Houthis' emergence as a de facto governing power, Iran's role as patron, Saudi and Emirati interests, and the responses of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Egypt. At the systemic level, the case reflects US naval hegemony, global supply-chain dependence, insurance-market amplification of risk, and great-power competition over maritime order. At the transnational level, it involves shipping networks, multinational naval coalitions, humanitarian access to Yemen, and the transfer of commercial risk across borders.

Mechanism. The mechanism is principal-agent delegation combined with asymmetric maritime coercion. Iran's relationship with the Houthis illustrates delegation with autonomy: support flows through weapons, training, intelligence, and political alignment, but the Houthis retain operational initiative and local legitimacy. The Houthis then exploit the geography of Bab el-Mandeb and the Red Sea, where a narrow and commercially vital corridor allows a weaker actor to impose costs on stronger ones. The key mechanism is not destruction of shipping but the inflation of risk: even limited attacks can raise insurance premiums, delay cargoes, reroute vessels, and force states to spend heavily on naval protection. This creates a cost-exchange asymmetry in which cheap drones and missiles can compel expensive multinational responses. The com-

mercial system itself amplifies the coercion, because shipping firms, insurers, and charterers respond to perceived risk faster than navies can restore confidence. EIA data on Hormuz transit volumes underscore the broader chokepoint logic, but the Red Sea case shows how a non-state actor can activate that logic without controlling a state or a fleet.

Perspective reconstruction. From an African vantage point, the Red Sea attacks were not primarily a naval contest between the Houthis and Western navies; they were a shock to African and Arab littoral economies that depend on Suez and Red Sea transit. Egypt's Suez Canal revenues, Djibouti's port economy, Sudan's and Ethiopia's logistics corridors, and wider food and fuel prices all absorbed costs generated by a conflict in which African states had little agency. The African perspective therefore treats the Houthis as actors with their own political project, not as instruments of Iranian strategy, while also refusing to let Western naval narratives define the meaning of the crisis. It highlights how global shipping risk is socialized onto poorer economies through insurance, freight, and import prices. Its limitation is that it can understate the coercive intent of the attacks and the legal and operational requirements of protecting civilian shipping. China's perspective stresses the economic damage of disrupted trade and the dangers of militarizing a commercial artery; it tends to frame the crisis as a failure of regional security governance and a threat to energy and supply-chain stability, while emphasizing negotiation and economic incentives, though it may understate Houthi agency and the coercive character of the attacks. Russia frames the crisis within a broader critique of Western hegemony and regional interventionism, treating Houthi actions as blowback from Western policies and emphasizing multipolar alternatives to US-led maritime order; this can illuminate grievances against selective enforcement of norms, yet it risks excusing attacks on civilian shipping and obscuring humanitarian and legal stakes. The Western perspective centers freedom of navigation, collective defense, and the operational necessity of naval escorts and strikes; it explains why states formed multinational responses and why deterrence was attempted, but it can overstate the controllability of the crisis and understate its costs for African and Arab economies. The UN perspective evaluates the crisis through UNCLOS, Security Council resolutions, humanitarian access to Yemen, and proportionality; it insists that responses to maritime threats must remain lawful and protect civilians, and it highlights the link between Red Sea insecurity and Yemen's humanitarian catastrophe, though procedural and legal frameworks may lag behind fast-moving proxy and commercial dynamics.

Explicit adjudication. The African perspective best explains the case as a whole because it captures the least visible but most consequential dimension: the redistribution of global shipping risk onto African and Arab economies and the agency of a non-state actor operating within a collapsed state. It also prevents the crisis from being reduced to a technical naval problem. However, it misses or underweights the operational logic of deterrence, the legal framework for protecting shipping, and the Houthis' deliberate coercion of global commerce. A complete explanation therefore synthesizes African political economy with Western operational analysis and UN legal-humanitarian constraints; no single perspective is sufficient, but the African perspective is the necessary corrective to accounts that treat the Red Sea as merely a corridor for Western naval power.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. Identify the principal-agent structure in Iran's 2019 tanker seizures: name the principal, the agent, the

delegated task, and the autonomy the agent retained.
2. Map the coercive mechanism: explain how seizure of tankers in the Strait of Hormuz translated into leverage over states, firms, and insurers.
3. Distinguish description from explanation: first describe the sequence of seizures (dates, vessels, locations), then explain why Iran chose this instrument rather than direct military confrontation.
4. Apply levels of analysis: individual (IRGC commanders), state (Iranian strategic calculus), systemic (US maximum pressure, regional balance), and transnational (shipping markets, insurance).
5. Reconstruct two perspectives—Western (freedom of navigation, deterrence) and Iranian (asymmetric coercion, resistance economy)—and state what each occludes.
6. Falsify: specify the evidence that would have shown the seizures were routine maritime enforcement rather than coercive leverage.

MODEL ANSWER

In July 2019, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) seized the British-flagged tanker *Stena Impero* in the Strait of Hormuz, following the earlier detention of the *Grace 1* (later *Adrian Darya 1*) by British forces off Gibraltar. The seizures occurred amid the US "maximum pressure" campaign and the effective collapse of the JCPOA. The principal-agent structure is not a clean delegation: the Iranian state (principal) relies on the IRGC Navy (agent), whose operational autonomy is high, consistent with Mumford's observation that proxies and delegated forces often possess independent agendas that complicate principal control. The delegated task was coercive signaling—disrupting commercial shipping to impose costs on states enforcing sanctions—while the agent retained latitude in timing and target selection, which Juneau's work on Iran's proxy architecture suggests is characteristic of Tehran's "forward defense" model.

The coercive mechanism operated through three channels. First, direct physical control of hulls and crews created immediate bargaining leverage over the flag state (the United Kingdom) and the vessel's owner. Second, the seizures injected risk into the Hormuz transit corridor, raising insurance premiums and forcing rerouting deliberations among shippers; Lloyd's List data from the period show elevated war-risk premiums in the Gulf. Third, the incidents demonstrated Iran's capacity to harass the strait without a formal blockade, converting geographic position into political currency. The leverage was thus not merely over the seized vessels but over the global oil supply chain's confidence in Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of world petroleum liquids transit (EIA Hormuz transit data).

At the individual level, IRGC commanders acted with operational discretion shaped by factional politics and the IRGC's institutional interest in demonstrating relevance. At the state level, Tehran calibrated seizures to avoid direct US military retaliation while maximizing pressure on European states to preserve JCPOA remnants. Systemically, the seizures were a response to the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and reimposition of sanctions, fitting a pattern of asymmetric coercion when conventional military options are unavailable. Transnationally, shipping markets and insurers transmitted and amplified the coercive effect, as risk pricing converted a localized incident into a global cost.

Western and Iranian perspectives diverge sharply. The Western framing, evident in UK and US statements, treated the seizures as violations of freedom of navigation and UNCLOS, justifying naval escorts and sanctions; it occludes the prior Gibraltar detention that Tehran cited as provocation. The Iranian framing, articulated by officials and aligned analysts, presented the seizures as lawful enforcement and proportionate response to economic warfare; it occludes the coercive intent and the harm to third-party commercial actors. A UN perspective would stress UNCLOS obligations and the need for de-escalation, while noting the absence of a binding Hormuz transit regime.

Adjudicating, the evidence supports the coercive-leverage interpretation over routine enforcement: the timing correlated with sanctions pressure, targets were selected for political salience (a British flag after Gibraltar), and IRGC statements emphasized retaliation. However, the mechanism's effectiveness was bounded—European states did not abandon sanctions, and the US did not lift maximum pressure—suggesting that chokepoint coercion can impose costs without achieving strategic objectives, a limit consistent with Mumford's caution that asymmetric instruments often produce tactical gains without strategic resolution.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description (150–200 words)

In May and June 2019, four commercial tankers were damaged by explosions near the UAE port of Fujairah in the Gulf of Oman, and two further tankers were attacked in the same waters weeks later. The United States attributed the incidents to Iran, citing limpet-mine damage and intelligence assessments; Iran denied responsibility and suggested a "false flag" operation. The attacks occurred during heightened US-Iran tensions following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and the reimposition of sanctions. Unlike the later Hormuz seizures, the Fujairah incidents involved no claimed responsibility and no detention of vessels, yet they similarly disrupted commercial confidence, raised insurance premiums, and prompted multinational naval deployments. The case is useful for testing whether chokepoint coercion requires acknowledged authorship to function, and whether attribution ambiguity strengthens or weakens the coercive effect.

(b) Required memo headings (use as prompts)

- **Mechanism:** How did the Fujairah attacks (if attributed to Iran) convert maritime geography into coercive leverage, and through which channels (physical damage, insurance pricing, naval response, diplomatic signaling)?
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct at least three perspectives (e.g., US/Western, Iranian, UN/UNCLOS) on the incidents; state what each contributes and what each occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one prior case of ambiguous maritime coercion (e.g., 1980s Tanker War, 2019 Hormuz seizures) and specify what is similar and what differs in mechanism and outcome.
- **Falsifiers:** State the evidence that would falsify (i) Iranian authorship, (ii) coercive intent, and (iii) strategic effectiveness.

(c) Self-check

Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened, when, to whom) from explanation (why it happened and through what mechanism), prediction (what follows if the mechanism holds), and prescription (what policy should follow).

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which of the following best explains why Iran's 2019 tanker seizures in the Strait of Hormuz functioned as coercive leverage rather than as routine maritime law enforcement?

A. Because the seizures were conducted by the IRGC Navy, which lacks legal authority under Iranian domestic law. B. Because the seizures targeted politically salient vessels at moments of sanctions pressure, raised

war-risk insurance premiums, and were accompanied by retaliatory rhetoric—indicating instrumental use of chokepoint geography. C. Because the United Kingdom immediately lifted sanctions on Iran in response. D. Because UNCLOS explicitly prohibits all vessel seizures in international straits.

Distractor diagnoses

- **A is wrong** because the legal authority of the IRGC Navy under Iranian domestic law is irrelevant to whether the seizures functioned as coercive leverage; the question concerns international coercive effect, not internal legal competence, and Iran's domestic legal framework does not determine how third parties (shippers, insurers, flag states) experienced the incidents.
- **C is wrong** because the United Kingdom did not lift sanctions in response to the seizures; this option inverts the actual outcome and conflates coercive intent with coercive success, which the evidence does not support.
- **D is wrong** because UNCLOS does not contain an explicit blanket prohibition on all vessel seizures in international straits; it establishes transit-passage and innocent-passage regimes, and the legal status of the seizures was contested rather than categorically prohibited, making this a misstatement of treaty law.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Red Sea / Suez Canal shipping indicators, 2023–2025 (indicative ranges from trade press and official statistics)

Indicator	Pre-crisis baseline (Q3 2023)	Crisis trough (Q1 2024)	Partial recovery (2025)	Source
Suez Canal transits (vessels/week)	~350–400	~150–200	~220–280	Suez Canal Authority; Lloyd's List
Share of global container traffic via Red Sea	~30%	~10–15%	~18–22%	UNCTAD; Lloyd's List
Additional voyage time via Cape of Good Hope	0 days	+10 to +14 days	+7 to +10 days	Carrier schedules; UNCTAD
War-risk insurance premium (% of hull value)	~0.05–0.1%	~0.5–1.5%	~0.3–0.7%	Lloyd's market; Joint War Committee

Table 2 — Strait of Hormuz oil and gas transit (EIA estimates)

Metric	Approximate value	Source
Crude oil and condensate transit (million b/d)	~20–21	EIA

Metric	Approximate value	Source
Share of global petroleum liquids consumption	~20%	EIA
LNG transit, primarily Qatari (bcf/d)	~3–4	EIA
Narrowest shipping lane (Traffic Separation Scheme)	~2 nautical miles	IMO / EIA
Alternative pipeline bypass capacity (Saudi East-West, UAE ADCOP)	~6–7 million b/d combined	EIA

Table 3 — Naval deployments, attack tallies, and market response, Red Sea 2023–2025

Element	Detail	Source
Operation Prosperity Guardian (US-led multinational)	Launched December 2023; defensive escort and interception	US CENTCOM
EU Aspides (defensive naval operation)	Launched February 2024	EU Council
Houthi attack incidents	Hundreds of drone, missile, and small-boat attacks, 2023–2025	US CENTCOM tallies
Joint War Committee (Lloyd's) high-risk listing	Red Sea and Gulf of Aden listed; premiums repriced	Lloyd's Market Association
Humanitarian access to Yemen	Port of Hodeidah operations intermittently disrupted; aid flows constrained	UN OCHA; Crisis Group

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Describe the trajectory of Suez Canal transits from the Q3 2023 baseline through the Q1 2024 trough to the 2025 partial recovery. Does the partial recovery indicate (a) a durable resolution of the security problem, (b) market adaptation without resolution, or (c) a new equilibrium of chronic risk? Justify with reference to the insurance-premium column.

2. **Level of analysis.** The Houthi attacks are frequently explained at the state level by Iran's sponsorship. Using principal-agent theory, identify the specific conditions under which the agent's autonomy — not the principal's intent — becomes the analytically decisive variable. Apply this to the question of whether Tehran ordered, permitted, or merely benefited from the Red Sea campaign.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each perspective reads the insurance-premium spike in Table 1: (a) African — spillover to import-dependent economies and port revenues; (b) Chinese — cost to Belt and Road logistics and energy security; (c) Russian — evidence of Western naval overstretch and anti-Western opportunity; (d) Western — market signal justifying naval intervention and freedom of navigation; (e) UN — humanitarian access and UNCLOS compliance. One sentence each, steel-manned.

4. **Interpretation.** Does the combined evidence of Tables 1–3 better support the "securitization of chokepoints" thesis (regional conflict becomes global economic emergency) or the "market adaptation" thesis (shipping reroutes, insurance reprices, trade continues)? Adjudicate on the evidence, specifying which metric would have to move in which direction to falsify your preferred reading.

5. **Limitation.** What do Tables 1–3 systematically fail to capture about the humanitarian situation in Yemen, and why does that omission matter for any policy evaluation that relies on these data? Identify at least two missing variables and their likely effect on conclusions.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — Principal-agent proxy network (hand-drawn diagram)

What to draw: Place a large circle at the top labeled "PRINCIPAL (Iran)" with sub-labels "funding / training / weapons / intelligence." Draw five smaller circles radiating downward and outward, each labeled: "Hezbollah (Lebanon)," "Houthis (Yemen)," "Hamas/PIJ (Gaza)," "Iraqi PMF militias," "Syrian regime allies." Draw solid arrows from the principal to each agent, annotated "delegation." Draw dashed arrows returning from each agent to the principal, annotated "autonomy / escalation risk / blowback." Add a horizontal axis at the bottom labeled "Control ←→ Autonomy" with each agent placed along it (Hezbollah closest to control, Houthis furthest). Add a second small box labeled "Delegation costs: deniability, blowback, mission creep."

Labels to place: "Principal," "Agent," "Delegation," "Autonomy," "Control," "Deniability," "Escalation risk."

Perspective overlay: Annotate in the margin — Western: "state sponsorship chain"; African: "externalization of regional order"; Chinese: "non-interference violated by proxy logic"; Russian: "asymmetric balancing against US hegemony"; UN: "accountability and attribution gaps."

Visual 2 — Chokepoint schematic map (hand-drawn, not to scale)

What to draw: Sketch the Arabian Peninsula in the center. To its east, draw the Persian Gulf with the Strait of Hormuz marked as a narrow gap (~2 nm lane) between Iran and Oman. To its west, draw the Red Sea with Bab el-Mandeb at the southern end and the Suez Canal at the northern end. Draw the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean beyond. Use thick blue arrows for shipping lanes: one through Hormuz (labeled "~20 mb/d oil"), one through Bab el-Mandeb and Suez (labeled "~12% of global trade"). Shade two "disruption zones" in red hatching: the Hormuz approaches and the southern Red Sea. Draw a dashed alternative route around the Cape of Good Hope labeled "+10–14 days."

Labels to place: "Strait of Hormuz," "Bab el-Mandeb," "Suez Canal," "Gulf of Aden," "Cape of Good Hope (reroute)," "Disruption zone."

Perspective overlay: Annotate — Chinese: "energy security and BRI corridor"; Russian: "Western naval concentration"; Western: "freedom of navigation"; UN: "UNCLOS transit passage"; African: "port revenues and food-import costs."

Visual 3 — Red Sea shipping volume trend (hand-drawn line chart)

What to draw: Draw axes: x-axis "Time (Oct 2023 – 2025)," y-axis "Suez Canal transits per week (or % of global container traffic)." Plot a line that starts high (~350–400 transits/week), drops sharply between

November 2023 and January 2024 to a trough (~150–200), then recovers partially to ~220–280 by 2025 without returning to baseline. Mark three vertical dashed lines with labels: "First Houthi attacks (Nov 2023)," "Operation Prosperity Guardian (Dec 2023)," "EU Aspides (Feb 2024)." Add a secondary small bar or annotation showing war-risk insurance premium rising then partially falling.

Labels to place: "Baseline," "Trough," "Partial recovery," "No return to baseline," event labels.

Perspective overlay: Annotate — African: "import cost inflation and port-traffic loss"; Chinese: "logistics cost shock"; Russian: "demonstration of Western inability to secure sea lanes"; Western: "naval response justified by data"; UN: "humanitarian access to Yemen not captured by this metric."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
Define proxy warfare	Indirect conflict in which a principal delegates violence to an agent to achieve goals while limiting direct exposure. Mumford (2013) frames it as a strategy of the weak and the strong alike, with delegation costs.
Principal-agent problem	Principal cannot perfectly monitor or control agent; agent has own interests, information asymmetry, and autonomy. Applies to Iran–proxy relationships. Juneau (2020).
Iran's proxy network	Hezbollah, Houthis, Hamas/PIJ, Iraqi PMF, Syrian allies. Functions as "forward defense" and deterrence. Juneau (2020).
Levantine theater	Lebanon/Syria/Israel dynamics; Hezbollah as most capable agent; autonomy highest where state capacity is weakest.
Yemeni maritime asymmetry	Houthis use cheap drones/missiles/USVs against high-value shipping; cost-exchange ratio favors attacker. Crisis Group Red Sea reports.
Strait of Hormuz	~20–21 mb/d oil; ~20% of global petroleum liquids; ~2 nm lane. EIA data.
Bab el-Mandeb	Southern Red Sea chokepoint; gateway to Suez; ~12% of global trade. Lloyd's List; UNCTAD.
Suez Canal	~30% of global container traffic pre-crisis; transits fell ~50%+ at trough.
War-risk insurance	Premiums rose from ~0.05–0.1% to ~0.5–1.5% of hull value at peak; partial normalization by 2025. Lloyd's market.
Naval responses	Operation Prosperity Guardian (Dec 2023); EU Aspides (Feb 2024); defensive posture, limited offensive scope.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
Securitization of chokepoints	Regional conflict reframed as global economic emergency; justifies multinational naval action.
African spillover	Higher freight and insurance costs raise import prices; port revenues and food security affected; African economies as price-takers.

Source log: Mumford (2013); Juneau (2020); International Crisis Group, Red Sea reports; Lloyd's List shipping data; US EIA, Strait of Hormuz transit data; UNCTAD; US CENTCOM; EU Council; UN OCHA.

Summary (3–5 sentences): Proxy warfare delegates violence from principal to agent, creating autonomy and escalation risks that the principal cannot fully control. In West Asia, Iran's proxy network extends this logic to maritime chokepoints, where the Houthis' asymmetric attacks on Red Sea shipping disrupted roughly half of Suez transits at the 2024 trough and spiked war-risk insurance premiums. Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb concentrate global oil and container flows into narrow passages, so regional conflict rapidly becomes a global supply-chain emergency. Naval responses restored partial traffic but did not resolve the underlying conflict, and African economies absorbed spillover costs as import-dependent price-takers. The data show market adaptation alongside, not instead of, securitization.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** A powerful state can fight indirectly by arming and funding smaller groups to do the fighting for it. This saves the powerful state from direct risk but creates a problem: the smaller groups have their own goals and may not obey. In West Asia, this dynamic meets geography. Two narrow sea passages — Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb — carry a large share of the world's oil and container ships. When a proxy group like the Houthis attacks ships in one of these passages, the damage is not just local: insurance prices spike, ships reroute around Africa adding weeks, and food and goods become more expensive far away, including in Africa. Navies then arrive to protect shipping, but they cannot easily stop cheap drones with expensive missiles, and they cannot fix the underlying political conflict. So the world adapts — trade continues, but costlier and riskier — while the root cause persists.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure of the exact share of Houthi attacks that Iran directly ordered versus permitted; the principal-agent autonomy problem is precisely that this is unobservable. I am also unsure whether the 2025 partial recovery in Suez transits reflects improved security or simply shipper habituation to higher costs. I have not specified the elasticity of African import prices to freight-cost shocks.

3. **Reread verification.** Rechecking Mumford (2013) confirms that proxy warfare is defined by delegation and its attendant control problems, not merely by covert action. Juneau (2020) confirms Iran's proxy strategy is framed as forward defense and deterrence, with acknowledged autonomy costs. EIA data confirm Hormuz carries roughly one-fifth of global petroleum liquids. Lloyd's List and UNCTAD confirm the Red Sea traffic collapse and partial recovery. Crisis Group reports confirm the humanitarian access constraints in Yemen that shipping data omit.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** Think of a principal as a landlord who hires a contractor to renovate a

building. The contractor may cut corners or escalate disputes with neighbors in ways the landlord did not authorize, and the landlord cannot easily fire the contractor mid-job without losing the investment. The analogy captures delegation and autonomy but breaks down on three points: (a) proxies are armed political actors, not commercial contractors; (b) the "building" is a regional order with sovereign states, not property; (c) the landlord (Iran) may actually benefit from some unauthorized escalation, whereas a landlord never benefits from a contractor's unauthorized damage.

5. **Rewrite.** Proxy warfare is a delegation relationship in which a principal transfers the means of violence to an agent, accepting autonomy and escalation risk in exchange for deniability and reduced direct exposure. When such proxy dynamics intersect with maritime chokepoints — narrow passages carrying disproportionate shares of global oil and container traffic — localized conflict is converted into systemic supply-chain risk. The Houthi Red Sea campaign (2023–2025) demonstrated this conversion: Suez transits fell by roughly half at the trough, war-risk premiums multiplied, and shipping rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope. Naval responses partially restored traffic but left the underlying conflict and its humanitarian costs in Yemen unresolved, while African and other import-dependent economies absorbed the price spillover. The evidence supports securitization and market adaptation as simultaneous, not competing, processes.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L44	Definition	What is proxy warfare in principal-agent terms?	Proxy warfare is the delegation of violence or coercion to an intermediary actor, creating a principal-agent relationship in which the sponsor seeks influence while the proxy retains partial autonomy. The mechanism is not simple command-and-control; it is bargaining over risk, resources, and escalation.	African: proxy relationships are often read through local legitimacy and survival, not only sponsor strategy.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L44	Mechanism	What is the autonomy problem in proxy warfare?	The autonomy problem arises when the proxy's local interests, ideology, or survival imperatives diverge from the sponsor's preferences, producing escalation or restraint that the sponsor did not authorize. This is the central mechanism linking delegation to unintended outcomes.	Western: often framed as control failure; African: often framed as local agency.
L44	Application	How does the Levantine theater illustrate proxy warfare?	The Hezbollah-Israel dynamic shows a non-state actor with its own domestic base, military capacity, and escalation logic operating within a broader Iran-aligned network. The mechanism is overlapping sovereignty: deterrence, retaliation, and political survival interact.	Israeli/Western: deterrence and security; Lebanese: sovereignty and civil vulnerability.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L44	Application	What is Yemeni maritime asymmetry?	The Houthis use relatively low-cost drones, missiles, and small-boat tactics to threaten high-value commercial shipping, converting geographic proximity to Bab el-Mandeb into coercive leverage. The mechanism is cost-exchange asymmetry, not fleet parity.	African: Red Sea littoral states bear spillover costs; UN: humanitarian access concerns.
L44	Definition	What makes a chokepoint strategically significant?	A chokepoint is a narrow maritime passage whose disruption can impose disproportionate costs on global trade, energy transit, or naval mobility. Significance depends on volume, substitutability, and the credibility of threats.	Chinese: supply-chain vulnerability; Russian: Western dependence.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L44	Mechanism	How do Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb differ as chokepoints?	Hormuz is primarily an energy-export chokepoint with high oil and LNG transit volumes, while Bab el-Mandeb is a broader commercial and naval passage linking the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. Both create leverage, but through different commodity and routing structures.	African: Bab el-Mandeb directly affects Horn of Africa economies; UN: maritime security and aid routes.
L44	Mechanism	What is the securitization of maritime chokepoints?	Securitization occurs when routine commercial risk is reframed as an existential or systemic threat, justifying naval deployments, insurance spikes, sanctions, or military action. The mechanism moves from local violence to global economic governance.	Western: freedom of navigation; Chinese: over-securitization of trade routes.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L44	Case	What did the Houthi Red Sea attacks (2023-2025) demonstrate?	A non-state actor disrupted major shipping lanes, raised insurance and rerouting costs, and forced multinational naval responses without possessing a conventional blue-water navy. The case shows how proxy-linked maritime coercion can globalize a regional conflict.	African: port, food, and fuel spillovers; UN: humanitarian and legal constraints.
L44	Case	How did Iran's 2019 tanker seizures create leverage?	Iran used seizures and harassment in and around Hormuz to signal that maritime pressure could be met with counter-pressure, raising costs for adversaries and demonstrating chokepoint responsiveness. The mechanism was coercive signaling, not permanent closure.	Western: deterrence and FON; Russian: anti-Western leverage.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L44	Data	What do Red Sea shipping volume declines indicate?	Declines in Red Sea transits indicate that threat perception, insurance pricing, and rerouting decisions can rapidly alter global shipping patterns even without a formal blockade. The data measure behavioral response as much as physical danger.	African: trade and inflation effects; Chinese: supply-chain risk.
L44	Data	What do Hormuz transit volumes indicate?	High Hormuz oil and LNG transit volumes indicate structural global dependence on a narrow passage, making even limited disruption threats economically significant. The data show vulnerability, not inevitability of closure.	Western: energy security; UN: regional stability.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L44	Perspective	What does the African perspective add to chokepoint analysis?	The African perspective foregrounds Red Sea and Horn of Africa spillovers, including port economies, food and fuel prices, inflation, and the security externalities imposed on littoral states. It reveals costs often treated as secondary in great-power debates.	African primary: local costs and agency.
L44	Perspective	What does the Chinese perspective emphasize?	The Chinese perspective emphasizes commercial shipping interests, energy import security, and skepticism toward Western-led securitization that may militarize trade routes. It contributes a trade-first reading of maritime order.	Chinese: economic interests; Western: naval order.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L44	Perspective	What does the UN perspective emphasize?	The UN perspective emphasizes UNCLOS, freedom of navigation, humanitarian access to Yemen, and Security Council frameworks, while facing constraints from great-power vetoes and enforcement gaps. It contributes legal and humanitarian guardrails.	UN: law and access; Russian: sovereignty critique.
L44	Adjudication	How should competing explanations of chokepoint crises be adjudicated?	Adjudication requires matching mechanisms to evidence: proxy autonomy, cost-exchange ratios, transit data, insurance premiums, naval deployments, and local spillovers. No single perspective should be treated as the natural frame.	All five: evidence over assertion.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100)

Topic	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Gap to close
Proxy warfare as principal-agent delegation		Can define delegation and autonomy problem	May overstate sponsor control

Topic	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Gap to close
Levantine theater and Hezbollah-Israel dynamic		Can explain overlapping sovereignty	May underweight Lebanese domestic politics
Yemeni maritime asymmetry and Houthi tactics		Can explain cost-exchange leverage	May conflate proxy with fully independent actor
Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb chokepoint logic		Can distinguish energy vs. commercial passages	May ignore substitutability and rerouting
Securitization of maritime chokepoints		Can explain threat framing to policy	May blur description with prescription
Five-perspective reconstruction		Can steel-man each view	May rank perspectives prematurely
Data interpretation (volumes, premiums, deployments)		Can link data to behavior	May treat correlation as causation
Worked example: Houthi Red Sea attacks		Can trace levels of analysis	May miss African spillover
Problem pair: Iran 2019 tanker seizures		Can identify coercive signaling	May overread intent from outcomes
Adjudication across theories		Can compare explanations	May understate scope conditions

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which concept in this lesson did I initially treat as settled truth, and what scope condition or counterargument should have complicated it?

2. Did I distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription when evaluating naval responses and proxy behavior?

3. Which perspective—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, or UN—did I most neglect, and what evidence would force me to take it seriously?

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Proxy actors are mere instruments of their sponsors.	Proxy actors retain autonomy; delegation creates bargaining, not simple control.	Principal-agent theory; Mumford (2013) on proxy warfare.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Chokepoint disruption requires closing the strait.	Threats, insurance spikes, and rerouting can disrupt commerce without physical closure.	Lloyd's List shipping data; Red Sea 2023-2025 case.
Naval deployments automatically restore deterrence.	Deployments may raise costs but can also escalate, displace risk, or fail to address proxy autonomy.	Houthi Red Sea attacks; Crisis Group Red Sea reports.
Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb are interchangeable chokepoints.	They differ in commodity mix, geography, naval access, and spillover patterns.	EIA Hormuz transit data; Red Sea shipping data.
The UN perspective is only legal formalism.	It also addresses humanitarian access, Yemeni civilian protection, and multilateral legitimacy constraints.	UN-focused analysis of UNCLOS and Security Council frameworks.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Proxy warfare; principal-agent delegation; autonomy; chokepoint; securitization; maritime asymmetry	Delegation with partial control; cost-exchange asymmetry; threat-induced rerouting; coercive signaling; reframing commercial risk as systemic threat	Mumford (2013) proxy warfare; Juneau (2020) Iran-Houthi limited partnership; principal-agent theory	Houthi Red Sea attacks 2023-2025; Iran 2019 tanker seizures; Hormuz oil/LNG transit; Red Sea shipping volume declines; insurance premium spikes; naval deployment counts	Control vs. autonomy; deterrence vs. escalation; freedom of navigation vs. militarization; global commerce vs. local spillover	Evidence that proxies act against sponsor preferences; no shipping response to threats; stable premiums despite attacks; no local African spillover	L23 asymmetric warfare; L25 maritime security; L43 sectarian geopolitics; L45 nuclear; L46 hydrocarbons; L48 Indo-Pacific chokepoints

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (24 hours):** Re-read the five key ideas and reconstruct the principal-agent mechanism in one paragraph without notes.
- **R2 (3 days):** Redraw the Houthi Red Sea case using the four levels of analysis and label each

perspective's contribution.

- **R3 (1 week):** Reconstruct Iran's 2019 tanker seizures as coercive signaling and list three scope conditions under which the tactic would fail.
- **R4 (2 weeks):** Reinterpret the Red Sea shipping and Hormuz transit data, distinguishing volume, premium, and deployment indicators.
- **R5 (1 month):** Write a short adjudication comparing African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of a new chokepoint incident.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define proxy warfare as principal-agent delegation with autonomy problems.

☐ I can explain the mechanism linking sponsor goals to proxy behavior.

☐ I can analyze the Levantine theater without reducing it to Iran-Israel rivalry.

☐ I can explain Yemeni maritime asymmetry and Houthi cost-exchange tactics.

☐ I can distinguish Hormuz from Bab el-Mandeb by commodity, geography, and spillover.

☐ I can explain securitization as a process, not just a label.

☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives from within.

☐ I can place the African perspective first and explain its distinctive contribution.

☐ I can interpret Red Sea shipping volume declines and insurance spikes.

☐ I can interpret Hormuz transit data as vulnerability rather than inevitability.

☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to the Houthi case.

☐ I can analyze Iran's 2019 tanker seizures as coercive leverage.

☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

☐ I can identify at least two falsifiers for each major claim.

☐ I can complete the memo headings without collapsing perspectives.

☐ I can explain why naval deployments do not automatically restore deterrence.

☐ I can link this lesson to L23, L25, L43, L45, L46, and L48.

☐ I can state the strongest counterargument to my preferred interpretation.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- Mumford, Andrew. *Proxy Warfare*. Polity, 2013.
- Juneau, Thomas. "Iran's Policy towards the Houthis in Yemen: A Limited Partnership." *International Affairs*, 2020.
- International Crisis Group. Red Sea reports, 2023-2025.
- Lloyd's List Intelligence. Red Sea shipping volume and routing data, 2023-2025.
- U.S. Energy Information Administration. World Oil Transit Chokepoints: Hormuz transit data.
- Byman, Daniel. Work on proxy warfare and non-state actors, for comparative mechanism-building.
- Bayart, Jean-François. *The State in Africa*, for African statehood and extraversion.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. *Citizen and Subject*, for colonial state legacies in African politics.
- Grovogui, Siba N. *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*, for African sovereignty critique.
- Tamale, Sylvia. *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*, for African-centered normative framing.
- UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), for maritime legal framework.
- Security Council resolutions on Yemen and Red Sea maritime security, for multilateral constraints.

End of Lesson 44. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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46. Nuclear Proliferation and Deterrence in West Asia

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 45: Nuclear Proliferation and Deterrence in West Asia
Module	Module 7: West Asia and Iranian Geopolitics
Prerequisites	L21 (nuclear strategy), L42 (Iran), L43 (sectarian)

Field	Value
Interleaved links	Forward to L46 (hydrocarbons), L55 (quantum and NC3), L47 (US-China nuclear dynamics)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, worked examples, flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple: why does a state that has never possessed a nuclear weapon, that is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and that faces no existential conventional military threat that nuclear weapons uniquely neutralize, invest more than half a century in building an enrichment infrastructure that places it weeks from weapons-grade material? The answer cannot be found in any single theory of international relations, and it cannot be found by looking only at Iran. The puzzle is systemic. It concerns the architecture of the NPT itself, the reversibility of great-power commitments, the credibility of extended deterrence, and the way in which a state can occupy the space between legal non-nuclear status and de facto nuclear latency without ever crossing the line that would trigger military action. Iran's nuclear program, from its origins in the 1950s Atoms for Peace initiative through the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and its subsequent collapse, is the most thoroughly documented case of a state navigating that space. By 2023, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that Iran had accumulated uranium enriched to 60 percent purity, a level with no credible civilian justification, and had installed advanced centrifuges that shortened the breakout timeline to a matter of weeks. The question is not whether Iran has decided to build a bomb—it has not, by most intelligence assessments—but why the international order has been unable to close the gap between Iran's capabilities and its commitments, and what that failure implies for the future of non-proliferation in West Asia and beyond.

This lesson sits at the intersection of three theoretical traditions, and part of its purpose is to force an adjudication among them. Realism, in its structural variant, treats Iran's program as rational hedging: a state facing a hostile regional environment—Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal, the US military presence in the Gulf, the memory of the Iran-Iraq War—seeks the ultimate insurance policy without paying the full cost of weaponization. The mechanism is the security dilemma: Iran's enrichment is read by others as threatening, which produces countermeasures (sanctions, sabotage, assassination of scientists) that in turn harden Iran's resolve. Liberal institutionalism treats the JCPOA as a verification-and-incentives bargain of unprecedented intrusiveness, and its collapse as evidence that institutional commitments are only as durable as the domestic politics of the most powerful signatory. The mechanism here is the reversibility of commitments: when the United States withdrew in 2018 and reimposed sanctions, the bargain's incentive structure inverted, and Iran's step-by-step reduction of compliance (2019–2021) was a predictable, if not inevitable, response. Constructivism treats the NPT as a normative order whose legitimacy depends on a reciprocal bargain—non-nuclear states forgo weapons in exchange for peaceful technology and, crucially, the nuclear-armed states' commitment to disarmament. The mechanism is normative erosion: when the nuclear-armed states fail to disarm, the non-nuclear states' compliance becomes a matter of coercion rather than consent, and the regime's legitimacy frays. Each theory captures something real; none is sufficient alone. The lesson's analytical task is to specify the scope conditions under which each operates and to identify the evidence that would discriminate among them.

The African vantage point is not a regional footnote to this story; it is the lens that reveals the structural asymmetry at the heart of the non-proliferation regime. African states have lived with the NPT's double standard since 1968: five states are permitted to retain nuclear weapons indefinitely, while all others are permanently barred from acquiring them. The African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (Pelindaba, 1996) was not merely a regional arrangement but a principled rejection of this asymmetry, and African diplomats have been among the most consistent advocates for disarmament at NPT Review Conferences. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, 2017), championed by African and Latin American states, represents the most direct challenge to the NPT's legitimacy in half a century. From this vantage, the Iranian case is not a story of a rogue state defying a legitimate order; it is a story of a state responding rationally to an order that permits permanent nuclear hierarchy. Scholars such as Siba Grovogui have argued that the international legal order itself is structured by colonial and racial hierarchies that determine whose sovereignty is respected and whose is conditional. Applied to the nuclear domain, this means that the same enrichment activity that is tolerated or even assisted when undertaken by allies is criminalized when undertaken by adversaries. The African perspective thus reframes the question: not "why is Iran proliferating?" but "why is the regime that defines proliferation legitimate, and for whom?" This reframing does not excuse Iranian non-compliance, but it does explain why the regime's enforcement mechanisms are perceived as political rather than legal across much of the Global South.

The threshold state problem is the lesson's second major puzzle, and it is where theory meets measurement. A threshold state is one that possesses the fissile material, the delivery systems, and the technical knowledge to produce a nuclear weapon within weeks or months, but has not assembled one. Iran's enrichment to 60 percent—far above the 3.67 percent cap of the JCPOA and the 20 percent level that had previously been treated as a red line—places it in this category. The IAEA's quarterly reports document not only enrichment levels but also the installation of IR-6 and IR-9 centrifuges, the accumulation of uranium hexafluoride, and the limitations on inspector access that followed Iran's 2021 decision to reduce cooperation. The significance of the threshold condition is not merely technical. It reshapes regional calculations: Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince has stated that the kingdom would acquire nuclear weapons if Iran does; Turkey and Egypt have made similar statements; Israel, which maintains a policy of nuclear ambiguity, has repeatedly signaled that it will not permit Iran to cross the threshold. The mechanism of cascade is not automatic—it requires decisions by multiple actors, each with their own domestic politics and alliance commitments—but the threshold condition lowers the barrier to those decisions by demonstrating that the NPT's enforcement is contingent on great-power will rather than on legal obligation.

The JCPOA is the lesson's central case study in institutional design and its limits. Signed in July 2015 by Iran and the P5+1 (the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany), the deal capped enrichment at 3.67 percent, reduced Iran's centrifuge inventory by two-thirds, shipped out 98 percent of its enriched uranium stockpile, and subjected Iran to the most intrusive verification regime ever negotiated. In exchange, Iran received sanctions relief. The architecture was elegant: it did not require Iran to abandon enrichment (which Iran insisted was a sovereign right under Article IV of the NPT) but it made weaponization practically impossible within a one-year breakout window. The US withdrawal in May 2018, followed by the reimposition of sanctions and Iran's phased reduction of compliance beginning in May 2019, demonstrated that the deal's durability depended on a political commitment that the US electoral system could not guarantee. The snapback mechanism—designed to automatically reimpose UN sanctions if Iran violated the deal—was itself contested when the US attempted to invoke it in 2020 after having withdrawn from the agreement. The episode reveals a design flaw: mechanisms intended to constrain the weaker party (Iran) were not matched by mechanisms constraining the stronger party (the US), and the Security Council's structure ensured that

no enforcement action could be taken against a permanent member.

What the student will be able to do after mastering this lesson is substantial and specific. They will be able to trace the causal mechanisms linking enrichment capacity to regional security dilemmas, distinguishing between the technical facts of Iran's program and the political interpretations placed upon them. They will be able to reconstruct five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on the Iranian nuclear question, identifying what each contributes and what each occludes. They will be able to evaluate the JCPOA's architecture against its alternatives, using evidence from IAEA reports, UNSC resolutions, and the statements of the parties. They will be able to specify the scope conditions under which extended deterrence stabilizes (when the guarantor's commitment is credible and the client's security concerns are addressed) and destabilizes (when the guarantor's commitment is doubted and the client seeks autonomous capability). And they will be able to identify the falsifiers that would challenge their conclusions: for example, if Iran were to accept zero enrichment, or if Saudi Arabia were to acquire nuclear weapons without an Iranian test, or if the NPT Review Conference were to produce a consensus document endorsing disarmament timelines. The lesson does not resolve the Iranian nuclear question; it equips the student to analyze it with the theoretical depth and evidentiary discipline that the question demands.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. What is the difference between counterforce and countervalue targeting, and why does it matter for crisis stability? (L21)
2. What is the stability-instability paradox, and how does it apply to nuclear-armed rivals? (L21)
3. What were the principal domestic and international drivers of the 1979 Iranian Revolution? (L42)
4. How does sectarian identity interact with state interest in the Middle East—does it determine policy or merely frame it? (L43)
5. What is extended deterrence, and what is the credibility problem that haunts it? (L21)
6. What distinguishes a nuclear-weapon state, a threshold state, and a non-nuclear-weapon state under the NPT? (L21, L42)

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Why did Iran invest in enrichment capacity for decades despite having no nuclear weapons and facing no existential conventional threat that nuclear weapons uniquely solve?
2. What does the collapse of the JCPOA reveal about the fragility of non-proliferation architecture when great-power commitments are reversible?
3. How does the African critique of the NPT—as a regime that permits permanent nuclear hierarchy—differ from the Western focus on Iranian non-compliance?
4. Under what conditions does extended deterrence stabilize versus destabilize the Middle East nuclear order?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Breakout timeline**: The estimated time required for a state to produce enough weapons-grade fissile material for one nuclear device, given its current enrichment capacity and stockpile. Provisional definition: a technical estimate, not a political decision to build.

- **Threshold state**: A state that possesses the fissile material, the delivery systems, and the technical knowledge to produce a nuclear weapon within weeks or months but has not assembled one. Provisional definition: latency without weaponization.
- **Enrichment**: The process of increasing the concentration of uranium-235 in uranium, typically via gas centrifuges, to produce fuel for reactors or, at higher levels, weapons-grade material. Provisional definition: a dual-use technology central to the NPT's Article IV bargain.
- **Centrifuge**: A rapidly spinning cylinder that separates uranium isotopes by mass, the core technology of modern enrichment. Provisional definition: the hardware whose quantity and type determine enrichment capacity.
- **Safeguards**: The IAEA's system of inspections, monitoring, and verification designed to ensure that nuclear material is not diverted to weapons use. Provisional definition: the technical backbone of NPT compliance.
- **JCPOA**: The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the 2015 agreement between Iran and the P5+1 that capped Iran's enrichment and subjected it to enhanced verification in exchange for sanctions relief. Provisional definition: the most intrusive non-proliferation bargain ever negotiated.
- **Snapback**: The mechanism in UNSC Resolution 2231 that allows any participant to reimpose UN sanctions on Iran if it is found in significant non-performance. Provisional definition: an automatic enforcement tool whose invocation became contested after US withdrawal.
- **Extended deterrence**: The commitment by a nuclear-armed state to use its nuclear weapons to defend an ally. Provisional definition: the security guarantee that underpins US alliances in the Middle East and beyond.
- **Nuclear ambiguity**: A policy of neither confirming nor denying possession of nuclear weapons, most associated with Israel. Provisional definition: a deterrent posture that avoids the legal and diplomatic costs of declared possession.
- **Hedging**: A strategy of maintaining the option to acquire nuclear weapons without crossing the threshold, through investment in enrichment and delivery systems. Provisional definition: the middle ground between compliance and proliferation.
- **NPT**: The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (1968), which divides states into nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states and promises peaceful nuclear cooperation. Provisional definition: the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime, increasingly contested.
- **Pelindaba Treaty**: The African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty (1996), establishing Africa as a zone free of nuclear weapons. Provisional definition: the African rejection of nuclear hierarchy.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Explain** the historical trajectory of Iran's nuclear program from the 1957 US-Iran Atoms for Peace agreement through the Shah's ambitious reactor plans, the post-revolutionary suspension, the 1990s covert revival, and the 2002 exposure of the Natanz and Arak facilities, identifying the key institutional actors (the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, the Supreme National Security Council) and the turning points (IAEA findings, UNSC resolutions 1696 and 1737) that transformed a bilateral technical cooperation project into a multilateral proliferation crisis.

2. **Analyze** the technical determinants of Iran's breakout timeline—centrifuge generations (IR-1 through IR-6), enrichment levels (3.67%, 20%, 60%), stockpile quantities measured in kilograms of uranium hexafluoride, and the critical distinction between fissile-material production and weaponization—evaluating how incremental changes in each variable alter independent estimates of the time required to produce 25 kilograms of weapons-grade highly enriched uranium.

3. **Evaluate** competing interpretations of Iran's nuclear intentions, distinguishing among the "civilian energy" narrative advanced by Iranian officials, the "latent deterrence" thesis favored by some strategic analysts, and the "threshold state" characterization used by non-proliferation specialists, using IAEA safeguards data, US National Intelligence Estimates, and Iranian Supreme Leader fatwas as evidence, and identifying what each interpretation can and cannot explain.

4. **Compare** the five major international perspectives on Iran's nuclear program—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—identifying each perspective's core causal claims, normative commitments, and characteristic blind spots, and explaining how these perspectives generate divergent policy prescriptions ranging from engagement and verification to sanctions and containment.

5. **Synthesize** the implications of Iran's threshold-state status for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime, assessing whether the treaty's grand bargain—non-proliferation in exchange for peaceful use and disarmament—can accommodate a state that has mastered the full fuel cycle without crossing the weapons threshold, and whether the erosion of that bargain threatens to trigger proliferation cascades across West Asia and beyond.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Iran's nuclear program: history, capabilities, breakout timelines

Bolded Causal Claim: Iran's nuclear program, initiated under the Shah as a civilian energy project and covertly revived in the 1990s as a latent weapons capability, has produced a durable "threshold state" condition in which Iran possesses the indigenous technical infrastructure to produce weapons-grade fissile material on a timeline of weeks to months, and this condition persists regardless of the diplomatic status of any particular agreement because enrichment knowledge, centrifuge manufacturing capacity, and industrial infrastructure cannot be reversed by treaty.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through four sequential phases, each of which added irreversible layers of technical capability. First, the *foundation phase* (1957–1979): under the US Atoms for Peace program, Iran received a 5-megawatt Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) in 1967, fueled by 93% enriched uranium supplied by the United States, and in 1974 the Shah established the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) with plans for 23 nuclear power reactors. Contracts were signed with Siemens (Germany) for the Bushehr plant and with Framatome (France) for additional reactors. Iran signed the NPT in 1970 and ratified it in 1974. This phase created the institutional and human-capital base—trained nuclear engineers, a regulatory framework, and a research reactor—that would later be repurposed. Second, the *suspension and survival phase* (1979–1989): the 1979 revolution halted most nuclear activities, and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) damaged the Bushehr site. However, the AEOI survived, and Iran maintained its NPT membership and its research reactor, preserving a thin thread of nuclear expertise. Third, the *covert revival phase* (1990s–2002): following the war, Iran quietly rebuilt its nuclear program with foreign assistance. Russia agreed in 1995 to complete the Bushehr reactor (which finally connected to the grid in 2011). More critically, Iran acquired centrifuge technology—initially P-1 designs derived from the Urenco/AQ Khan network, and later more advanced models—through a combination of procurement networks and possibly direct transfers. Iran be-

gan constructing the Natanz enrichment facility and the Arak heavy-water reactor (IR-40) without declaring them to the IAEA, in violation of its safeguards obligations. The existence of these facilities was revealed in August 2002 by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an opposition group, triggering the first IAEA inspections and the beginning of the international crisis. Fourth, the *maturation and diversification phase* (2002–present): Iran admitted to undeclared activities, signed the Additional Protocol voluntarily in 2003 (though it suspended implementation in 2006), and began feeding uranium hexafluoride (UF6) into centrifuge cascades at Natanz in 2006. The IAEA discovered that Iran had conducted plutonium separation experiments and had worked on P-1 and P-2 centrifuge designs. In 2009, the existence of the Fordow enrichment facility—built inside a mountain near Qom—was revealed, providing a hardened, deeply buried site for enrichment. Iran began enriching to 20% in 2010 at Natanz (justified as fuel for the TRR) and at Fordow in 2012. The 20% enrichment level is significant because it represents roughly 90% of the separative work needed to reach weapons-grade (90%) enrichment, dramatically shortening the breakout timeline. The Stuxnet cyberattack in 2010 destroyed approximately 1,000 IR-1 centrifuges at Natanz, demonstrating that the program was vulnerable to sabotage but also that Iran could replace and expand its centrifuge inventory. By 2013, independent analysts estimated that Iran could produce enough weapons-grade uranium for one nuclear device in approximately two to three months, assuming it used its existing stockpile of 20% enriched uranium and its installed centrifuge capacity. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015 extended this breakout timeline to roughly one year by capping enrichment at 3.67%, limiting the stockpile to 300 kg of UF6, restricting centrifuges to 5,060 IR-1 machines at Natanz, and requiring the redesign of the Arak reactor. However, the technical knowledge, the centrifuge manufacturing infrastructure, and the experienced workforce remained intact. Following the US withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018, Iran progressively reduced its commitments: it exceeded the 3.67% cap in 2019, accumulated a growing stockpile, installed advanced centrifuges (IR-2m, IR-4, IR-6) at Natanz and Fordow, and began enriching to 60% in 2021. By 2022, IAEA inspectors detected uranium particles enriched to 83.7% at Fordow—just below the 90% weapons-grade threshold—though Iran attributed this to unintended fluctuations. Independent breakout estimates consequently shortened to weeks rather than months. The mechanism's irreversibility lies in the fact that centrifuge design knowledge, cascade configuration expertise, and uranium metallurgy skills are embedded in human capital and institutional memory; they cannot be "unlearned" by diplomatic agreement, only monitored, delayed, or redirected.

Scope Conditions: This causal claim holds under specific conditions and fails under others. It holds when a state has (a) indigenous uranium enrichment capability, (b) a covert or semi-covert history of undeclared nuclear activities, (c) a stockpile of enriched uranium at levels above natural (0.7%) and approaching or exceeding 20%, and (d) a workforce and industrial base capable of manufacturing and maintaining centrifuges. It does not hold for states that rely entirely on imported fuel and lack enrichment infrastructure (e.g., most NPT non-nuclear-weapon states), nor does it apply to states that have voluntarily dismantled their programs (South Africa in the early 1990s, Libya in 2003). The claim also assumes that the state in question has not made a definitive political decision to build a weapon; Iran's Supreme Leader has issued a fatwa against nuclear weapons, and the US intelligence community has assessed since 2007 that Iran halted its structured weaponization program in 2003. The threshold-state condition is therefore a statement about *capability*, not *intent*—a distinction that is analytically crucial but politically contested. The claim further assumes that IAEA safeguards, while imperfect, provide sufficient monitoring to detect a diversion of declared material; it does not assume that safeguards can detect all covert activities, as the 2002 revelations demonstrated.

Observable Implications: If this causal claim is correct, we should observe several patterns. First, IAEA Director General reports should show a steady increase in Iran's installed centrifuge capacity and enrich-

ment levels following the collapse of the JCPOA, with particular attention to the deployment of advanced centrifuges (IR-2m, IR-4, IR-6) and the accumulation of 60% enriched uranium. Second, independent breakout estimates (published by institutions such as the Institute for Science and International Security) should shorten from months to weeks as Iran's stockpile grows and its centrifuge inventory diversifies. Third, Iran should maintain a gap between its technical capability and an actual weaponization decision, preserving ambiguity—what strategists call "nuclear hedging"—rather than conducting an overt test. Fourth, we should observe continued Iranian insistence on its right to peaceful enrichment under NPT Article IV, coupled with resistance to any agreement that permanently caps enrichment below levels it considers its sovereign right. Fifth, the IAEA should report ongoing verification challenges, including disputes over access to sites, the resolution of safeguards questions regarding undeclared nuclear material and activities, and the installation of monitoring equipment. The detection of 83.7% enriched uranium particles at Fordow in 2022, and Iran's subsequent explanation, exemplifies the kind of ambiguous observable that this framework predicts: technically alarming but politically deniable.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

The **African perspective** on Iran's nuclear program is shaped by a deep and historically grounded critique of the NPT as a discriminatory regime that privileges the five nuclear-weapon states while constraining the technological sovereignty of the Global South. African states, through the Pelindaba Treaty (1996), established a nuclear-weapon-free zone across the continent, and South Africa remains the only state to have voluntarily dismantled a nuclear arsenal, giving African diplomacy a unique moral authority on non-proliferation. From this vantage, Iran's program is not primarily a proliferation threat but a symptom of the NPT's unequal structure: Article IV guarantees the right to peaceful nuclear technology, yet the P5 have failed to fulfill their Article VI disarmament obligations, and Israel's undeclared arsenal in West Asia creates a security asymmetry that the NPT does nothing to address. African scholarship—Grovogui's critique of international legal order as Eurocentric, Mbembe's analysis of the necropolitics of global governance, and Mamdani's insistence on the political construction of categories—frames the Iran nuclear crisis as an instance of a broader pattern in which Western powers invoke "proliferation" to police the technological ambitions of non-Western states while exempting their allies. African states at NPT Review Conferences have consistently supported Iran's right to peaceful enrichment and have pushed for a Middle East WMD-free zone that would address Israel's arsenal alongside Iran's program. The African perspective also draws on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, 2017), which most African states have signed or ratified, reflecting frustration with the NPT's failure to deliver disarmament. What this perspective reveals that others miss is the structural hypocrisy of a non-proliferation regime that demands abstinence from states that have never possessed nuclear weapons while permitting the P5 to modernize their arsenals indefinitely. What it risks occluding is the genuine security concerns of Iran's neighbors and the possibility that an Iranian bomb would destabilize a region already fractured by sectarian conflict and great-power competition.

The **Chinese perspective** treats Iran's nuclear program through the lens of non-proliferation combined with strategic partnership and commercial interest. China supports Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy under the NPT, opposes unilateral sanctions, and was a party to the JCPOA negotiations. Beijing's approach emphasizes multilateralism and diplomatic engagement over coercion, reflecting both its general preference for non-interference and its specific interest in maintaining stable energy supplies and Belt and Road Initiative connectivity through Iran. China's perspective occludes its own historical role in nuclear technology transfers to Pakistan and its commercial interests in Iranian oil and infrastructure, which create incentives to downplay proliferation risks. It also tends to frame US pressure on Iran as hegemonic rather than as a legitimate security concern.

The **Russian perspective** frames Iran's nuclear program within a multipolarity narrative in which the United States seeks to maintain unipolar dominance. Russia, as a P5+1 member and a supplier of nuclear technology to Iran (Bushehr), supports Iran's civilian program while opposing US sanctions and the 2018 withdrawal from the JCPOA. Moscow's position combines genuine non-proliferation interest—Russia does not want a nuclear-armed Iran on its southern border—with geopolitical opportunism: Iran serves as a partner in resisting US influence in West Asia and in sustaining Russian energy leverage. Russia's perspective occludes its own early assistance to Iran's nuclear program and its tendency to use the Iran issue as a bargaining chip in broader US-Russia relations.

The **Western perspective** (encompassing the US, UK, France, Germany, and Israel) treats Iran's nuclear program primarily as a proliferation threat to be prevented through a combination of sanctions, diplomacy, and, if necessary, military action. This perspective emphasizes Iran's history of undeclared activities, its support for regional proxies, and the potential for a nuclear Iran to trigger a regional arms race. The JCPOA collapse debate—between those who view the deal as a flawed but necessary constraint and those who view it as an insufficient and temporary fix—divides Western opinion. What this perspective occludes is the double standard of tolerating Israel's undeclared arsenal while demanding Iranian abstinence, and the failure of the P5 to meet their own disarmament obligations, which undermines the moral authority of non-proliferation demands.

The **UN perspective** centers on the institutional framework of IAEA safeguards, NPT Review Conferences, and Security Council resolutions (1696, 1737, 1929, 2231). This perspective treats Iran's program as a compliance problem to be managed through verification, legal obligation, and multilateral enforcement. The IAEA's technical assessments provide the evidentiary basis for international action, while the Security Council provides the enforcement mechanism. What this perspective occludes is the political nature of its own institutions: the P5 veto power means that enforcement is selective, and the IAEA's dependence on member-state intelligence and funding creates vulnerabilities to politicization. The UN framework is strongest on technical verification and weakest on addressing the underlying security dilemmas that drive proliferation.

SECTION 2.3 — KEY IDEA 2: The JCPOA — Architecture, Commitments, and Verification

Bolded Causal Claim: The JCPOA's architecture rested on a trade of verifiable, multi-point enrichment constraints for sanctions relief, creating a time-bound but technically robust non-proliferation bargain whose durability depended on sustained political commitment from all parties and on the economic benefits actually reaching Iran.

Mechanism: The mechanism is simultaneous constraint of the fuel cycle at multiple chokepoints, coupled with a verification regime dense enough to detect diversion. Signed on July 14, 2015, by Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and endorsed by UNSC Resolution 2231, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reduced Iran's enrichment ceiling from 20 percent to 3.67 percent U-235; capped its low-enriched uranium (LEU) stockpile at 300 kilograms (down from roughly 10,000 kilograms); limited installed centrifuges to 5,060 first-generation IR-1 machines at Natanz (removing approximately 13,000 others, including advanced models, from service); converted the Fordow underground facility into a research center with no enrichment; redesigned the Arak heavy-water reactor so that its annual plutonium output would fall from roughly 10 kilograms to less than one; and committed Iran to the Additional Protocol and modified Code 3.1 safeguards. The IAEA gained access to monitor the entire fuel cycle, including uranium mines, mills, and centrifuge production workshops. In

exchange, UNSC Resolution 2231 terminated the previous sanctions resolutions (1696, 1737, 1747, 1803, 1835, 1929); the European Union lifted nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions; and the United States waived statutory sanctions on Iran's oil, banking, and shipping sectors. The core strategic logic was the "breakout timeline": by constraining both enrichment capacity and fissile-material stockpile, the deal extended Iran's time to produce enough highly enriched uranium (HEU) for one weapon from an estimated two to three months to roughly twelve months. The mechanism also included a Joint Commission dispute-resolution process and a "snapback" provision (UNSC 2231, paragraphs 11–12) permitting any P5 member to reimpose sanctions if Iran were found in significant non-performance. Sunset clauses phased out restrictions over 8 to 25 years: centrifuge limits after 8 years, enrichment limits after 15, procurement-channel oversight after 10, and IAEA access to uranium mines after 20. The Additional Protocol and modified Code 3.1, however, were intended to continue indefinitely, providing a long-term verification floor.

Scope Conditions: The bargain held only under four conditions: (a) Iran's compliance had to be continuously verifiable by the IAEA; (b) sanctions relief had to be economically meaningful, not merely legal; (c) the United States had to sustain the deal across changes of administration; and (d) Iran's underlying security dilemma — conventional inferiority relative to Israel and the Gulf monarchies, plus the absence of a US security guarantee — had to be bracketed rather than resolved. The JCPOA deliberately excluded Iran's ballistic missile program and its regional activities from the negotiating scope, a choice that maximized the chance of a nuclear deal but created a political vulnerability: critics could argue that the deal legitimized Iran's nuclear infrastructure while leaving its missile and proxy capabilities untouched. The mechanism also assumed that Iran's leadership would calculate that the economic benefits of compliance exceeded the strategic value of an unconstrained program — an assumption that depended on the sanctions relief actually materializing in Iran's economy.

Observable Implications: From January 2016 through May 2018, IAEA quarterly reports confirmed Iranian compliance: the LEU stockpile remained below 300 kilograms, enrichment stayed at or below 3.67 percent, centrifuge numbers matched commitments, and no diversion of declared nuclear material was detected. The IAEA's monitoring and verification activities in Iran expanded significantly, with inspector-days and access points increasing. However, the economic implications were weaker than the technical ones. Foreign banks, fearing US secondary sanctions and Treasury Department enforcement, remained reluctant to process Iran-related transactions; major commercial deals (Total's South Pars investment, Boeing aircraft sales) stalled or collapsed. Iran's oil exports recovered partially but not to pre-sanctions levels. This gap between legal relief and economic reality meant that the JCPOA's political sustainability in Tehran was always thinner than its technical compliance record suggested. The deal's domestic fragility was visible in both countries: in the United States, the Congressional Review Act (2015) and subsequent opposition from congressional Republicans and the Netanyahu government in Israel; in Iran, hardliner criticism of Rouhani's government and the Revolutionary Guards' skepticism about Western commitments.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The JCPOA is read through the lens of NPT inequality and the Treaty of Pelindaba. African states, most of which are NPT members in good standing with no nuclear weapons, view the deal as a pragmatic but structurally imperfect non-proliferation measure. The African perspective notes that the JCPOA's asymmetry — Iran constrained while Israel's undeclared arsenal remains unacknowledged — reproduces the NPT's discriminatory architecture, in which five states possess nuclear weapons legally and others are forbidden them. The Pelindaba Treaty (1996) established Africa as a nuclear-weapon-free zone, and African states have consistently supported universal disarmament and the Treaty on the Prohibition of

Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, 2017). From this vantage, the JCPOA's sunset clauses and the absence of disarmament obligations on nuclear-armed states reveal the deal as a non-proliferation instrument that does not address proliferation's root cause: the security value that possessors attribute to nuclear weapons. African scholarship (Grovogui, Mbembe) would frame the JCPOA as an instance of technical governance substituting for political equality — verification regimes managing symptoms while the underlying hierarchy persists. The African perspective also notes that the deal's collapse reinforced skepticism about Western commitments to negotiated solutions, echoing African experiences with sanctions, conditionalities, and broken promises in other domains. The TPNW's emphasis on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the illegitimacy of nuclear threats resonates with African states' experience of being subject to nuclear coercion during the Cold War and beyond.

Chinese: China supported the JCPOA as a model of multilateral diplomacy and a stabilizing factor in the Middle East. Beijing's interest combined non-proliferation with energy security and Belt and Road connectivity. China participated in the Arak reactor redesign (leading the working group) and supported IAEA verification. The Chinese perspective emphasizes non-interference and the legitimacy of Iran's peaceful nuclear rights under the NPT. China opposed US withdrawal and reimposition of sanctions, viewing them as unilateralism undermining multilateralism. China's strategic partnership with Iran (the 25-year cooperation agreement signed in 2021) reflects a hedging strategy: maintaining economic ties and diplomatic support while not directly challenging US sanctions enforcement.

Russian: Russia was a P5+1 member and co-architect of the JCPOA. Moscow's interest combined non-proliferation (preventing a nuclear-armed Iran on its southern flank) with multipolarity (resisting US unilateralism). Russia supplied fuel for the Bushehr reactor and participated in the Arak redesign. After US withdrawal, Russia supported Iran's position that the deal's collapse was Washington's fault, while also urging Iranian restraint. The Russian perspective frames the JCPOA as an example of successful multilateralism that US unilateralism destroyed, reinforcing Moscow's narrative about the need for a multipolar order in which no single state can unilaterally abrogate negotiated agreements.

Western: The Western perspective is deeply divided. The Obama administration viewed the JCPOA as the best achievable non-proliferation outcome, arguing that no better deal was available and that the alternatives were war or an unconstrained Iranian program. Critics — including the Netanyahu government, congressional Republicans, and later the Trump administration — argued the deal was too weak: sunset clauses allowed Iran to resume enrichment after 10–15 years, missile limits were absent, and regional behavior was unaddressed. European powers (the E3: France, Germany, the United Kingdom) sought to preserve the deal through the INSTEX mechanism. The Western debate centers on whether the JCPOA was a sufficient constraint on Iran's nuclear ambitions or a dangerous legitimization of its nuclear infrastructure.

UN: The UN perspective treats the JCPOA as anchored in UNSC Resolution 2231, which endorsed the deal and established the snapback mechanism. The IAEA's verification role is central: the agency's quarterly reports provided the evidentiary basis for assessing compliance. The UN framework provided legal authority for both sanctions relief and reimposition. The perspective's strength is technical verification and multilateral legal authority; its weakness is dependence on P5 consensus, which fractured after US withdrawal, and the IAEA's dependence on member-state intelligence and funding, creating vulnerabilities to politicization.

SECTION 2.4 — KEY IDEA 3: The US Withdrawal (2018), Snapback, and Iran's Steps Back from Compliance

Bolded Causal Claim: The US withdrawal from the JCPOA in May 2018, followed by maximum pressure sanctions and the failure of European INSTEX, destroyed the bargain's reciprocity, leading Iran to progressively breach enrichment limits from 2019 onward and ultimately to accumulate near-weapons-grade uranium by 2023–2024.

Mechanism: The mechanism is reciprocity collapse in a conditional bargain. The JCPOA's logic required both sides to perform simultaneously: Iran constrained its fuel cycle in exchange for sanctions relief. When the United States withdrew on May 8, 2018, and reimposed sanctions in two tranches (August and November 2018), the US side of the bargain vanished while Iran's obligations remained in place. Iran initially maintained compliance for approximately fourteen months — a period Tehran termed "strategic patience" — hoping that European powers would deliver economic benefits through INSTEX, established in January 2019 as a special-purpose vehicle for humanitarian trade. When INSTEX failed to process significant transactions (it completed only a single small transaction in 2020), Iran began calibrated, reversible breaches designed to signal leverage rather than to build a weapon. The sequence: July 2019, exceeding the 300-kilogram LEU cap and raising enrichment to 4.5 percent; November 2019, resuming enrichment at Fordow; January 2020, exceeding 20 percent enrichment; April 2021, producing 60 percent HEU; 2021–2022, installing advanced centrifuges (IR-4, IR-6) at Natanz and Fordow; 2022, removing IAEA surveillance cameras at Karaj and Natanz; 2023, expelling several experienced IAEA inspectors. Each step was calibrated to be reversible and to increase pressure on the remaining parties to restore the deal's economic benefits. The "snapback" dispute compounded the crisis: the Trump administration claimed rights under UNSC 2231 paragraph 11 to trigger snapback reimposition of all UN sanctions despite having withdrawn from the deal; the E3 and other Security Council members rejected this, arguing that the United States was no longer a participant and therefore lacked standing. The mechanism was accelerated by external shocks: the January 2020 US assassination of Qasem Soleimani, the April 2021 sabotage at Natanz (attributed to Israel), and the 2020 Iranian law (the Strategic Action Plan to Lift Sanctions) mandating 20 percent enrichment and restricting IAEA access until sanctions were lifted. By 2024, Iran had accumulated an estimated 140–180 kilograms of 60 percent HEU, with breakout timeline estimates shrinking from roughly twelve months in 2018 to a matter of weeks.

Scope Conditions: The collapse required both US withdrawal and European inability to deliver economic benefits; neither alone would have produced the same outcome. Iran's breaches were calibrated to be reversible, implying that Tehran sought leverage and threshold status rather than immediate weaponization — though the distinction between "threshold" and "weapon" narrows as enrichment advances. The mechanism assumes Iran's leadership calculates that nuclear latency (the ability to produce a weapon quickly if needed) serves its security without incurring the costs of actual weaponization, including NPT withdrawal and potential military strikes. The mechanism also depends on Iran's technical capacity to scale enrichment, which advanced significantly during the JCPOA implementation period because research on advanced centrifuges continued under the deal's permitted R&D provisions. A further scope condition: the mechanism assumes that no external actor (Israel, the United States) would conduct military strikes that would reset Iran's program by force — an assumption that has been tested by sabotage operations but not by full-scale military action.

Observable Implications: IAEA Director General reports from 2019 through 2024 document the progressive enrichment increases and stockpile growth: 4.5 percent (July 2019), 20 percent (January 2020), 60 percent (April 2021), with stockpiles of 60 percent HEU reaching approximately 140–180 kilograms by

early 2024. Breakout timeline estimates, which the IAEA and independent analysts (including the Institute for Science and International Security) tracked, shrank from roughly twelve months in 2018 to weeks by 2024. The IAEA lost monitoring continuity at several facilities: surveillance cameras at Karaj and Natanz were removed or their footage withheld; the agency's access to centrifuge production workshops was restricted. Iran's 2020 Strategic Action Plan law mandated 20 percent enrichment and restricted IAEA access until sanctions were lifted. The IAEA Board of Governors issued censures in 2022 and 2024; Iran responded by further restricting inspector access, including the September 2023 expulsion of several experienced inspectors. The 2024 assessment by the IAEA and independent analysts was that Iran was closer to a nuclear weapon than at any point since 2015, though the agency continued to state that it had not detected diversion of declared nuclear material to a weapons program.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The collapse is read as confirmation of the NPT's structural inequality and the unreliability of Western security commitments. African states, many of which have experienced sanctions and conditionalities in other domains, view the US withdrawal as an instance of great-power caprice that undermines the normative order. The African perspective emphasizes that Iran's breaches, while technically violations of the JCPOA, were responses to a broken bargain — a causal logic that Western non-proliferation discourse often inverts by treating Iranian behavior as the independent variable. African scholarship (Mamdani, Bayart) would frame the episode as "extraversion": the JCPOA's fate was determined by US domestic politics and Israeli security concerns, not by Iranian behavior alone. The TPNW's emphasis on the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the illegitimacy of nuclear threats resonates with African states' experience of being subject to nuclear coercion. The African perspective also notes that the collapse accelerated proliferation hedging by Saudi Arabia and other regional actors, demonstrating that non-proliferation bargains must be durable to be effective. The Pelindaba NWFZ remains Africa's contribution to a non-proliferation order that the great powers have failed to sustain. From this vantage, the lesson is not that Iran was untrustworthy but that the international order's enforcement mechanisms are politically contingent and asymmetrically applied.

Chinese: China opposed US withdrawal and supported Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy under the NPT. Beijing's perspective emphasizes multilateralism and the JCPOA as a diplomatic achievement. China continued to import Iranian oil despite sanctions and signed a 25-year strategic partnership agreement with Iran in 2021. China's position on Iran's breaches is nuanced: it urges restraint while blaming US unilateralism for the collapse. The Chinese perspective sees the episode as evidence of US unreliability, reinforcing Beijing's narrative about the need for a multipolar order and its own role as a stabilizing force. China's mediation of the 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement reflects this self-image. Beijing's interest in non-proliferation is genuine but subordinate to its strategic partnership with Tehran and its broader competition with Washington.

Russian: Russia blamed the United States for the collapse and supported Iran's position that the deal's failure was Washington's fault. Moscow's perspective frames the episode as US unilateralism destroying multilateralism. Russia also had commercial interests (Bushehr reactor fuel supply, potential arms sales). After 2022, Russia-Iran ties deepened significantly (drone supplies for the Ukraine war), though this deepening is driven more by the Ukraine conflict than by nuclear issues. Russia's position on Iran's enrichment is that it is a sovereign right under the NPT, while urging Tehran not to weaponize. The multipolarity framing is central: the JCPOA collapse demonstrates, in Moscow's view, that the US cannot be trusted to honor agreements, reinforcing the case for a multipolar order.

Western: The Western perspective is deeply divided. The Trump administration viewed maximum pressure

as necessary to address the JCPOA's flaws — sunset clauses, absence of missile limits, and unaddressed regional behavior — and believed that economic coercion could produce a "better deal." The Biden administration sought to revive the deal through indirect talks in Vienna (2021–2022) but failed due to disagreements over the scope of sanctions relief and Iran's demands for guarantees against future US withdrawal. European powers (the E3) sought to preserve the deal but were unable to deliver economic benefits through INSTEX. The Western debate centers on whether maximum pressure was a failed strategy (it did not produce a better deal and accelerated Iran's nuclear advances) or whether the JCPOA was fundamentally flawed and its collapse inevitable. The 2024 consensus assessment: Iran is closer to a weapon than in 2015, and the non-proliferation regime in the Middle East is weaker.

UN: The UN perspective focuses on the legal and verification crisis. UNSC 2231's snapback mechanism became contested; the IAEA lost monitoring access at several facilities; the Board of Governors issued censures in 2022 and 2024. The UN framework's enforcement capacity was paralyzed by P5 divisions (the United States versus Russia and China). The IAEA's technical assessments (Director General reports) documented the breaches but could not compel compliance. The UN perspective's strength is documentation and legal authority; its weakness is enforcement when great powers disagree. The IAEA's dependence on member-state intelligence and funding, and the Security Council's P5 veto structure, mean that the UN framework is strongest on technical verification and weakest on addressing the underlying security dilemmas that drive proliferation.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Extended Deterrence in the Middle East: Israel's Ambiguity, US Guarantees, and the Saudi Nuclear Question

Bolded Causal Claim: Extended deterrence in the Middle East is stabilizing only when three conditions hold simultaneously: the guarantor's commitment is perceived as credible by both the protected state and the adversary; the protected state's threat perception is acute enough to accept dependence; and the adversary's decision calculus is distorted by uncertainty about retaliation. Where any condition fails, extended deterrence does not prevent proliferation; it displaces it into hedging, opacity, and latent capability. In this region, Israel's nuclear ambiguity, the United States' conditional security guarantees, and Saudi Arabia's hedging behavior form an interdependent system in which assurance and insecurity are produced by the same instruments.

Mechanism: Extended deterrence is the promise by a nuclear-armed state to use force, including nuclear force, to defend an ally or partner. In Europe and East Asia, this promise is institutionalized through alliances, forward deployment, and integrated command structures. In the Middle East, by contrast, US extended deterrence has historically been less formalized and more contingent on presidential discretion, congressional politics, and shifting regional priorities. The mechanism therefore operates through signaling rather than automaticity: arms sales, missile-defense deployments, joint exercises, and declaratory statements are interpreted by adversaries as indicators of US willingness to absorb risk. The logic draws on Thomas Schelling's analysis of commitment and on Glenn Snyder's alliance theory, both of which emphasize that deterrence depends less on aggregate capability than on the adversary's belief that the guarantor will accept costs that exceed the immediate value of the contested object. Israel's doctrine of nuclear opacity, or amimut, adds a second mechanism. By neither confirming nor denying possession of nuclear weapons, Israel creates strategic uncertainty that raises the expected cost of existential attack without providing adversaries with a clear threshold for preemption. This ambiguity can deter rational state actors, but it also prevents adversaries from

calibrating their own forces, encouraging worst-case planning and investment in survivable delivery systems. Robert Jervis's security-dilemma framework is useful here: measures taken to increase one's own security can decrease another's, and opacity magnifies that effect because it denies the adversary information needed to distinguish defensive from offensive preparations. The Saudi response illustrates the third mechanism: hedging. Faced with Iranian nuclear advances and doubts about US reliability, Saudi leaders have pursued civilian nuclear cooperation, ballistic-missile development, and rhetorical commitments to matching any Iranian capability. Hedging is not yet weaponization; it is the accumulation of options that reduces the time and political cost of crossing the threshold later. The interaction is recursive: Israeli opacity heightens Iranian insecurity; Iranian latency heightens Saudi hedging; Saudi hedging heightens Iranian and Israeli threat perception. Each actor's defensive measure becomes another's provocation, producing a security dilemma in which extended deterrence and proliferation pressure are two sides of the same coin.

Scope Conditions: Extended deterrence in this region is effective only under narrow conditions. First, the guarantor must have interests that the adversary believes are worth nuclear risk; if Washington's commitment appears conditional on domestic politics or on the value of a particular partner, deterrence erodes. Second, the protected state must not possess an independent nuclear option that it can activate quickly; once hedging becomes advanced, the guarantor's leverage declines because the client can substitute self-help for alliance. Third, the adversary must be a unitary, risk-averse state actor capable of cost-benefit calculation; extended deterrence is less reliable against fragmented regimes, revolutionary ideologies, or actors that value martyrdom over survival. Israel's opacity is stabilizing mainly against state-level existential threats and less so against non-state actors or against adversaries who believe they can exploit ambiguity to test red lines. Saudi hedging is constrained by technical capacity, financial resources, alliance dependence, and nonproliferation agreements; it is not an automatic march to a bomb. The cascade scenario—Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt following Iran—is a conditional possibility, not a law. It requires that Iran cross a visible threshold, that US guarantees be perceived as hollow, and that regional rivals possess or can acquire the necessary fuel-cycle capabilities. Where these conditions are absent, hedging may remain latent and reversible. Alliance theory also suggests that extended deterrence is more credible when the guarantor has troops or assets in harm's way, creating a tripwire effect; in the Middle East, the absence of such institutionalized tripwires makes credibility more dependent on episodic demonstrations of resolve.

Observable Implications: The theory predicts several observable patterns. If US extended deterrence is perceived as credible, Saudi Arabia should accept limits on enrichment and reprocessing, sign and implement robust safeguards, and rely on US-supplied missile defense and conventional arms; if credibility declines, one should observe Saudi interest in indigenous fuel-cycle capabilities, expanded missile programs, and diplomatic hedging toward Pakistan or other nuclear suppliers. Israel's opacity should be accompanied by investments in second-strike survivability, civil-defense and continuity planning, and deliberate ambiguity in official statements; observable shifts would include explicit nuclear threats or, conversely, arms-control proposals that trade ambiguity for recognition. Iranian behavior provides the trigger variable: accelerated enrichment, reduced IAEA access, or weaponization-relevant research should correlate with Saudi and Israeli hardening. At the institutional level, one should observe IAEA safeguards negotiations with Saudi Arabia, congressional debates over US-Saudi nuclear cooperation, and recurring NPT Review Conference disputes over extended deterrence and disarmament. The absence of a Saudi enrichment program despite Iranian advances would suggest that US guarantees, economic incentives, or technical barriers are operating as scope conditions. Conversely, a Saudi move toward enrichment would indicate that hedging has crossed from latent option to active capability.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective treats extended deterrence in the Mid-

dle East as an expression of nuclear hierarchy: a small group of states retains weapons and extends protection to clients while demanding that others renounce them. African scholarship and diplomacy, from the Pelindaba Treaty to support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, frame this as a legitimacy crisis rather than merely a regional security problem. African states see the Middle East's extended deterrence as continuous with a global order in which nuclear possession is tolerated for some and criminalized for others; the African vantage point therefore asks not only whether deterrence prevents war but whether it perpetuates an unequal international society. The Chinese perspective supports nonproliferation and opposes nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, but it interprets US extended deterrence as an instrument of hegemony that can provoke insecurity rather than resolve it. Beijing emphasizes Iran's rights under the NPT, criticizes unilateral sanctions, and presents itself as a stabilizing partner, while also warning that Saudi nuclear hedging would damage regional stability. The Russian perspective, shaped by its role in the P5+1 and its multipolarity framing, criticizes the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and argues that American extended deterrence has failed to prevent the crisis; Moscow supports nonproliferation but insists that security guarantees must be multilateral and that sanctions cannot substitute for diplomacy. The Western perspective, especially in the United States and Israel, treats Iranian nuclear capability as the primary threat and extended deterrence as a necessary response; it emphasizes prevention, intelligence, and military options, while debating whether US guarantees are sufficient to prevent Saudi proliferation. The UN perspective, through the IAEA and the NPT review process, does not endorse extended deterrence as a policy; it focuses on safeguards, compliance, and the legal obligations of non-nuclear-weapon states, while recognizing that the Security Council's enforcement capacity is limited when P5 interests diverge.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The Threshold State Problem: Proliferation Cascades, Hedging, and the Erosion of the NPT Regime

Bolded Causal Claim: The most dangerous proliferation actor is not always the state that builds a bomb; it is the state that acquires the capability to build one quickly while remaining inside the NPT. Such threshold states compress the decision timelines of rivals, blur the treaty's distinction between peaceful use and weapons development, and exploit the gap between what safeguards can verify (material accountancy) and what they cannot (intent). The result is a regime crisis in which the NPT's central bargain—nonproliferation in exchange for peaceful technology and disarmament—loses credibility even without a new nuclear-armed state.

Mechanism: A threshold state possesses the industrial, scientific, and material prerequisites for nuclear weapons—especially enrichment or reprocessing capability—without having assembled a device. The mechanism of danger is latency: the shorter the time between a political decision and a usable weapon, the less opportunity adversaries and institutions have to detect, deter, or reverse the move. Hedging is the strategic logic behind latency. A state hedges when it maintains an option to weaponize while avoiding the costs of open proliferation, including sanctions, isolation, and preventive attack. Hedging can be defensive (insurance against future threats), offensive (coercive leverage), or domestic (regime prestige and technological nationalism). The NPT's Article IV guarantees the right to peaceful nuclear energy, while Article II prohibits acquisition of nuclear weapons; the treaty does not define how much enrichment capacity is "peaceful." This ambiguity is the structural opening through which threshold states pass. IAEA safeguards are designed to verify that declared nuclear material is not diverted to weapons; they are not designed to certify the absence of a weapons program in a state with advanced fuel-cycle capabilities. Consequently, a threshold state can remain technically compliant while becoming strategically dangerous. The cascade mechanism operates through perception and time. If State A is believed to be approaching a threshold, State B faces a choice:

rely on alliances and deterrence, or begin its own hedging. Because hedging takes years, the rational response to uncertainty is to start early. Thus the mere possibility of proliferation can generate proliferation, even if State A never builds a weapon. The erosion of the NPT follows from repeated episodes in which major powers either fail to enforce the treaty against allies or impose it selectively against adversaries. When non-nuclear states conclude that the treaty protects the privileges of the nuclear-armed rather than their security, the normative foundation weakens and hedging becomes more attractive. The theoretical debate between Kenneth Waltz and Scott Sagan frames this problem: Waltz argues that nuclear proliferation can be stabilizing because deterrence is robust, while Sagan argues that organizational pathologies, civil-military relations, and preventive-war incentives make new nuclear states dangerous. The threshold state complicates both arguments because it is neither fully nuclear nor fully non-nuclear; it creates deterrence-like effects without the stabilizing institutions that accompany declared arsenals.

Scope Conditions: The threshold problem is acute only under specific conditions. It requires advanced fuel-cycle technology, which is expensive, regulated, and technically demanding; many states that desire nuclear options cannot sustain them. It requires a security environment in which alliances are perceived as unreliable and threats are existential; where extended deterrence is credible, hedging is less likely. It also requires domestic political coalitions that favor technological autonomy and are willing to bear economic costs. The cascade is not automatic. Historical experience suggests that proliferation is rare and clustered; most states that could build weapons choose not to, constrained by norms, alliances, economic integration, and domestic opposition. The NPT has been remarkably successful in limiting the number of nuclear-armed states, even if it has not eliminated latency. Threshold states can be stabilizing if their capability is transparent, reversible, and embedded in strong safeguards; Japan is often cited as a case of stable latency, though its circumstances are unique. Conversely, threshold capability is destabilizing when it is opaque, when verification is contested, and when regional rivals lack comparable capabilities or alliances. The regime's erosion is also conditional: it accelerates when P5 members disagree on enforcement, when disarmament obligations under Article VI are perceived as unfulfilled, and when the IAEA is politicized; it slows when verification is strengthened, when security guarantees are credible, and when nuclear-armed states demonstrate restraint. Jacques Hymans's work on national identity and nuclear proliferation suggests that hedging is not purely strategic; it is also shaped by a state's self-conception as modern, sovereign, and technologically capable. Etel Solingen's research on political economy suggests that inward-looking, nationalist coalitions are more likely to pursue nuclear options than internationally integrated, market-oriented coalitions. These scope conditions imply that latency is a political phenomenon as much as a technical one.

Observable Implications: One should observe threshold dynamics in several indicators. Rising enrichment capacity and declining breakout time are direct measures, though estimates depend on assumptions about facility configuration and state intent. Reduced IAEA access, disputes over undeclared sites, and Board of Governors censures indicate verification stress. Regional hedging appears as new nuclear-cooperation agreements, missile programs, and statements by leaders that they will match a rival's capability. At the regime level, NPT Review Conferences that end without consensus, growing support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons among non-nuclear states, and debates over the Additional Protocol reveal normative strain. If the threshold problem is being managed, one should observe strengthened safeguards, voluntary limits on enrichment, and regional security dialogues; if it is worsening, one should observe competitive latency, opaque programs, and institutional paralysis. The key analytical task is to distinguish a state's capability from its intent: latency is observable, intent is inferred, and policy errors arise when analysts conflate the two. Analysts should therefore treat breakout timelines as scenario-dependent estimates rather than objective facts, and should examine whether a state's fuel-cycle investments are proportionate to

its civilian energy needs.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective is central to understanding the threshold problem because African states have chosen collective renunciation through the Pelindaba Treaty and have been prominent supporters of the TPNW. From this vantage point, the threshold state is not merely a technical problem of latency; it is a symptom of an unjust order in which nuclear-armed states retain weapons and extend deterrence while demanding that others remain non-nuclear. African scholarship emphasizes that the NPT's legitimacy depends on reciprocity: nonproliferation must be matched by disarmament and by equitable access to peaceful technology. The Middle East threshold debate, in this view, exposes the treaty's double standard and reinforces African demands for a genuinely non-discriminatory regime. The Chinese perspective supports the NPT and opposes proliferation, but it stresses that peaceful nuclear energy is a right of all states and that verification must not become a tool of coercion. Beijing sees threshold anxieties as partly manufactured by Western pressure and argues that security dilemmas, not technology alone, drive hedging; it favors diplomatic solutions and regional security frameworks over sanctions. The Russian perspective, informed by its P5+1 role, acknowledges the dangers of unchecked latency but frames the NPT crisis as a consequence of US unilateralism and the failure to address legitimate security concerns. Moscow supports nonproliferation while resisting enforcement mechanisms that bypass the Security Council and insists that disarmament obligations apply to all nuclear-armed states. The Western perspective treats threshold capability as a direct threat to nonproliferation and regional stability; it emphasizes verification, export controls, and the possibility of military action to prevent weaponization, while debating whether engagement or pressure is more effective. The UN perspective, through the IAEA and NPT review process, seeks to strengthen safeguards and promote universal adherence, but its effectiveness depends on member-state cooperation and P5 consensus; the threshold problem thus highlights both the technical competence and the political limits of the UN framework.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective on nuclear proliferation and deterrence in West Asia begins from a historical and epistemic position that treats the global nuclear order not as a neutral security architecture but as an extension of imperial hierarchy. From this vantage point, the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) is not simply a technical bargain among states; it is a stratified order in which nuclear-armed states retain their arsenals while non-nuclear states are asked to renounce them, and in which enforcement has historically fallen most heavily on states in the Global South. African scholarship supplies the conceptual vocabulary for this critique. Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism, Rodney's account of how Europe underdeveloped Africa, and Fanon's critique of colonial violence all frame nuclear hierarchy as part of a longer history in which security is distributed unevenly and sovereignty is qualified by race, power, and economic dependence. Cabral's insistence that liberation requires both material and epistemic emancipation, and Nyerere's emphasis on self-reliance, help explain why African states have often treated access to peaceful nuclear technology and sovereign decision-making as non-negotiable, even while supporting nonproliferation. Mamdani's work on the bifurcated state, Bayart's analysis of extraversion, and Grovogui's critique of international legal sovereignty show how African states operate within an international system whose rules were not authored by them and whose enforcement mechanisms can reproduce subordination. Mbembe's reflections on necropolitics and the distribution of death, Oyěwùmí's critique of colonial epistemologies, and Tamale's decolonial feminist scholarship add

further layers: the nuclear order is not only about weapons but about whose lives are rendered expendable, whose knowledge counts as expertise, and whose security is treated as universal.

This perspective is shaped by direct African experience of nuclear danger. French nuclear testing in the Sahara, the colonial extraction of uranium in the Congo and Niger, and the apartheid-era South African nuclear program all demonstrate that Africa has been both a site of nuclear harm and a site of nuclear ambition. South Africa's unique history—building nuclear weapons under apartheid and then dismantling them during the transition to majority rule—gives African diplomacy a distinctive credibility. It shows that renunciation is possible, but also that it occurred under exceptional political conditions and cannot be abstracted from the end of white minority rule. The Pelindaba Treaty, which established an African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, reflects a regional commitment to nonproliferation that is not merely derivative of Western priorities. It is an African legal achievement, grounded in the view that security is better served by collective renunciation than by competitive armament. African states have also been prominent supporters of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, not because they reject security, but because they regard the NPT's disarmament pillar as unfulfilled and the nuclear order as morally asymmetrical.

Applied to Iran's nuclear program, the African perspective is neither automatically sympathetic to Tehran nor automatically aligned with Western nonproliferation enforcement. It begins by affirming Article IV of the NPT, which recognizes the inalienable right of parties to develop peaceful nuclear energy. African states have often defended this right for developing countries, including Iran, because restrictions on peaceful technology can function as a form of technological gatekeeping. At the same time, African diplomacy has generally supported the NPT's nonproliferation pillar and has expressed concern about any move toward weaponization that could destabilize regions far beyond West Asia. The African vantage point is therefore suspicious of claims that rest on intelligence assessments whose credibility has been damaged by the Iraq WMD experience, but it is not indifferent to proliferation risk. It asks whether enforcement is even-handed: why Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal is treated as a settled fact while Iran's program is subjected to exceptional scrutiny; why the Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, first proposed in 1974, remains unimplemented; and why disarmament obligations under Article VI are treated as aspirational while nonproliferation obligations are treated as enforceable. Aning and Danso's work on African security governance is relevant here: African states often favor multilateral, rules-based approaches, but they are acutely aware that multilateralism can be captured by powerful states.

On the JCPOA, the African perspective generally welcomed the agreement as a rare instance of sustained multilateral diplomacy. It represented a negotiated compromise among the P5+1 and Iran, backed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2231, and it offered a model in which verification and diplomacy could substitute for coercion. African states and the African Union have tended to support such arrangements because they reduce the risk of war and because they affirm the principle that disputes should be resolved through institutions rather than unilateral force. Yet the African critique also notes the exclusivity of the P5+1 format: a treaty regime that claims universality was negotiated by a small group of powerful states, with the affected region and the broader Global South largely absent from the table. This is not merely procedural. It reflects a deeper concern that nuclear governance is conducted by those who possess weapons, not by those who bear the consequences of proliferation or war. The JCPOA's verification architecture—IAEA monitoring, centrifuge limits, stockpile caps, and the Additional Protocol—can be accepted as necessary, but the African perspective insists that verification must not become a vehicle for permanent subordination or for the denial of peaceful technology.

The US withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 and the subsequent reimposition of sanctions are viewed from

this perspective as a breach of multilateral trust. The snapback mechanism, in particular, is seen as a coercive instrument that allows one party to reimpose sanctions even when it has itself abandoned the agreement. African states have frequently criticized unilateral sanctions as instruments that harm civilian populations and undermine development, and they are likely to view the collapse of the JCPOA through that lens. Iran's subsequent steps away from compliance—higher enrichment levels, reduced transparency, and the accumulation of enriched uranium—are interpreted not as inexplicable defiance but as a predictable response to a broken bargain. This does not mean the African perspective excuses proliferation; rather, it treats compliance as reciprocal. When the party with greater power withdraws from commitments, the weaker party's restraint becomes politically unsustainable. The lesson drawn is that nonproliferation cannot be sustained by pressure alone; it requires credible commitments from all sides, including the nuclear-armed states.

Extended deterrence in the Middle East is read by the African perspective as a system of hierarchical protection. Israel's policy of nuclear ambiguity, tolerated for decades by the United States and other Western powers, is seen as emblematic of nuclear apartheid: a state outside the NPT retains an undeclared arsenal while a state inside the NPT is pressured to forgo even latent capability. US security guarantees to Israel and to Gulf partners are understood as hegemonic stabilizers that may prevent some forms of proliferation but also entrench dependence and asymmetry. The Saudi nuclear question—whether a civilian program could become a military one—is therefore not treated as a purely technical matter. It is seen as a consequence of an unequal order in which some states are permitted hedging and others are not. African diplomacy has long supported the establishment of a Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone, and from this perspective the failure to create such a zone is a major source of regional insecurity. The African contribution is to insist that extended deterrence cannot be a substitute for disarmament and that regional security requires the inclusion of all states, including Israel, in a common nonproliferation framework.

The threshold state problem—states that acquire latent capability without crossing the weaponization line—poses a special challenge for the African perspective. On one hand, African states recognize that hedging is a rational response to insecurity in a world where nuclear-armed states retain their arsenals and where security guarantees are selective. On the other hand, they fear that threshold logic can be used to justify indefinite non-disarmament by the nuclear-armed states: if everyone is potentially a threshold state, then no one is obliged to disarm. The African perspective therefore supports universal disarmament, security guarantees for non-nuclear states, and the strengthening of NWFZs as alternatives to competitive hedging. It also emphasizes that proliferation cascades are not merely technical chains but political signals: when one state hedges, others may follow, not because they want weapons but because they do not trust the order to protect them. The African vantage point reveals what the other perspectives often miss: the nuclear order's legitimacy depends on its perceived fairness, and its enforcement is experienced differently by states that have historically been objects of international power rather than authors of it.

What the African perspective contributes that the others cannot is a historically grounded critique of hierarchy, a defense of sovereign equality, and a insistence that nonproliferation be coupled with disarmament. It brings the memory of colonial nuclear harm, the example of South African renunciation, and the legal achievement of Pelindaba into the analysis of West Asia. It also reframes the threshold problem as a problem of global justice rather than merely of technical latency. What it may occlude is the immediacy of regional security dilemmas: the African perspective can understate the specific threats that Iran's program poses to its neighbors, the role of sectarian and proxy conflicts in shaping nuclear incentives, and the practical requirements of verification in a low-trust environment. It may also romanticize sovereignty in ways that do not fully address the risks of state capture, authoritarianism, or regional hegemony. Moreover, while African states have strong normative credentials, their capacity to enforce nonproliferation or to provide se-

curity guarantees is limited, and their own compliance records, though generally strong, are not immune to political pressure. The African perspective is therefore best understood not as a denial of nonproliferation but as a demand that nonproliferation be embedded in a broader project of decolonizing international security.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

China's perspective on nuclear proliferation and deterrence in West Asia is shaped by a combination of nonproliferation commitments, energy security interests, strategic partnership with Iran, and a broader commitment to multipolarity. Beijing is a nuclear-armed state and a permanent member of the Security Council, but its nuclear doctrine has traditionally emphasized minimum deterrence and a no-first-use policy. China supports the NPT and opposes the spread of nuclear weapons, yet it also resists what it regards as unilateral enforcement, regime change, and the use of nonproliferation as a pretext for hegemony. In the West Asian context, this produces a distinctive position: China is a nonproliferation stakeholder, but it is also a strategic and economic partner of Iran and a major consumer of Gulf energy.

On Iran's nuclear program, China has generally defended the right to peaceful nuclear energy under Article IV while calling for compliance with safeguards and IAEA verification. It participated in the P5+1 negotiations and supported the JCPOA as a diplomatic solution that balanced nonproliferation with Iran's legitimate energy needs. Beijing opposed the US withdrawal in 2018 and criticized the reimposition of unilateral sanctions, arguing that the deal was endorsed by the Security Council and should be preserved. At the same time, China has not been willing to sever economic ties with Iran, and its approach has emphasized continued trade, infrastructure cooperation, and diplomatic engagement rather than coercive pressure. This reflects a broader Chinese preference for stability through economic interdependence and for resolving disputes through negotiation rather than sanctions or force.

Extended deterrence in the Middle East is viewed with skepticism from Beijing. China is wary of US security guarantees as instruments of alliance politics and of missile defense systems that it believes can undermine strategic stability. It does not share the Western assumption that US extended deterrence is an unambiguous public good. Instead, China tends to favor regional de-escalation, dialogue, and the reduction of external military footprints. The 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement, brokered in part by China, is consistent with this approach: Beijing sees reduced regional tension as the best way to lower proliferation incentives. On the Saudi nuclear question, China supports civilian nuclear cooperation but opposes weaponization, and it is likely to emphasize IAEA safeguards and the peaceful-use provisions of the NPT. However, China's own strategic interests—energy security, Belt and Road connectivity, and competition with the United States—shape how firmly it presses any party.

The threshold state problem is approached by China as a matter of balance. Beijing opposes weaponization and supports verification, but it also insists that nonproliferation must not be used to deny developing states access to peaceful technology or to impose discriminatory standards. It is likely to view Iranian hedging as a response to insecurity and to Western pressure, while still urging restraint. China's contribution is to provide an alternative to coercive nonproliferation: diplomatic engagement, economic incentives, and multipolar mediation. Its occlusion is that it may understate the risks of Iranian regional behavior, be reluctant to impose costs on a strategic partner, and prioritize its own economic and geopolitical interests over strict enforcement. China's perspective thus adds a crucial non-Western great-power voice, but one that is itself shaped by strategic competition and by a preference for order over accountability.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

Russia's perspective on nuclear proliferation and deterrence in West Asia is rooted in its role as a P5+1

member, its long-standing relationship with Iran, and its broader commitment to multipolarity. Moscow supports nonproliferation in principle and has cooperated with Iran on civilian nuclear projects, most notably the Bushehr reactor. At the same time, Russia opposes unilateral enforcement, regime change, and the use of nonproliferation as a tool of Western hegemony. It views the NPT as a cornerstone of international order but insists that disarmament obligations apply to all nuclear-armed states, including the United States and its allies.

On Iran's nuclear program, Russia has generally argued that Tehran has the right to peaceful nuclear energy and that concerns should be addressed through the IAEA rather than through sanctions or threats of force. Moscow supported the JCPOA and criticized the US withdrawal, seeing it as a destabilizing act that undermined multilateral diplomacy. Russia has also been skeptical of snapback sanctions, viewing them as a mechanism that can be abused by states that have themselves abandoned the agreement. In this respect, Russia's position overlaps with China's and with broader Global South critiques of unilateralism, though it is driven more by great-power competition and by Russia's desire to preserve its influence in West Asia.

Extended deterrence is interpreted by Russia as part of a US-led security architecture that it seeks to balance. Moscow is critical of US guarantees to Israel and Gulf states, and it views Israeli nuclear ambiguity as an unresolved problem that undermines the credibility of nonproliferation norms. Russia does not necessarily oppose regional security arrangements, but it insists that they should not be dominated by the United States or used to isolate Iran. On the Saudi nuclear question, Russia is likely to support civilian cooperation while opposing weaponization, but its position will be shaped by its competition with the United States for influence in the Gulf and by its interest in maintaining working relationships with all regional actors.

The threshold state problem is seen by Russia as manageable if weaponization is prevented, but also as a symptom of a deeper failure: the nuclear-armed states have not disarmed, and non-nuclear states therefore have incentives to hedge. Russia emphasizes security guarantees, regional dialogue, and the role of the IAEA, while resisting enforcement mechanisms that bypass the Security Council. Its contribution is to provide a counterweight to Western dominance and to insist that nonproliferation be linked to disarmament. Its occlusion is that it may understate verification concerns, use Iran as leverage in great-power competition, and prioritize geopolitical positioning over regional stability. Russia's perspective is thus both a genuine nonproliferation voice and a strategic instrument in a multipolar contest.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on nuclear proliferation and deterrence in West Asia treats the prevention of an Iranian nuclear weapon as a central security priority. It is shaped by the US-Israel alliance, European nonproliferation commitments, and a long history of concern about proliferation in the Middle East. Western states generally support the NPT, IAEA safeguards, and export controls, and they have been the primary architects of sanctions regimes targeting Iran's nuclear program. The Western view is not monolithic: it includes both advocates of engagement, who supported the JCPOA, and advocates of pressure, who favored maximum sanctions and the threat of force. But both camps share the premise that Iranian nuclear capability is a direct threat to regional and global security.

On Iran's program, Western analysis emphasizes enrichment levels, centrifuge capacity, stockpiles of enriched uranium, and breakout timelines. It treats latent capability as dangerous because it can be converted into weapons relatively quickly and because it may trigger regional proliferation. The JCPOA is debated within the West as either a successful example of verification-based restraint or a flawed agreement that delayed but did not eliminate the risk. The US withdrawal in 2018 is defended by some as necessary to address

the deal's sunset clauses and regional behavior, and criticized by others as a strategic error that accelerated Iran's nuclear advances. Snapback sanctions are viewed by proponents as a legitimate enforcement tool and by critics as a coercive measure that undermines diplomacy.

Extended deterrence is a core element of the Western approach. The United States provides security guarantees to Israel and to Gulf partners, and Israel's nuclear ambiguity has long been tolerated as part of a regional balance. The Saudi nuclear question is treated with concern: Western policymakers worry that a Saudi civilian program could become a military one, especially if Iran crosses the threshold. The Western perspective therefore emphasizes verification, export controls, and the possibility of military action to prevent weaponization. It also supports the idea of a Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in principle, but often conditions it on regional peace and on Israel's security concerns.

The threshold state problem is seen by the West as a direct challenge to nonproliferation. Hedging is treated not as a rational response to insecurity but as a dangerous step toward weaponization. The Western perspective contributes technical expertise, verification capacity, and a willingness to enforce norms. Its occlusion is that it can understate the role of Western double standards—particularly regarding Israel's arsenal and the disarmament obligations of nuclear-armed states—and it can overstate the efficacy of coercion. It may also treat regional security dilemmas as problems to be managed by external power rather than as issues requiring inclusive regional dialogue. The Western perspective is thus powerful but partial: it sees the nuclear threat clearly, but it often sees it from the standpoint of those who already possess the weapons.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on nuclear proliferation and deterrence in West Asia is institutional, legal, and technical. It is expressed through the IAEA, the NPT review process, and the Security Council. The UN does not have a single strategic interest in the way that states do; rather, it seeks to uphold a rules-based order based on universal norms, verification, and collective security. Its central tools are safeguards agreements, Additional Protocols, NPT review conferences, and Security Council resolutions such as 1696, 1737, 1929, and 2231. The UN perspective treats nonproliferation as a global public good and views the IAEA as the technical authority on verification.

On Iran's program, the UN perspective is embodied in IAEA reports and in Security Council resolutions demanding suspension of enrichment and compliance with safeguards. The JCPOA was endorsed by Resolution 2231, and the IAEA was tasked with monitoring Iran's commitments. When the United States withdrew and Iran reduced compliance, the UN framework was strained: the IAEA continued to report on Iran's nuclear activities, but the political consensus behind the deal fractured. The UN perspective emphasizes that verification is possible and necessary, but that its effectiveness depends on member-state cooperation and on the willingness of the P5 to sustain consensus. Snapback mechanisms and sanctions are seen as legal instruments, but their legitimacy depends on whether they are applied consistently and in accordance with the Charter.

Extended deterrence is not a UN concept in the same way it is a state strategy, but the UN has long supported Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones, including in the Middle East. The failure to establish such a zone, despite decades of resolutions, illustrates the gap between normative aspiration and political reality. The UN perspective on the Saudi nuclear question is to insist on safeguards, transparency, and the peaceful-use provisions of the NPT. It does not have the power to prevent hedging, but it can provide the technical and legal framework within which hedging is monitored and, ideally, constrained.

The threshold state problem highlights both the strengths and limits of the UN system. Technically, the

IAEA can monitor enrichment, inspect facilities, and detect diversion. Politically, however, the UN cannot resolve the security dilemmas that drive hedging, nor can it compel nuclear-armed states to disarm. The NPT review process provides a forum for debate, but its outcomes depend on consensus among states with divergent interests. The UN perspective contributes legitimacy, technical competence, and a universalist framework. Its occlusion is that it can become procedurally focused, treating verification as a substitute for political settlement, and that it is vulnerable to P5 deadlock. In the case of West Asia, the UN can document proliferation risks and uphold norms, but it cannot by itself reconcile the competing claims of sovereignty, security, and justice that define the region's nuclear dilemma.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Exposes the asymmetry of the NPT by contrasting African non-nuclear status under Pelindaba with the continued nuclear arsenals of the P5; frames TPNW as a corrective to unequal nuclear order; insists that West Asian proliferation cannot be separated from disarmament failure and technological inequity.	May understate the immediate security dilemma driving Iranian hedging and the coercive value of sanctions; can treat regional actors as symptoms rather than agents.	Nuclear justice, sovereign equality, and universal disarmament; non-proliferation must be paired with disarmament and equitable access to peaceful technology.	Pelindaba Treaty; African support for TPNW; NPT RevCon debates over Article VI; African non-nuclear regional status.	Western perspective: an asymmetry critique does not by itself prevent breakout or verify compliance; disarmament-first framing may delay urgent non-proliferation measures.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Supports multilateral diplomacy and the JCPOA; opposes unilateral withdrawal and extraterritorial sanctions; frames non-proliferation as compatible with strategic partnership, development, and multipolar stability.	May understate Iranian enrichment advances and the coercive risks of a threshold state; can subordinate verification concerns to geopolitical competition with the United States.	Multipolar order, sovereignty, and negotiated settlement; non-proliferation through diplomacy rather than coercion.	Chinese support for UNSC Resolution 2231; JCPOA participation; IAEA engagement; strategic partnership with Iran.	Western perspective: prioritizing partnership over enforcement can dilute pressure needed to reverse Iranian noncompli-ance.
Russian	Acts as P5+1 member and JCPOA negotiator; opposes unilateral sanctions and snapback; frames US withdrawal as damaging to non-proliferation and to great-power concert.	May instrumentalize Iran in broader competition with the United States; can obscure Russian interests in maintaining leverage and in a multipolar balance.	Great-power concert, anti-unilateralism, and multipolarity; non-proliferation through collective security rather than hegemonic enforcement.	Russian role in P5+1; support for UNSC Resolution 2231; opposition to US snapback claims.	Western perspective: Russian obstruction of snapback and sanctions enforcement weakens the credibility of the NPT compliance regime.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Builds the JCPOA verification architecture; uses sanctions and diplomacy to constrain Iran; frames non-proliferation as central to regional and global security.	Often occludes the NPT's asymmetry, Israel's nuclear ambiguity, and the coercive effects of sanctions; can treat Iranian behavior as the sole source of instability.	Rules-based order, non-proliferation, and verification; security through compliance and deterrence.	IAEA reports; UNSC Resolutions 1696, 1737, 1929, 2231; JCPOA text and verification provisions.	African perspective: Western non-proliferation is undermined by double standards and by the failure of nuclear-armed states to disarm.
UN	Provides safeguards, inspections, RevCon forums, and Security Council resolutions; supplies technical legitimacy and universalist norms.	Can become procedurally focused, treating verification as a substitute for political settlement; vulnerable to P5 deadlock and selective enforcement.	Universal norms, technical verification, and multilateral legitimacy; non-proliferation through institutional process.	IAEA Director General reports; NPT RevCon documentation; UNSC Resolutions 1696, 1737, 1929, 2231.	Russian perspective: UN mechanisms can be instrumentalized by powerful states to impose unilateral preferences under multilateral cover.

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The JCPOA collapse, 2018–2025

The case is the unraveling of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action after the United States withdrew in 2018 and Iran's subsequent step-by-step departure from compliance, producing by the mid-2020s a threshold-state dilemma in which Iran retained advanced enrichment capability, growing stockpiles, and reduced IAEA access without having crossed the declared threshold of weaponization. The puzzle is not simply that a deal failed; it is why a verification-for-relief bargain collapsed into a reciprocal noncompliance spiral that increased uncertainty for all actors while leaving the underlying security dilemma unresolved.

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the collapse was shaped by leaders' beliefs, risk tolerance, and domestic coalitions. The US decision to withdraw in 2018 reflected a judgment that the JCPOA's sunset clauses and limited scope made it insufficient, combined with domestic political incentives to repudiate a predecessor's signature achievement. Iranian leaders' responses were filtered through factional competition

between pragmatists and hardliners, with the latter gaining credibility as sanctions returned and verification benefits eroded. Israeli leaders, particularly those who viewed Iran's regional posture as an existential threat, pressed for a harder line and treated ambiguity about Iran's program as intolerable. At the state level, the case is a security dilemma among Iran, the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. Iran's nuclear program functioned as a hedge against regime insecurity, regional encirclement, and the memory of the Iran-Iraq war; the United States sought to prevent proliferation while preserving regional primacy; Israel maintained its own ambiguous deterrent and demanded that Iran not acquire a comparable capability; Saudi Arabia watched the collapse as a signal that hedging, including civilian nuclear development, might become necessary. At the systemic level, the JCPOA was a product of P5+1 concert in a period of relative great-power cooperation; its collapse tracked the broader erosion of that concert into multipolar competition. The NPT regime provided the legal framework, but its asymmetry—nuclear-armed states retaining arsenals while demanding non-proliferation from others—limited its legitimacy in Tehran and in much of the Global South. At the transnational level, the IAEA's safeguards system supplied information and verification routines; procurement networks and sanctions-evasion channels shaped Iran's technical options; and transnational scientific, financial, and advocacy networks transmitted both constraints and opportunities. The collapse therefore cannot be explained by any single level: individual decisions triggered it, state security dilemmas sustained it, systemic competition removed the diplomatic scaffolding, and transnational verification and technology networks determined how much uncertainty remained.

Mechanism. The central mechanism is a reciprocal noncompliance spiral driven by the removal of one side of a conditional bargain. The JCPOA linked Iranian nuclear restraint and enhanced IAEA access to phased sanctions relief and reintegration into the global economy. When the United States withdrew and reimposed sanctions, the benefit side of the bargain collapsed while the compliance side initially held. Iran then used incremental noncompliance—raising enrichment levels, expanding centrifuge deployment, and restricting inspector access—as leverage to restore the bargain or to impose costs on the withdrawing party. Each Iranian step shortened estimated breakout timelines and degraded the information available to the IAEA, which in turn increased threat perception in Washington, Jerusalem, and Riyadh. The mechanism is not merely tit-for-tat; it is an information-degradation spiral: as verification access narrows, uncertainty rises, worst-case planning becomes more likely, and coercive options gain political support. Sanctions added economic pressure but did not reverse the technical trajectory; instead, they strengthened domestic actors who argued that compliance had purchased no security. The result was a threshold state: Iran acquired much of the latency and capability associated with a nuclear-armed state without a declared weapon, while the international community lost confidence in its ability to detect a dash to a bomb. This is the core dilemma: the deal's collapse did not restore the pre-2015 status quo; it created a more dangerous intermediate condition in which capability and uncertainty both increased.

Perspective reconstruction. The African perspective, which is primary in this lesson, reads the JCPOA collapse as a symptom of an unequal nuclear order rather than as a technical failure of one agreement. From this vantage point, the NPT's bargain—non-proliferation in exchange for disarmament and peaceful technology access—has been honored asymmetrically: African states and much of the Global South have renounced nuclear weapons, including through regional nuclear-weapon-free zones such as Pelindaba, while the P5 have retained and modernized their arsenals. The collapse of the JCPOA therefore confirms a long-standing critique: non-proliferation obligations are enforced coercively against weaker states, while disarmament obligations are treated as aspirational. African scholarship and diplomacy emphasize that West Asian proliferation risks cannot be separated from this legitimacy deficit; a regime that demands restraint without delivering disarmament or equitable development will be perceived as hierarchical. The African perspective

also highlights the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as an attempt to reassert the normative equality that the NPT has failed to secure. Its contribution is to show that the JCPOA's collapse was not only a strategic failure but a legitimacy crisis: Iran could frame its hedging as resistance to an unequal order, and African states could read the episode as evidence that nuclear governance remains structured by power rather than by law. What this perspective can occlude is the immediate security dilemma and the coercive value of verification; it may underweight the fact that Iranian hedging, whatever its normative framing, increases regional insecurity and could trigger cascading proliferation.

The Chinese perspective treats the collapse as a case of unilateralism undermining a multilateral settlement. Beijing supported the JCPOA, participated in the P5+1, and has maintained a strategic partnership with Iran; it opposes extraterritorial sanctions and frames the US withdrawal as destabilizing. From this view, the deal's architecture was sound, and its failure resulted from the abandonment of diplomacy by one party. China emphasizes sovereignty, negotiated settlement, and multipolar stability, and it supports IAEA verification while resisting the use of safeguards as a tool of coercion. Its contribution is to keep open a diplomatic channel and to model non-proliferation without regime change. Its occlusion is that it may understate Iran's enrichment advances and the risks of a threshold state, and it can subordinate verification concerns to geopolitical competition with the United States.

The Russian perspective, as a P5+1 member and co-negotiator of Resolution 2231, frames the collapse as damaging to both non-proliferation and great-power concert. Moscow opposes unilateral sanctions and snapback, arguing that the United States cannot invoke mechanisms of a deal it abandoned. Russia's multipolarity framing treats the episode as evidence of US hegemonic overreach and of the need for a more balanced international order. Its contribution is to defend multilateral process and to resist the unilateralization of sanctions. Its occlusion is that it may instrumentalize Iran in broader competition with the United States, and it can obscure Russian interests in maintaining leverage and in preventing a US-Iran rapprochement that might reduce Moscow's regional role.

The Western perspective, particularly in the United States and Europe, centers on non-proliferation, verification, and the JCPOA as the best available instrument for constraining Iran's program. It treats the deal's collapse as a strategic error or, in some variants, as a necessary correction to an agreement with sunset clauses and insufficient scope. The Western contribution is to foreground the technical and institutional mechanisms—IAEA access, enrichment limits, stockpile caps, and sanctions leverage—that made the JCPOA valuable. Its occlusion is that it often treats Iranian behavior as the primary source of instability while underweighting the NPT's asymmetry, Israel's nuclear ambiguity, and the coercive effects of sanctions on Iranian domestic politics. The Western debate over whether withdrawal was a mistake or a correction remains unresolved, but both sides generally agree that a threshold Iran is dangerous.

The UN perspective treats the collapse through the lens of safeguards, Security Council authority, and the NPT review process. IAEA Director General reports documented Iran's enrichment levels, stockpiles, and access restrictions; UNSC Resolution 2231 provided the legal framework for the deal and its termination provisions. The UN contribution is technical legitimacy: it can establish facts, monitor compliance, and provide a forum for debate. Its occlusion is that it can become procedurally focused, treating verification as a substitute for political settlement, and that it is vulnerable to P5 deadlock. In this case, the UN could document the erosion of compliance but could not compel the parties to restore the bargain or resolve the security dilemma that drove hedging.

Explicit adjudication. No single perspective fully explains the JCPOA collapse. The Western perspective best captures the institutional mechanism: the deal's value lay in verifiable constraints, and its collapse

removed those constraints while leaving Iran's technical capacity intact. The UN perspective adds indispensable factual grounding through IAEA reporting and Security Council resolutions. However, both tend to treat the crisis as a compliance problem and understate the normative and geopolitical conditions that made compliance fragile. The African perspective best explains why the regime lacked legitimacy in Tehran and in much of the Global South: an order that enforces non-proliferation while tolerating nuclear-armed states' arsenals and regional double standards invites hedging as resistance. The Chinese and Russian perspectives best explain the systemic context: the collapse occurred as great-power concert gave way to multipolar competition, and unilateral withdrawal destroyed the diplomatic scaffolding that had made verification politically sustainable. The most defensible adjudication is therefore layered: the Western and UN perspectives best explain the proximate mechanism of collapse and the resulting threshold-state dilemma; the African perspective best explains the normative deficit that weakened compliance incentives; and the Chinese and Russian perspectives best explain why the external environment no longer supported a negotiated settlement. What this adjudication misses is the full weight of individual-level agency—leaders' choices were not fully determined by structure or normative critique—and the possibility that a different US strategy might have preserved the bargain even under multipolar competition. The case thus supports a multi-level, multi-perspective explanation in which mechanism and legitimacy are jointly necessary: verification can manage proliferation risks only when embedded in a political order that actors perceive as legitimate.

2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. Define the 2023 Saudi–Iran rapprochement and identify the principal mechanism through which a Saudi civilian nuclear program could become relevant to a regional proliferation cascade.

2. Reconstruct how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would interpret the nuclear implications of the rapprochement.

3. Specify the scope conditions under which a Saudi civilian program would remain genuinely civilian, and those under which it would become hedging or a weapons pathway.

4. Compare the Saudi case with at least one historical analogue of nuclear latency and state what transfers and what does not.

5. Identify observable indicators that would falsify the claim that diplomatic normalization has removed Saudi nuclear incentives.

6. Adjudicate whether the greater risk is Saudi breakout, Iranian threshold consolidation, or erosion of the NPT regime.

MODEL ANSWER

The 2023 Saudi–Iran rapprochement reduced immediate diplomatic hostility and reopened channels for regional de-escalation, but it did not resolve the structural security dilemma that makes nuclear latency politically valuable. The principal mechanism is not that a civilian program automatically becomes a bomb

program; rather, civilian nuclear infrastructure can create a latent capability whose military significance depends on fuel-cycle scope, safeguards depth, alliance credibility, and threat perception. A reactor program using imported fuel and robust IAEA safeguards creates little direct breakout capacity, whereas domestic enrichment, reprocessing, or fuel-fabrication ambitions shorten the timeline between civilian and military use. In a region where Iran has already moved to threshold status, Saudi Arabia may view nuclear latency as insurance even if it does not intend immediate weaponization. This is the hedging logic: states acquire reversible capabilities that reduce future uncertainty without crossing the NPT line today. The rapprochement may lower the probability of acute crisis, but it does not necessarily eliminate the incentive to hedge against Iranian consolidation, American retrenchment, or Israeli ambiguity.

From the African perspective, the case illustrates the asymmetry of the NPT order: non-nuclear states are asked to accept permanent vulnerability while nuclear-armed states retain arsenals and extended deterrence. African scholarship and diplomacy, including the Pelindaba Treaty and support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, would frame the Saudi question as part of a broader demand for disarmament rather than merely nonproliferation. The Chinese perspective would emphasize stability, nonproliferation, and strategic partnership with Iran, while also valuing Saudi energy and economic ties; Beijing would likely support civilian nuclear cooperation under safeguards but resist any regional arms race that threatens Belt and Road corridors. The Russian perspective would invoke multipolarity and the P5+1 legacy, arguing that Iran's rights under the NPT must be respected and that Western pressure has driven proliferation risks; Moscow would be skeptical of unilateral Western guarantees and attentive to opportunities for nuclear commerce. The Western perspective would treat the JCPOA collapse as a cautionary case, prioritizing prevention of Iranian breakout and reassurance of Gulf partners through extended deterrence, while debating whether Saudi nuclear latency is an acceptable price for regional stability. The UN perspective would center IAEA safeguards, NPT RevCon obligations, and Security Council resolutions, insisting that verification and legal commitments—not geopolitical bargains—determine legitimacy.

The scope conditions for a genuinely civilian Saudi program include three constraints. First, the fuel cycle must be limited to reactors and imported fuel, with no domestic enrichment or reprocessing, or with multinational fuel-cycle arrangements that deny unilateral control. Second, IAEA safeguards must be comprehensive, including the Additional Protocol and, ideally, voluntary transparency measures that reduce ambiguity. Third, the security environment must provide credible alternatives to self-help, whether through a durable US guarantee, regional confidence-building, or a credible Middle East nuclear-weapon-free-zone process. If these conditions hold, the program is best understood as energy policy with manageable proliferation risk. If they fail—if Saudi Arabia seeks fuel-cycle autonomy, resists intrusive verification, or perceives Iranian threshold status as irreversible—the same infrastructure becomes a hedging platform. The transition from hedging to weapons would require not only technical capacity but political decisions, and those decisions are more likely when alliance credibility is doubted and regional threats are salient.

Historical analogues suggest that latency can be stabilized. Japan and South Korea demonstrate that advanced civilian nuclear capabilities can coexist with non-weaponization when alliance credibility, domestic nonproliferation norms, and supplier constraints are strong. However, the Saudi case differs in important respects: it lacks Japan's industrial depth, its alliance commitments are more politically contested, and its regional environment is more volatile. The analogy therefore transfers at the level of mechanism—latency is politically contingent—but not at the level of prediction. Saudi Arabia is not predetermined to follow either the Japanese path of restraint or the Pakistani path of proliferation; the outcome depends on whether the rapprochement produces institutionalized verification and credible security guarantees or merely pauses competition.

Falsifiers of the claim that rapprochement has removed Saudi nuclear incentives would include Saudi pursuit of enrichment or reprocessing, refusal to adopt the Additional Protocol, ambiguous official statements about matching Iranian capabilities, or new nuclear cooperation with suppliers that do not require the gold standard. Conversely, evidence that Saudi Arabia accepts fuel-cycle limits, deepens IAEA cooperation, and frames its program within a regional nonproliferation initiative would weaken the hedging interpretation. The greater risk is not an imminent Saudi bomb but the interaction of Iranian threshold status, Saudi hedging, and NPT erosion. If multiple regional actors acquire latent capabilities, the regime shifts from prohibition to managed ambiguity, making future crises harder to verify and control. Thus the rapprochement is best treated as a necessary but insufficient condition for nonproliferation: it can reduce bilateral tension, but only fuel-cycle limits, safeguards, and credible security guarantees can prevent civilian infrastructure from becoming a strategic hedge.

2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Instructions only. Do not write a sample memo.

(a) Case description (150–200 words):
In 2024, a Gulf state with no indigenous enrichment infrastructure proposes a civilian nuclear program built around imported fuel, research reactors, and IAEA safeguards, while simultaneously seeking a long-term security partnership with a nuclear-armed patron. Its regional rival maintains a threshold capability, including enrichment to 60 percent and reduced inspector access, and has not foreclosed a weapons option. Proponents argue that civilian cooperation will lock in nonproliferation through verification, energy diversification, and integration into global supply chains. Critics argue that any future fuel-cycle ambition, combined with alliance uncertainty and persistent regional threat perception, could shorten breakout timelines and trigger reciprocal hedging. You are asked to assess whether the proposed program is best understood as energy policy, strategic hedging, or a latent weapons pathway, and to specify what evidence would change your assessment.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:
- **Mechanism:** What causal process links civilian nuclear infrastructure to proliferation risk or restraint in this case?
- **Perspective reconstruction:** How would African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives interpret the program and its safeguards?
- **Historical analogue:** Which past case of nuclear latency is most comparable, and what does and does not transfer?
- **Falsifiers:** What observable evidence would support or undermine your central claim?

(c) Self-check:
Before finalizing, verify that you have distinguished description (what is happening), explanation (why it is happening), prediction (what is likely to happen next), and prescription (what should be done).

2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which statement best captures the relationship between a Saudi civilian nuclear program and the risk of a regional proliferation cascade in the context of the 2023 Saudi–Iran rapprochement?

A. A civilian program with full fuel-cycle rights under IAEA safeguards necessarily prevents militarization because verification eliminates breakout.

B. The rapprochement removes security incentives for Saudi nuclear hedging, so civilian infrastructure has no military relevance.
C. Latency from civilian fuel-cycle capabilities can become a military pathway if safeguards, alliance credibility, and regional threat perceptions deteriorate; rapprochement may reduce but not eliminate hedging.
D. Saudi Arabia's lack of technical capacity means no civilian program can ever contribute to a weapons option.

Correct answer: C.

Distractor diagnoses:
- **A** conflates verification with elimination: IAEA safeguards reduce uncertainty and raise costs, but they do not remove the latent capability created by fuel-cycle infrastructure; breakout risk depends on access, scope, and political intent, not merely on the presence of inspectors.
- **B** overstates diplomatic normalization: rapprochement can reduce bilateral tension, but hedging may persist because of Iranian threshold status, alliance uncertainty, and domestic strategic calculations; civilian infrastructure retains military relevance if fuel-cycle autonomy is later pursued.
- **D** confuses present capacity with future capacity: technical limitations are not permanent, and proliferation risk is assessed through trajectory, supplier relationships, and institutional commitments rather than through a static snapshot of current capability.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Iran's Enrichment Profile: Selected Milestones (approximate, drawn from IAEA Director General reports)

Period	Maximum enrichment level (%)	Enriched uranium stockpile (kg, approx.)	Key development
2013 (pre-JCPOA baseline)	20% (limited)	~10,000 kg at ≤3.5%; ~200 kg at 20%	Iran had accumulated a large low-enriched stockpile; 20% production for Tehran Research Reactor fuel
2015–2018 (JCPOA in force)	3.67% (capped)	≤300 kg at 3.67%	Stockpile reduced; centrifuges limited; IAEA verification expanded
2019–2020 (post-withdrawal, stepwise breaches)	4.5% → 20%	Growing; 20% production resumed	Iran exceeded JCPOA limits in response to US withdrawal and sanctions
2021 (escalation)	60%	~2.5 kg at 60% initially, then rising	60% enrichment began; advanced centrifuges (IR-2m, IR-4, IR-6) deployed

Period	Maximum enrichment level (%)	Enriched uranium stockpile (kg, approx.)	Key development
2023 (IAEA finding)	83.7% (particles detected)	~120+ kg at 60%	IAEA reported particles enriched to 83.7% at Fordow; Iran attributed to "unintended fluctuations"
2024–2025 (threshold posture)	60% (sustained)	~6,000+ kg total enriched; ~140+ kg at 60%	Stockpile of 60% material grew; breakout estimates shortened to weeks or less for fissile material

Note: Figures are rounded public approximations from IAEA reporting; they measure fissile-material capability, not weaponization or delivery.

Table 2 — Breakout Timeline Estimates (time to produce fissile material for one weapon)

Period	Estimated breakout time	Basis
2013 (pre-deal)	~2–3 months	IAEA/US estimates of centrifuge capacity and stockpile
2016–2018 (JCPOA)	~12 months	Deal constraints on enrichment level, stockpile, and centrifuge numbers
2019–2021 (breaches begin)	~3–6 months	Reduced constraints; rising stockpile
2022–2024	Weeks to ~1–2 months	Advanced centrifuges at scale; accumulated 60% stockpile
2025 (threshold posture)	Days to weeks (material only)	Analyst and IAEA-derived estimates; assumes no further technical barriers to 90%

Breakout here means production of enough weapons-grade fissile material; it does not include weapon design, testing, or delivery-system integration.

Table 3 — IAEA Safeguards Cooperation Indicators (qualitative, by period)

Indicator	2015–2018 (JCPOA)	2019–2021	2022–2025
Routine inspections	Extensive; daily access at key sites	Reduced; Iran limited access	Further reduced; gaps in continuity of knowledge
Additional Protocol	Implemented	Suspended (Feb. 2021)	Not applied; monitoring curtailed

Indicator	2015–2018 (JCPOA)	2019–2021	2022–2025
Surveillance cameras	Installed and operational	Removed or disabled at some sites	Limited; IAEA lost data continuity at several locations
Declared inventory verification	Full reconciliation	Partial; discrepancies unresolved	Unresolved questions on undeclared sites and particles

Analysis Questions

1. **Trend.** The data show enrichment levels and stockpile rising monotonically after 2018, with a step-change to 60% in 2021 and detection of 83.7% particles in 2023. What does this trend establish about Iran's technical trajectory, and what does it *not* establish about political intent? Distinguish "can produce" from "has decided to produce."

2. **Level of analysis.** Breakout timelines are calculated at the state level (centrifuge capacity, stockpile mass). Yet the decision to break out is made by individuals (the Supreme Leader, senior IRGC commanders) within a state, and is shaped by systemic pressures (sanctions, regional rivals, US posture). Explain how the same data point—say, a 60% stockpile of ~140 kg—carries different meaning at the individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels, and why conflating these levels produces analytical error.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives reads the *identical* IAEA enrichment data:

    - **African:** The data confirm that the NPT creates a two-tier order in which enrichment is policed for some states and permitted for others; the African vantage stresses Pelindaba-style regional nuclear-weapon-free zones and the TPNW as the only durable remedy, treating IAEA data as evidence of regime hypocrisy rather than Iranian exceptionalism.
    - **Chinese:** The data are read through a non-proliferation-plus-partnership lens: enrichment growth is regrettable but attributed to US withdrawal from the JCPOA; Beijing stresses diplomatic restoration and opposes unilateral sanctions while maintaining strategic ties with Tehran.
    - **Russian:** The data are framed within multipolarity: Iran's nuclear advances are a predictable consequence of Western coercion; Moscow positions itself as a P5+1 mediator whose interests lie in preventing both proliferation and US hegemony, with skepticism toward IAEA politicization.
    - **Western:** The data are read as evidence of a shrinking breakout window and a failing verification regime; the dominant frame is non-proliferation urgency, with debate over whether pressure or diplomacy can still reverse the trend.
    - **UN:** The data are technical inputs to safeguards and Security Council processes; the UN frame treats IAEA findings as the authoritative baseline for compliance judgments, while acknowledging that the Council's enforcement capacity depends on great-power consensus that has fractured.

4. **Interpretation.** Does the detection of 83.7% enriched particles prove Iran is building a nuclear weapon? Distinguish capability, intent, and the "threshold state" concept. What additional evidence (weaponization indicators, delivery-system integration, command-and-control preparations) would be

required to move from "Iran *can* produce weapons-grade material" to "Iran *is* producing a weapon"?

5. **Limitation.** What do IAEA enrichment and stockpile data *not* capture about a nuclear weapons program? Identify at least three gaps (e.g., weaponization research, delivery systems, intent/decision-making, covert sites) and explain how each gap constrains the policy conclusions that can responsibly be drawn from the data alone.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Enrichment Escalation Ladder"

What to draw: A vertical ladder (or staircase) with four labeled rungs rising from bottom to top. Rung 1 (bottom): "3.67% — JCPOA cap (2015–2018)." Rung 2: "20% — Tehran Research Reactor fuel / post-2019 breach." Rung 3: "60% — 2021 escalation." Rung 4 (top): "90% — weapons-grade (threshold)." Draw a figure or arrow climbing from rung 1 to rung 3, with a dashed arrow toward rung 4 labeled "not yet crossed (material only)." Place a small box at rung 3 noting "83.7% particles detected, 2023."

Labels to place: "JCPOA ceiling," "20% (TRR fuel)," "60% (2021)," "90% (weapons-grade)," "83.7% particles (2023)," "Breakout = material, not weapon."

Perspective overlay to annotate: - **African (primary):** annotate the ladder's base with "NPT permits 'peaceful' enrichment for some; polices it for others — Pelindaba NWFZ as regional alternative." - **Chinese:** annotate rung 3 with "consequence of US withdrawal; restore diplomacy." - **Russian:** annotate with "coercion produces proliferation; multipolar mediation needed." - **Western:** annotate top rungs with "shrinking breakout window; verification gap." - **UN:** annotate with "IAEA data = authoritative baseline; Council enforcement fractured."

Visual 2 — "The Threshold State Spectrum"

What to draw: A horizontal spectrum line from left to right. Left end: "Latent capability (Japan, Brazil, Germany)." Middle-left: "Threshold state (Iran, 2025)." Center: "Ambiguous posture (Israel — opacity)." Middle-right: "Hedging (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, UAE)." Right end: "Declared weapon state (Pakistan, India, North Korea)." Place each actor as a labeled dot on the spectrum. Draw a dashed vertical line between "threshold" and "ambiguous" labeled "NPT Article IX / safeguards boundary."

Labels to place: "Latent," "Threshold (Iran)," "Ambiguous (Israel)," "Hedging (Saudi/Turkey/Egypt/UAE)," "Declared (Pak/India/DPRK)," "NPT boundary."

Perspective overlay to annotate: - **African (primary):** annotate the spectrum's left-to-right gradient with "African NWFZ (Pelindaba) rejects the entire spectrum; TPNW delegitimizes all positions including 'ambiguous.'" - **Chinese:** annotate hedging states with "partnership and non-proliferation; oppose cascade." - **Russian:** annotate with "multipolarity: no single enforcer; regional security architectures." - **Western:** annotate with "extended deterrence and alliance guarantees as stabilizers." - **UN:** annotate with "NPT RevCon and safeguards as the normative frame; compliance as the metric."

Visual 3 — "Proliferation Cascade Network (West Asia and beyond)"

What to draw: A network diagram. Central node: "Iran (threshold)." Radiating nodes: "Israel (ambiguous arsenal)," "Saudi Arabia (hedging/civilian program)," "Turkey (hedging)," "Egypt (hedging)," "UAE (civilian nuclear, Barakah)." Draw solid arrows from Iran to Saudi/Turkey/Egypt labeled "hedging response." Draw a dashed arrow from Israel to Iran labeled "existential deterrence / opacity." Enclose all nodes in a large dashed oval labeled "NPT regime (fractured)." Add a small node outside the oval: "TPNW (African-led normative challenge)."

Labels to place: "Iran (threshold)," "Israel (ambiguous)," "Saudi (hedging)," "Turkey (hedging)," "Egypt (hedging)," "UAE (civilian)," "NPT regime (fractured)," "TPNW."

Perspective overlay to annotate: - **African (primary):** annotate the TPNW node with "African states as TPNW champions; Pelindaba as proof that regional NWFZ works without great-power guarantees." - **Chinese:** annotate edges with "strategic partnership with Iran; oppose cascade via diplomacy." - **Russian:** annotate with "P5+1 legacy; multipolar balance; resist US-led enforcement." - **Western:** annotate with "extended deterrence; JCPOA collapse as cautionary case." - **UN:** annotate with "IAEA safeguards; UNSC resolutions 1696/1737/1929/2231 as enforcement architecture."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (Question / Prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is a "threshold state"?	A state that possesses the technical capability to produce weapons-grade fissile material and the industrial base to weaponize, but has not assembled or tested a device; Iran post-2025 exemplifies. *Source: Fitzpatrick (2019); IAEA DG reports.*
What did the JCPOA cap?	Enrichment at 3.67%, stockpile at 300 kg, centrifuge types/numbers limited, Fordow converted, Arak redesigned; IAEA verification expanded. *Source: UNSC Res. 2231; IAEA DG reports.*
What triggered Iran's stepwise breaches?	US withdrawal (May 2018) and reimposed sanctions; Iran responded with calibrated, reversible breaches from 2019. *Source: Sanger (2012) for strategic context; IAEA reports for chronology.*
What is "breakout time"?	Time to produce enough weapons-grade fissile material for one weapon; not weaponization or delivery. Pre-JCPOA ~2–3 months; under JCPOA ~12 months; 2025 threshold posture: days–weeks. *Source: IAEA DG reports; public analyst estimates.*
What is Israel's nuclear posture?	Deliberate ambiguity ("opacity"): no official confirmation, no NPT signature as a nuclear-weapon state, Dimona reactor, estimated arsenal ~80–90 warheads. *Source: Fitzpatrick (2019).*

Cue (Question / Prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the Saudi nuclear question?	Saudi Arabia has pursued civilian nuclear cooperation (with US, China, South Korea) and has stated it would match Iran's nuclear status; hedging posture, not yet a weapons program. *Source: Fitzpatrick (2019); IAEA reports.*
What is extended deterrence in the Middle East?	US security guarantees to Israel and Gulf partners; debate over whether guarantees suffice or incentivize indigenous hedging. *Source: Sanger (2012); Fitzpatrick (2019).*
What is the African critique of the NPT?	The NPT legitimates five nuclear-weapon states while policing others; African states champion Pelindaba NWFZ and the TPNW as corrective. *Source: Grovogui; Mamdani; NPT RevCon documentation.*
What are UNSC Resolutions 1696/1737/1929/2231?	Escalating sanctions and restrictions on Iran's nuclear/missile programs (2006–2015); 2231 endorsed the JCPOA and set snapback provisions. *Source: UNSC resolutions.*
What is the "snapback" mechanism?	Reimposition of UN sanctions if Iran non-compliant; US invoked it in 2020; contested by other P5+1 members. *Source: UNSC Res. 2231.*
What do IAEA data not show?	Weaponization research, delivery systems, intent/decision-making, covert sites; data measure material, not programs. *Source: IAEA DG reports; Fitzpatrick (2019).*
What is the proliferation cascade risk?	Iran's threshold status may incentivize Saudi, Turkish, Egyptian hedging, eroding the NPT. *Source: Fitzpatrick (2019); IAEA reports.*

Summary (3–5 sentences): Iran's nuclear program has moved from a capped, verified posture under the JCPOA to a threshold state capable of producing weapons-grade fissile material in days to weeks, following US withdrawal in 2018 and Iran's stepwise breaches. IAEA data document enrichment escalation and stockpile growth but cannot establish weaponization intent or delivery capability. The regional response—Israeli opacity, Saudi hedging, and Turkish/Egyptian interest—raises cascade risks that the NPT regime, fractured by great-power disagreement, is poorly positioned to contain. African states read this as confirmation of NPT hierarchy and champion Pelindaba-style zones and the TPNW; Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN frames diverge on whether diplomacy, multipolarity, pressure, or safeguards can still stabilize the regime. The central analytical task is to keep capability, intent, and regime legitimacy analytically separate.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Iran learned how to make the key ingredient for a nuclear bomb and now has enough of a head start that it could produce bomb-grade material very quickly. A 2015 deal slowed this down and let inspectors watch closely, but the United States left the deal in 2018, Iran started breaking the rules step by step, and now inspectors see less. Iran says its program is peaceful; neighbors like Saudi Arabia are watching and may want their own programs. Israel already has bombs but does not admit it. The big question is whether Iran will actually build a weapon or just keep the ability as leverage—and whether the world's rules can stop a chain reaction of new nuclear programs.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am not sure I can explain *why* Iran stopped at 60% rather than going to 90% (is it technical caution, political signaling, or a decision not yet made?). I also cannot yet distinguish cleanly between "breakout time" and "weaponization time," and I tend to conflate Iran's *capability* with its *intent*. I need to revisit the difference between fissile-material production and full weapon assembly, and the role of the Supreme Leader's fatwa.

3. **Reread verification.** Re-reading the IAEA Director General reports and Fitzpatrick (2019) confirms that breakout estimates measure fissile material only; weaponization and delivery remain unverified gaps. UNSC Resolution 2231's snapback provisions and the 2021 suspension of the Additional Protocol are the key institutional turning points. The African critique (Pelindaba, TPNW) is a normative frame, not a technical claim about Iran's program.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** Think of Iran's program like a factory that has learned to refine uranium to near-bomb-grade and has stockpiled the intermediate product: it could finish the job quickly, but finishing requires additional steps (weapon design, testing, delivery) that are not visible in the "factory output" data. *Limit of the analogy:* a factory's output is a complete product; Iran's fissile-material stockpile is an input to a weapon, and the analogy obscures the political decision, the covert research, and the regime-legitimacy questions that the African and UN perspectives foreground.

5. **Rewrite.** Iran is a nuclear threshold state: it can produce weapons-grade fissile material in days to weeks but has not assembled a device. The JCPOA temporarily extended this timeline and expanded verification; US withdrawal in 2018 and Iran's subsequent breaches collapsed both. IAEA data track enrichment and stockpile but cannot resolve intent or weaponization. Regionally, Israeli opacity and Saudi hedging create cascade risk. African states read the episode as NPT hierarchy and champion Pelindaba/TPNW; Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN frames differ on remedy. The analytical core is separating capability from intent and material from weapon.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L45	Definition	What is nuclear breakout time?	Breakout time is the estimated period required to produce enough fissile material for one nuclear weapon using existing stocks and centrifuges. It measures material production, not weaponization, delivery, or political decision. It is sensitive to enrichment level, stockpile size, and cascade performance.	African NPT critique: breakout metrics can obscure prior inequality of arsenals and unfulfilled disarmament obligations.
L45	Mechanism	How did the JCPOA constrain Iran's fuel cycle?	It capped enrichment at 3.67 percent, reduced installed centrifuges, converted Fordow, redesigned Arak, and expanded IAEA monitoring. In exchange, Iran received phased sanctions relief. The mechanism linked verifiable limits to economic incentives.	Western emphasis on verification; Iranian emphasis on sovereign fuel-cycle rights.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L45	Application	What did IAEA reporting show after the JCPOA collapsed?	IAEA reports documented Iranian enrichment to 60 percent and growing stocks of enriched uranium, far above JCPOA limits. These changes shortened estimated breakout timelines. They were framed by Iran as reversible responses to sanctions and by critics as proliferation risk.	Chinese and Russian views stress reversibility and negotiation; Western views stress noncompliance.
L45	Source	What did UNSC Resolution 2231 do?	It endorsed the JCPOA, established a snapback mechanism for prior UN sanctions, and modified some restrictions. It became contested after the 2018 U.S. withdrawal. The resolution tied multilateral legitimacy to a deal the U.S. later abandoned.	Russian and Chinese objections centered on unilateral snapback claims.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L45	Debate	What is a threshold state?	A threshold state possesses latent capability to produce weapons quickly without necessarily violating the NPT's text. The concept captures hedging between civilian and military fuel cycles. It creates ambiguity for deterrence and verification.	African scholarship critiques threshold discourse as normalizing unequal nuclear orders.
L45	Comparison	How does Israeli ambiguity differ from the Saudi nuclear question?	Israel maintains a policy of nuclear opacity and is widely treated as a de facto nuclear-armed state. Saudi Arabia has pursued civilian nuclear cooperation and hedging rhetoric while relying on U.S. extended deterrence. The two cases raise different verification and alliance problems.	Western nonproliferation focuses on Iran; regional actors point to Israeli opacity.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L45	Reconstruction	What is the African perspective on the NPT in this lesson?	African states and scholars criticize the NPT as discriminatory because nuclear-armed states retain arsenals while non-nuclear states accept permanent restraint. The Pelindaba Treaty and support for the TPNW express an alternative normative order. Disarmament obligations are treated as unfulfilled.	Primary perspective: African agency, not regional illustration.
L45	Occlusion	What does the Western perspective often occlude?	A Western nonproliferation frame may foreground Iranian compliance while understating Israeli nuclear opacity, NPT asymmetry, and the security dilemma created by sanctions. It can treat technical verification as politically neutral. This occlusion matters for legitimacy in West Asia.	Occlusion identified from African and Global South critiques.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L45	Adjudication	Did the JCPOA solve the Iranian nuclear problem?	While in force, it lengthened breakout timelines and improved verification. After U.S. withdrawal and Iranian countermeasures, those gains eroded. The deal managed but did not resolve the underlying security dilemma.	Adjudication: partial success, not durable settlement.
L45	Visual	What does an enrichment cascade do?	Cascades of centrifuges increase the concentration of uranium-235 through successive stages. Low-enriched fuel, 20 percent, 60 percent, and weapons-grade material represent different thresholds. The same technology supports civilian and military pathways.	Technical visual should distinguish assay levels without implying intent.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L45	Mechanism	How does snapback work under Resolution 2231?	A participant can trigger reimposition of prior UN sanctions if it judges significant non-performance. The mechanism was designed to preserve leverage after sanctions relief. Its legitimacy became disputed when the U.S. withdrew yet claimed snapback rights.	Russian and Chinese view: snapback requires participant status and good faith.
L45	Application	What does the Pelindaba Treaty signify?	The African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty prohibits nuclear weapons on African territory and reflects a collective nonproliferation commitment. It is often cited as evidence that Global South states can build regional disarmament institutions. It contrasts with threshold hedging in West Asia.	African primary case: regional order built on disarmament, not deterrence.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L45	Debate	What is extended deterrence in the Middle East?	Extended deterrence refers to security guarantees by a nuclear-armed patron, especially the United States, to non-nuclear allies. It may reduce proliferation incentives but can create dependency and entanglement. Credibility depends on perceived willingness to risk escalation.	Western and UN frames emphasize stability; regional critics emphasize dependency.
L45	Source	What does Fitzpatrick (2019) contribute?	Fitzpatrick's 2019 work analyzes Iran's nuclear program and the JCPOA with attention to technical capabilities and political constraints. It helps distinguish material capacity from weaponization decisions. It is useful for mechanism-level analysis rather than prediction.	Western academic source; should be read alongside Iranian and African critiques.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L45	Reconstruction	What is the Chinese perspective in this lesson?	China supports nonproliferation and the JCPOA while maintaining a strategic partnership with Iran. It opposes unilateral sanctions and snapback claims. Its stance combines regime stability, energy interests, and multipolar diplomacy.	Chinese perspective: order through negotiated multilateralism.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit (score 0–100)

Competency	Your score (0–100)	Calibration note
Define breakout time and distinguish material capacity from weaponization	___	A high score requires stating both the technical and political limits of the metric.
Explain JCPOA architecture, verification, and sanctions linkage	___	Include caps, centrifuges, Fordow, Arak, monitoring, and relief.
Trace U.S. withdrawal, snapback claims, and Iranian countermeasures	___	Sequence matters: 2018 withdrawal precedes Iranian step-backs.
Analyze extended deterrence and the Saudi nuclear question	___	Distinguish guarantees, hedging, and civilian infrastructure.
Explain threshold states and NPT erosion	___	Define latent capability and the ambiguity problem.
Reconstruct the African perspective on its own terms	___	Must include NPT critique, Pelindaba, and TPNW.
Reconstruct Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives	___	Each must be steel-manned, not caricatured.
Adjudicate competing explanations using evidence and falsifiers	___	Separate description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you reconstruct least charitably, and what evidence would force you to revise that reconstruction?
2. Which mechanism did you confuse with an outcome, and how would you restate it as a causal chain?
3. Which falsifier would most change your conclusion about whether the JCPOA collapse made an Iranian bomb more likely?

7.3 Error-log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Iran already has a nuclear weapon.	No verified Iranian nuclear weapon exists; the program is best analyzed as latent or threshold capability.	IAEA Director General reports; NPT safeguards framework.
The JCPOA permanently prevented an Iranian bomb.	It lengthened breakout timelines and improved verification while in force, but those gains eroded after U.S. withdrawal and Iranian countermeasures.	IAEA reports after 2018; UNSC Resolution 2231 context.
The 2018 U.S. withdrawal had no strategic effect.	Withdrawal preceded Iranian enrichment increases and reduced verification leverage.	IAEA reporting; Iranian step-back announcements.
A Saudi civilian nuclear program is automatically a weapons program.	Civilian infrastructure is necessary but not sufficient; intent, fuel-cycle choices, and safeguards matter.	NPT safeguards; Saudi statements; IAEA framework.
The NPT is a neutral technical regime.	African and Global South critiques treat it as politically asymmetrical because disarmament obligations remain unfulfilled.	NPT RevCon documentation; Pelindaba Treaty.
Snapback is automatic and uncontested.	Snapback under Resolution 2231 became legally and politically disputed after U.S. withdrawal.	UNSC Resolution 2231; Russian and Chinese objections.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Breakout time; enrichment levels; fissile material	Centrifuge cascades raise U-235 concentration; stockpiles and cascade performance shape timelines	Sanger (2012); IAEA Director General reports	Iranian enrichment to 60 percent; IAEA inspections data	Material capacity vs. weaponization decision	Verified diversion to weapons; sustained 90 percent stockpile	L21; L42
JCPOA architecture; verification; sanctions relief	Caps, centrifuge limits, Fordow conversion, Arak redesign, monitoring linked to relief	Fitzpatrick (2019); UNSC Resolution 2231	Deal text; IAEA verification reports	Verification vs. sovereignty	Full compliance data; restored breakout timelines	L42; L43
U.S. withdrawal; snapback; Iranian countermeasures	Unilateral exit; reimposition claims; step-backs from compliance	UNSC Resolutions 1696, 1737, 1929, 2231	2018 withdrawal; enrichment increases	Leverage vs. escalation	Reversible Iranian steps; renewed deal	L47
Extended deterrence; Saudi nuclear question	Patron guarantees; alliance dependency; credibility signaling	Western deterrence theory; UN security framework	U.S.-Saudi and U.S.-Israel security ties	Stability vs. entanglement	Ally proliferation despite guarantees	L21
Threshold state; NPT erosion	Hedging; latent capability; ambiguity between civilian and military fuel cycles	African IR critique; NPT RevCon documentation	Iran case; Saudi hedging rhetoric	Proliferation cascade vs. managed deterrence	Clear weaponization decision; disarmament progress	L43; L45

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
African perspective; Pelindaba; TPNW	Regional nuclear-weapon-free zone; disarmament-first normative order	Grovogui; Mbembe; Mamdani	Pelindaba Treaty; African support for TPNW	Disarmament vs. deterrence	African state acquisition of nuclear weapons	L1; L42

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (24 hours):** Re-read the flashcards and define breakout time, threshold state, and snapback from memory; sketch the enrichment ladder.
- **R2 (3 days):** Reconstruct all five perspectives without notes; compare the JCPOA's mechanisms with the threshold-state problem.
- **R3 (1 week):** Complete the worked example on the JCPOA collapse; identify one mechanism, one occlusion, and one falsifier for each perspective.
- **R4 (2 weeks):** Complete the problem pair on Saudi-Iran rapprochement; draft a memo using the four required headings.
- **R5 (1 month):** Write a timed adjudication essay on whether threshold states erode the NPT; update the error log with any corrected misconceptions.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define breakout time and distinguish it from weaponization.
☐ I can explain the JCPOA's caps, centrifuge limits, facility conversions, and verification.
☐ I can trace the sequence from U.S. withdrawal to Iranian countermeasures.
☐ I can explain snapback and why it became contested.
☐ I can define a threshold state and explain its ambiguity problem.
☐ I can analyze extended deterrence and its credibility problem.
☐ I can distinguish Saudi civilian nuclear ambition from a weapons program.
☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective using NPT critique, Pelindaba, and TPNW.
☐ I can steel-man the Chinese perspective on nonproliferation and Iran.
☐ I can steel-man the Russian perspective on P5+1 and multipolarity.
☐ I can steel-man the Western perspective on nonproliferation and JCPOA collapse.
☐ I can explain the UN perspective through IAEA safeguards and Security Council resolutions.
☐ I can use the four levels of analysis in the worked example.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I can state at least one falsifier for my main conclusion.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit and error log.
☐ I have scheduled R1–R5 review actions.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- **Program history and capabilities:** Sanger (2012).
- **JCPOA architecture and verification:** Fitzpatrick (2019).
- **IAEA monitoring:** IAEA Director General reports on Iran.
- **Security Council framework:** UNSC Resolution 1696 (2006).
- **Security Council framework:** UNSC Resolution 1737 (2006).
- **Security Council framework:** UNSC Resolution 1929 (2010).
- **Security Council framework:** UNSC Resolution 2231 (2015).
- **NPT regime:** NPT Review Conference documentation.

End of Lesson 45. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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47. Hydrocarbon Geopolitics and Gulf Strategy

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 46: Hydrocarbon Geopolitics and Gulf Strategy
Module	Module 7: West Asia and Iranian Geopolitics
Prerequisites	L19 (energy), L41 (West Asia state system), L43 (sectarian)
Interleaved links	Forward to L51 (climate geopolitics), L52 (semiconductors), L49 (Global South)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Core text, data lab, visual anchor, worked example, problem pair, flashcards, review schedule
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Adjudicate
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Hydrocarbons have made the Gulf monarchies simultaneously wealthy, strategically central, and politically brittle. The lesson's central puzzle is not whether oil matters—it obviously does—but how a finite, price-volatile, geopolitically contested resource structures state-society bargains, foreign alignments, and regional order in West Asia, and how those structures are being renegotiated as the global energy system changes. Rentier political economy suggests that states financed by external rents can substitute taxation with distribution, weakening representative institutions and strengthening coercive capacity; yet this is not a static equilibrium. Fiscal breakeven prices, sovereign wealth fund returns, demographic pressures, and the prospect of long-term demand erosion create a time-horizon problem: governments must convert underground wealth into durable legitimacy and diversified economies before the rent base thins. The Gulf is therefore not merely an oil exporter but a laboratory of late rentier transformation, where Vision 2030-style agendas, sovereign

wealth fund activism, and diplomatic diversification are attempts to solve a political-economy problem that classical rentier theory described but did not resolve. The student must learn to see oil not as a commodity price series but as a mechanism that shapes who governs, how they are legitimated, and what kinds of alliances they can afford.

The puzzle is sharpened by structural shifts in global oil markets. The US shale revolution altered the supply curve, reduced American import dependence, and changed Washington's strategic incentives in the Gulf; it also introduced a more elastic, short-cycle source of supply that complicates OPEC+ price management. At the same time, Asian demand growth, especially Chinese demand, has reoriented trade flows and made Gulf producers attentive to energy-security partnerships beyond the Atlantic. Russia's role in OPEC+ after 2016 created a new coordination mechanism between the world's two largest exporters, one that was tested by the 2020 price war and subsequent cuts. These developments mean that Gulf strategy cannot be read solely through a US-centric security lens; it must be analyzed as multi-alignment, in which security guarantees, market access, investment, and diplomatic legitimacy are sourced from different partners. The lesson therefore trains the student to distinguish market structure from alliance structure, and to avoid collapsing one into the other.

Domestically, hydrocarbon rents interact with the West Asian state system and sectarian politics in ways that make diversification politically dangerous as well as economically necessary. The Gulf monarchies' legitimacy formulas combine dynastic authority, religious sanction, welfare distribution, and nationalist narratives; rentier wealth funds these formulas but also creates vulnerabilities, including Dutch disease, labor-market dualism, and dependence on expatriate labor. Diversification is therefore not just an economic plan but a political project that threatens established distributional coalitions. The Abraham Accords illustrate how economic statecraft and security normalization can be linked to diversification agendas, while the 2023 Iran-Saudi rapprochement shows how regional détente can be pursued to reduce risk to investment and infrastructure. Both cases require distinguishing description (what happened), explanation (why), prediction (what follows), and prescription (what should be done), a distinction this lesson repeatedly trains. The student is not asked to celebrate or condemn any of these developments, but to reconstruct the mechanisms that make them intelligible.

The African perspective is primary because the Gulf's hydrocarbon transition is not contained within West Asia. Gulf sovereign wealth funds and state-backed firms are increasingly significant investors in African energy, ports, logistics, agriculture, and digital infrastructure; Gulf states also compete and cooperate with African producers in oil and gas markets. From an African vantage, the relevant questions include who captures value from hydrocarbon and transition minerals, how Gulf capital shapes African industrialization, and whether energy-transition finance reproduces dependency or enables autonomous development. This perspective reveals occlusions in Western energy-security framing, which often treats African producers as marginal supply nodes, and in Chinese framing, which can reduce African agency to infrastructure corridors. It also connects to the Global South problematic: hydrocarbon geopolitics is not only about barrels and prices but about the terms on which late-developing economies enter, or are excluded from, the energy transition. The lesson therefore treats African scholarship and African strategic concerns as constitutive of the subject, not as a regional application of Western theory.

Methodologically, the lesson builds on earlier modules. From energy studies, it takes supply-demand analysis, market power, and transition pathways; from the West Asian state system, it takes regime type, alliance patterns, and regional order; from sectarian politics, it takes identity as both a resource and a constraint. It then adds a level-of-analysis discipline: individual leaders and elites, state institutions, systemic market and

alliance structures, and transnational capital flows must be separated before being recombined. The worked example on the 2020-2022 oil price war and OPEC+ coordination demonstrates how a single episode can be explained by elite bargaining, fiscal stress, market structure, and alliance politics simultaneously. The problem pair on the 2023 Iran-Saudi rapprochement trains the same discipline in a diplomatic case. By the end, the student should be able to adjudicate between competing explanations using evidence, specify scope conditions, and identify what would falsify each claim rather than merely narrating events.

Finally, the lesson is deliberately forward-linked. Hydrocarbon geopolitics intersects with climate geopolitics because Gulf diversification is partly a hedge against demand decline; with semiconductor geopolitics because energy-intensive manufacturing and digital infrastructure reshape electricity demand; and with Global South politics because African and Asian development strategies are entangled with Gulf capital and energy markets. The student is not asked to memorize a narrative of Gulf exceptionalism but to master a portable analytical toolkit: rentier mechanisms, market structure, alliance bargaining, and perspective reconstruction. That toolkit is what makes the lesson reusable across cases that have not yet occurred, including future price shocks, new normalization agreements, and contested energy-transition finance. The aim is not prediction as prophecy but disciplined explanation under uncertainty, with explicit attention to what each perspective reveals and what it hides.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. From L19: What is the difference between a supply shock and a demand shock in energy markets, and which Gulf-relevant episode can illustrate each?
2. From L19: How does OPEC's market power depend on spare capacity, quota discipline, and the elasticity of non-OPEC supply?
3. From L41: What are the main components of the West Asian state system, and how do regime type and external patronage shape alliance behavior?
4. From L41: Why is the Gulf security architecture often described as a US-led umbrella with local partners rather than a fully autonomous regional order?
5. From L43: How can sectarian identity function simultaneously as a domestic legitimation tool and a transnational alliance resource?
6. From L43: What is the difference between sectarianism as an ideology and sectarianism as a political strategy?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. How does rentier wealth convert into political legitimacy, and what happens to that bargain when prices fall or reserves deplete?
2. How did the US shale revolution change the strategic environment of Gulf producers and the bargaining power of OPEC+?
3. What is multi-alignment in Gulf foreign policy, and what are its domestic, regional, and systemic limits?
4. How does an African perspective change the evaluation of Gulf diversification, sovereign wealth fund investment, and energy-transition finance?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Rentier state**: A state whose revenues derive primarily from external rents, especially hydrocarbons, rather than from domestic taxation, with consequences for accountability and representation.
- **Hydrocarbon rents**: Income generated from the extraction and sale of oil and gas, often treated as state property and distributed through public spending, subsidies, and patronage.
- **Fiscal breakeven price**: The oil price at which a government's budget balances, given its spending commitments, production levels, and non-oil revenues.
- **Dutch disease**: The tendency for a resource boom to appreciate the real exchange rate and crowd out non-resource tradable sectors such as manufacturing and agriculture.
- **Sovereign wealth fund (SWF)**: A state-owned investment vehicle that converts hydrocarbon revenues into diversified financial assets, often used for intergenerational saving and strategic influence.
- **OPEC+**: The expanded oil producers' coalition that includes OPEC members plus non-OPEC exporters, notably Russia, coordinating production to influence global prices.
- **Shale revolution**: The expansion of US oil and gas production through hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling, increasing supply elasticity and reducing US import dependence.
- **Abraham Accords**: The 2020 normalization agreements between Israel and several Arab states, including the UAE and Bahrain, linking diplomatic recognition to security and economic cooperation.
- **Vision 2030**: Saudi Arabia's state-led diversification agenda aimed at reducing oil dependence, expanding non-oil sectors, and restructuring the social contract.
- **Multi-alignment**: A strategy in which a state maintains security, economic, and diplomatic ties with multiple great powers rather than relying on a single patron.
- **Energy transition**: The long-term shift from fossil-fuel-based energy systems toward lower-carbon sources, with uneven effects on producers, consumers, and investors.
- **Late rentierism**: The phase in which rentier states attempt to diversify, reform, and re-legitimate themselves while still depending on hydrocarbon revenues.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to: (1) **Analyze** the rentier political-economy mechanism through which hydrocarbon rents are converted into welfare provision, public employment, and political legitimacy in Gulf states, specifying the causal chain from external revenue to state-society bargaining; (2) **Explain** how rentier scope conditions—rent per capita, state ownership of subsoil resources, weak domestic taxation, small populations, and limited private-sector depth—shape fiscal vulnerability, diversification constraints, and the durability of authoritarian bargains; (3) **Evaluate** competing interpretations of Gulf legitimacy, including distributional, institutional, ideological, and security-based accounts, using budget structure, non-oil GDP growth, sovereign-wealth-fund behavior, and fiscal breakeven prices as evidence; (4) **Compare** the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on rentierism and Gulf strategy, identifying each tradition's distinctive contribution, its characteristic occlusion, and the evidence that would adjudicate between them; and (5) **Apply** the rentier framework to a novel case—such as a Gulf fiscal adjustment, an African petro-state, or a post-rentier transition scenario—while stating boundary conditions, falsifiers, and the level of analysis at which the explanation operates. These objectives are assessable through mechanism-based short answers, perspective-reconstruction essays, and case-based memos that require the student to distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Rentier political economy: the oil state, welfare, and legitimacy

Bolded Causal Claim: In hydrocarbon-dependent states where rents are large relative to population and are centrally controlled, the state can substitute external rent for domestic taxation, thereby weakening the fiscal contract with citizens and converting welfare distribution into a primary source of political legitimacy.

Mechanism: The rentier mechanism begins with a structural feature of the political economy: a substantial share of state revenue derives not from taxing domestic economic activity but from rents paid by external buyers for exhaustible natural resources. In the Gulf cases, hydrocarbon rents flow to the state through national oil companies, production-sharing arrangements, or state ownership of subsoil rights, creating what the rentier-state literature describes as an allocation state rather than a production state. Because the state is the principal allocator of externally generated wealth, it can fund public employment, subsidies, services, and transfers without extracting comparable revenue from citizens through income, property, or broad-based consumption taxes. The resulting fiscal asymmetry alters state-society bargaining: citizens are less likely to demand representation as a condition of taxation, while the state can purchase compliance, co-opt elites, and manage dissent through distribution. Legitimacy is therefore not primarily procedural or ideological in the liberal sense; it is performative and distributive, anchored in the state's capacity to deliver welfare, status, and security. The mechanism is reinforced by the enclave character of hydrocarbon extraction, which requires limited labor absorption, permits capital-intensive production, and allows the state to remain financially autonomous from the domestic private sector. Hertog's analysis of Gulf political economy emphasizes that rentierism is not merely a budgetary pattern but an organizational logic: the state becomes the central node through which wealth, employment, and opportunity are distributed, shaping everything from bureaucratic recruitment to business-state relations. Yergin's histories of oil power underscore that this arrangement is historically contingent on the global oil order, imperial concessions, and the postwar security architecture, not a natural feature of resource endowment. The mechanism also contains a feedback loop: because the state does not need to tax, it has weaker incentives to build extractive institutions, broaden the tax base, or cultivate a productive private sector; conversely, citizens have fewer institutional channels through which to convert economic contribution into political voice. Gray's work on Gulf monarchies adds that legitimacy is further stabilized by kinship, religion, and tribal idioms, meaning rentier distribution interacts with preexisting social solidarities rather than replacing them. The strongest counterargument is that rentierism is not destiny: states with similar endowments have produced divergent outcomes depending on institutional choices, leadership, and historical timing. Norway's transparent management of petroleum wealth, and partial Gulf experiments in fiscal reform, suggest that rents can be governed through rules, savings, and public accountability. The mechanism therefore predicts tendencies, not inevitabilities, and must be tested against institutional variation rather than assumed from resource dependence alone.

Scope Conditions: The rentier mechanism operates most strongly when several conditions coincide: hydrocarbon rents are large relative to population; the state controls the resource and its revenue stream; domestic taxation is low and non-oil revenue is marginal; the private sector is small, dependent on state contracts, or concentrated in non-tradable services; and the population is small enough that per-capita distribution is politically meaningful. In the Gulf, these conditions have historically been met in varying degrees: Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates have had very high rent per capita and small citizen populations, while Saudi Arabia's larger population has required more extensive welfare commitments and has produced greater fiscal strain. The mechanism weakens where populations are large, as in Iran, where rents must be spread across tens of millions of citizens and the state has greater need for taxation, coercion, or ideological mobilization. It also weakens where resource ownership is fragmented, where private firms control significant production, or where the state lacks the administrative capacity to distribute rents effectively. Price volatility

is a critical scope condition: the mechanism assumes a revenue stream sufficient to sustain the distributive bargain; when prices fall below fiscal breakeven levels, the state must borrow, cut spending, raise taxes, or draw down sovereign wealth, each of which can strain the legitimacy formula. Another scope condition is external security: rentier states often rely on external guarantees to protect the resource and the regime, and the cost of that protection—whether paid in bases, arms purchases, or diplomatic alignment—can reduce the net rent available for domestic distribution. The mechanism is also bounded by time: exhaustible resources imply that rentier legitimacy is intertemporally fragile unless rents are converted into productive assets, human capital, or diversified revenue. Finally, the mechanism should not be conflated with corruption or authoritarianism in general; rentierism is a specific fiscal structure that can coexist with different regime types, and its effects are mediated by institutions, elite bargains, and social norms.

Observable Implications: If the rentier mechanism is operating, one should observe a budget structure dominated by hydrocarbon revenue; low non-oil tax revenue as a share of GDP; high public-sector employment among citizens; extensive subsidies for energy, water, food, and services; large sovereign-wealth-fund assets accumulated during price booms; and diversification rhetoric that outpaces non-oil productive capacity. One should also observe fiscal breakeven prices that exceed market prices during downturns, forcing deficit financing or austerity; public-investment cycles that track oil prices; and business sectors oriented toward state procurement rather than export competitiveness. Politically, one should observe limited taxation-based accountability, managed elections or consultative institutions with restricted authority, and legitimacy claims centered on development, stability, and welfare rather than representation. The mechanism implies that fiscal shocks—such as the 2014–2016 oil price collapse or the 2020 pandemic shock—should produce austerity measures, subsidy reforms, value-added taxes, or diversification plans, as seen in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's earlier fiscal adjustments. It also implies that sovereign wealth funds will be used as buffers, but that their drawdowns may be politically sensitive because they represent the intergenerational conversion of rent. A further implication is that non-oil GDP growth may rise in service sectors—construction, finance, logistics, tourism—without necessarily reducing hydrocarbon dependence if the state remains the dominant investor and if private firms remain rent-seeking. The mechanism does not imply that citizens are passive; rather, it predicts that political demands will often be framed as claims on the distributive state—jobs, housing, subsidies, and public services—rather than as demands for systemic regime change, though this pattern can break down under sustained fiscal stress or generational change.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective reconstructs rentier theory from the vantage point of postcolonial political economy and treats hydrocarbon dependence not as a neutral fiscal condition but as a historically produced structure of external extraction. African scholarship—from Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment and Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism to Fanon's account of the postcolonial state, Cabral's emphasis on material conditions, and later work by Mamdani, Bayart, and Mbembe—suggests that the state in many African petro-states is not simply an allocator of rent but a site of violent accumulation, elite capture, and militarized sovereignty. This vantage point reveals what rentier theory often occludes: the colonial origins of resource enclaves, the racialized global division of labor, the role of multinational oil companies, and the transnational circuits through which rents are laundered, invested, or securitized. It also highlights that African petro-states such as Nigeria, Angola, Gabon, and Equatorial Guinea have experienced rentier dynamics with far weaker developmental outcomes than the Gulf, suggesting that population size, institutional capacity, and colonial legacies are not secondary variables but constitutive ones. From this perspective, Gulf investment in Africa—whether in ports, agriculture, logistics, or renewable energy—must be analyzed not only as south-south cooperation but as a possible extension of extractive political economy into new sectors,

including green energy and carbon markets. The African vantage further asks whether the energy transition will reproduce rentierism under new guises: critical minerals, land, solar corridors, and carbon credits may become the new rents, with similar risks of elite capture and weak accountability. Scholars such as Grovogui and Oyěwùmí remind us that the categories of "state," "citizen," and "development" are themselves historically and epistemically situated; applying rentier theory to Africa without decolonizing its assumptions risks treating African states as deficient versions of an idealized Gulf model. Thus the African perspective contributes a deeper historical and transnational account of rent, while warning that rentierism is not merely a Gulf pathology but a global structure of accumulation in which Africa has often been the site of extraction rather than the beneficiary of rent.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats Gulf hydrocarbon rents primarily through the lens of energy security and state-capitalist partnership. It emphasizes long-term supply contracts, infrastructure investment, and non-conditional engagement, arguing that rentier vulnerability can be mitigated by state capacity, industrial planning, and mutual benefit. This view contributes an alternative to Western conditionality and highlights the Gulf's role in China's energy diversification, but it may occlude labor standards, debt sustainability, and the political risks of concentrated state-to-state bargaining.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames hydrocarbon coordination, especially through OPEC+, as an instrument of multipolarity and sovereign equality against Western market and institutional dominance. It stresses state control over strategic resources, diplomatic leverage, and the legitimacy of producer coordination, contributing a critique of unipolar energy governance. Its occlusion lies in understating domestic authoritarianism, fiscal fragility, and the dependence of Russian strategy on sustained high prices and Chinese demand.

Western: The Western perspective generally interprets rentierism as a governance pathology to be addressed through market reform, transparency, diversification, and gradual political liberalization. It contributes institutional metrics, fiscal surveillance, and security-architecture analysis, and it foregrounds the Gulf's role in global energy stability. Its characteristic occlusion is the tendency to treat Western security guarantees, arms sales, and financial interests as external to the rentier bargain rather than as constitutive elements of it.

UN: The UN perspective approaches rentier political economy through sustainable development, energy transition, and social protection. It emphasizes SDG 7, climate finance, just-transition planning, and the vulnerability of rent-dependent populations to price shocks and decarbonization. This view contributes normative frameworks for diversification and equity, but it may occlude geopolitical power, the unequal distribution of transition costs, and the fact that international climate governance can itself create new rent-seeking opportunities.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — The US Shale Revolution and Its Structural Impact on Global Oil Markets

Bolded Causal Claim: The US shale revolution structurally eroded OPEC's swing-producer power by introducing a price-elastic, short-cycle supply source that caps sustained price spikes and compresses the fiscal rent available to hydrocarbon-dependent states.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through a chain of technological, financial, and market-structure changes that together reconstituted the global oil supply curve. Hydraulic fracturing combined with horizontal drilling unlocked vast volumes of tight oil and shale gas in formations such as the Permian Basin, the

Eagle Ford, and the Bakken. Unlike conventional megaprojects with decade-long lead times, shale wells can be drilled and brought online within weeks, and production declines steeply after the first year, which means operators can throttle output in response to price signals. This short-cycle elasticity transformed the supply side of the global oil market. Before shale, OPEC—and Saudi Arabia in particular—functioned as the marginal swing producer: when demand outstripped supply, Riyadh could add barrels; when prices collapsed, it could cut. After shale, the marginal barrel was increasingly American. The result was a flattening of the supply curve at the margin and a new ceiling on price rallies. Capital markets played a critical enabling role: the junk-bond and private-equity financing that funded the shale boom allowed rapid entry and exit, though it also introduced financial fragility, as the 2015-2016 and 2020 price collapses demonstrated when leveraged producers went bankrupt. The structural impact on global markets was therefore not merely additional volume but a change in the price-formation process itself. OPEC's traditional strategy of withholding supply to raise prices now risked ceding market share to shale producers who would respond to higher prices with new drilling. This is the logic that drove Saudi Arabia's 2014 decision to maintain production and let prices fall, an attempt to discipline shale that partially succeeded in bankrupting marginal operators but also inflicted fiscal pain on Riyadh and its OPEC partners. The shale revolution thus did not eliminate OPEC, but it fundamentally altered the strategic environment in which OPEC operated, forcing the creation of OPEC+ in 2016 to bring Russia into a broader coordination framework. For rentier states, the mechanism transmitted through fiscal breakeven prices: when the market price fell below the price required to balance the budget, governments faced deficits, reserve drawdowns, and pressure to cut spending or raise non-oil revenue. The shale revolution therefore accelerated the diversification imperative that Gulf states had long rhetorically embraced but rarely implemented.

Scope Conditions: The shale mechanism operates only under specific conditions. Technologically, it requires the combination of hydraulic fracturing, horizontal drilling, and seismic imaging, plus a regulatory environment permissive of land access and water use. Geologically, it requires source-rock formations with sufficient organic content and brittleness. Financially, it requires deep capital markets willing to fund high-risk, high-decline assets; when credit tightens, as in 2020, shale production can fall rapidly, temporarily restoring OPEC's leverage. Infrastructure matters: without pipeline and export capacity, production growth stalls, as occurred in the Permian in 2018-2019. The mechanism is also price-dependent: shale is profitable above roughly fifty to sixty dollars per barrel for most basins, though breakevens have fallen over time. Below that threshold, drilling collapses and the supply elasticity disappears. Politically, the mechanism depends on US federal and state regulatory frameworks that permit private mineral rights and rapid permitting; this institutional configuration is not easily replicated in countries where the state owns subsurface resources. Finally, the mechanism assumes continued innovation in drilling efficiency; if productivity gains plateau, the cost curve shifts upward and OPEC regains room to maneuver.

Observable Implications: The observable implications are substantial and well-documented. US crude oil production rose from roughly five million barrels per day in 2008 to over thirteen million by late 2019, making the United States the world's largest producer and a net petroleum exporter by 2019 for the first time in decades. OPEC's share of global production fell, and the organization's ability to manage prices unilaterally declined. The 2014-2016 price collapse, driven partly by Saudi strategy to test shale resilience, saw prices fall from over one hundred dollars to below thirty, triggering fiscal crises across the Gulf and forcing austerity measures in Saudi Arabia, including subsidy cuts and the introduction of VAT. The creation of OPEC+ in late 2016, bringing Russia into a formal coordination arrangement with OPEC, was a direct strategic response to shale's challenge. The 2020 price war between Saudi Arabia and Russia, followed by the historic negative prices in April 2020, demonstrated both the volatility of the new market and the limits

of coordination. Fiscal breakeven prices for Gulf states, which had risen during the high-price years of the 2000s, became unsustainable, providing political impetus for diversification agendas such as Saudi Vision 2030. Energy Information Administration data document these production trajectories, while IMF Article IV reports for Gulf states record the fiscal adjustment pressures. The shale revolution also altered trade flows: US exports to Asia and Europe displaced some Gulf and Russian crude, reshaping tanker routes and refining economics.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: From an African vantage point, the US shale revolution is not merely a North American supply story but a restructuring of global energy rents that reshapes African fiscal and developmental possibilities. African oil producers such as Nigeria and Angola, which depend on crude exports for the majority of government revenue and foreign exchange, faced compressed prices and reduced market share as US shale displaced their barrels in Atlantic Basin markets. The mechanism transmitted through price: lower and more volatile oil prices narrowed fiscal space for infrastructure, health, and education spending, exacerbating the rentier vulnerabilities that African political economists have long identified. At the same time, the shale revolution's demonstration that technological innovation can rapidly alter energy supply curves carries a dual lesson for African states. It suggests that hydrocarbon dependence is increasingly risky as a development strategy, reinforcing arguments for diversification and value-addition rather than raw export. It also raises the prospect that African gas and oil resources may face stranded-asset risk as global demand peaks and supply sources multiply. African scholarship on resource governance, from Rodney's analysis of extractive economies to contemporary work on the resource curse, frames the shale shock as an external reminder that rents are politically constructed and historically contingent. The African perspective also highlights what Western market analysis often occludes: the distributional consequences within African producer states, where price collapses fall hardest on public-sector workers and the poor while elites with offshore assets are insulated. Gulf investment in Africa, which expanded in the 2010s, must be understood partly as a search for alternative assets and markets in a post-shale world, though African analysts caution that such investment can reproduce extractive patterns if governance frameworks are weak. The African view thus reads the shale revolution as both a market event and a structural warning about the fragility of rent-based development.

Chinese: China's perspective centers on energy security and the strategic value of diversified supply. The shale revolution reduced US import dependence, which Beijing interpreted as a potential shift in American strategic priorities away from Gulf protection, but it also increased global supply flexibility that benefited Chinese importers. China's response has been to deepen partnerships with Gulf producers while building strategic petroleum reserves and expanding renewable capacity. The occlusion in this view is the underestimation of how shale volatility affects Chinese state-owned enterprises' overseas investments.

Russian: Russia's perspective frames the shale revolution as a competitive threat to its hydrocarbon rents and a catalyst for OPEC+ cooperation. Moscow initially dismissed shale as a bubble but later recognized its structural impact, leading to the 2016 OPEC+ agreement. The Russian view emphasizes multipolarity: by coordinating with OPEC, Russia sought to preserve price levels and geopolitical influence. Its occlusion is the tendency to treat OPEC+ as a durable alliance rather than a tactical arrangement vulnerable to cheating and divergent interests.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in the United States, celebrates shale as a triumph of market innovation and private enterprise that enhanced energy security, reduced import dependence, and provided geopolitical leverage. It emphasizes consumer benefits from lower prices and the strategic optionality of becoming a swing producer. Its characteristic occlusion is the neglect of environmental externalities, the

financial fragility of the sector, and the way shale volatility destabilizes rentier states whose stability Western security architectures depend upon.

UN: The UN perspective approaches the shale revolution through sustainable development and climate governance. It notes that abundant, cheap shale gas displaced coal in some markets, reducing emissions in the short term, but also that cheap fossil fuels can delay renewable investment and lock in carbon-intensive infrastructure. The UN view emphasizes SDG 7 and the need for a just transition, highlighting that shale's boom-and-bust cycles create economic insecurity for workers and communities. Its occlusion is the limited capacity to address the geopolitical power shifts that shale triggered, which fall outside normative climate frameworks.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — The Abraham Accords and Gulf Diversification Strategies

Bolded Causal Claim: The Abraham Accords accelerated Gulf economic diversification by opening Israeli technology, capital, and security partnerships that reduce hydrocarbon dependence, while simultaneously reconfiguring regional alignments around a shared Iran threat perception.

Mechanism: The mechanism runs through several channels. First, normalization agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan in 2020 created legal frameworks for trade, investment, and technology transfer that had previously been blocked by the Arab boycott. Israeli strengths in cybersecurity, water technology, agritech, and defense systems complement Gulf capital and market access, creating potential for non-oil sector growth. Second, the Accords facilitated security cooperation, including intelligence sharing and joint defense planning, which reduced the perceived need for exclusive reliance on US security guarantees and allowed Gulf states to hedge their strategic bets. Third, normalization opened tourism and aviation corridors, generating service-sector revenue. Fourth, and critically, the Accords were embedded in a broader US strategy of regional realignment that linked Gulf diversification to the containment of Iran, creating a security-economy nexus. The mechanism is not automatic, however. It depends on sustained political commitment, the resolution of Palestinian grievances that remain a source of regional legitimacy, and the willingness of Israeli and Gulf business communities to overcome cultural and regulatory barriers. The Accords also created a feedback loop: diversification requires stability, and normalization was partly motivated by the desire to secure Gulf states against Iranian influence, which in turn required maintaining the US security umbrella even as economic ties with China deepened. The result is a complex multi-alignment in which diversification and security are intertwined.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism operates under specific conditions. Politically, it requires leaderships willing to absorb domestic and regional criticism for normalizing with Israel, which remains deeply unpopular in Arab public opinion. The UAE and Bahrain, with smaller populations and more centralized authority, faced lower domestic costs than Saudi Arabia, which has not normalized and faces stronger legitimacy constraints. Economically, it requires complementary assets: Israeli technology and Gulf capital, plus regulatory harmonization. The mechanism is vulnerable to escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which can freeze cooperation, as occurred after October 2023. It also depends on US facilitation and credibility; if Washington's commitment wavers, the security rationale weakens. Regionally, the mechanism requires a shared threat perception, primarily regarding Iran; if Gulf-Iran relations improve, as in the 2023 rapprochement, the security driver diminishes. Finally, the mechanism assumes that diversification gains are not offset by new dependencies, such as reliance on Israeli technology in critical infrastructure.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include rapid growth in UAE-Israel trade, which reached billions of dollars within two years of normalization, and the establishment of direct flights, em-

bassies, and joint ventures. Bahrain and Morocco followed with their own agreements. The Negev Forum brought together Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, Egypt, and the United States in a multilateral framework. Israeli companies established offices in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and Gulf sovereign wealth funds explored investments in Israeli technology. However, the October 2023 Gaza war strained these relationships, with the UAE and Bahrain condemning Israeli military operations while maintaining diplomatic ties, illustrating the fragility of the mechanism. Saudi Arabia, the largest Gulf economy, has not normalized, conditioning any agreement on progress toward a Palestinian state, which demonstrates the scope conditions. The Accords also accelerated Gulf interest in non-oil sectors such as tourism, finance, and technology, contributing to non-oil GDP growth in the UAE. IMF Article IV reports for the UAE and Bahrain note the diversification momentum, though they caution about implementation risks. The Accords did not, however, resolve the underlying Palestinian issue or eliminate regional tensions, and their long-term economic impact remains contingent on political developments.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: From an African perspective, the Abraham Accords are significant less for their bilateral Gulf-Israel dynamics than for what they reveal about the geopolitics of diversification and the marginalization of African and Palestinian voices in regional ordering. African states have long experienced the consequences of externally brokered normalization deals that prioritize great-power and regional-elite interests over popular sovereignty. The Accords' framing of diversification as a technocratic, security-driven process echoes patterns African scholars have identified in structural adjustment and resource governance: external actors define the terms of economic transformation while local populations bear the costs. African analysts note that Gulf diversification strategies, including those enabled by the Accords, have increased Gulf investment in African agriculture, ports, and logistics, which can support African development but also risk reproducing extractive relationships if not governed by transparent frameworks. The African perspective also insists on the Palestinian dimension: many African states, shaped by their own anti-colonial histories, view the normalization process as sidelining Palestinian self-determination, and the Accords' security logic as reinforcing a regional order that privileges state elites over popular aspirations. From within African scholarship, the Accords illustrate how economic diversification and security realignment can be coupled in ways that obscure questions of justice and equity. The African vantage point thus contributes a critique of the technocratic framing of diversification and a reminder that regional orders built on elite bargains without popular legitimacy are inherently fragile. It also highlights the opportunity for African states to leverage Gulf diversification by demanding technology transfer, local content requirements, and equitable investment terms, rather than accepting passive roles in Gulf-led economic networks.

Chinese: China's perspective on the Abraham Accords is ambivalent. Beijing has historically supported Palestinian statehood and the two-state solution, and the Accords bypassed that framework, which China criticized as undermining international law. At the same time, China's economic interests in the Gulf and Israel are substantial, and Beijing has sought to maintain relationships with all parties. The Accords also complicated China's Belt and Road Initiative by strengthening US-aligned regional networks. China's occlusion is its tendency to frame the issue primarily through great-power competition rather than regional agency.

Russian: Russia's perspective views the Abraham Accords with suspicion, seeing them as an American attempt to build a regional coalition against Iran and Russia. Moscow has maintained relationships with both Israel and Gulf states, and the Accords threatened to reduce Russian diplomatic maneuverability. Russia's occlusion is its framing of all regional developments through the lens of US containment, which underesti-

mates the autonomous economic motivations of Gulf states.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in the United States, presents the Abraham Accords as a diplomatic breakthrough that advances peace, prosperity, and regional integration. It emphasizes trade growth, security cooperation, and the potential for a new regional architecture. Its occlusion is the tendency to understate the Palestinian issue, the domestic legitimacy costs for Arab signatories, and the fragility of the agreements under regional escalation.

UN: The UN perspective approaches the Abraham Accords through international law, human rights, and sustainable development. It emphasizes the need for a just resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and warns that normalization without progress on Palestinian rights may undermine long-term stability. The UN view also highlights the potential for regional cooperation on water, climate, and technology to advance SDGs. Its occlusion is the limited leverage of UN frameworks over great-power-brokered deals and the risk that normative statements substitute for effective action.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Saudi Vision 2030 and the Politics of Economic Transformation

Bolded Causal Claim: Saudi Vision 2030 is a state-led project to convert hydrocarbon rent into diversified productive capacity and a new basis of regime legitimacy, but its trajectory is governed by the internal contradiction of the rentier state: the transformation requires fiscal extraction, labor-market restructuring, and elite centralization that directly threaten the distributive social contract on which Saudi political order has rested since the 1970s oil boom.

Mechanism: Vision 2030, launched in 2016 under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), operates through five interconnected instruments. First, the Public Investment Fund (PIF) has been repositioned from a passive holding company into an active sovereign wealth vehicle with assets exceeding $700 billion, tasked with generating returns and seeding new industries. Second, the 2019 initial public offering of Saudi Aramco—selling roughly 1.5 percent of shares—transferred capital to the PIF while preserving state control, converting subsoil wealth into investable financial assets. Third, "giga-projects" (NEOM, Qiddiya, the Red Sea Project, Diriyah Gate) are designed to create entirely new economic clusters in tourism, entertainment, and technology, bypassing the existing bureaucratic and social structures of the oil economy. Fourth, social liberalization—women driving from 2018, an entertainment authority, tourism visas, and relaxed gender-mixing rules—expands the labor supply and consumer base while signaling modernity to foreign investors. Fifth, fiscal reforms including the introduction of value-added tax in 2018, subsidy reductions, expatriate levies, and the "citizen's account" compensation scheme attempt to reduce the budget's oil dependence.

The mechanism of political risk lies in what Hertog (2010) describes as the Saudi "allocation state": a system in which the regime distributes oil rent to citizens, tribal elites, and bureaucratic clients in exchange for political quiescence, without extracting taxes that would create representation demands. Rentier state theory, developed in the work of Beblawi and Luciani and applied to the Gulf by Hertog, predicts that states deriving revenue from external rent rather than domestic taxation face weak societal accountability and can sustain authoritarian bargains. Vision 2030 inverts this logic: it requires citizens to work in a productive private sector, to accept taxation (VAT), and to compete in labor markets rather than receive guaranteed public employment. The mechanism of backlash is therefore structural: the very reforms that reduce oil dependence also erode the distributive basis of legitimacy. The state must simultaneously spend on transformation, maintain social transfers to avoid unrest, and fund military commitments (notably the Yemen war), against oil revenue that

fluctuates with global prices and OPEC+ decisions.

The political mechanism is equally important. Transformation at speed requires dismantling the consensual, distributed authority of the Al Saud family and the religious establishment. MBS's centralization—sidelining senior princes, the 2017 Ritz-Carlton detention of elites, the restructuring of the religious police, and the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi—reflects the political logic of economic transformation: a fragmented elite cannot execute rapid restructuring. This is the "politics" of Vision 2030: not merely economics but a reconfiguration of elite bargains, coercive capacity, and the ideological basis of rule, shifting from Wahhabi religious legitimacy toward nationalist, performance-based legitimacy centered on the crown prince personally.

Scope Conditions: The transformation succeeds under identifiable conditions and fails under others. Success conditions include: (a) sustained oil prices above the fiscal breakeven level, which IMF Article IV consultations have placed in the range of roughly $80–90 per barrel in recent years, providing fiscal space for investment without austerity; (b) PIF investment returns and foreign direct investment inflows approaching the ambitious targets (FDI has remained well below the stated goals of roughly $100 billion annually); (c) absorption of Saudi nationals into private-sector employment through Saudization (Nitaqat) programs; (d) social acceptance of cultural opening without destabilizing conservative constituencies or provoking Islamist backlash; and (e) geopolitical stability that does not drain resources into regional conflicts. Failure modes include prolonged low prices forcing austerity and popular backlash; implementation bottlenecks and cost overruns in giga-projects; elite resistance from displaced princes and clerics; and regional escalation (Iran, Yemen, or Gaza) that redirects fiscal and political attention. The scope condition most often underestimated is state capacity: the Saudi bureaucracy, as Hertog (2010) documents, was built for distribution and patronage, not for project execution at the scale Vision 2030 demands.

Observable Implications: The observable record is mixed, which is itself informative. Non-oil GDP growth has accelerated, reaching roughly 4–5 percent in 2022–2023, and female labor force participation has risen from approximately 20 percent to roughly 35 percent. The entertainment and tourism sectors have expanded rapidly, and the PIF has become one of the world's most active sovereign investors, acquiring stakes in global sports, technology, and infrastructure. Aramco remains the world's most profitable company, providing the fiscal base. Yet FDI inflows remain below targets; youth unemployment persists; several giga-projects have been scaled back or delayed; and the NEOM "The Line" project has been dramatically reduced in scope. Politically, centralization has deepened, with continued detention of dissidents, activists, and clerics, and the Khashoggi killing remains a defining reputational cost. The Saudi Green Initiative and associated climate commitments represent an overlay that attempts to align transformation with global energy-transition discourse, but hydrocarbon production remains central to fiscal planning.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective (primary) treats Vision 2030 as both a source of capital and a contested model of state-led diversification. Gulf sovereign wealth funds—PIF, Mubadala, ADIA, QIA—have become major investors in African infrastructure, agriculture, ports, and technology, including Saudi and Emirati investments in mining and logistics across the continent. African scholarship, drawing on Rodney's analysis of "development of underdevelopment" and Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism, asks whether Gulf capital reproduces extractive patterns—extracting resources and repatriating profits—or builds productive capacity through technology transfer and local content requirements. The African vantage point also highlights that Gulf investment is not monolithic: competition among Saudi, Emirati, and Qatari capital creates openings for African states to negotiate better terms, but only if African governments possess the industrial policy capacity to do so. Vision 2030's energy-transition rhetoric intersects

with African energy needs in contradictory ways: Gulf states invest in African renewables and green hydrogen while simultaneously expanding fossil-fuel extraction, creating tension for climate-vulnerable African populations. The African perspective's occlusion is the internal Saudi political dynamics—centralization, repression, elite bargaining—that shape investment decisions; African analysis often treats Gulf states as unitary actors, missing the domestic politics that drive external economic behavior. The Chinese perspective views Vision 2030 as an opportunity for economic partnership, with Chinese firms involved in construction, technology, and energy-transition projects; it emphasizes mutual benefit and non-interference while occluding governance and labor-rights concerns. The Russian perspective sees Saudi transformation as both a potential competitor in oil markets and a partner in OPEC+ coordination; it emphasizes multipolarity and the weakening of US influence while occluding Saudi domestic politics and the limits of Russian economic capacity. The Western perspective focuses on investment opportunities, market opening, and social liberalization as modernization indicators, while also expressing security concerns about MBS's authoritarian consolidation; it tends to occlude the rentier-structural constraints and the possibility that transformation reinforces rather than dissolves authoritarianism. The UN perspective emphasizes SDG alignment, diversification, women's empowerment, and climate commitments, while occluding political repression and the persistent gap between stated targets and implementation outcomes.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The Gulf's Multi-Alignment Strategy: US Security Guarantees, Chinese Economic Partnership, and Russian Diplomatic Relations

Bolded Causal Claim: Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have adopted a multi-alignment strategy that decouples security dependence on the United States from economic partnership with China and diplomatic coordination with Russia, a strategy made possible by the US shale revolution's reduction of American import dependence and by the eastward shift of global oil demand toward Asia.

Mechanism: Multi-alignment operates through three distinct pillars that are deliberately kept separate. The security pillar remains anchored in the United States: the US Fifth Fleet is headquartered in Bahrain, Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar hosts US Central Command forward elements, and Washington provides arms sales, intelligence sharing, and missile defense cooperation. No Gulf state has sought to replace this security architecture, because no alternative power can project comparable military force into the Gulf. The economic pillar has shifted decisively toward China: China is the largest trading partner for most Gulf states, Chinese firms dominate construction and infrastructure, Huawei has built 5G networks across the Gulf, and Gulf sovereign wealth funds have increased allocations to Chinese markets. The diplomatic and energy pillar involves coordination with Russia through OPEC+ since 2016, participation in BRICS (UAE joined in January 2024; Saudi Arabia was invited), dialogue-partner status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and experiments with non-dollar trade settlement.

The enabling mechanism is structural rather than ideological. The US shale revolution, documented by Yergin (2011) and subsequent EIA data, transformed the United States from the world's largest oil importer into a major producer and net exporter, reducing American dependence on Gulf hydrocarbons. This reduced the US willingness to guarantee Gulf security unconditionally—evident in the muted US response to the 2019 Abqaiq-Khurais attacks on Saudi oil facilities—and created incentives for Gulf states to diversify their partnerships. Simultaneously, global oil demand growth shifted eastward: China, India, Japan, and South Korea became the primary destinations for Gulf crude, making Asian markets economically indispensable. The mechanism is "strategic autonomy" through issue-specific alignment rather than bloc commitment: security

with Washington, economy with Beijing, energy diplomacy with Moscow. This is sustained by the fact that neither the United States nor China has yet demanded exclusive alignment, and by Gulf states' financial capacity to purchase influence across multiple capitals. The 2023 Iran-Saudi rapprochement, brokered by China, demonstrated that multi-alignment could yield diplomatic dividends unavailable through US mediation alone.

Scope Conditions: Multi-alignment works when great powers tolerate hedging, when oil revenues fund diversification, and when regional threats are manageable through diplomacy or deterrence. It is facilitated by the absence of a formal US security treaty that would prohibit independent diplomacy, and by Gulf states' small populations and large financial resources, which allow them to absorb the costs of playing multiple sides. It fails or strains under three conditions: first, if US-China competition forces a binary choice, particularly in technology (Huawei 5G, semiconductor access) or financial sanctions; second, if regional escalation—such as the Gaza war or a direct Iran-Israel confrontation—forces Gulf states to choose sides publicly; third, if domestic political change in a Gulf state alters its risk tolerance. The scope condition most often overlooked is the asymmetry of dependence: Gulf states need the US for security more than the US needs Gulf oil, while China needs Gulf oil more than Gulf states need Chinese security, creating a complex triangular bargaining structure that favors different parties on different issues.

Observable Implications: The observable record includes the December 2022 state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Riyadh, which produced a comprehensive strategic partnership and dozens of agreements; the UAE's accession to BRICS in January 2024; Saudi Arabia's invitation to BRICS; the March 2023 Iran-Saudi rapprochement brokered by China; OPEC+ production cuts coordinated with Russia despite Western sanctions; Gulf states' refusal to join sanctions against Russia after 2022; diversification of arms procurement (French Rafale jets for the UAE, Chinese Wing Loong drones); and pilot programs for yuan-denominated oil trade. These are not signs of anti-Americanism but of calibrated hedging: Gulf states continue to host US forces, purchase US weapons, and coordinate on regional security even as they deepen ties with Beijing and Moscow.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective (primary) examines Gulf multi-alignment through its implications for African security and development. Gulf states' expanded multi-aligned footprint in Africa—UAE and Saudi investments in ports, logistics, agriculture, and mining; Qatari mediation in Sudan and Darfur; Emirati involvement in the Horn of Africa—creates both opportunities and risks for African states. The African perspective asks whether multi-alignment among Gulf powers allows African states to play competing Gulf actors against each other for better terms, or whether it fragments African agency by multiplying external patrons. African scholars such as Aning and Danso emphasize that African states must develop their own multi-alignment strategies rather than become arenas for Gulf and great-power competition. The African vantage point also highlights that Gulf multi-alignment includes competition over green hydrogen and critical minerals in Africa, with Gulf states positioning themselves as intermediaries between African resources and Asian and European markets. The occlusion in African analysis is the tendency to treat Gulf states as monolithic "Middle Eastern" actors, missing their internal differentiation and the fact that Gulf multi-alignment is itself a response to declining US hegemony—a structural shift that also reshapes Africa's room for maneuver. The Chinese perspective views Gulf multi-alignment as validation of its economic diplomacy and "community of shared future," positioning China as an indispensable partner; it occludes security risks and the limits of Chinese hard power in the Gulf. The Russian perspective frames multi-alignment as evidence of multipolarity and declining US unipolarity, with OPEC+ as proof of Russia's continued relevance; it occludes Russian economic weakness and dependence on the Chinese market. The Western perspective expresses anxiety about loss of influence, technology

leakage through Huawei, and Gulf states' refusal to align on Russia sanctions, while also seeing opportunity in the Abraham Accords; it occludes the US role in driving Gulf diversification through shale production and strategic retrenchment. The UN perspective emphasizes multilateralism, SDG financing, and climate cooperation, seeing multi-alignment as potentially supportive of UN frameworks if channeled toward development; it occludes power politics and the risk that multipolarity weakens normative enforcement.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on hydrocarbon geopolitics and Gulf strategy is not a regional application of theories developed elsewhere; it is a generative standpoint from which the entire field looks different. To understand why, one must begin with the structural position that African states occupy in the global hydrocarbon order. Africa is simultaneously a major hydrocarbon producer—Nigeria, Angola, Algeria, Libya, Egypt, and Equatorial Guinea among them—and a continent whose energy access deficits remain acute, with roughly six hundred million people lacking electricity access according to the International Energy Agency's 2023 Africa Energy Outlook. This dual position means that African states experience Gulf hydrocarbon geopolitics not as distant great-power maneuvering but as a set of forces that directly shape their fiscal capacity, their development trajectories, and their vulnerability to price shocks. When OPEC+ coordinated production cuts in 2020 and again in 2022, the price effects rippled through African petrostate budgets with immediate consequences for public spending, debt servicing, and social stability. The African perspective thus begins from material embeddedness rather than from abstract strategic theory.

The theoretical lineage of this perspective runs through several distinct African intellectual traditions. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) established the foundational insight that extractive economies in the periphery are not merely underdeveloped but actively underdeveloped by the structure of global capitalism, a framework that applies with equal force to African hydrocarbon economies and to the Gulf rentier states that compete with them in global markets. Rodney's analysis of the "development of underdevelopment" provides the conceptual architecture for understanding how Gulf oil wealth, rather than simply enriching Gulf populations, has historically been integrated into a global system that constrains African industrialization by locking in primary commodity dependence. Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) extended this analysis to the post-independence period, arguing that formal sovereignty masked continued economic subordination through control of commodity markets, investment flows, and technology transfer. Nkrumah's framework is directly relevant to contemporary Gulf-Africa relations: when Gulf sovereign wealth funds acquire African agricultural land, port infrastructure, or telecommunications assets, the question of whether this constitutes development partnership or neo-colonial extraction cannot be answered by the investor's stated intentions alone but must be assessed through the structural effects on African productive capacity.

Jean-François Bayart's concept of "extraversion"—the strategic orientation of African elites toward external patrons as a source of domestic power—provides a second theoretical pillar. In *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (1993), Bayart argued that African states are not simply weak or failed but are organized around a distinctive political logic in which rulers derive legitimacy and resources from their position in international networks rather than from domestic taxation or production. This framework illuminates the Gulf-Africa nexus in two directions. First, it helps explain why African elites have historically welcomed

Gulf investment without demanding the governance conditionalities that Western donors attach: Gulf capital comes without the institutional reform agendas that African rulers experience as sovereignty violations. Second, and more critically, it suggests that the Gulf's own rentier state model—where legitimacy derives from hydrocarbon distribution rather than taxation—represents an extreme form of the extraversion logic that Bayart identified in African politics. The Gulf states are not a different species of state; they are the logical terminus of a political economy in which external resource rents substitute for domestic productive legitimacy. This insight is unavailable from Western or Chinese perspectives, which tend to treat Gulf rentierism as sui generis rather than as a variant of a broader postcolonial political economy.

Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996) adds a crucial dimension through his analysis of the bifurcated state—the institutional separation between urban civil society and rural customary authority that colonialism bequeathed to postcolonial Africa. Mamdani's framework helps explain why African states have struggled to convert hydrocarbon revenues into broad-based development: the institutional architecture of the postcolonial state was designed for extraction and control, not for productive investment. When Gulf states invest in African infrastructure, they are operating within institutional environments shaped by this bifurcated legacy, and the development outcomes depend less on the volume of investment than on whether it reinforces or transcends the extractive institutional logic. Mamdani's insistence on the historical specificity of African state forms also serves as a corrective to the universalizing tendencies of rentier state theory, which often assumes that oil wealth produces similar political outcomes regardless of institutional context.

Amílcar Cabral's writings on national liberation and economic transformation provide a third theoretical resource. Cabral's insistence that political independence without economic transformation is meaningless—his famous formulation that "the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone's head. They are fighting to win material benefits, to live better and in peace, to see their lives go forward"—frames the African evaluation of Gulf investment in terms of concrete material outcomes rather than diplomatic symbolism. From a Cabralian perspective, the question is not whether Gulf states are "good partners" in the abstract but whether their investment increases African productive capacity, transfers technology, and builds domestic institutional capability. The evidence here is mixed: Gulf investment in African ports (DP World in Djibouti, Senegal, and elsewhere) has improved logistics infrastructure but has also generated sovereignty disputes, as in the Djibouti case where the government terminated DP World's concession and seized the Doraleh Container Terminal in 2018, triggering international arbitration. Gulf investment in African agriculture—often characterized as "land grabs" by critics—has frequently prioritized export-oriented production over domestic food security, reproducing the colonial pattern of extracting primary commodities for external markets.

Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) contributes the critical insight that the national bourgeoisie in postcolonial states often becomes a comprador class, mediating between foreign capital and domestic populations without generating genuine development. Fanon's analysis is directly applicable to the Gulf-Africa nexus: the African intermediaries who facilitate Gulf investment—politicians, business elites, military officers—may capture rents from the relationship without ensuring that benefits reach broader populations. Fanon's warning about the "pitfalls of national consciousness" also cautions against celebrating Gulf-Africa partnerships as evidence of South-South solidarity when the structural dynamics may reproduce dependency. The African perspective thus demands a distinction between the diplomatic rhetoric of partnership and the material reality of extraction, a distinction that Western and Chinese perspectives often blur in their enthusiasm for or anxiety about Gulf strategic realignment.

Julius Nyerere's philosophy of ujamaa and self-reliance provides a normative counterpoint. Nyerere's insistence that African development must be rooted in African realities and controlled by African peoples frames the evaluation of Gulf investment in terms of sovereignty and self-determination rather than efficiency or growth. From this standpoint, the critical question is not whether Gulf capital flows into Africa but whether African states retain policy space to direct those flows toward nationally determined priorities. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which entered into force in 2021, represents an attempt to build the kind of collective bargaining power that Nyerere envisioned, and its interaction with Gulf investment strategies—whether Gulf states engage with AfCFTA as a continental framework or continue bilateral deal-making with individual states—will be a key indicator of whether the relationship is genuinely developmental or merely extractive.

Achille Mbembe's *On the Postcolony* (2001) and his subsequent work on necropolitics provide a more contemporary theoretical lens. Mbembe's analysis of the "commandment" as a mode of power—where authority operates through the spectacle of violence and the management of bodies rather than through institutional legitimacy—helps explain the political dynamics of African petrostates where hydrocarbon revenues fund security apparatuses that maintain order without consent. Mbembe's concept of "brutalism" and his analysis of the "becoming-black of the world" also frame the African experience of global hydrocarbon politics in terms of racialized extraction: the environmental and social costs of hydrocarbon production are disproportionately borne by populations of color, whether in the Niger Delta, the Gulf of Guinea, or the Gulf states' own migrant labor camps. This racial dimension is largely invisible in Western, Chinese, and Russian perspectives, which treat hydrocarbon geopolitics as a matter of state interest rather than of embodied inequality.

Siba Grovogui's work on international relations theory and African agency provides the most direct theoretical challenge to the Western-centric frameworks that dominate Gulf geopolitics analysis. In *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996) and subsequent writings, Grovogui argued that the international system was constructed through the exclusion of African and other non-Western peoples, and that the resulting order systematically privileges Western states' interests while presenting itself as universal. Applied to Gulf hydrocarbon geopolitics, Grovogui's framework suggests that the "rules-based international order" that Western states invoke when discussing Gulf security is itself a historically contingent construction that serves Western energy security interests. The African perspective thus asks: whose order is being defended when the US maintains military bases in the Gulf? Whose development is being prioritized when OPEC+ coordinates production cuts? The answers, from an African standpoint, are not neutral but reflect the power asymmetries embedded in the international system.

Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) and her broader work on gender and social organization in African societies contributes a dimension that is entirely absent from mainstream Gulf geopolitics analysis. Oyěwùmí's argument that gender categories are culturally constructed rather than biologically determined, and her critique of the imposition of Western gender binaries on African societies, has implications for understanding the social transformations that Gulf diversification strategies entail. Vision 2030's social reforms in Saudi Arabia—women's driving rights, entertainment liberalization, labor market participation—are often analyzed in Western frameworks as "modernization" or "liberalization." An Oyěwùmí-informed perspective would ask how these reforms interact with existing gendered social structures in Gulf societies and what their implications are for African migrant workers, particularly women, who constitute a significant share of the Gulf's domestic labor force. The kafala system, which ties migrant workers to individual sponsors, has been extensively documented as a site of exploitation, and African women migrants—particularly from Ethiopia, Kenya, and Nigeria—have been disproportionately affected. The African perspective thus insists that Gulf hydrocarbon geopolitics cannot be analyzed without attention to the gendered and racialized

labor regimes that sustain Gulf economies.

Kwesi Aning's work on African security governance and Rita Tamale's contributions to African feminist jurisprudence provide additional analytical resources. Aning's research on the securitization of African politics and the role of external actors in African security arrangements is relevant to understanding how Gulf states' security partnerships with African states—particularly in the Horn of Africa, where the UAE has established military bases in Eritrea and Somaliland—reshape African security governance. Tamale's work on the intersection of law, gender, and power in African contexts provides tools for analyzing how Gulf investment in African infrastructure affects local communities, particularly women who bear disproportionate costs of land displacement and environmental degradation.

What does the African perspective contribute that the other four cannot? First, it centers the material experience of populations in the global South who are affected by Gulf hydrocarbon geopolitics but who have no voice in its formulation. The Western, Chinese, and Russian perspectives are all state-centric; the UN perspective is institution-centric. The African perspective, rooted in traditions of anti-colonial thought and postcolonial critique, insists on the standpoint of those who experience the consequences of great-power and middle-power strategies without participating in their design. Second, it provides a theoretical framework—drawing on Rodney, Nkrumah, Bayart, Mamdani, and others—that treats extraction and dependency as structural features of the global economy rather than as policy failures or development gaps. This framework is essential for understanding why Gulf diversification strategies, however well-intentioned, may reproduce rather than transcend the extractive dynamics of the hydrocarbon era. Third, it reveals the racialized and gendered dimensions of Gulf hydrocarbon geopolitics that are invisible in other perspectives: the migrant labor regimes, the environmental injustices, and the unequal distribution of climate vulnerability.

What does the African perspective occlude? It may underweight the genuine security concerns that drive Gulf states' strategic calculations—the Iranian threat, the instability of the regional order, the vulnerability of maritime chokepoints. By focusing on extraction and dependency, it risks treating Gulf states as mere extensions of global capitalism rather than as actors with their own agency, interests, and constraints. It may also underweight the agency of African states themselves, which are not simply victims of Gulf investment but active negotiators with their own strategic interests. The African perspective's emphasis on structural inequality can sometimes obscure the heterogeneity of African experiences—oil-producing states like Nigeria and Angola face different challenges than oil-importing states like Kenya and Ethiopia, and the Gulf's role in each differs accordingly. Finally, the African perspective may be overly skeptical of Gulf diversification, underweighting the genuine economic transformation that Vision 2030 and similar initiatives represent and the opportunities they create for African trade and investment.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on hydrocarbon geopolitics and Gulf strategy is organized around a single overriding imperative: energy security for the world's largest oil importer. China imported approximately 11.3 million barrels per day of crude oil in 2023, of which roughly half originated from the Gulf region, with Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the UAE, and Kuwait as the principal suppliers. This dependency ratio means that Gulf stability is not a distant strategic concern for Beijing but a direct determinant of Chinese economic performance and social stability. The Chinese perspective thus begins from vulnerability rather than from power, a framing that distinguishes it sharply from Western analyses that treat China as a rising hegemon seeking to displace US influence in the Gulf.

The theoretical and policy lineage of this perspective runs through China's "going out" strategy (zou chuqu),

launched in the early 2000s and accelerated under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) announced in 2013. The BRI's energy corridor through the Gulf—encompassing port investments in the UAE, pipeline projects in Saudi Arabia, and refinery partnerships in Oman and Kuwait—represents not merely commercial expansion but a strategic effort to secure supply routes and diversify import sources. Chinese state-owned enterprises, particularly Sinopec, CNPC, and CNOOC, have become major players in Gulf upstream and downstream operations, with Sinopec's 2022 acquisition of a stake in Saudi Aramco's refining capacity representing a landmark in bilateral energy integration. The Chinese perspective treats these investments as win-win partnerships that benefit both parties: China gains supply security, Gulf states gain access to the world's largest growth market.

The concept of "multi-alignment" in Gulf strategy is viewed from Beijing as a strategic opportunity rather than a threat. Chinese analysts have long argued that the US unipolar order in the Gulf was inherently unstable and that a multipolar arrangement—in which Gulf states maintain security ties with Washington while deepening economic ties with Beijing—better serves Chinese interests. The 2023 Iran-Saudi rapprochement, brokered by China, is celebrated in Chinese strategic discourse as evidence of Beijing's growing diplomatic capacity and of the declining efficacy of US-centric security architectures. From this standpoint, China is not seeking to replace the US as the Gulf's security guarantor—a role it explicitly disavows—but to create a diplomatic and economic environment in which Gulf states have alternatives to US conditionalities.

The Chinese perspective also emphasizes the complementarity between Gulf diversification strategies and Chinese economic interests. Saudi Vision 2030's emphasis on non-oil GDP growth, technology transfer, and infrastructure development aligns with Chinese capabilities in construction, renewable energy, and digital technology. The NEOM project, Saudi Arabia's planned megacity, has attracted significant Chinese investment and contracting, and Chinese firms are major participants in the Gulf's renewable energy buildout, including solar projects in the UAE and Saudi Arabia. From Beijing's standpoint, Gulf diversification is not a threat to Chinese energy interests but an expansion of the economic relationship beyond hydrocarbons into higher-value sectors.

What does the Chinese perspective contribute that others cannot? It provides the most detailed understanding of the economic complementarities between Gulf states and Asian markets, and it frames Gulf multi-alignment as a natural evolution rather than a crisis. It also brings a long-term developmental perspective—rooted in China's own experience of state-led economic transformation—that treats Gulf diversification as a genuine project rather than as rhetoric.

What does it occlude? The Chinese perspective systematically underweights the political and security dimensions of Gulf strategy. By treating Gulf states primarily as economic partners, it risks underestimating the depth of US security commitments and the institutional inertia of the Gulf security architecture. It also underweights the human rights and labor governance issues that affect Chinese workers and African migrant laborers in the Gulf. The Chinese perspective's emphasis on "win-win" cooperation can obscure the power asymmetries in Gulf-China economic relations, where Gulf sovereign wealth funds are increasingly acquiring strategic assets in China while Chinese firms remain dependent on Gulf state contracts. Finally, by celebrating the Iran-Saudi rapprochement as a Chinese diplomatic triumph, Beijing risks overestimating its own influence and underestimating the fragility of the agreement, which remains vulnerable to regional escalation and domestic political shifts in both Tehran and Riyadh.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on hydrocarbon geopolitics and Gulf strategy is shaped by a dual identity: Russia is simultaneously a major hydrocarbon producer competing with Gulf states in global markets and a diplomatic actor seeking to leverage energy coordination into broader geopolitical influence. This dual identity produces a perspective that is more internally contradictory than the Chinese or Western alternatives, and it requires careful parsing.

The theoretical lineage runs through Russia's post-Soviet strategic doctrine, which treats energy as a geopolitical instrument rather than merely a commercial commodity. This doctrine was articulated most clearly in the 2003 Energy Strategy of Russia and subsequent iterations, which framed Russia's hydrocarbon resources as a source of "soft power" and a tool for restoring Russia's great-power status. The concept of "energy superpower" (energeticheskaya sverkhderzhava), popularized in Russian strategic discourse in the mid-2000s, captured the ambition to convert hydrocarbon wealth into diplomatic leverage. While this concept has been partially discredited by the shale revolution's erosion of Russian market power in Europe, it remains influential in Russian thinking about Gulf relations.

The OPEC+ framework is the central institutional expression of the Russian perspective. Russia's participation in OPEC+ coordination—beginning with the 2016 Vienna agreement and continuing through the 2020 price war and subsequent production cuts—represents a strategic choice to cooperate with Gulf producers rather than compete with them. From Moscow's standpoint, OPEC+ serves multiple functions: it stabilizes global oil prices in ways that benefit Russian fiscal revenues; it provides a forum for Russia to engage with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states as an equal rather than a supplicant; and it demonstrates Russia's continued relevance in global energy governance despite Western sanctions and the loss of European markets. The 2020-2022 oil price war, in which Saudi Arabia and Russia initially clashed over production levels before reaching a historic agreement, is interpreted in Russian discourse as evidence of Moscow's indispensability: Saudi Arabia could not stabilize markets without Russian cooperation, and the eventual OPEC+ agreement validated Russia's strategic importance.

The multipolarity framing is the second pillar of the Russian perspective. Russian strategic discourse consistently interprets Gulf multi-alignment as evidence of a declining US unipolar order and the emergence of a multipolar world in which Russia plays a central role. The Abraham Accords are viewed with suspicion as a US-Israeli initiative designed to consolidate Western influence, but the broader trend of Gulf states diversifying their partnerships—including with Russia—is celebrated as validation of Moscow's multipolarity thesis. Russia's diplomatic relations with Gulf states, including arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, nuclear cooperation agreements, and participation in regional security dialogues, are presented as evidence that Russia remains a relevant actor in the Gulf despite its economic limitations.

What does the Russian perspective contribute that others cannot? It provides the most explicit articulation of energy as a geopolitical instrument and the most developed theory of how hydrocarbon coordination can serve multipolar ambitions. It also brings a practitioner's understanding of OPEC+ dynamics, having been a central participant in the framework's evolution.

What does it occlude? The Russian perspective systematically overstates Russia's economic leverage in the Gulf and understates its dependence on Chinese markets for hydrocarbon exports following the loss of European demand. It treats OPEC+ coordination as evidence of Russian power when it may more accurately reflect Russian weakness—the need to cooperate with Saudi Arabia to prevent price collapse. It also occludes the impact of Western sanctions on Russia's ability to invest in or technology-transfer to Gulf states,

and it underweights the Gulf states' own agency in managing relations with Moscow as part of a broader diversification strategy rather than as alignment with Russian interests. The Russian perspective's multipolarity framing can become self-serving, interpreting any Gulf state's refusal to follow US preferences as evidence of Russian influence when it may reflect independent Gulf calculations. Finally, the perspective tends to treat the Iran-Saudi rapprochement as a setback for US influence without adequately acknowledging that China, not Russia, brokered the agreement—a fact that underscores Russia's secondary role in Gulf diplomacy.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on hydrocarbon geopolitics and Gulf strategy is organized around two imperatives that are increasingly in tension: energy security and the maintenance of a US-led security architecture in the Gulf. This tension has intensified since the US shale revolution reduced American dependence on Gulf oil imports, creating a strategic paradox in which the US remains the Gulf's security guarantor while becoming less economically dependent on Gulf hydrocarbons. The Western perspective is thus characterized by anxiety about the sustainability of the security-for-energy bargain that has structured US-Gulf relations since the 1945 Quincy meeting between Franklin Roosevelt and Ibn Saud.

The theoretical lineage runs through the realist tradition in international relations, particularly the "hegemonic stability" framework associated with Robert Gilpin and Charles Kindleberger, which treats US military presence in the Gulf as a public good that stabilizes global energy markets. This framework was operationalized through the Carter Doctrine of 1980, which declared that any attempt by an external force to gain control of the Gulf region would be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States. The Carter Doctrine and its successors established the institutional architecture—CENTCOM, the Fifth Fleet, bilateral defense agreements—that remains the foundation of Gulf security. The Western perspective treats this architecture as essential not merely for US interests but for global economic stability, since Gulf oil flows underpin the entire international trading system.

The shale revolution has profoundly disrupted this framework. As US oil production surged from approximately 5 million barrels per day in 2008 to over 13 million by 2023, the US became the world's largest oil producer and a net exporter of petroleum products. This transformation reduced US dependence on Gulf imports but did not eliminate US interest in Gulf stability, since global oil prices remain interconnected and Gulf supply disruptions would still affect US consumers and the global economy. However, the shale revolution did alter the political economy of US-Gulf relations: Gulf states could no longer assume that their oil exports purchased automatic US security guarantees, and the US could no longer justify its Gulf military presence primarily in terms of energy security. The Western perspective has struggled to articulate a coherent rationale for continued US engagement, oscillating between "great power competition" framing (countering China and Russia), counterterrorism, and regional stability.

The Abraham Accords of 2020 represent the most significant Western diplomatic initiative in the Gulf in recent decades. From the US perspective, the normalization agreements between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan were designed to create a regional coalition against Iran, to reduce US military burdens by fostering regional self-defense, and to create economic opportunities that would bind Gulf states more closely to the US-led order. The Western perspective treats the Accords as a strategic success that demonstrates the continued relevance of US diplomacy in the Gulf, even as it acknowledges that the Accords have not produced the anticipated broader normalization (particularly with Saudi Arabia) and have been complicated by the 2023-2024 Gaza conflict.

The Western perspective also encompasses significant European dimensions. European states, particularly the UK and France, maintain military presences in the Gulf and have deep historical ties to the region. The European energy crisis triggered by Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine renewed European interest in Gulf LNG supplies, with Germany and other states signing long-term contracts with Qatar. This has created a transatlantic divergence in which European states are more dependent on Gulf energy than the US, producing different strategic calculations within the Western camp.

What does the Western perspective contribute that others cannot? It provides the most detailed understanding of the institutional and military architecture of Gulf security, and it brings a practitioner's knowledge of alliance management, defense cooperation, and intelligence sharing. It also offers the most developed analysis of the shale revolution's structural impact on global oil markets, drawing on extensive data from the Energy Information Administration and other sources.

What does it occlude? The Western perspective systematically underweights the agency of Gulf states in driving diversification and multi-alignment, treating these trends primarily as reactions to US policy rather than as independent strategic choices. It also underweights the economic complementarities between Gulf states and Asian markets, which are the primary drivers of Gulf reorientation. The Western perspective's anxiety about "losing" the Gulf to China and Russia can become self-fulfilling, producing policy responses—such as technology restrictions and alliance pressure—that accelerate rather than retard Gulf diversification. It also tends to treat the Abraham Accords as a Western achievement rather than as a Gulf state strategy, occluding the UAE's independent motivations for normalization. Finally, the Western perspective's focus on security architecture can obscure the domestic political economy of Gulf states—the rentier dynamics, the social contracts, the transformation pressures—that ultimately determine their strategic choices.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on hydrocarbon geopolitics and Gulf strategy is organized around the tension between the Sustainable Development Goals—particularly SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy) and SDG 13 (climate action)—and the continued centrality of hydrocarbons to global energy systems and to the economies of Gulf states. This tension is not merely analytical but institutional: the UN system contains both agencies that promote fossil fuel development (such as the UN Development Programme's work on energy access) and agencies that advocate for rapid decarbonization (such as the UN Environment Programme and the IPCC). The UN perspective thus reflects the organization's own internal contradictions as much as any coherent analytical framework.

The theoretical lineage runs through the UN's sustainable development paradigm, which emerged from the 1987 Brundtland Commission report and was codified in the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals. The SDG framework treats energy as a cross-cutting issue that affects poverty reduction, health, education, gender equality, and climate action. From this standpoint, Gulf hydrocarbon geopolitics is evaluated not in terms of state power or market efficiency but in terms of its contribution to or detraction from sustainable development. The UN perspective asks: does Gulf oil production support or undermine global energy access? Does Gulf diversification create opportunities for technology transfer and capacity building in developing countries? Does the Gulf's multi-alignment strategy strengthen or weaken multilateral cooperation on climate change?

The UN's engagement with Gulf states has intensified in recent years through several channels. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process has seen Gulf states—particularly the UAE, which hosted COP28 in 2023—take on leadership roles in climate diplomacy. The UAE's appointment of Sultan Al Jaber, CEO of ADNOC, as COP28 president was controversial but reflected the UN's pragmatic

recognition that fossil fuel producers must be part of the climate solution. The UN's climate finance architecture, including the Green Climate Fund and the Loss and Damage Fund established at COP27, depends significantly on contributions from Gulf sovereign wealth funds and development finance institutions. The UN perspective thus treats Gulf states as potential partners in climate finance and technology transfer, while also pressing them to accelerate decarbonization and reduce fossil fuel production.

The UN perspective also encompasses the humanitarian and development dimensions of Gulf-Africa relations. UN agencies operating in Africa—including UNDP, UNICEF, and WFP—interact with Gulf development finance institutions such as the Saudi Fund for Development and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development. The UN perspective evaluates these interactions in terms of their contribution to African development outcomes, with particular attention to the SDG targets on poverty, hunger, health, and education. From this standpoint, Gulf investment in African infrastructure is welcome insofar as it supports SDG achievement but problematic insofar as it creates debt burdens, displaces communities, or prioritizes extractive over developmental outcomes.

The UN perspective's treatment of multi-alignment is cautiously optimistic. The organization's founding principles—sovereign equality, non-intervention, peaceful settlement of disputes—align with Gulf states' desire for strategic autonomy. The UN sees multi-alignment as potentially supportive of multilateralism if it channels Gulf resources toward development and climate goals rather than toward competitive great-power rivalry. However, the UN also recognizes the risk that multipolarity weakens normative enforcement: if Gulf states can play competing powers against each other, they may be less responsive to UN human rights and governance standards.

What does the UN perspective contribute that others cannot? It provides the only framework that systematically evaluates Gulf hydrocarbon geopolitics in terms of global public goods—climate stability, energy access, poverty reduction—rather than state interests. It also brings institutional legitimacy and convening power that no single state possesses, enabling it to broker agreements (such as the COP28 UAE Consensus) that would be impossible through bilateral diplomacy alone.

What does it occlude? The UN perspective systematically underweights power politics and the security dimensions of Gulf strategy. By treating Gulf states as development partners and climate actors, it risks underestimating the competitive dynamics that drive their strategic choices. It also occludes the organization's own dependence on Gulf funding for its development and humanitarian operations, which can constrain its ability to criticize Gulf states' human rights records or environmental practices. The UN perspective's emphasis on multilateralism can become normative rather than analytical, treating the organization's own frameworks as universal when they are in fact contested and historically contingent. Finally, by focusing on climate and development, the UN perspective may underweight the immediate security concerns—regional stability, maritime security, non-proliferation—that dominate Gulf states' strategic calculations and that shape their willingness to cooperate with UN initiatives.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African	Centers the distributional consequences of Gulf-centered oil politics for African producers and importers; shows how OPEC+ price management externalizes adjustment onto the Global South; highlights Gulf sovereign-wealth and national-oil-company investment in African energy and infrastructure	May understate intra-Gulf agency, market mechanisms, and the strategic autonomy of Gulf states; can risk treating African economies as passive price-takers	Energy justice, equitable transition, developmental sovereignty, and protection of fiscal space in import-dependent states	African fiscal stress during the 2020 price collapse; Gulf investment in African gas, renewables, ports, and infrastructure	Western perspective: market adjustment and domestic policy choices, not cartel politics alone, determine African outcomes; African states retain agency in diversification
Chinese	Treats China as the decisive demand-side weight in global oil markets; explains Gulf strategy through energy security, supply diversification, and long-term economic partnership	May understate political risk, price volatility, and the possibility that Gulf states use Chinese demand as leverage rather than simply serving it	Stable supply, mutual benefit, non-interference, and managed interdepen-dence	China's large Gulf crude imports; BRI energy and infrastructure projects; strategic petroleum reserve expansion	Russian perspective: Chinese demand alone does not explain OPEC+ bargaining; Saudi-Russian coordination is driven by producer-state interests, not consumer demand

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Frames OPEC+ as a platform for multipolarity, sovereign equality, and resistance to US-dominated energy governance; explains Saudi-Russian cooperation as strategic alignment beyond oil	Underplays the economic costs of price wars, the asymmetry of Saudi-Russian quota bargaining, and the dependence of Russian fiscal planning on coordinated cuts	Multipolarity, anti-unilateralism, producer sovereignty, and diplomatic parity with the United States	Russia-Saudi coordination during 2020–2022; Russian insistence on OPEC+ as a political as well as market forum	Western perspective: OPEC+ is cartel collusion that harms consumers and distorts markets; cooperation with Russia after 2022 is strategically indefensible
Western	Explains market structure, shale responsiveness, fiscal breakevens, and the Gulf security architecture; captures the United States' shift from dependent importer to net exporter and security guarantor	Often treats Gulf states as clients or derivative actors; underplays their strategic autonomy, multi-alignment, and domestic transformation agendas	Open markets, alliance management, energy security, and rules-based international order	US shale boom and bust; EIA production data; IMF Article IV fiscal assessments; Gulf basing and security cooperation	African perspective: market framing ignores distributional harm to import-dependent states and the externalization of adjustment costs

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Brings energy transition, SDG 7, climate finance, and vulnerability of importers into the analysis; highlights how price volatility affects investment in renewables and fossil-fuel subsidy regimes	Underweights immediate security concerns, fiscal breakevens, maritime security, and non-proliferation; can treat UN frameworks as universal rather than contested	Sustainable development, multilateralism, climate justice, and protection of vulnerable populations	UN energy-transition agendas; SDG 7 indicators; climate-finance discussions; price-shock impacts on import-dependent economies	Russian perspective: transition timelines and climate conditionality can ignore development needs and producer-state sovereignty

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2020–2022 oil price war and OPEC+ coordination

Levels of analysis

At the **individual** level, the episode was shaped by the decisions of a small number of leaders: Mohammed bin Salman's willingness to flood the market in March 2020 after Russia refused deeper cuts; Vladimir Putin's calculation that lower prices would damage US shale producers more than Russian fiscal capacity; and Donald Trump's pressure on both Riyadh and Moscow to reach an agreement as prices collapsed. At the **state** level, Saudi Arabia's high fiscal breakeven price, Russia's budget dependence on hydrocarbon revenues, the financial fragility of US shale firms, and the sanctions environment after 2022 structured what each government could accept. At the **systemic** level, the case combined a pandemic demand shock, the rise of US shale as a flexible non-OPEC supply source, the institutionalization of OPEC+ as a Saudi-Russian co-management forum, and the geopolitical rupture caused by Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. At the **transnational** level, oil traders, national oil companies, international agencies, sanctions-evasion networks, capital markets, and consumer-state diplomacy all transmitted and amplified the effects of producer-state bargains.

Mechanism

The core mechanism was coercive bargaining followed by institutionalized collusion. In March 2020, Saudi Arabia used its spare capacity to slash prices and increase output after Russia rejected proposed cuts, imposing costs on both Moscow and US shale producers. The resulting price collapse—Brent fell below $20 per barrel in April 2020—forced a reversal: the April 2020 OPEC+ agreement cut 9.7 million barrels per day, the largest coordinated reduction in the group's history. The crisis converted a temporary price war into a durable framework in which Saudi Arabia and Russia jointly managed supply through OPEC+. When demand recov-

ered in 2021, the group gradually unwound cuts; when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, sanctions disrupted Russian exports, but OPEC+ maintained a cautious, incremental approach rather than fully replacing lost Russian barrels. The result was not simply higher or lower prices, but a new market structure in which Saudi Arabia retained swing-producer leverage, Russia retained a diplomatic platform despite sanctions, and US shale became a financially sensitive marginal adjuster rather than the dominant price-setter.

Perspective reconstruction

The African perspective, which should be read as primary rather than peripheral, treats the 2020–2022 episode as an external shock that restructured fiscal and developmental possibilities across the continent. The March 2020 collapse transmitted immediately into African oil exporters' revenue streams and into the debt and import-cost calculations of African oil importers, while the subsequent OPEC+ cuts raised energy costs during a fragile recovery. African scholarship on dependency and extraversion helps explain why African producers and consumers remain price-takers in a market governed by Saudi-Russian bargaining, even when African states possess significant hydrocarbon reserves. At the same time, Gulf sovereign wealth funds and national oil companies expanded investments in African gas, renewables, ports, and infrastructure, creating new dependencies that are not captured by either Western market narratives or UN transition frameworks. The African vantage point therefore reveals that the price war was not merely a technical supply episode but a redistribution of energy rents and investment power with uneven developmental consequences. It also shows that Gulf-Africa energy relations are now shaped as much by capital flows and infrastructure finance as by crude prices.

The Chinese perspective emphasizes energy security and demand-side weight. As the world's largest crude importer, China benefited temporarily from the 2020 price collapse but also faced the fragility of a market on which its industrial economy depends. The subsequent OPEC+ cuts raised import costs and complicated planning, reinforcing Beijing's interest in diversified suppliers, strategic petroleum reserves, and long-term contracts with Gulf producers. China deepened partnerships with both Saudi Arabia and Russia, treating OPEC+ as a stabilizing forum while accelerating domestic renewables and electrification. This perspective reads the episode as evidence that energy interdependence requires diplomatic hedging rather than reliance on any single supplier or price regime.

The Russian perspective frames OPEC+ as a vehicle for multipolarity and sovereign equality. Moscow initially resisted Saudi-proposed cuts in March 2020, calculating that lower prices would weaken US shale more than Russian fiscal capacity; the subsequent collapse and April agreement exposed the limits of that strategy. After 2022, OPEC+ became a platform through which Russia retained market influence and diplomatic legitimacy despite Western sanctions, with Saudi Arabia's refusal to isolate Moscow underscoring a multipolar alignment. Russian analysts present this cooperation as resistance to US-dominated energy governance. Yet the same arrangement required Russia to accept Saudi leadership in setting quotas, revealing an asymmetry that the multipolarity narrative tends to obscure.

The Western perspective centers market structure, shale responsiveness, and alliance politics. Western analysts argue that Saudi flooding and subsequent OPEC+ cuts demonstrated the cartel's residual power to manage prices, while US shale's rapid decline and partial recovery showed the elasticity of non-OPEC supply. The episode reinforced the importance of the Gulf security architecture to Washington, even as the United States became a net exporter and less directly dependent on Gulf oil. After 2022, Western governments criticized OPEC+ for insufficient production increases amid the Ukraine war, framing Saudi-Russian coordination as strategically problematic. This lens captures market and alliance dynamics well but often treats Gulf agency as derivative of US security guarantees.

The UN perspective highlights how extreme price volatility complicates energy-transition planning. Very low prices in 2020 discouraged investment across both hydrocarbons and renewables, while high prices in 2022 accelerated fossil-fuel subsidies, cost-of-living crises, and political pressure to maximize short-term output. OPEC+ management is assessed against SDG 7 and climate goals: prolonged high prices can fund transition investments but may also entrench carbon-intensive systems. The UN frame also stresses impacts on vulnerable importers and the need for climate finance. It is strongest on normative goals and transition planning but weaker on the security and fiscal imperatives that drove Saudi and Russian choices.

Explicit adjudication

The most persuasive explanation of the 2020–2022 episode is a state-centric political-economy account: Saudi Arabia and Russia used OPEC+ to reconcile fiscal imperatives with strategic bargaining, while US shale acted as a flexible but financially fragile competitor. This account best explains both the 2020 collapse and the 2021–2022 stabilization because it links producer-state budget needs, spare-capacity leverage, and institutionalized supply management. However, it underweights the transnational distributional consequences emphasized by the African perspective and the normative transition concerns raised by the UN perspective. The African perspective is indispensable for seeing who bore the adjustment costs and how Gulf capital is reshaping African energy systems; the UN perspective is indispensable for seeing how price volatility distorted transition investment. Neither alone explains Saudi-Russian agency, but together they correct the tendency of Western and Russian accounts to treat the global oil market as a closed game among producers.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Case: The 2023 Iran–Saudi rapprochement — how did it reshape Gulf strategic calculations?

Tasks:

1. **Mechanism identification.** Identify the proximate trigger and the deeper structural cause of the March 2023 Beijing-brokered agreement restoring diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Distinguish the Chinese mediation role from the underlying convergence of interests.
2. **Levels of analysis.** Analyze the rapprochement at four levels: individual (leadership decisions by Mohammed bin Salman, Ebrahim Raisi, and Xi Jinping), state (Saudi strategic pivot toward Vision 2030 and Iranian economic distress under sanctions), systemic (US retrenchment from the Gulf and the rise of multipolarity), and transnational (sectarian proxy networks in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq).
3. **Perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — interprets the rapprochement's significance for Gulf order.
4. **Historical analogue.** Compare the 2023 rapprochement with an earlier episode of Saudi–Iranian détente (e.g., the mid-1990s rapprochement under Rafsanjani and Crown Prince Abdullah, or the 2015 JCPOA period). What is similar and what differs in the causal structure?
5. **Falsifiers.** Specify two pieces of evidence that would falsify your preferred explanation — for example, a resumption of proxy escalation in Yemen or a Saudi return to exclusive US security dependence.
6. **Adjudication.** On the basis of the evidence, which perspective provides the most complete explanation, and what does it occlude?

MODEL ANSWER

The 2023 Iran–Saudi rapprochement is best explained as a structural adjustment to US retrenchment and the rise of Chinese economic leverage, not as a sudden diplomatic breakthrough. The proximate trigger was Chinese mediation in Beijing in March 2023, but the deeper cause was a convergence of Saudi and Iranian interests produced by shifts in the systemic environment. Saudi Arabia, under Mohammed bin Salman, had concluded that the US security guarantee was no longer sufficient to manage regional threats, particularly after the 2019 Abqaiq attack and the perceived US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Iran, meanwhile, faced severe economic distress under sanctions and sought relief through regional de-escalation. China, as the largest buyer of both Saudi and Iranian oil, possessed the economic leverage to broker a deal that Washington could not.

At the individual level, the rapprochement reflected leadership calculations: MBS needed stability to execute Vision 2030, Raisi needed economic breathing room, and Xi needed to demonstrate China's capacity as a global mediator. At the state level, Saudi Arabia was pivoting from a security-first posture to an economic-transformation agenda, while Iran was attempting to break out of diplomatic isolation. At the systemic level, US shale production had reduced American dependence on Gulf oil, weakening the strategic rationale for US military primacy in the region and creating space for multipolar diplomacy. At the transnational level, the rapprochement did not immediately dissolve sectarian proxy networks in Yemen, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq; rather, it created a framework for managing them, with the Yemen ceasefire as the most visible early dividend.

The African perspective highlights that the rapprochement reduced the risk of a wider Gulf war that would have disrupted energy markets and African import costs, while also noting that Gulf investment flows into Africa — particularly Saudi and Emirati capital — depend on regional stability. The Chinese perspective frames the deal as evidence of Beijing's growing diplomatic capacity and its interest in securing energy supply lines through the Belt and Road Initiative. The Russian perspective interprets it as a blow to US unipolarity and a vindication of multipolarity, consistent with Moscow's OPEC+ coordination with Riyadh. The Western perspective, particularly in Washington, initially viewed the deal with alarm as a loss of influence, though some analysts argued it aligned with US interests in reducing regional tensions. The UN perspective welcomed the agreement as a contribution to regional stability and SDG 16, while noting that durable peace requires addressing underlying grievances and proxy conflicts.

Historically, the rapprochement resembles the mid-1990s détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran under Rafsanjani and Crown Prince Abdullah, which also followed a period of tension and was driven by mutual economic interests. However, the 2023 agreement differs in three respects: it was brokered by China rather than by bilateral diplomacy; it occurred in a context of US retrenchment rather than US primacy; and it was explicitly linked to Saudi economic diversification rather than to oil-market management alone. The 2015 JCPOA period offers a partial analogue, but that episode was centered on Iran's nuclear program and US diplomacy, whereas the 2023 deal was a regional arrangement independent of Washington.

Falsifiers of this explanation would include a collapse of the agreement due to renewed proxy escalation in Yemen or Lebanon, or a Saudi decision to re-anchor its security posture exclusively in the US. If either occurred, it would suggest that the structural drivers identified here were weaker than the proximate diplomatic factors. Conversely, sustained economic cooperation between Riyadh and Tehran, including joint investment or energy projects, would strengthen the structural explanation.

On balance, the Chinese and systemic perspectives together provide the most complete explanation, because they capture both the mediator's leverage and the underlying shift in great-power competition. However, this combination occludes the domestic political drivers — MBS's need for stability to execute Vision 2030

and Iran's internal economic crisis — which the state-level perspective captures. The Western perspective, by contrast, overstates the loss of US influence and understates the degree to which Washington tacitly welcomed de-escalation. The African perspective correctly identifies the energy-market and investment implications but does not fully explain the diplomatic mechanism. The UN perspective is normatively valuable but analytically thin on causation. The most robust conclusion is that the rapprochement was overdetermined: multiple structural and agential factors converged, and no single perspective captures all of them.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In 2023, Saudi Arabia announced additional voluntary oil production cuts of one million barrels per day, extending them into 2024, while simultaneously accelerating non-oil GDP growth targets under Vision 2030 and expanding sovereign wealth fund investments in African infrastructure. The cuts occurred amid US pressure to increase production to lower global prices and amid recovering Chinese demand. Analyze this decision: why did Riyadh reduce supply when Washington wanted more, and how does the cut interact with Saudi diversification strategy and multi-alignment diplomacy?

(b) Required memo headings (use as prompts):

- **Mechanism:** What causal chain links the production cut to Saudi fiscal needs, OPEC+ coordination with Russia, and the signaling of strategic autonomy from Washington?
- **Perspective reconstruction:** How do the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each interpret the cut's significance?
- **Historical analogue:** Which earlier episode of Saudi supply management (e.g., the 1973 embargo, the 1980s price war, or the 2020 price war) offers the best comparison, and where does the analogy break down?
- **Falsifiers:** What evidence would disprove your explanation — for example, a Saudi reversal of cuts following US diplomatic pressure, or a sustained rise in non-oil revenue that decouples the budget from oil prices?

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description (what happened) from explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen next), and prescription (what should be done)?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which of the following best explains why Saudi Arabia cut oil production in 2023 despite US pressure to increase supply?

A) Saudi Arabia cut production primarily to punish the United States for its shale revolution, which had reduced American dependence on Gulf oil.

B) Saudi Arabia cut production because its fiscal breakeven price exceeded the market price, and it needed to support prices to fund Vision 2030.

C) Saudi Arabia cut production as part of a coordinated OPEC+ strategy with Russia to manage global supply, while using the resulting price stability to fund diversification under Vision 2030 and signal strategic autonomy from Washington.

D) Saudi Arabia cut production because Chinese demand had collapsed, making additional supply unnecessary.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **A is wrong** because it conflates a long-term structural shift (the shale revolution reducing US import dependence) with an immediate causal motive. The shale revolution shaped the systemic environment but did not directly trigger the 2023 cuts; Riyadh's decision was about price support and strategic signaling, not retaliation against US energy independence.
- **B is partially correct but incomplete** because it captures the fiscal motive — Saudi breakeven prices do exceed some market levels — but it misses the OPEC+ coordination with Russia, the multi-alignment signaling, and the political dimension of asserting autonomy from Washington. A purely fiscal explanation cannot account for why Riyadh accepted diplomatic friction with the US.
- **D is wrong** because Chinese demand was recovering, not collapsing, in 2023 following the end of zero-COVID policies. The cuts were a supply-management decision, not a response to demand destruction; had demand truly collapsed, price support would have been futile.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. Approximate crude oil production by country (recent annual averages, million barrels per day).
Sources: EIA international petroleum data; approximate ranges only; verify latest release before use.

Rank	Country	Approx. production (mb/d)	Approx. share of global output	Reading note
1	United States	13.0–13.5	~13–14%	Shale-driven, price-responsive, decentralized
2	Saudi Arabia	9.0–10.0	~9–10%	OPEC+ swing producer; spare capacity central
3	Russia	9.0–9.5	~9%	Sanctions, discounts, OPEC+ coordination
4	Canada	4.8–5.2	~5%	Oil sands; pipeline/export constraints
5	Iraq	4.2–4.6	~4–5%	State-led, infrastructure and security limits

Rank	Country	Approx. production (mb/d)	Approx. share of global output	Reading note
6	China	4.0–4.3	~4%	Import-dependent despite domestic output
7	Brazil	3.3–3.6	~3–4%	Pre-salt offshore; state-company role
8	United Arab Emirates	3.0–3.3	~3%	Capacity expansion; ADNOC-led
9	Iran	2.8–3.2	~3%	Sanctions-constrained; gray-market exports
10	Kuwait	2.5–2.8	~2.5–3%	Low-cost, OPEC quota-bound

Table 2. Gulf fiscal breakeven prices and non-oil growth (approximate).
Sources: IMF Article IV reports; EIA; national statistics; ranges are indicative.

State | Approx. fiscal breakeven oil price ($/bbl) | Approx. recent non-oil GDP growth (%) | Diversification signal | Fiscal vulnerability note | |—|—:|—:|—|—| | Saudi Arabia | 75–90 | 4–6 | Vision 2030, PIF, non-oil revenue reforms | High spending commitments; breakeven sensitive to OPEC+ cuts | | United Arab Emirates | 45–60 | 4–6 | Trade, logistics, finance, tourism | Lower breakeven; more diversified base | | Qatar | 40–55 | 3–5 | LNG, finance, aviation, World Cup legacy | Gas-heavy; LNG contract structures matter | | Kuwait | 60–75 | 2–4 | Slow reform; parliamentary constraints | High assets but slower diversification | | Oman | 65–80 | 2–4 | Duqm, tourism, logistics | Moderate breakeven; debt-management focus | | Bahrain | 90–110 | 2–4 | Financial services, aluminum, tourism | Highest vulnerability among Gulf six | | Iran | 100+ (sanctions-distorted) | 1–3 | State-led, constrained by sanctions | Breakeven not market-clearing; gray exports |

Table 3. Approximate sovereign wealth fund assets (selected, $ billions). *Sources: SWF Institute-style estimates; IMF; national disclosures; figures are approximate and valuation-dependent.*

Fund / State | Approx. assets ($bn) | Primary function | Perspective note | |—|—:|—|—| | Norway GPFG | 1,500–1,700 | Intergenerational saving, ethical investment | Western model of transparent, rules-based saving | | Abu Dhabi ADIA / related entities | 900–1,100 | Long-horizon investment, diversification | Gulf capital as global portfolio power | | Saudi PIF | 800–950 | Domestic transformation + global bets | State-led development finance, not only saving | | Kuwait KIA | 700–850 | Future generations, budget stabilization | Rentier saving with political constraints | | Qatar QIA | 450–550 | Strategic global investment | Small-state leverage through capital | | China CIC | 1,200–1,400 | Foreign-exchange diversification | State-capitalist global investor | | Russia NWF | 120–180 | Budget support, sanctions-era liquidity | Fiscal buffer under geopolitical pressure |

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Using Table 1, identify the two most important structural shifts in global oil supply since the early 2000s. How does the rise of U.S. shale production change the meaning of Saudi spare capacity, and what does the table suggest about the difference between "production volume" and "market power"?

2. **Level of analysis.** Table 2 presents fiscal breakeven prices. Are breakeven prices best treated as a state-level fiscal variable, a systemic market variable, or an interaction between the two? Explain how a state's breakeven price can be altered by domestic policy, while its realized revenue still depends on OPEC+ decisions, sanctions, and global demand.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each perspective would read Tables 2 and 3 together:

    - **African:** Gulf SWFs as capital sources for African infrastructure, energy transition, and industrialization, but also as instruments that may bypass African public accountability.

    - **Chinese:** Gulf diversification as compatible with Belt and Road energy security, port access, and long-term supply contracts.

    - **Russian:** Gulf fiscal stress and OPEC+ coordination as evidence that multipolarity requires producer-state solidarity against Western financial and sanctions power.

    - **Western:** SWF growth and non-oil growth as indicators of market reform, but with concerns about governance, transparency, and strategic asset acquisition.

    - **UN:** Non-oil growth as a development gain, but breakeven dependence as a climate-transition risk if hydrocarbon revenues fund delayed diversification.

4. **Interpretation.** Does a rising non-oil GDP growth rate demonstrate that a rentier state has escaped rentierism? Distinguish "diversification of output" from "diversification of state revenue," "diversification of employment," and "diversification of political legitimacy." Which of these four is hardest to observe in the tables?

5. **Limitation.** What do these tables systematically fail to capture? Consider off-budget spending, sovereign-wealth valuation swings, sanctions evasion, informal oil trade, military expenditure, climate-transition scenarios, and the difference between announced projects and completed productive capacity.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Rentier Fiscal Circuit and Diversification Threshold" (hand-drawn flow diagram).
Draw a large circle at the top labeled **Oil Rent**. Draw a thick downward arrow into a central rectangle labeled **State Budget**. From the rectangle, draw four branching arrows to smaller boxes: **Welfare and Subsidies**, **Public Employment**, **Security Apparatus**, and **Sovereign Wealth Fund**. Draw a curved feedback arrow

from all four boxes back to a smaller circle labeled **Political Legitimacy / Social Contract**. Draw a horizontal dashed line across the middle labeled **Fiscal Breakeven Price**; place a small oil-barrel icon above the line labeled **High Price: Surplus** and one below labeled **Low Price: Deficit**. Add a dashed arrow from **State Budget** to a box on the right labeled **Non-Oil GDP / Vision 2030 Projects**, with a question mark over the arrow to signal uncertain transformation. Label the whole diagram **Rentier Loop**.
Perspective overlay: Annotate in four corners: top-left **African: who captures rent and who bears extraction risk?**; top-right **Chinese: supply security and long-term contracts**; bottom-left **Russian: producer solidarity and OPEC+ discipline**; bottom-right **Western: market reform and fiscal sustainability**; along the bottom edge **UN: transition finance and SDG 7**.

Visual 2 — "Gulf Multi-Alignment Triangle" (hand-drawn strategic map).
Draw a triangle. At the top vertex place a circle labeled **Gulf State (security + capital)**. At the bottom-left vertex draw a shield labeled **United States: security guarantees, bases, arms, naval protection**. At the bottom-right vertex draw a factory/trade icon labeled **China: energy demand, infrastructure, technology, ports**. At the bottom-center, slightly below the base, draw a smaller oil-barrel icon labeled **Russia: OPEC+ coordination, diplomatic multipolarity, sanctions-era market management**. Draw solid arrows from the Gulf state to each vertex, labeled respectively **Security**, **Trade/Energy**, and **Producer Coordination**. Draw a dashed double-headed arrow between the U.S. and China vertices labeled **Strategic Competition**. Draw a smaller dashed arrow from Russia to OPEC+ labeled **Price Discipline**. Shade the center of the triangle lightly and label it **Multi-Alignment Space**.
Perspective overlay: Write around the triangle: **African: Gulf capital and energy-transition partnerships**; **Chinese: non-Western economic order**; **Russian: multipolar producer politics**; **Western: alliance management and deterrence**; **UN: cooperative security and energy access**.

Visual 3 — "Energy Transition Interface: Gulf Capital and African Development" (hand-drawn scatter/map hybrid).
Draw a simple map outline of Africa and the Gulf region. Place three large circles in the Gulf labeled **SWF Capital**, **LNG/Oil Revenue**, and **Technology/Logistics**. Draw arrows from these circles to African locations: one arrow to a solar-panel icon labeled **Renewables and Grids**, one to a port icon labeled **Ports and Logistics**, one to a mine icon labeled **Critical Minerals**, and one to a factory icon labeled **Industrial Zones**. Add a small box labeled **African Agency: contract terms, local content, debt transparency**. On the side, draw a small scatterplot with x-axis **Non-Oil GDP Growth** and y-axis **Fiscal Breakeven Price**; plot three unlabeled bubbles of different sizes representing **SWF Assets**. Label the plot **Diversification Is Not Yet Decoupling**.
Perspective overlay: Annotate the African side as primary: **African: development finance, energy access, sovereignty over terms**; annotate the Gulf side: **Chinese: supply-chain and infrastructure integration**; **Russian: producer-state solidarity**; **Western: investment governance and risk**; **UN: SDG 7, climate finance, just transition**.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
Rentier state: definition and mechanism	State derives large share of revenue from external rent (oil/gas), not domestic taxation; welfare substitutes for representation; legitimacy tied to distribution. Source log: Hertog (2010); Gray (2011).
Rentierism: scope conditions	Works best where rent is large, state capacity is centralized, and society is dependent on public spending; weaker where taxation, private capital, or federalism create alternative accountability. Source log: Hertog (2010).
U.S. shale revolution: mechanism	Horizontal drilling + hydraulic fracturing lowered cost and shortened investment cycles; U.S. became swing supplier; global price formation less OPEC-centric. Source log: Yergin (2011); EIA data.
Shale: systemic impact	Increased price volatility; reduced OPEC pricing power; made Saudi spare capacity more strategic but less price-determining; linked oil to financialized drilling cycles. Source log: Yergin (2011).
Abraham Accords: Gulf diversification	Normalization with Israel created new trade, technology, and security channels; diversification not only economic but diplomatic and security-oriented. Source log: general IR literature; no invented citation.
Saudi Vision 2030: transformation politics	PIF-led projects, non-oil revenue, social liberalization, and centralization of authority; transformation is political as much as economic. Source log: IMF Article IV reports; Hertog (2010) for rentier context.
Gulf multi-alignment	Simultaneous U.S. security dependence, Chinese economic partnership, Russian OPEC+ coordination; hedging under multipolarity. Source log: Yergin (1991, 2011) for oil geopolitics; EIA/IMF for data.
2020–2022 oil price war / OPEC+	Saudi-Russia breakdown and restoration showed producer coordination as strategic weapon; pandemic demand collapse plus supply surge; later OPEC+ cuts supported prices. Source log: Yergin (2011); EIA data.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
2023 Iran-Saudi rapprochement	Chinese-brokered détente reduced immediate Gulf escalation; did not resolve structural rivalry; affected Yemen, Lebanon, maritime security, and OPEC+ politics. Source log: general IR literature; no invented citation.
African perspective (primary)	Energy transition, Gulf investment, extraction governance, local content, debt transparency; African agency in setting terms. Source log: Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, Oyěwùmí as theoretical lineage.
Chinese / Russian / Western / UN perspectives	Chinese: energy security + economic partnership; Russian: OPEC+ + multipolarity; Western: energy security + Gulf security architecture; UN: transition + SDG 7 + climate finance. Source log: Yergin; EIA; IMF.
Data limitations	Breakeven prices are estimates; SWF assets are valuation-dependent; non-oil growth can be project-driven and not fiscally transformative. Source log: IMF Article IV reports.

Summary (3–5 sentences). Hydrocarbon geopolitics in the Gulf is not only about oil prices; it is about how rent structures state-society relations, how shale altered OPEC's market power, and how Gulf states now hedge across security, economic, and diplomatic partners. Vision 2030 and the Abraham Accords illustrate diversification as a political project, not merely a growth strategy. The African perspective foregrounds who captures rent, who finances transition, and whose development priorities are served by Gulf capital. Data on production, breakeven prices, SWF assets, and non-oil growth help describe this transformation, but they cannot by themselves prove political decoupling from hydrocarbons.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Oil money lets some states provide benefits without taxing citizens heavily, which shapes politics. The U.S. shale boom made oil supply more flexible and weakened OPEC's old control. Gulf states now try to build non-oil economies while still depending on oil money, and they keep ties with the U.S. for security, China for trade, and Russia for oil coordination. The African question is whether Gulf money and energy projects help African development on African terms.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am less certain about exact fiscal breakeven prices, because they depend on hidden spending, subsidies, and accounting choices. I also need to separate "non-oil growth" from "non-oil state revenue," and I should not treat SWF size as proof of successful diversification. I have not yet explained how sanctions alter Iran's breakeven in a non-market way.

3. **Reread verification.** Rechecking the core claims: rentier theory predicts welfare-for-legitimacy ex-

change but does not predict identical outcomes across Gulf states; shale increased supply responsiveness but did not eliminate OPEC+ influence; Vision 2030 is a transformation agenda with political centralization; multi-alignment is hedging, not abandonment of the U.S. security umbrella. These claims are consistent with Hertog, Gray, Yergin, EIA, and IMF sources.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** A Gulf state can be compared to a household whose main income comes from one high-paying but volatile job: it saves in investments, tries to start side businesses, and keeps relationships with different protectors and partners. The analogy helps explain diversification anxiety, but it fails because states are not households: they control coercion, set laws, manage currencies, and their "income" is geopolitical rent rather than wages.

5. **Rewrite.** Hydrocarbon geopolitics is a system in which oil rent structures state power, shale has fragmented supply control, and Gulf states are attempting economic transformation without surrendering strategic hedging. The key analytical task is to distinguish output diversification from fiscal, political, and legitimacy diversification, while reading Gulf capital and energy policy through African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN vantage points. Data on production, breakeven prices, SWF assets, and non-oil growth are necessary but insufficient evidence for claims about transformation.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L46	Definition	What is a rentier state?	A rentier state derives a large share of government revenue from external rent, especially hydrocarbons, rather than broad domestic taxation. This can fund welfare and patronage while weakening fiscal bargaining between citizens and the state. Rentierism is a variable condition, not an automatic regime type.	African political economy often stresses extraction and external dependence, but Gulf rentierism is state-led, fiscally centralized, and historically tied to monarchical bargains.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L46	Mechanism	How does hydrocarbon rent shape political legitimacy?	Rent allows governments to provide subsidies, public employment, and services without relying heavily on taxation, producing a distribution-based social contract. Legitimacy then depends on performance and patronage as much as on consent. The mechanism is contingent on institutions and elite choices.	Western modernization theory can overstate automatic authoritarianism; African and Gulf scholarship emphasizes bargains, contingencies, and social contracts.
L46	Application	What is a fiscal breakeven oil price?	It is the oil price at which a government's budget is expected to balance under stated spending and production assumptions. Prices above it create surpluses; prices below it imply deficits, reserve drawdowns, or adjustment. It is a planning metric, not a market forecast.	IMF Article IV reports use breakevens to assess Gulf sustainability, but the metric can obscure distributional choices and political priorities.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L46	Mechanism	How did the US shale revolution structurally affect global oil markets?	Shale added short-cycle, price-responsive supply that increased global supply elasticity and shortened price cycles. It reduced OPEC's ability to manage prices through cuts alone and changed the United States from a major importer to an exporter. It did not eliminate OPEC+ influence.	Western energy-security narratives often celebrate shale; Russian and Gulf perspectives treat it as a competitive shock requiring coordination.
L46	Comparison	What distinguishes OPEC from OPEC+?	OPEC is the original producer cartel, while OPEC+ includes Russia and other non-OPEC producers. OPEC+ expands coordination capacity but also introduces bargaining among members with different fiscal needs and geopolitical goals. It is a coordination mechanism, not a unified state.	Russian perspectives frame OPEC+ as multipolar energy governance; Western perspectives often emphasize cartel power and consumer costs.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L46	Source	What is Yergin's main contribution to hydrocarbon geopolitics?	Yergin traces how oil shapes geopolitics, technology, markets, and security across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His work is a historical narrative of energy transitions and strategic competition rather than a single causal model. It supports mechanism tracing but not deterministic prediction.	The narrative is largely Western-centric; African and Global South readings ask whose energy security is centered and who bears transition costs.
L46	Debate	Is Saudi Vision 2030 mainly economic diversification or political legitimation?	It is both: diversification aims to reduce oil dependence and create employment, while also repositioning the state and its leadership domestically and internationally. These goals can conflict if restructuring or austerity strains the social contract. Evidence includes non-oil GDP targets, project scale, and labor-market reforms.	African development scholars would ask whether diversification reproduces dependency through mega-projects and uneven regional development.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L46	Mechanism	How do the Abraham Accords connect to Gulf diversification?	Normalization with Israel opened channels for technology, investment, security cooperation, and market access that Gulf states can use to accelerate non-oil sectors. It also carries domestic and regional legitimacy costs. It is a strategic option, not an inevitable alignment.	Western framing emphasizes peace and markets; Arab and African perspectives emphasize Palestinian sovereignty and the political costs of normalization.
L46	Application	What is Gulf multi-alignment?	Gulf states combine US security guarantees, Chinese economic partnerships, and Russian diplomatic and energy coordination to maximize autonomy and reduce dependence on any single power. The strategy requires managing contradictions among partners. It is enabled by rentier wealth but constrained by security dependence.	African non-alignment traditions offer analogies, but Gulf multi-alignment is backed by hydrocarbon wealth and US security guarantees.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L46	Comparison	How do US security guarantees and Chinese economic partnerships differ in Gulf strategy?	The United States provides military protection, arms, and regional security architecture; China provides markets, investment, infrastructure, and energy demand. Gulf states use both to avoid exclusive dependence. Neither alone explains Gulf agency.	Chinese perspectives emphasize mutual development and sovereignty; Western perspectives emphasize alliance management and deterrence.
L46	Source	What do IMF Article IV reports contribute to Gulf analysis?	They provide country-specific macroeconomic assessments, including fiscal breakevens, growth projections, and reform progress. They are useful for testing diversification claims against fiscal data. They are technocratic and may underweight politics and distribution.	African scholars caution that IMF metrics can normalize austerity and understate the social-contract dimensions of reform.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L46	Debate	Did the 2020-2022 oil price war strengthen or weaken OPEC+?	It initially collapsed prices and exposed Saudi-Russian rivalry, but later coordination restored prices and institutionalized OPEC+. The episode shows both fragility and resilience. Adjudication depends on time horizon and whether the metric is price stability, market share, or institutional cohesion.	Russian perspectives see restored multipolar coordination; Western perspectives emphasize volatility and consumer costs.
L46	Reconstruction	How did the 2023 Iran-Saudi rapprochement reshape Gulf calculations?	It reduced immediate escalation risk and created space for economic prioritization, while complicating US-centric security framing. It did not resolve proxy conflicts or ideological rivalry. It is best treated as tactical de-escalation with strategic ambiguity.	African conflict-resolution perspectives value regional dialogue; Western perspectives worry about erosion of US influence.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L46	Occlusion	What does the Western perspective often occlude in Gulf hydrocarbon geopolitics?	It often centers consumer energy security and alliance stability while underweighting Gulf domestic political bargains, African energy-transition impacts, and the distributional costs of diversification. This can make Gulf agency appear as either compliance or defiance rather than strategic calculation.	The African perspective foregrounds transition justice, investment asymmetries, and the externalities of Gulf capital flows.
L46	Adjudication	How should one adjudicate claims that oil dependence is declining?	Use multiple metrics: non-oil GDP growth, fiscal breakeven, export concentration, sovereign wealth assets, employment quality, and political reform. No single indicator is sufficient. Theories predict different timelines and mechanisms.	African political economy adds regional inequality, labor precarity, and the quality of diversification, not just its quantity.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score each item 0-100)

Competency	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of Mastery
Define rentier state and state its scope conditions		
Explain the mechanism linking rent to legitimacy		
Interpret fiscal breakeven prices		
Explain the structural impact of US shale		
Distinguish OPEC from OPEC+		
Reconstruct all five perspectives on Gulf hydrocarbon geopolitics		
Apply levels of analysis to the 2020-2022 oil price war		
Adjudicate competing claims about Gulf diversification		

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you reconstruct least accurately, and what evidence would improve it?
2. Which mechanism did you initially confuse with an outcome, and how did the causal chain differ?
3. What single piece of evidence would most strongly challenge your current adjudication of Gulf multi-alignment?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Oil wealth automatically produces authoritarianism.	Rentierism is contingent; institutions, elite bargains, and social contracts vary across oil states.	Hertog (2010); Gray (2011).
The US shale revolution ended OPEC's relevance.	Shale increased supply elasticity but OPEC+ coordination still shapes prices and market expectations.	EIA data; OPEC+ agreements.
Saudi Vision 2030 guarantees successful diversification.	Targets and projects are not outcomes; fiscal, labor, and political constraints remain.	IMF Article IV reports.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
The Abraham Accords resolved regional conflict.	Normalization created new channels but did not resolve Palestinian or Iranian questions.	Regional diplomatic record.
Multi-alignment means Gulf states are neutral.	They remain security-dependent on the United States while deepening economic ties with China and Russia.	Defense and trade patterns.
The 2023 Iran-Saudi rapprochement ended rivalry.	It reduced escalation risk but left proxy conflicts and ideological competition unresolved.	Diplomatic statements and continued regional tensions.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Rentier state; fiscal breakeven; OPEC/OPEC+; shale revolution; Vision 2030; Abraham Accords; multi-alignment	Rent funds welfare without taxation; shale shortens price cycles; OPEC+ coordinates supply; diversification repositions state; multi-alignment hedges dependence	Rentier theory; Hertog (2010); Gray (2011); Yergin (1991, 2011); IMF macro-fiscal analysis	2020-2022 oil price war; 2023 Iran-Saudi rapprochement; EIA production data; IMF Article IV reports	Rentierism vs. institutional variation; shale vs. OPEC power; diversification as economics vs. legitimation; multi-alignment vs. neutrality	Sustained low breakeven with high non-oil employment; OPEC+ collapse without price recovery; Vision 2030 targets missed with fiscal crisis; rapprochement followed by direct conflict	L19 energy; L41 West Asia state system; L43 sectarianism; L49 Global South; L51 climate geopolitics; L52 semiconductors

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 20 minutes):** Review flashcards and define rentier state, fiscal breakeven, OPEC+, and multi-alignment without notes.
- **R2 (Day 3, 30 minutes):** Reconstruct the 2020-2022 oil price war across individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels of analysis.

- **R3 (Week 1, 45 minutes):** Complete the problem pair on the 2023 Iran-Saudi rapprochement and compare your answer with the model answer.
- **R4 (Week 2, 60 minutes):** Draft the independent memo, ensuring separate sections for mechanism, perspective reconstruction, historical analogue, and falsifiers.
- **R5 (Month 1, 90 minutes):** Reconstruct all five perspectives from memory, then adjudicate one contested claim using evidence and explicit scope conditions.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define a rentier state and state its scope conditions.
☐ I can explain the mechanism linking hydrocarbon rent to legitimacy.
☐ I can interpret a fiscal breakeven price.
☐ I can explain the structural impact of the US shale revolution.
☐ I can distinguish OPEC from OPEC+.
☐ I can explain Saudi Vision 2030 as both economic and political strategy.
☐ I can explain the Abraham Accords' connection to Gulf diversification.
☐ I can define Gulf multi-alignment.
☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary.
☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese perspective.
☐ I can reconstruct the Russian perspective.
☐ I can reconstruct the Western perspective.
☐ I can reconstruct the UN perspective.
☐ I can apply levels of analysis to the 2020-2022 oil price war.
☐ I can adjudicate competing claims about Gulf diversification.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit.
☐ I have logged at least one misconception and correction.
☐ I have scheduled R1-R5 reviews.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Energy history and markets - Yergin, D. (1991). *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power*. - Yergin, D. (2011). *The Quest: Energy, Security, and the Remaking of the Modern World*.

Rentierism and Gulf political economy - Hertog, S. (2010). *Princes, Brokers, and Bureaucrats: Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia*. - Gray, M. (2011). Work on late rentierism in the Arab Gulf states.

Data and macro-fiscal assessment - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA). International energy statistics and production data. - IMF Article IV Consultation reports: Saudi Arabia. - IMF Article IV Consultation reports: United Arab Emirates. - IMF Article IV Consultation reports: Qatar. - IMF Article IV Consultation reports: Kuwait. - IMF Article IV Consultation reports: Oman and Bahrain.

End of Lesson 46. Say **Next** when you are ready.

48. US-China Rivalry and Power Transition

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 47: US-China Rivalry and Power Transition
Module	Module 8: Indo-Pacific, Systemic Rivalry, and Transnational Forces
Prerequisites	L5 (realism), L13 (liberal order), L14 (contemporary transition), L18 (interdependence)
Interleaved links	Forward to L48 (Indo-Pacific), L49 (institutional revisionism), L52-56 (techno-geopolitics)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Estimated study time	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, visual anchor, worked example, problem pair, flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of contemporary international order is whether the relative decline of the United States and the rise of China must culminate in great-power war, or whether the transition can be managed without catastrophic violence. This is not merely an empirical question about two states; it is a theoretical question about the relationship between material power shifts and systemic stability. The lesson takes as its object the US-China rivalry as the paradigmatic case of power transition in the twenty-first century, and asks students to evaluate competing theoretical accounts—power transition theory, offensive realism, Chinese relational and moral realism, interdependence theory, and the engagement-containment debate—against evidence from trade, technology, military spending, and the Taiwan flashpoint. The puzzle is deliberately framed from an African vantage point: African states are not bystanders to this rivalry but are increasingly the terrain on which it is contested, through debt, infrastructure, digital networks, and security partnerships. What the African perspective reveals that the others miss is that bipolar competition is experienced not as an abstract systemic shift but as a set of concrete constraints and opportunities that reshape domestic politics, fiscal space, and strategic autonomy across the continent.

The theoretical stakes are high because each framework carries different implications for policy and for the probability of war. Organski's power transition theory (1958) posits that the international system is hierarchical and that war becomes likely when a challenger approaches the dominant power's capabilities and is dissatisfied with the status quo distribution of benefits. Allison's "Thucydides Trap" (2017) popularized this logic, cataloguing sixteen cases of rising-power challenge and finding war in twelve. Mearsheimer's offensive realism (2001, 2014) goes further: great powers are structurally compelled to maximize relative power, and a rising China will inevitably seek regional hegemony, provoking US resistance. Both frameworks treat conflict as structurally overdetermined. Against them, Chinese scholars offer alternative ontologies. Qin Yaqing's relational theory (2018) locates order in relationships rather than in material power; Yan Xuetong's

moral realism (2011) argues that legitimacy and moral leadership, not merely capability, determine which state leads; Zhao Tingyang's Tianxia (2021) proposes a world order built on inclusive relationality rather than zero-sum competition. These are not mere propaganda; they are serious theoretical traditions with distinct scope conditions and empirical referents.

The economic dimension complicates every theoretical prediction. L18 established that interdependence creates both vulnerability and restraint. The US-China economic relationship—deeply integrated supply chains, mutual investment, and dollar-denominated trade—has been described as too big to fail, yet also as a source of strategic risk. Friedberg (2018) argues that engagement failed to liberalize China and that the United States must now adopt a strategy of competitive containment, including decoupling in sensitive sectors. The "new cold war" framing implies a bipolar division of the global economy into competing blocs. But the evidence is mixed: trade volumes remained high even during tariff escalation, and third countries—especially in Africa and Southeast Asia—have become critical nodes in rerouted supply chains. The question is whether interdependence stabilizes or destabilizes, and under what conditions.

Taiwan is the most concrete and dangerous flashpoint. The island sits at the intersection of power transition, security dilemma, and domestic politics in both Beijing and Washington. A power-transition reading sees Taiwan as the test of whether the challenger can revise the status quo; an offensive-realist reading sees it as the geographic anchor of US containment; a relational reading sees it as a relationship that must be managed through mutual recognition rather than coercion. The risk of war is not abstract: military exercises, gray-zone coercion, and alliance commitments (AUKUS, Quad) have raised the temperature. The lesson's problem pair asks students to apply both power transition and security dilemma frameworks to the Taiwan Strait.

The African perspective is primary because it reveals what the other four occlude. African states experience the rivalry as a set of structural pressures: debt distress linked to Chinese lending and Western conditionality; competition for critical minerals; digital infrastructure choices between Huawei and Western vendors; and security partnerships that import great-power competition into fragile states. Yet African agency is real: multi-alignment, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and collective bargaining through the African Union offer strategies for preserving autonomy. Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, and others have theorized this condition as extraversion, rhizomatic power, and the politics of the belly—frameworks that do not reduce African states to pawns. The African vantage point shows that the "US-China rivalry" is not only a bilateral or systemic phenomenon but a transnational one that reconfigures sovereignty, development, and security across the Global South.

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to: (1) state and compare the causal mechanisms of power transition theory, offensive realism, and Chinese relational and moral realism; (2) specify the scope conditions under which each predicts war or peace; (3) reconstruct how each of the five perspectives frames the rivalry; (4) apply these frameworks to the 2018-2024 trade and technology war and to the Taiwan flashpoint; and (5) identify falsifiers that would discriminate among the theories. The lesson is designed for graduate-level evaluation, not mere description: every claim must be tied to a mechanism, and every theory must be presented with its strongest counterargument.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. According to structural realism (L5), what is the primary determinant of state behavior, and how does

this differ from classical realism's emphasis on human nature?
2. What are the three pillars of the post-1945 liberal international order (L13), and what does the "contemporary transition" (L14) suggest about their durability?
3. How does the "contemporary transition" framework (L14) distinguish between a change in the distribution of power and a change in the rules of the international order?
4. Under what conditions does economic interdependence reduce the probability of war, and under what conditions does it increase it (L18)?
5. What is the security dilemma, and why does it make cooperation difficult even between states with no aggressive intentions (L5)?
6. What is hegemonic stability theory, and what does its decline imply for global governance (L13, L14)?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Does China's rise necessarily produce war with the United States, or can the transition be managed?
2. How do Chinese theoretical traditions challenge the Western assumption that power transitions are zero-sum?
3. Is economic interdependence between the US and China a stabilizer or a source of vulnerability?
4. What would have to be true for the "engagement" strategy to be judged a success or a failure?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Power transition theory**: A theory (Organski 1958) holding that the international system is hierarchical and that war becomes most likely when a rising challenger approaches parity with the dominant power and is dissatisfied with the status quo distribution of benefits.
- **Thucydides Trap**: Allison's (2017) term for the structural tendency toward war when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power; derived from Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War.
- **Offensive realism**: Mearsheimer's (2001) theory that great powers are structurally compelled to maximize relative power and seek regional hegemony, making intense security competition inevitable.
- **Relational theory (guanxi)**: Qin Yaqing's (2018) framework locating international order in social relationships and processes rather than in material power distributions.
- **Moral realism**: Yan Xuetong's (2011) argument that legitimacy, moral leadership, and political authority—not merely capability—determine which state can lead the international order.
- **Tianxia**: Zhao Tingyang's (2021) concept of a world order built on inclusive relationality and universal benefit rather than zero-sum competition among sovereign states.
- **Security dilemma**: The condition in which one state's efforts to increase its security decrease the security of others, potentially producing arms races and conflict even without aggressive intent.
- **Engagement vs. containment**: The debate over whether to integrate China into the liberal order (engagement) or to limit its power (containment); Friedberg (2018) argues engagement failed.
- **Decoupling**: The partial or full separation of US and Chinese economies in sensitive sectors such as semiconductors, telecommunications, and critical minerals.
- **Gray-zone coercion**: Actions below the threshold of armed conflict—cyber operations, economic pressure, maritime militia—that advance strategic objectives without triggering war.
- **Multi-alignment**: The strategy of maintaining productive relationships with multiple great powers simultaneously rather than choosing a single patron.
- **Extraversion**: Bayart's concept describing how African states have historically engaged external pow-

ers to secure resources and legitimacy, a framework that illuminates contemporary multi-alignment.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Explain** the causal mechanism of power transition theory as formulated by A.F.K. Organski and refined by Jacek Kugler, including the role of differential growth rates, the "danger zone" of approaching parity, and the critical distinction between power transition and power dissatisfaction, and identify the scope conditions under which the theory predicts major war rather than peaceful adjustment. (Bloom: comprehension/analysis)
2. **Analyze** how Graham Allison's "Thucydides Trap" framing has shaped policy discourse in both Washington and Beijing, distinguishing Allison's stronger, more deterministic claim from Organski's original conditional argument, and evaluating whether the framing functions as an analytical tool or as a self-fulfilling prophecy that narrows the space for diplomatic creativity. (Bloom: analysis/evaluation)
3. **Evaluate** the empirical foundations of the power-transition research program against the principal critiques—Jack Levy's finding that hegemonic wars are historically rare, Steve Chan's challenge to the theory's case selection and its application to China, and the security-dilemma literature's argument that structural pressures do not mechanically produce war—rendering a reasoned judgment about the theory's predictive validity. (Bloom: evaluation)
4. **Apply** power transition theory and the security dilemma to the Taiwan flashpoint, distinguishing the structural pressures generated by a narrowing power gap from the agency exercised by leaders, domestic coalitions, and third-party actors, and specifying what evidence would confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis that Taiwan is the likely trigger of a US-China war. (Bloom: application)
5. **Synthesize** the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on US-China rivalry into a comparative analytical judgment, identifying what each perspective reveals about the distribution of costs and benefits of great-power competition and what each occludes, with particular attention to the African vantage point on bipolar competition as a structural condition shaping the continent's development trajectory. (Bloom: synthesis)

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Power transition theory (Organski, Kugler) and the Thucydides Trap (Allison)

Bolded Causal Claim: Major war becomes most probable when a dissatisfied rising power approaches parity with the dominant power in the international system, because the narrowing power gap simultaneously tempts the challenger to demand revision of the order and tempts the hegemon to strike preventively while it still holds a margin of superiority, and because neither side can credibly commit to restraint once the balance shifts.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through four linked stages. First, differential growth rates: in Organski's original formulation in *World Politics* (1958), the international system is hierarchical, with a dominant power at the apex, great powers below, and small powers at the base. Growth is not uniform; a challenger state may grow faster than the hegemon because it is modernizing from a lower base, because it has not yet

assumed the burdens of global order maintenance, or because its political system permits more concentrated resource mobilization. Second, the "danger zone": Organski and Kugler, in *The War Ledger* (1980), specified that the risk of war peaks when the challenger reaches roughly 80 percent of the dominant power's capabilities—not at full parity, and not when the challenger is still weak. The logic is that at 80 percent the challenger is strong enough to fight and to win a revisionist war, yet not so strong that the hegemon has already accommodated; the hegemon, meanwhile, still has a margin of superiority that makes preventive war thinkable. Third, dissatisfaction as the activating variable: power transition alone does not cause war. Organski was explicit that a satisfied rising power—one that accepts the rules, norms, and distribution of benefits of the existing order—will be accommodated peacefully, as the United States was accommodated by Britain in the late nineteenth century. War requires that the challenger be dissatisfied with the status quo, whether because the order was built by and for the hegemon, because the challenger's growing power is not matched by growing influence, or because the challenger holds a different vision of legitimate international order. Fourth, the trap dynamics that Allison emphasizes: even rational leaders who wish to avoid war may be unable to do so because of commitment problems (the rising power cannot credibly promise not to use its future power to extract concessions), preventive-war incentives (the declining power has reason to fight now rather than later), audience costs (leaders who appear weak face domestic punishment), and the catalytic role of third-party crises that force choices before the underlying power shift has been negotiated. Allison's *Destined for War* (2017) draws on Thucydides' observation that "it was the rise of Athens and the fear that this instilled in Sparta that made war inevitable" to argue that structural forces can overwhelm individual agency. Allison studied sixteen cases of a rising power challenging a ruling power over five centuries and found that twelve ended in war—a 75 percent rate that he presents as a warning rather than a destiny. The mechanism, in Allison's rendering, is not that leaders want war but that the structural position of the two powers generates incentives and fears that make war the default outcome unless both sides make "huge, painful, and reciprocal" adjustments to accommodate the shift.

Scope Conditions: Power transition theory applies only under a specific set of conditions, and recognizing these conditions is essential to avoiding the theory's overextension. First, the theory assumes a hierarchical system with a single dominant power and a single challenger; it does not travel well to multipolar systems or to systems with multiple rising powers. Second, it requires that power be measurable and that the challenger's growth trajectory be sustained and visible; if growth stalls or if power is diffuse across military, economic, and technological dimensions that do not move in tandem, the "danger zone" becomes difficult to locate. Third, the theory's predictive power depends on the challenger's dissatisfaction, which is a subjective and politically constructed variable; a challenger that is integrated into the order through institutions, trade, and elite socialization may remain satisfied even as its power grows. Fourth, the theory was developed to explain hegemonic war—war between great powers for control of the international system—and does not necessarily explain regional conflicts, civil wars, or wars of intervention. Fifth, and critically, Organski's original theory was conditional and probabilistic; Allison's "trap" framing is stronger and more deterministic. Conflating the two produces the error of treating a structural tendency as an iron law. The theory also struggles to account for nuclear deterrence, which may suppress the preventive-war mechanism that drives the model, and for the role of domestic politics, which can either accelerate or retard the transition. Finally, the theory assumes that states are unitary actors with coherent preferences; it has difficulty incorporating the role of transnational actors, multinational corporations, and global supply chains that may create cross-cutting interests between the hegemon and the challenger.

Observable Implications: If power transition theory is operating in the US-China case, several observable implications should follow. Militarily, one would expect a sustained increase in Chinese defense spending

as a share of GDP, the expansion of the People's Liberation Army's power-projection capabilities, and the development of anti-access/area-denial systems designed to raise the cost of US intervention in the Western Pacific. One would expect the United States to respond with forward deployment, alliance reinforcement, and investments in technologies designed to offset Chinese advantages. Economically, one would expect a gradual decoupling of supply chains, the weaponization of trade and technology, and the formation of competing economic blocs. Diplomatically, one would expect the challenger to demand greater voice in international institutions, the creation of parallel institutions, and the contestation of norms. In the Taiwan case specifically, one would expect the issue to become more salient as the power gap narrows, with both sides hardening their positions and reducing the space for ambiguity. The theory also implies that crises over peripheral territories—Taiwan, the South China Sea, the East China Sea—will become more frequent and more dangerous as the transition proceeds, because these crises serve as tests of resolve and as opportunities to establish new facts on the ground. Conversely, if the theory is wrong or inapplicable, one would expect to see continued deep economic interdependence, institutional cooperation on shared challenges such as climate change and pandemic response, and the absence of a clear "danger zone" moment because power is multidimensional and does not converge on a single metric.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on power transition theory begins from a position that the theory itself does not occupy: the view from the periphery of a system whose center is defined by great-power competition. African scholarship—drawing on Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism, Rodney's account of how Europe underdeveloped Africa, and Mamdani's work on the bifurcated colonial state—treats the international system not as an anarchic arena of sovereign equals but as a structured hierarchy in which the rules of the game were written by and for the dominant powers. From this vantage point, the US-China power transition is not an abstract structural process but a concrete reconfiguration of the conditions under which African states must pursue development. The theory's focus on the hegemon-challenger dyad occludes the fact that the "transition" is experienced in Africa as a new scramble: competition for minerals critical to the green transition and digital economy, competition for port access and military basing rights, and competition for diplomatic alignment in multilateral forums. African scholars such as Grovogui have argued that the language of "power transition" itself reproduces a Eurocentric ontology in which Africa appears only as a terrain of competition rather than as a site of agency. Yet the African perspective also identifies opportunities: the rivalry creates bargaining leverage for African states that can play the two powers against each other, diversify their partnerships, and extract better terms for infrastructure and technology transfer. The African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area represent attempts to aggregate African bargaining power and reduce the continent's vulnerability to external shocks. The African vantage point thus reveals what the theory's systemic framing misses: that power transitions are not just about who rules the system but about how the transition reshapes the life chances of those who did not design it. It also raises the question—rarely asked in Western or Chinese discourse—of whether the "trap" is not just a risk of war between two great powers but a trap of perpetual subordination for the rest of the world, in which the costs of great-power competition are externalized onto the Global South.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective on power transition theory is shaped by a dual movement: the embrace of the theory's descriptive insight that China is rising, combined with a sharp rejection of its prescriptive implication that war is likely or inevitable. Chinese scholars and officials have argued that the "Thucydides Trap" is a Western construct that misreads Chinese intentions and that China's rise is peaceful, defensive, and oriented toward the restoration of a rightful position rather than the overthrow of the existing order. The official Chinese position, articulated in Xi Jinping's 2015 statement that "there is no such thing as the

Thucydides Trap," holds that the theory reflects a Western zero-sum mentality that China does not share. Chinese international-relations scholars such as Qin Yaqing have argued that the theory's state-centric, materialist framework misses the relational and normative dimensions of Chinese foreign policy. At the same time, Chinese strategic discourse has internalized the theory's warning: the recognition that the United States may act preventively has informed Chinese investments in military modernization, economic resilience, and technological self-sufficiency. The Chinese perspective thus both rejects and instrumentalizes the theory—rejecting its determinism while using its structural logic to justify defensive preparations.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats power transition theory as a partial description of a broader process: the decline of unipolarity and the emergence of a multipolar world order. Russian scholars and officials have argued that the theory's focus on a single hegemon-challenger dyad is too narrow and that the relevant transition is not from US to Chinese hegemony but from unipolarity to multipolarity, in which Russia, China, and other powers collectively constrain American dominance. The Russian framing emphasizes the anti-hegemonic dimension: the problem is not China's rise per se but the United States' refusal to accept the loss of its unipolar moment. From this vantage point, the "Thucydides Trap" is a Western anxiety that reflects the hegemon's fear of losing control, and the appropriate response is not to manage a bilateral transition but to accelerate the construction of a multipolar order in which no single power can dominate. Russian discourse has also stressed the role of the United States in provoking the rivalry through NATO expansion, color revolutions, and the weaponization of the dollar, suggesting that the "trap" is not structural but manufactured by hegemonic overreach.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in the United States, has been deeply shaped by Allison's framing, which has entered the policy mainstream as a warning that requires active management. The dominant Western view treats the US-China rivalry as a strategic competition in which China is a revisionist power seeking to displace the United States, and the policy debate centers on whether to engage, contain, or compete. Scholars such as Aaron Friedberg have argued that engagement has failed and that the United States must adopt a strategy of competitive containment. The Western perspective emphasizes the liberal international order as a public good that China threatens, and it frames the power transition as a test of whether the order can accommodate a rising authoritarian power. The perspective's strength is its attention to the material and institutional dimensions of the rivalry; its weakness, acknowledged by critics within the Western tradition, is its tendency to mirror-image Chinese intentions and to treat the rivalry as a new Cold War, which may foreclose cooperative solutions to shared problems.

UN: The UN perspective approaches the power transition through the lens of Charter principles: sovereign equality, the prohibition on the use of force, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. The UN framework does not deny that power shifts occur, but it insists that they must be managed within the rules-based order rather than through unilateral action or preventive war. The UN perspective highlights the risk that great-power rivalry poses to the multilateral system, including the Security Council's ability to function, the integrity of international law, and the protection of smaller states caught between competing powers. On Taiwan specifically, the UN perspective is constrained by the fact that the organization does not recognize Taiwan as a member state and that the issue is governed by the "One China" principle as understood by the majority of member states, yet the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of force applies to all parties. The UN vantage point thus emphasizes de-escalation, crisis management, and the maintenance of channels of communication, while acknowledging that the organization's effectiveness depends on the willingness of the great powers to subordinate their rivalry to collective security.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Offensive realism (Mearsheimer) and the tragedy of great-power politics applied to US-China

Bolded Causal Claim: Under offensive realism, the anarchic structure of international politics compels great powers to maximize relative power and seek regional hegemony, so the rise of China makes sustained US-China strategic competition and a high risk of conflict structurally likely even in the absence of hostile intentions.

Mechanism: Offensive realism, most systematically developed by John Mearsheimer in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001) and applied to China in later work (2014), rests on five core assumptions: the international system is anarchic; no state can be certain of another state's intentions; states prioritize survival; states can never be certain that other states will not use force; and power is the means by which states ensure survival. From these assumptions, Mearsheimer derives a demanding conclusion: great powers are not merely security-seekers but power-maximizers, and the ultimate aim of each is to become the hegemon in its own region while preventing any other state from achieving hegemony in another region. Global hegemony is treated as impossible because of the difficulty of projecting power across oceans, so the realistic ambition is regional hegemony. The "tragedy" is that even rational, defensive efforts to increase security are interpreted by others as threatening, producing a security dilemma in which all states end up less secure. Applied to US-China relations, the mechanism works as follows. The United States has been the regional hegemon in the Western Hemisphere and the dominant external power in East Asia since 1945; China's rapid economic and military growth threatens that position. Because intentions cannot be verified, Washington must assume that a stronger China will eventually seek to dominate Asia and push the United States out. Beijing, conversely, must assume that Washington will try to contain it and preserve US primacy. Each side's defensive measures—US alliances, forward bases, and freedom-of-navigation operations; Chinese anti-access/area-denial capabilities, naval expansion, and missile forces—are read by the other as preparations for coercion. Taiwan sits at the center of this mechanism because it is both a strategic and symbolic node in the first island chain; control of Taiwan would significantly expand China's ability to project power into the western Pacific and complicate US defense of Japan and the Philippines. Mearsheimer's 2014 argument that China cannot rise peacefully follows directly: the United States and China's neighbors will balance against it, and China will respond by seeking greater military capability, making intense security competition likely. Nuclear weapons may reduce the probability of all-out war by making conquest prohibitively costly, but they do not eliminate conventional conflict, crises, or the possibility of escalation. The theory therefore predicts not an inevitable war but a structurally driven rivalry in which both sides have strong incentives to compete for relative power.

Scope Conditions: Offensive realism applies most strongly when five conditions hold: the system is anarchic and lacks a reliable enforcer; states are rational unitary actors focused on survival; power can be converted into security; geography permits regional hegemony; and intentions are opaque. It is less predictive when nuclear deterrence makes war unthinkable, when economic interdependence creates powerful domestic constituencies against conflict, when a state's ambitions are genuinely limited, when regional states bandwagon rather than balance, or when domestic politics and ideology override structural incentives. It also assumes that power is measurable and that military capability is the decisive currency of international politics; it therefore struggles to account for forms of influence that are not easily militarized, such as institutional leadership, technological standards, or normative attraction. The theory is a theory of great powers, not of small states, and it says little about the agency of secondary actors except as balancers or bandwagoners. Finally, because it treats intentions as unknowable, it cannot distinguish between a genuinely revisionist China and a China seeking only security; this is both its analytical strength and its policy danger, since it can justify

worst-case planning that becomes self-fulfilling.

Observable Implications: If offensive realism is a useful lens, one should observe sustained increases in military spending on both sides; the expansion of Chinese naval, missile, and space capabilities; the strengthening of US alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, including AUKUS and the Quad; more frequent US freedom-of-navigation operations; larger and more complex Taiwan arms packages; Japanese and Australian defense buildups; South China Sea militarization; and efforts by both powers to reduce dependence in security-sensitive technologies. One should also observe hedging by regional states that fear both Chinese dominance and US abandonment. The theory implies that economic cooperation will be subordinated to security competition in strategic sectors, even if broad trade continues. Falsifiers would include a durable peaceful power transition, Chinese acceptance of US regional primacy, US retrenchment without conflict, deep integration preventing war, China refraining from military dominance, or regional states refusing to balance. The theory is not falsified merely by the absence of war, because it predicts competition rather than conflict; but it is weakened if competition remains limited and institutionalized over long periods.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): Offensive realism's structural determinism can be read from Africa as a theory that treats great-power competition as inevitable and thereby normalizes the subordination of smaller states to the security requirements of hegemons. African scholarship and diplomacy have long emphasized that bipolar and unipolar systems generate externalities—commodity price shocks, debt distress, militarized aid, and proxy conflicts—that are borne disproportionately by the global South. Yet the same structural rivalry also creates multi-alignment opportunities: African states can leverage competition among powers to diversify partnerships, negotiate better terms, and resist exclusive alignment. The African vantage point therefore does not deny the reality of power competition but insists that its costs and opportunities are unevenly distributed and that African agency lies in strategic autonomy, regional integration, and the refusal to be conscripted into a binary. Scholars such as Grovogui and Mbembe highlight how international orders are experienced as racialized and extractive; from this perspective, offensive realism explains the behavior of great powers but not the legitimacy of their claims. The theory's occlusion is its tendency to treat African states as objects of balancing rather than as actors with their own security projects.

Chinese: Offensive realism is frequently rejected in Chinese discourse as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Chinese officials and scholars argue that the "Thucydides Trap" is not a law of history and that China's rise can be peaceful if the United States abandons containment and zero-sum thinking. The theory is seen as rationalizing US military primacy and alliance expansion in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, some Chinese realists accept structural competition and advocate military modernization; the debate is internal as well as external. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that intentions matter and can be shaped through dialogue, economic integration, and institutional cooperation.

Russian: Russian commentary generally treats offensive realism as a description of US behavior rather than a universal law. Moscow frames the United States as a declining hegemon resisting multipolarity, while China's rise is interpreted as part of a broader correction of the post-Cold War order. Russia's own strategic culture combines great-power realism with anti-hegemonic rhetoric, producing an alignment with China that is pragmatic rather than ideological. The risk, from a Russian vantage point, is that an unbalanced China could itself become a hegemon; hence Moscow values multipolarity and strategic autonomy even within the Sino-Russian partnership.

Western: In Western IR, offensive realism is one of the most influential and contested theories of great-power politics. Mearsheimer's work shapes US strategic debates, especially arguments for offshore balancing and preventing Chinese regional hegemony. Critics from liberal institutionalism, constructivism, and economic

interdependence theory argue that the theory overstates the inevitability of conflict, understates the constraining effects of institutions and commerce, and risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Western perspective is therefore internally divided between those who see structural competition as unavoidable and those who believe policy can shape outcomes.

UN: The UN perspective treats offensive realism as a warning about the dangers of unchecked great-power competition rather than as a policy guide. The Charter's prohibition on the use of force and its emphasis on collective security stand in tension with a theory that normalizes power maximization. From the UN vantage point, the relevant question is whether crisis-management mechanisms, communication channels, and legal constraints can prevent structural pressures from producing war. Taiwan is a particular concern because any conflict would implicate the Charter's core norms and the organization's credibility.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Chinese relational and moral realist accounts (Qin Yaqing, Yan Xuetong, Zhao Tingyang)

Bolded Causal Claim: Chinese relational and moral-realist theories argue that international order is constituted by relationships, moral authority, and inclusive world-systems rather than by anarchic power competition; therefore US-China rivalry need not follow a Thucydides Trap if both sides cultivate relational harmony, moral leadership, and Tianxia-style inclusive governance.

Mechanism: The mechanism has three distinct but complementary strands. First, Qin Yaqing's relational theory, developed in *A Relational Theory of World Politics* (2018), begins with an ontological claim: the world is composed of relations rather than substances. Actors are not pre-given, self-contained units that enter into relations; they are constituted by their relations. This challenges the substantialist ontology that underlies much Western IR theory, in which states are treated as billiard balls or unitary actors. Qin introduces "relational rationality," in which actors pursue harmony, mutual constitution, and the maintenance of relationships rather than only utility maximization. Power is understood as relational capacity—the ability to shape and sustain networks of relations—rather than as a stock of material resources. "Harmony without uniformity" becomes a governing principle: order does not require sameness but the management of difference through relationship. In the US-China context, this implies that rivalry is not mechanically determined by material power shifts; it is shaped by the quality of diplomatic, economic, and social relations. If both sides invest in relational management—summits, institutional dialogue, people-to-people ties, and shared problem-solving—anarchy can be socially transformed into a more ordered relational community. Second, Yan Xuetong's moral realism, articulated in *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power* (2011), argues that international leadership depends on moral standing as well as material power. Drawing on pre-Qin Chinese thought, Yan distinguishes "humane authority" (wangdao), which attracts voluntary followers through moral credibility and benevolent governance, from "hegemony" (badao), which relies on coercion and is less durable. Moral realism does not deny power politics; it insists that power must be accompanied by moral resources if it is to produce stable leadership. In a power transition, the rising power must cultivate strategic credibility and moral authority; the declining power's resistance may be mitigated if the rising power is perceived as legitimate. This reframes the US-China rivalry not only as a contest over capabilities but as a competition over which state can offer a more credible and attractive model of order. Third, Zhao Tingyang's Tianxia theory, developed in works such as *All Under Heaven* (2021), critiques the Westphalian system as exclusionary, anarchic, and incapable of producing genuine world order. Tianxia, or "all-under-heaven," proposes an inclusive world system in which the world is treated as a single political community rather than a collection of sovereign states. "Coexistence" and "universal care" are central; the goal is not hegemony but the construction of a shared world. Zhao's argument is philosophical and normative rather than a blueprint

for policy, but it offers a powerful critique of both US liberal hegemony and crude realism. Together, these three strands shift the analytical focus from material structure to social and moral constitution, from zero-sum power to relational harmony, and from state-centric anarchy to world-system inclusiveness. They suggest that US-China rivalry can be moderated by relational management, moral legitimacy, and inclusive institutions, even though they do not deny the reality of power.

Scope Conditions: These theories are most plausible when several conditions hold: elites and publics are receptive to relational or moral frameworks; institutions can be reformed to reflect inclusiveness; power asymmetries are manageable; security dilemmas are not acute; and cultural resources are credible to both domestic and international audiences. They are less applicable when material threats dominate decision-making, when trust is absent, when core security issues such as Taiwan are at stake, when domestic politics reward hawkishness, or when the theories are deployed as normative cover for power projection. There is also an epistemological boundary: relational and moral theories are partly philosophical and normative, and their empirical validation is difficult. They may describe how order ought to be constituted more than how it is constituted. A further risk is conflation between scholarly theory and state discourse. Qin's relational theory, Yan's moral realism, and Zhao's Tianxia are academic arguments; they are not identical to official Chinese policy, even though they resonate with concepts such as a "community of shared future for mankind." Treating them as mere propaganda would be unfair, but treating them as settled descriptions of Chinese state behavior would be equally mistaken. Finally, these theories may understate the coercive dimensions of power: relational harmony can be imposed, and moral claims can be instrumentalized.

Observable Implications: If these theories influence Chinese diplomacy and international order-building, one should observe sustained emphasis on relational language—"community of shared future," "win-win cooperation," "mutual respect," "harmony without uniformity"—in official discourse; the use of the Belt and Road Initiative as a relational network rather than a purely extractive project; investments in people-to-people ties, educational exchange, and cultural diplomacy; moral claims in global governance debates; and academic prominence for Tianxia and relational theory. One might also expect efforts to create or reform institutions that emphasize inclusiveness and consensus. However, observable implications also include continued military modernization, coercive diplomacy, and assertive behavior in the South China Sea and around Taiwan, which suggest that material competition persists alongside relational rhetoric. The theories are therefore not falsified by the existence of rivalry, but they are weakened if relational language is consistently contradicted by coercive practice. Conversely, they are strengthened if periods of tension are followed by renewed cooperation, institutional innovation, or durable crisis management. A key test is whether relational and moral frameworks can constrain behavior when core interests are at stake, or whether they function mainly as diplomatic vocabulary during periods of lower tension.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):
African (primary): Relational and moral-realist theories resonate with African intellectual traditions that emphasize communal ethics, Ubuntu, and the critique of atomistic individualism. African scholars have long argued that international order should be evaluated by its capacity to sustain human dignity and collective flourishing, not merely by power balances. From this vantage point, Qin's relational ontology and Zhao's inclusive world-system offer a vocabulary for multi-alignment and for resisting binary Cold War logics. Yet African critics, including Grovogui and Mbembe, caution that relational harmony can obscure structural asymmetry: a "community of shared future" may still be organized around the interests of the powerful. The African perspective therefore welcomes the decentering of Western individualism but insists that relational ethics must be coupled with material redistribution, debt justice, and genuine equality. Theories of moral leadership are attractive, but African history warns that moral claims by great powers can legitimate interven-

tion and extraction. Thus the African contribution is to demand that relational and moral orders be measured by their effects on the most vulnerable, not by the rhetoric of the powerful.

Chinese: This is the indigenous theoretical core. Qin, Yan, and Zhao represent efforts to build Chinese IR theory from Chinese philosophical resources rather than importing Western frameworks. They are not identical to official policy: Qin's relational theory is academic; Yan's moral realism is prescriptive; Zhao's Tianxia is philosophical. Yet they resonate with official discourse about a "community of shared future for mankind" and multipolarity. The Chinese perspective sees these theories as correcting Western biases—substantialism, individualism, and anarchy—and as offering a more humane and inclusive vision of order. Critics within China debate their empirical validity and political implications.

Russian: Russian IR and strategic culture are more statist and civilizational than relational in the Chinese sense, but Moscow finds Chinese moral/relational rhetoric useful as a counter to Western liberal universalism. The idea of multipolarity and civilizational pluralism aligns with Russian critiques of US hegemony. Russia's own tradition emphasizes sovereignty, great-power status, and anti-hegemonism rather than relational harmony. Thus the Russian perspective treats Chinese theories as complementary to, but not substitutable for, a multipolar balance of power. There is also caution about Chinese moral claims becoming a new form of universalism.

Western: Western scholars are divided. Liberals and constructivists may find relational ethics and moral leadership promising, especially as correctives to crude realism. Realists tend to view these theories as normative narratives that do not alter material constraints; some see them as strategic discourse designed to legitimize China's rise. The Western perspective also worries that Tianxia can be read as a hierarchical order centered on China. The debate is whether these theories are genuine alternatives to anarchy or sophisticated justifications for power.

UN: The UN Charter's universalism, sovereign equality, and collective security resonate with the inclusive aspirations of Tianxia and relational ethics. However, the UN system is legal and institutional rather than moral-philosophical; it depends on state consent and great-power cooperation. From the UN vantage point, relational and moral theories can support diplomacy and confidence-building, but they cannot replace legal obligations or enforcement. The risk is that moral claims by powerful states override the rights of smaller states. The UN perspective therefore welcomes dialogue while insisting on Charter principles.

SECTION 2.5 — KEY IDEA 4: ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE AND THE 'NEW COLD WAR' FRAMING

Bolded Causal Claim: Deep US–China economic interdependence does not reliably pacify rivalry once security externalities and asymmetric vulnerabilities are securitized; instead, interdependence becomes a domain of coercion, producing selective decoupling and a "new cold war" in strategic sectors without full economic separation.

Mechanism: The liberal interdependence tradition, most clearly associated with Keohane and Nye, predicts that dense trade, investment, and production networks raise the cost of conflict and create stakeholders for cooperation. That mechanism operates when economic exchange is politically insulated and when gains are broadly distributed. In the US–China case, however, the same networks created chokepoints: semiconductor equipment, advanced chips, critical minerals, cloud infrastructure, financial messaging, and data flows became instruments of leverage. The mechanism of escalation is not simply tariff retaliation but the conversion of commercial dependence into strategic vulnerability. When Washington perceives that Chinese firms

can access dual-use technologies, it expands export controls, investment screening, and sanctions; when Beijing perceives that supply chains and capital markets can be weaponized, it accelerates self-reliance, stockpiling, and alternative payment systems. The "new cold war" framing, advanced by scholars such as Friedberg, captures a competition that is ideological and systemic rather than merely territorial, yet it differs from the US–Soviet case because the two economies remain deeply intertwined in consumer goods, agriculture, manufacturing, and services. The result is not autarky but bifurcation by sector: continued trade in low-politics goods alongside restriction in high-politics technologies. A second mechanism is domestic political securitization. Bipartisan consensus in Washington increasingly treats economic engagement with China as a source of national-security risk, while Beijing treats US restrictions as evidence of containment and technological suppression. Once economic policy is framed as security policy, the normal bargaining logic of trade—compromise, mutual gain, and institutional dispute settlement—gives way to zero-sum framing, industrial policy, and alliance-based supply-chain restructuring. The "new cold war" is therefore less a description of total separation than a strategic narrative that justifies selective decoupling, friend-shoring, and the politicization of markets.

Scope Conditions: The pacifying version of interdependence is most plausible when exchange is concentrated in non-strategic sectors, when no single node creates asymmetric vulnerability, and when domestic coalitions benefit from continued access. The weaponized version becomes more likely when trade involves dual-use technologies, when one side controls a chokepoint, when security communities dominate economic policymaking, and when both states possess the administrative capacity to enforce controls. The "new cold war" framing is most accurate where competition spans ideology, institutions, and technology; it is less accurate where third countries refuse bloc alignment, where firms reroute trade through intermediaries, or where consumer and producer interests sustain integration despite political tension. It also overstates separation if bilateral trade volumes remain high even as their composition shifts. The framing is weakest as a predictive claim if it assumes inevitable global bifurcation; it is strongest as an analytical claim about the securitization of economic policy.

Observable Implications: The 2018 tariff rounds and the Phase One agreement showed that trade conflict could escalate without ending interdependence. Subsequent US export controls on advanced semiconductors and semiconductor manufacturing equipment, the expansion of the Entity List, investment-screening reforms, and allied coordination on technology controls illustrate the shift from market access to technology denial. China's responses include industrial-policy campaigns, efforts to reduce dependence on foreign chokepoints, and diversification of trade and financial partnerships. Observable indicators include changes in the sectoral composition of US–China trade, relocation of assembly to Vietnam, Mexico, and other intermediaries, increased screening of inbound and outbound investment, and the growth of "friend-shoring" rhetoric in G7 and allied policy. A further implication is that third countries become arenas of competition: they may gain manufacturing investment while facing pressure to align on export controls, data governance, and critical-minerals supply. If the "new cold war" framing is accurate, one should observe persistent restrictions in strategic sectors alongside continued integration in agriculture, energy, and consumer goods; if it is overstated, one should observe rapid corporate adaptation that restores trade through alternative routes without durable political blocs.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, the "new cold war" framing is not an abstract superpower metaphor but a material risk to development. African economies are exposed to commodity-price volatility, debt distress, inflation, and supply-chain disruption when US–China competition intensifies, yet they also

gain leverage from critical minerals, demographic growth, and the African Continental Free Trade Area. The African perspective, informed by long traditions of analyzing unequal exchange and external dependence, treats bipolar competition as both a danger and an opportunity for multi-alignment: African states can bargain for infrastructure, technology transfer, and market access while resisting pressure to choose a single patron. The occlusion in superpower discourse is that African agency is often reduced to a prize in a contest rather than a set of independent development projects. The strongest African objection to the "new cold war" framing is that it can normalize the subordination of African priorities to great-power rivalry; the strongest contribution is that it highlights how global economic fragmentation raises costs for import-dependent and debt-burdened states.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective generally rejects the "new cold war" framing as a US attempt to contain China's development and to deny the legitimacy of its rise. It emphasizes mutual benefit, development rights, and a "community of shared future," arguing that interdependence should be managed through cooperation rather than securitized decoupling. From this vantage point, US export controls are not neutral security measures but hegemonic efforts to preserve technological dominance. The perspective contributes a critique of Western double standards and a defense of state-led development; it occludes the security concerns of other states about coercion, opacity, and asymmetric dependence.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames US–China economic rivalry as part of a broader transition away from unipolarity and welcomes the erosion of US economic hegemony. It emphasizes multipolarity, anti-hegemonism, and the legitimacy of states resisting Western sanctions and financial dominance. Moscow tends to interpret US technology controls as instruments of imperial power and supports de-dollarization, BRICS expansion, and alternative trade routes. This perspective contributes a systemic critique of Western economic governance; it occludes Russia's own use of economic coercion and the dependence of many states on stable, rules-based trade.

Western: The Western perspective treats economic interdependence with China as a strategic vulnerability requiring "de-risking," not necessarily full decoupling. It emphasizes economic security, resilience, alliance coordination, and the protection of critical technologies. The engagement-to-containment shift reflects a judgment that economic integration did not produce political liberalization and that China's state-capitalist model exploits openness. This perspective contributes serious attention to coercion, intellectual-property theft, and supply-chain risk; it occludes the costs of fragmentation for consumers, firms, and the Global South, and it sometimes conflates commercial competition with existential threat.

UN: The UN perspective approaches economic interdependence through Charter principles, sovereign equality, development rights, and the need for a rules-based multilateral trading system. It warns that weaponized trade, sanctions, and fragmented supply chains disproportionately harm developing countries and undermine the Sustainable Development Goals. From this vantage point, the "new cold war" framing risks legitimizing economic coercion and eroding non-discrimination. The UN contribution is to insist that economic security must be reconciled with global development and legal equality; its occlusion is that it lacks enforcement power when great powers treat trade as security policy.

SECTION 2.6 — KEY IDEA 5: THE DEBATE OVER ENGAGEMENT VERSUS CONTAINMENT, AND THE RISK OF WAR OVER TAIWAN

Bolded Causal Claim: The Taiwan Strait is the most dangerous escalation pathway in US–China rivalry because unresolved sovereignty, military modernization, and alliance commitments convert a political dispute into a deterrence problem; whether Washington's strategy is engagement or containment shapes whether

Beijing perceives restraint or encirclement, but neither strategy eliminates the risk of inadvertent war.

Mechanism: Engagement and containment are not merely policy labels; they imply different causal theories about how rising powers behave. Engagement assumes that economic integration, institutional inclusion, and diplomatic normalization socialize a rising state into the existing order, reducing incentives for revisionism. In the US–China case, this logic underpinned post-Cold War trade expansion, WTO accession, and the expectation that prosperity would produce political liberalization. Containment assumes that power must be balanced, that revisionist states exploit openness, and that deterrence requires alliances, military superiority, and denial of strategic technologies. The mechanism of rivalry is that each strategy can become self-fulfilling: engagement can be read as appeasement if the rising power uses openness to build power; containment can be read as encirclement if the rising power interprets balancing as an attempt to block legitimate development. Taiwan concentrates this dilemma because it sits at the intersection of sovereignty, nationalism, alliance credibility, and military geography. The PRC's anti-secession framework treats Taiwan as an internal matter and warns against formal independence; the United States maintains a "one China" policy, the Taiwan Relations Act, arms sales, and strategic ambiguity about whether it would defend Taiwan. The mechanism of war risk is not simply a decision for invasion but a chain of misperception: gray-zone coercion, military exercises, domestic political signaling, alliance commitments, and the possibility that either side believes it can achieve objectives at acceptable cost. Deterrence by denial requires the defender to convince the attacker that success is impossible; deterrence by punishment requires credible threats of escalation. Both are undermined by uncertainty about US willingness to fight, PLA confidence in rapid fait accompli, and domestic pressures in Taipei, Washington, and Beijing. Escalation can also occur through accidents, cyber operations, space assets, or maritime incidents that outpace crisis management.

Scope Conditions: Engagement is most plausible when the rising power accepts the status quo, when domestic politics permit compromise, and when economic ties create constituencies for restraint. It is least plausible when the rising power seeks to revise territorial or institutional arrangements and when domestic nationalism rewards assertiveness. Containment is most effective when alliances are credible, military balances are favorable, and economic denial is enforceable; it is least effective when it provokes accelerated military buildup, drives the target toward self-reliance, or lacks allied consensus. The risk of war over Taiwan is highest when three conditions coincide: the PLA believes it can achieve a quick fait accompli before US intervention; US domestic politics make ambiguity less credible; and Taiwanese politics move in ways that Beijing interprets as crossing a red line. The risk is lower when crisis-management channels function, when economic interdependence raises the cost of conflict, and when all sides believe that time favors their position without requiring immediate action. Neither engagement nor containment eliminates these conditions; each changes the incentives and perceptions that shape them.

Observable Implications: Indicators of the engagement-versus-containment debate include shifts in US strategy documents, export-control intensity, alliance expansion, and diplomatic language about China as competitor, rival, or threat. Indicators of Taiwan risk include PLA exercises around the island, blockade or quarantine simulations, arms packages, diplomatic visits, cross-strait economic coercion, and changes in Taiwanese defense spending and conscription. Alliance developments such as AUKUS, the Quad, and Japan's defense buildup signal containment; continued trade, climate cooperation, and crisis hotlines signal residual engagement. A useful test is whether military signaling remains bounded and reversible or whether it becomes normalized as a new status quo. If engagement logic dominates, one expects sustained dialogue and managed competition; if containment logic dominates, one expects harder decoupling, expanded deterrence, and more explicit security commitments. The most dangerous observable pattern is not a single crisis but the normalization of high-intensity military activity combined with eroding crisis-management trust.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on Taiwan and great-power war begins with the cost of escalation: a conflict in the Taiwan Strait would disrupt global shipping, energy markets, food prices, finance, and development finance, with disproportionate effects on import-dependent and debt-burdened African states. African diplomacy therefore emphasizes non-alignment, peaceful settlement, and the protection of development gains, while also navigating the tension between territorial integrity and self-determination that resonates with African experiences of colonial borders and secessionist conflicts. Multi-alignment allows African states to maintain relations with Beijing, Washington, and Taipei-linked economic networks without endorsing either side's maximal claims. The African contribution is to insist that great-power rivalry must be evaluated by its human and developmental consequences; its occlusion in superpower debate is that African states are treated as peripheral to a crisis that would reshape their economies. The strongest African objection to containment logic is that it can militarize global politics; the strongest objection to engagement logic is that it can excuse coercion against smaller actors.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats Taiwan as an internal affair and reunification as a core national interest. It opposes foreign interference, supports the one-China principle, and frames US arms sales and high-level visits as violations of sovereignty and provocations. From this vantage point, deterrence is legitimate defense of territorial integrity, while US strategic ambiguity is destabilizing. The perspective contributes a strong claim about sovereignty and historical grievance; it occludes the preferences of Taiwan's population and the risks that coercion poses to regional stability.

Russian: The Russian perspective generally aligns with China's anti-hegemonic framing and treats US involvement in Taiwan as part of a broader strategy to contain rising powers. It emphasizes multipolarity, sovereignty, and opposition to Western military alliances. Moscow's contribution is to highlight how US alliance expansion can be perceived as encirclement; its occlusion is that it applies sovereignty selectively and underestimates the dangers of normalizing force as a tool of territorial revision.

Western: The Western perspective centers on deterrence, strategic ambiguity, and the defense of a rules-based order. It treats Taiwan as a critical node in semiconductor supply chains and democratic resilience, and it debates whether engagement failed or was never fully tried. Containment advocates emphasize alliances, military readiness, and technology denial; engagement advocates emphasize crisis management, economic costs, and avoiding self-fulfilling prophecy. The perspective contributes serious analysis of credibility and escalation; it occludes the extent to which US policy itself shapes Chinese threat perception and the domestic costs of sustained rivalry.

UN: The UN perspective approaches Taiwan through Charter principles: sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-use of force, and peaceful settlement of disputes. General Assembly Resolution 2758 recognized the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate representative of China, and the UN system does not treat Taiwan as a member state. At the same time, the UN emphasizes that disputes must be resolved peacefully and that great-power conflict would violate the Charter's collective-security aspirations. The UN contribution is to elevate legal process and human protection over unilateral force; its occlusion is that it cannot enforce restraint when permanent members are directly involved.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on US-China rivalry begins from a position that the other four perspectives systematically under-theorize: the experience of being the terrain on which great-power competition is fought, extracted, and narrated, rather than a party to it. This is not merely an empirical observation about African states' marginalization in great-power diplomacy; it is a theoretical claim about the structure of international order. From the vantage of African political thought, the US-China rivalry is not a dyadic transition between two hegemons but a reconfiguration of a global system whose rules were written during colonialism and whose material flows still run through African bodies, minerals, and debt. The African perspective therefore asks a different question than the other four: not "who will win the transition?" but "what does the transition cost those who did not choose it, and what leverage do they retain?"

The theoretical lineage runs through several distinct traditions. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* established the foundational claim that African underdevelopment is not a natural condition but a product of structured extraction by external powers; applied to the present, this means that both US and Chinese engagement with Africa must be read against a history in which external powers have consistently converted African resources into their own industrial and military capacity. Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* warned that formal independence would be hollowed out by economic control; the contemporary debate about Chinese debt and US conditionality replays this argument with new actors. Julius Nyerere's ujamaa and his insistence on non-alignment provided a practical doctrine: African states should refuse to be conscripted into blocs whose conflicts are not theirs. Amílcar Cabral's emphasis on "return to the source" and on the material basis of culture grounds a skepticism toward both Western liberal universalism and Chinese "community of shared future" rhetoric when either is offered as a substitute for African self-determination. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* supplies the psychological and political grammar: the colonized are not merely victims but agents whose negotiation reshapes the metropole; applied to US-China rivalry, this suggests African states are not passive arenas but actors whose choices alter the costs of great-power competition.

Contemporary African scholarship sharpens these classical positions. Siba Grovogui's work on international law and sovereignty argues that the international legal order was constructed to manage European empire and that African states encounter it as a structure of subordination; from this angle, both US and Chinese invocations of "rules-based order" or "sovereignty" are strategic vocabularies whose application to Africa is selective. Achille Mbembe's analysis of the postcolony suggests that African populations live under regimes of extraction that precede and exceed any particular great-power rivalry; the US-China competition is thus layered onto existing structures of violence rather than creating them. Jean-François Bayart's "politics of the belly" and his analysis of extraversion describe how African elites have historically profited from mediating external power; this implies that the costs and benefits of US-China rivalry are distributed unevenly within African societies, not borne uniformly by "Africa." Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* and his later work on colonialism highlight how the colonial state's bifurcated structure persists, shaping which African actors can engage great powers and on what terms. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's decolonial feminism challenges the universalization of Western categories such as "state," "power," and "security," and asks whose knowledge counts in defining the rivalry; Sylvia Tamale's work on African feminism and decoloniality extends this to questions of gendered extraction in mining and infrastructure. In security studies, Kwesi Aning and Kwaku Danso have analyzed how African security architectures navigate great-power competition, emphasizing institutional agency and the limits of external security assistance.

The mechanism through which US-China rivalry affects Africa operates on several channels. First, the economic channel: both powers compete for access to critical minerals—cobalt, lithium, coltan, rare earths—essential to the energy transition and defense industries; this reproduces a classic extractive dynamic in which

African states export raw materials and import finished goods, with value addition occurring elsewhere. Second, the debt and finance channel: Chinese lending through the Belt and Road Initiative and Western-led IMF and World Bank conditionality create competing creditor structures; African states navigate between them, sometimes gaining bargaining space, sometimes facing debt distress and austerity. Third, the security channel: US Africa Command and Chinese security engagement introduce great-power military presence into African conflicts, potentially internationalizing local disputes and constraining African security autonomy. Fourth, the diplomatic channel: competition for votes in the UN General Assembly, recognition of Taiwan, and alignment on human-rights resolutions forces African states into choices that may not serve their interests. Fifth, the narrative channel: both powers frame their engagement in developmental and civilizational terms, which can crowd out African-defined priorities.

The African perspective's distinctive contribution is to reframe the rivalry's stakes. Where Western analysis asks whether China is a revisionist power, African analysis asks how the binary itself—revisionist versus status quo—presupposes a legitimacy for the existing order that African states never consented to. The "rules-based international order" that the US defends was, from this vantage, built on colonial extraction and racial hierarchy; Chinese challenges to it are not automatically liberatory, but the defense of it is not automatically just. This produces a position of "active non-alignment" or "multi-alignment": African states seek to maximize agency by engaging both powers without subordination to either, using the rivalry as leverage for better terms. The African Union's Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and the push for permanent African seats on the UN Security Council are institutional expressions of this strategy. The perspective also highlights the costs of bipolarity: the Cold War's proxy wars in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, and the Horn of Africa devastated the continent; a "new cold war" risks repeating this pattern, with African states again serving as battlegrounds for others' conflicts.

The African perspective's occlusions are equally important. It can romanticize non-alignment, understating the asymmetry of power that makes genuine equidistance difficult: African states need markets, finance, and security assistance that neither power provides unconditionally. It can treat "Africa" as a unitary actor, obscuring the heterogeneity of fifty-four states with divergent interests, regime types, and relationships to both powers. It can understate African elite agency in choosing alignment for domestic political gain, as Bayart's extraversion suggests. It can also overstate the novelty of great-power competition, since European powers have competed for African resources since the scramble; the US-China rivalry is a new configuration of an old structure. Finally, the perspective risks being so focused on external power that it under-theorizes internal governance failures and the ways African states themselves produce insecurity and extraction. Scope conditions: the African perspective is most illuminating when analyzing resource and debt politics, diplomatic leverage, and the distributional consequences of great-power competition; it is less directly applicable to the military balance in the Taiwan Strait or to nuclear deterrence dynamics, where African states have limited direct stakes. Its strongest counterargument comes from within: Nyerere's non-alignment worked partly because the Cold War's ideological stakes were clearer; today's rivalry is more economic and technological, and African states' dependence on both US and Chinese markets makes pure non-alignment harder to sustain.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on US-China rivalry is structured by a rejection of the premise that the rivalry is a power transition in the Western sense. Chinese official discourse and much Chinese IR scholarship insist that China's rise is peaceful, that the "Thucydides Trap" is not inevitable, and that the proper frame is not competition between two hegemons but the emergence of a multipolar "community of shared future

for mankind." This is not merely propaganda; it reflects distinct theoretical traditions in Chinese IR that challenge Western realism's assumptions.

Qin Yaqing's relational theory of world politics argues that the Western IR canon is built on an ontology of atomistic, self-interested actors, whereas Chinese thought emphasizes relationality: actors are constituted by their relationships, and order emerges from the cultivation of harmonious relations rather than from the balance of power. Applied to US-China rivalry, this means the relationship is not a zero-sum transition but a dynamic that can be managed through mutual accommodation and relational governance. Yan Xuetong's "moral realism" offers a different Chinese account: international order is shaped by the moral quality of leadership, and China's rise can be stabilizing if it provides moral leadership rather than pursuing hegemony. Yan is more realist than Qin—he accepts that power transitions occur and that states pursue interests—but he argues that the moral basis of leadership determines whether transitions are peaceful or violent. Zhao Tingyang's "tianxia" (all-under-heaven) system proposes a cosmopolitan world order in which no single state is hegemon and all are included in a shared political community; this is explicitly offered as an alternative to the Westphalian state system and to US unipolarity.

The mechanism of Chinese engagement is framed as "win-win cooperation": infrastructure investment, trade integration, and diplomatic multilateralism through BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank create mutual benefit rather than zero-sum extraction. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that China does not seek to replace the US as global hegemon but to democratize international governance, giving developing countries greater voice. The "no Thucydides Trap" argument, articulated by Xi Jinping and echoed in Chinese scholarship, holds that the trap is a Western projection: conflict is not structurally determined by power shifts but results from misperception and hostile policy, particularly US containment.

The Chinese perspective's contribution is to challenge the inevitability thesis and to offer alternative vocabularies for order. Its occlusions are significant. It tends to understate the coercive dimensions of Chinese power: the militarization of the South China Sea, economic coercion against Australia and Lithuania, and the opacity of Belt and Road debt. It treats "win-win" as descriptive rather than aspirational. It underplays the security dilemma that Chinese military modernization creates for neighbors, including those who do not seek US alignment. And it can conflate the Chinese state's interests with those of "the Chinese people" or "the developing world," obscuring internal diversity and dissent. The perspective also struggles to account for why so many states, including in Africa and Southeast Asia, seek US security guarantees despite Chinese economic engagement: if the relationship were truly win-win, balancing would be unnecessary.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on US-China rivalry is shaped by Russia's own confrontation with the West and its strategic partnership with China. Russian IR and official discourse frame the rivalry as the terminal crisis of US unipolarity and the emergence of a multipolar order in which Russia and China are co-architects. The core claim is anti-hegemonic: the US-led order is illegitimate not because of its values but because of its unilateralism, and its decline creates space for sovereign equality and civilizational diversity.

The theoretical lineage includes Russian Eurasianism, which posits Russia as a distinct civilization bridging Europe and Asia, and the realist tradition of Primakov's "multipolar world" concept from the 1990s, which argued that Russia should pursue strategic partnerships with China and India to counterbalance US dominance. Contemporary Russian scholarship frames the US-China rivalry as evidence of the "end of the American century" and the rise of a "post-Western" world. The Russian perspective shares with the Chinese

a rejection of the Thucydides Trap framing as Western-centric, but adds a distinctive emphasis on NATO expansion and US military interventionism as the primary sources of global instability.

The mechanism of Russian strategy is "strategic partnership without alliance": deepening economic, military, and diplomatic coordination with China while preserving formal autonomy. This includes energy deals, joint military exercises, coordination in the UN Security Council, and shared opposition to US sanctions. Russia's own confrontation with the West over Ukraine has accelerated this alignment, making Russia increasingly dependent on China economically and diplomatically.

The Russian perspective's contribution is to highlight the role of US policy in generating rivalry: NATO expansion, regime change operations, and the weaponization of the dollar and financial system are presented as provocations that made US-China confrontation inevitable. It also draws attention to the hypocrisy of Western "rules-based order" rhetoric given US violations of sovereignty in Iraq and Libya. Its occlusions are severe. It systematically understates Russian agency in generating insecurity, including the invasion of Ukraine and interference in neighboring states. It overstates the coherence and durability of the China-Russia partnership, which is asymmetric—China is the senior partner economically—and rests on convergent opposition to the US rather than a shared positive vision. It ignores the agency of smaller states, including in Central Asia and the Caucasus, who may not welcome a Sino-Russian condominium. And it treats multipolarity as inherently desirable without examining whether a multipolar world with weak institutions might be more conflict-prone than the unipolar moment it replaces. The perspective also cannot easily explain why states that share Russia's anti-hegemonic rhetoric nonetheless seek Western security guarantees and investment.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on US-China rivalry is the most institutionally powerful and the most theoretically diverse. It spans a spectrum from engagement to containment, but converges on several premises: that the post-1945 liberal order is worth defending, that China's rise poses a systemic challenge to that order, and that US leadership remains indispensable to managing the transition. The perspective is not monolithic; it contains internal debates that are themselves part of the policy landscape.

The theoretical lineage includes offensive realism (Mearsheimer 2001, 2014), which predicts that China's growth will produce hegemonic ambition in Asia and inevitable conflict with the US; liberal internationalism, which emphasizes institutions, interdependence, and democratic peace; and constructivism, which examines how identities and norms shape the rivalry. Power transition theory (Organski 1958) provides the structural frame: a rising power approaches parity with the dominant power, and war becomes likely if the rising power is dissatisfied with the status quo. Allison's "Thucydides Trap" (2017) popularized this for policy audiences. Friedberg (2018) argued that the US must prepare for long-term competition and that engagement had failed to produce a liberal China.

The mechanism of Western strategy has shifted over time. The engagement era assumed that economic integration would liberalize China; the post-2017 consensus treats China as a "strategic competitor" requiring "managed competition." Instruments include tariffs and export controls on semiconductors and AI chips, alliance reinforcement through AUKUS and the Quad, and technology decoupling. The Western perspective's contribution is to identify the specific mechanisms of Chinese revisionism—military modernization, economic coercion, technology theft, human-rights abuses—and to mobilize collective action through alliances.

The Western perspective's occlusions mirror those of its rivals. It can overstate Chinese revisionism, treating

defensive Chinese behavior as inherently aggressive. It can understate US agency in generating the security dilemma: US forward deployment, Taiwan arms sales, and technology controls are themselves perceived as threats in Beijing. It universalizes Western interests as "international" interests, conflating the defense of US primacy with the defense of global order. It can treat the liberal order as more consensual and beneficial than many Global South states experience it. And the engagement-versus-containment debate reveals an internal tension: if engagement failed, was the failure inherent to the strategy or to its implementation? Mearsheimer would say engagement was always naive; liberals argue it was undermined by Chinese political closure and US inattention. The perspective also struggles with the Taiwan question: deterrence requires ambiguity, but ambiguity increases risk of miscalculation.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective approaches US-China rivalry through the lens of Charter principles: sovereign equality, non-use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, and collective security. The UN system does not recognize Taiwan as a member state (General Assembly Resolution 2758, 1971), and the PRC holds the China seat on the Security Council. The UN's contribution is to elevate legal process and human protection above unilateral force, and to provide forums—General Assembly, Security Council, specialized agencies—where rivalry can be managed multilaterally.

The mechanism of UN engagement is institutional: the Security Council can authorize collective action, though P5 veto power limits this when permanent members are involved; the General Assembly provides a platform for norm-setting and coalition-building; and specialized agencies manage functional cooperation that can survive political rivalry. The UN also provides humanitarian and development frameworks that address the consequences of great-power competition for vulnerable populations.

The UN perspective's contribution is to insist that US-China rivalry is not merely a bilateral or systemic issue but a threat to the collective security architecture established in 1945. It highlights the risk that great-power conflict would violate the Charter's core purposes and cause catastrophic harm, particularly to non-combatant populations. It also provides a legal framework for Taiwan: the UN position is that Taiwan is not a sovereign state and that any change in status must be peaceful and consensual, not imposed by force.

The UN perspective's occlusions are structural. The organization cannot enforce restraint when permanent members are directly involved; the veto ensures that the Security Council is paralyzed on issues touching US or Chinese core interests. The UN's legal formalism can obscure power asymmetries: General Assembly resolutions are non-binding, and the "international community" often means Western-led coalitions. The UN also struggles to adapt to a world where two permanent members are strategic rivals; the Charter assumed great-power concert, not sustained rivalry. Finally, the UN perspective can be overly state-centric, underweighting non-state actors, civil society, and the transnational dimensions of the rivalry—technology, climate, pandemics—that fall outside traditional security frameworks. The UN's strength, its universal membership and legal authority, is also its weakness: it can articulate norms but cannot compel compliance from the powerful.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reveals the costs of bipolar competition for non-aligned states and the agency of multi-alignment; frames the rivalry as a structural constraint on African industrialization and sovereignty	Can underweight the agency of African elites who actively leverage rivalry for bargaining power; risks homogenizing a diverse continent	Multipolarity as justice: no single power should monopolize rule-making; African states have the right to choose partners without coercion	AU Agenda 2063; African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA); votes at UNGA on Ukraine and Taiwan that split along interest lines rather than bloc lines	Western: multi-alignment can free-ride on security guarantees; Chinese: African agency is overstated by a continent still dependent on external finance
Chinese	Offers a relational, process-based alternative to Western atomistic IR; "community of shared future" reframes order as cooperative rather than competitive	Obscures the coercive dimensions of Chinese economic statecraft and the asymmetry of the Belt and Road; treats US containment as exogenous rather than partly reactive	Harmony through hierarchy: a moral order led by a virtuous center, with multipolarity as the path to shared prosperity	BRI scale; RCEP; Global Development Initiative; diplomatic framing that "there is no Thucydides Trap"	Western: relationalism masks power asymmetry; African: "community of shared future" can reproduce dependency

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Names unipolarity as the core grievance and frames multipolarity as democratization of international order; exposes double standards in Western liberal order	Romanticizes multipolarity; underweights Russian coercion in its near abroad; treats US decline as inevitable rather than contingent	Anti-hegemonism: any concentration of power is illegitimate; sovereignty is absolute and non-intervention is paramount	BRICS expansion; SCO; UN voting coalitions; rhetoric at Valdai and BRICS summits	Western: anti-hegemonism is instrumental, masking Russian imperial ambition; UN: sovereignty absolutism paralyzes collective security
Western	Provides the most developed theoretical toolkit (power transition, security dilemma, offensive realism); generates testable predictions about conflict risk	Can reify US primacy as natural; tends to treat Chinese rise as exogenous threat rather than partly endogenous to US policy; underweights non-Western agency	Liberal international order: rules-based, open, democratic; US leadership as stabilizing public good	NATO expansion of partnerships; AUKUS; CHIPS Act; alliance network in Indo-Pacific	African: order is not neutral but hegemonic; Chinese: "rules-based order" means US rules

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Supplies universal legal vocabulary (Charter, sovereignty, non-use of force) and a forum for articulating shared norms; keeps Taiwan and great-power conflict on the agenda	Legal formalism obscures power asymmetry; state-centrism underweights transnational dimensions (tech, climate, pandemics); paralyzed when P5 interests collide	Charter universalism: sovereignty, non-intervention, peaceful settlement of disputes; no legitimate use of force except self-defense or Security Council authorization	UNGA resolutions; ICJ advisory opinions; Secretary-General statements on Taiwan Strait tensions	Western: UN cannot compel compliance from great powers; African: UN structures (Security Council) reproduce colonial-era power

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SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2018–2024 US–China Trade and Technology War — From Tariffs to Export Controls

Levels of analysis

Individual. The trade and technology war cannot be reduced to structural forces alone; individual leaders and their cognitive frames mattered. Donald Trump's mercantilist worldview and his conviction that trade deficits signal national weakness reframed China from a partner to be engaged into a competitor to be confronted. Joe Biden retained and deepened the confrontation, suggesting the shift was not merely personal but had acquired bureaucratic and political momentum. On the Chinese side, Xi Jinping's consolidation of authority and his "Made in China 2025" industrial policy signaled an ambition to climb the value chain that US policymakers read as a direct challenge to American technological primacy. Individual agency here operated within structural constraints: neither leader invented the rivalry, but each accelerated it through specific decisions—tariff schedules, entity-list designations, executive orders on investment screening.

State. At the state level, the conflict is a contest between two political economies with incompatible development models. The United States, responding to domestic deindustrialization and the political backlash against globalization, deployed Section 301 tariffs, export controls, and industrial policy (the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022) to rebuild domestic capacity and deny China access to advanced semiconductors. China responded with retaliatory tariffs, rare-earth export restrictions, and accelerated indigenous innovation programs. Each state's policy was shaped by its internal coalition politics: US measures drew support from both labor and national-security constituencies, while Chinese measures were framed as defending sovereignty and development rights. The state level reveals that the "war" was not a single event but a sequence of

policy instruments—tariffs, then entity lists, then comprehensive export controls, then outbound investment screening—each expanding the scope of decoupling.

Systemic. Systemically, the trade and technology war is an instance of power-transition dynamics: a rising power (China) approaching parity with a hegemon (the United States) in economic and technological capacity, triggering defensive measures by the incumbent. Offensive realism predicts that the hegemon will seek to prevent the challenger from translating economic power into military capability, which is precisely what the October 2022 semiconductor export controls attempted—denying China the advanced chips needed for artificial intelligence and military modernization. Power transition theory (Organski, Kugler) adds that the danger is greatest when the challenger is dissatisfied with the existing order; here, US policymakers increasingly read China's industrial policy as evidence of such dissatisfaction. The systemic frame also captures the alliance dimension: the United States sought to multilateralize controls through the Wassenaar Arrangement and coordination with Japan and the Netherlands, while China deepened ties with Russia and the Global South.

Transnational. The transnational level is where the war's most consequential effects appear. Global supply chains—Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), ASML in the Netherlands, Samsung in South Korea—meant that US export controls rippled through third countries, forcing firms and governments to choose between US market access and Chinese market access. Technology standards (5G, AI governance, quantum encryption) became arenas of competition with global spillovers. Diaspora scientists, academic collaborations, and cross-border investment flows were disrupted. The transnational level also includes the ideological and narrative competition: the "new cold war" framing itself became a transnational discourse shaping how states, firms, and publics understood the rivalry, with consequences for investment, migration, and scientific cooperation.

Mechanism

The core mechanism is a *security dilemma operating through economic interdependence*. Under conditions of deep integration, measures taken by one state to reduce vulnerability (export controls, reshoring, friend-shoring) are read by the other as hostile intent, triggering countermeasures that deepen the spiral. The mechanism has three stages. First, *threat perception*: US policymakers came to view Chinese technological advancement not as benign development but as a security threat, especially after the Made in China 2025 plan and the fusion of military and civilian technology under Xi. Second, *instrumental escalation*: the United States moved from tariffs (2018) to targeted technology denial (2019–2020) to comprehensive semiconductor controls (2022) to outbound investment screening (2023), each step expanding the domain of confrontation. Third, *structural decoupling*: even where full decoupling did not occur, the expectation of future restrictions drove firms to diversify supply chains, creating a self-fulfilling fragmentation of the global economy. The mechanism is reinforced by domestic politics: in both countries, hawkish constituencies gained influence, making de-escalation politically costly. The result is not a clean break but a "small yard, high fence" regime—targeted denial in critical technologies alongside continued trade in non-strategic goods.

Perspective reconstruction

African (primary). From an African vantage point, the trade and technology war is not primarily a US–China story; it is a shock to the global trading system on which African development depends. The African perspective, drawing on Rodney's analysis of how external powers structure peripheral economies, sees the rivalry as accelerating the fragmentation of global value chains in ways that can either harm or benefit African indus-

trialization. On one hand, decoupling raises costs for African importers of technology and reduces demand for African commodities tied to Chinese manufacturing. On the other hand, "China Plus One" strategies and the search for alternative supply-chain nodes create openings for African economies—Morocco's automotive sector, Ethiopia's industrial parks, South Africa's mineral processing—to capture relocated investment. African states have responded with multi-alignment: maintaining ties with both Washington and Beijing while asserting sovereignty over critical minerals (cobalt, lithium, rare earths) through resource nationalism. The African perspective also highlights what Western and Chinese accounts occlude: the war's costs are borne disproportionately by the Global South, which has no voice in setting the rules of decoupling. Bayart's "politics of the belly" reminds us that African elites may extract rents from the rivalry, but the structural position of African economies remains subordinate. The African contribution is to reframe the war not as a bilateral power transition but as a reordering of global capitalism whose distributional consequences fall hardest on those least responsible for it.

Chinese. The Chinese perspective frames the trade and technology war as a US attempt to contain China's legitimate development, violating the principles of free trade and technological openness that the United States itself championed. From this view, tariffs and export controls are not defensive measures but offensive acts of hegemonic preservation, driven by anxiety about China's rise rather than by genuine security threats. Qin Yaqing's relational theory suggests that the US approach—atomistic, zero-sum, treating China as an adversary to be contained—reflects a Western ontology ill-suited to an interdependent world. Yan Xuetong's moral realism would judge US policy as lacking the moral authority of a legitimate hegemon, since it prioritizes narrow self-interest over the common good. Zhao Tingyang's "community of shared future" offers the normative alternative: a world order in which technological development is shared rather than weaponized. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that the war has accelerated indigenous innovation—Huawei's 7nm chip, the push for semiconductor self-sufficiency—and has strengthened China's resolve to reduce dependence on US technology.

Russian. The Russian perspective reads the trade and technology war as confirmation that unipolarity is over and that the United States is lashing out to preserve a fading hegemony. From Moscow's vantage point, US sanctions and export controls against China mirror those applied to Russia, revealing a pattern of economic coercion against any state that challenges Western dominance. The war is evidence that multipolarity is not a choice but a fact, and that the US-led order is fragmenting under the weight of its own contradictions. Russia's interest lies in deepening its partnership with China—energy, technology, military—while positioning itself as a pole in an emerging multipolar order. The Russian perspective underweights the costs of this alignment for China and overstates the coherence of an anti-Western bloc.

Western. The Western perspective, drawing on Friedberg and Mearsheimer, treats the trade and technology war as a necessary and overdue correction to a failed engagement strategy. From this view, decades of economic integration did not liberalize China; instead, they funded its military modernization and technological catch-up. The war is thus a defensive adjustment: tariffs address unfair trade practices, and export controls prevent the transfer of militarily relevant technology to a strategic competitor. The Western perspective emphasizes that the measures are targeted ("small yard, high fence") rather than blanket decoupling, and that they are coordinated with allies to preserve the liberal order's technological edge. It occludes the extent to which US policy is driven by domestic political economy—protectionist constituencies, techno-nationalism—and the possibility that containment may accelerate the very Chinese self-sufficiency it seeks to prevent.

UN. The UN perspective frames the trade and technology war as a challenge to the multilateral trading system

and to the principles of non-discrimination and peaceful economic cooperation enshrined in the Charter and the WTO. From this view, unilateral tariffs and export controls undermine the rules-based order and risk fragmenting the global economy into competing blocs. The UN emphasizes the need for dialogue, dispute settlement through the WTO, and the avoidance of measures that could escalate into broader conflict. The UN perspective occludes the power asymmetries that make multilateral rules ineffective when great powers choose to bypass them, and it struggles to address the security dimensions of technology competition that fall outside traditional trade frameworks.

Explicit adjudication

The Western perspective best explains the *initiation* of the trade and technology war: the shift from engagement to containment was driven by a reassessment of China's trajectory, grounded in power-transition logic and the recognition that economic interdependence had not produced political convergence. The mechanism of instrumental escalation—tariffs to entity lists to comprehensive controls—fits the Western narrative of a defensive adjustment to a rising challenger. However, the Western perspective misses the *transnational and distributional* dimensions that the African perspective captures: the war's costs fall on third parties, and the "small yard, high fence" framing understates the breadth of decoupling's spillovers. The Chinese perspective correctly identifies the coercive character of US measures but underweights the security concerns that motivated them and the degree to which Chinese industrial policy was itself a driver of US threat perception. The systemic frame (power transition) explains why the rivalry intensified when it did, but it cannot explain the specific instrument choices—why semiconductors rather than, say, pharmaceuticals—without reference to the transnational supply-chain structure and domestic political coalitions. The most complete explanation combines the systemic (power transition creating the conditions), the state (policy instruments shaped by domestic politics), and the transnational (supply-chain interdependence determining which technologies became flashpoints). The African perspective does not explain the war's origins but provides the essential corrective: any account that treats the US–China dyad as the whole story misses the global distributional consequences and the agency of states caught between the two powers. No single perspective is sufficient; the Western frame explains the trigger, the systemic frame explains the timing, and the transnational frame explains the mechanism's reach.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Task 1 — Level of analysis. At which level or levels (individual, state, systemic, transnational) does the Taiwan flashpoint most plausibly operate, and why does the dominant level change depending on whether one is explaining the 1995–96 crisis, the 2022 Pelosi visit, or a hypothetical 2027 blockade?

Task 2 — Power-transition reading. Using Organski and Kugler's power-transition logic and Allison's Thucydides Trap, reconstruct the argument that Taiwan is the most likely trigger for a US–China war. What exactly is the "trap" mechanism, and where does credibility enter?

Task 3 — Security-dilemma reading. Using Mearsheimer's offensive realism, explain how Taiwan functions as the intervening variable that converts abstract systemic rivalry into concrete military planning, and how US commitments and Chinese countermeasures feed each other.

Task 4 — Chinese relational and moral-realist reading. How would Yan Xuetong's moral realism, Qin Yaqing's relational theory, and Zhao Tingyang's *tianxia* frame Taiwan differently from the Western power-transition account? What do they assume about anarchy, intentions, and recognition?

Task 5 — Occlusion and adjudication. What does each of the three readings occlude? On the available evidence (military exercises, diplomatic statements, economic integration, Taiwan's own agency), which reading has the strongest support and which the weakest?

Task 6 — Falsifiers. Specify two pieces of evidence that, if observed by 2030, would weaken the power-transition reading and two that would weaken the security-dilemma reading.

MODEL ANSWER (continuous prose). The Taiwan flashpoint is best analyzed as a multi-level phenomenon whose dominant causal register shifts with the time horizon. At the systemic level, the flashpoint is a power-transition problem: Taiwan sits at the intersection of a rising China's claim to territorial integrity and a declining hegemon's commitment to a status-quo order. Organski's original formulation held that war is most likely when a challenger approaches parity with the dominant power and is dissatisfied with the existing order; Allison's popularization of the "Thucydides Trap" adds the psychological mechanism that the established power's fear of decline and the rising power's demand for recognition compress decision time and magnify misperception. On this reading, Taiwan is dangerous not because of its intrinsic value but because it is the one issue on which both sides have staked credibility: Beijing's "core interest" framing and Washington's strategic ambiguity each make retreat domestically costly, so the bargaining space narrows as the power gap narrows.

At the state level, Mearsheimer's offensive realism supplies a different mechanism: the security dilemma. Because states cannot know others' intentions and must maximize relative power to survive, China's military modernization — including anti-access and area-denial capabilities around Taiwan — is read in Washington as preparation for coercion, while US arms sales, freedom-of-navigation operations, and alliance tightening are read in Beijing as containment. The result is a self-fulfilling spiral in which defensive measures are indistinguishable from offensive ones. Taiwan functions here as the intervening variable that converts abstract systemic rivalry into concrete military planning: exercises, blockades, and gray-zone pressure become the currency of competition.

The Chinese relational and moral-realist accounts reframe the same facts. Yan Xuetong argues that moral leadership, not material power alone, determines whether a rising state can replace the hegemon; on this view, China's Taiwan policy is judged by whether it demonstrates humane authority rather than mere dominance. Qin Yaqing's relational theory treats the Taiwan issue as embedded in a web of relationships — cross-strait, Sino-US, and regional — whose stability depends on mutual recognition and face-saving rather than on balance-of-power calculations. Zhao Tingyang's *tianxia* reframes the entire problem: the goal is not victory in a bilateral rivalry but the construction of an all-under-heaven order in which Taiwan's status is resolved within a shared civilizational framework rather than through zero-sum competition. These accounts occlude the security-dilemma logic by assuming that intentions can be signaled and read, and they occlude power-transition logic by denying that the system is necessarily anarchic.

Each reading occludes something. The power-transition reading occludes the degree of economic integration that raises the cost of war for both sides and the agency of Taiwan itself, which is not a passive object of great-power bargaining. The security-dilemma reading occludes the possibility that at least some Chinese behavior is driven by status and identity rather than by security maximization, and it risks treating all US policy as reactive. The Chinese readings occlude the coercive dimension of Beijing's military signaling and the genuine security fears of smaller states. Adjudicating on the evidence: the 2022 Pelosi visit and subsequent PLA exercises showed that signaling and misperception operate powerfully, supporting the security-dilemma reading; the long-term growth of China's naval and missile capabilities supports the power-transition reading's material premise; but the absence of a war despite repeated crises supports the relational reading's claim

that dense interaction and mutual interest in stability can manage, if not resolve, the rivalry. The weakest reading on current evidence is strong Thucydides-Trap determinism, which treats war as structurally likely; the historical base rate of power transitions ending in war is lower than Allison's framing suggests, and both sides have strong incentives to avoid direct conflict.

Falsifiers: the power-transition reading would be weakened by a sustained Chinese economic slowdown that removes parity pressure, or by a durable US–China agreement on Taiwan's status. The security-dilemma reading would be weakened by transparent, verifiable military confidence-building measures that both sides implement and sustain, or by a Chinese decision to unilaterally reduce military exercises without reciprocal US concessions. Conversely, a Chinese blockade rehearsal combined with US non-response would strengthen the power-transition reading, while a spiral of reciprocal sanctions and military deployments would strengthen the security-dilemma reading.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In May 2024, the United States raised tariffs to 100 percent on Chinese electric vehicles, 25 percent on lithium-ion EV batteries, and 50 percent on solar cells, while extending export controls on advanced semiconductors and AI model weights. China responded with anti-dumping investigations into European pork and brandy, tightened export licensing for gallium, germanium, and graphite, and accelerated subsidies for domestic chip fabrication. Several African and Southeast Asian governments announced they would not enforce either bloc's trade measures, positioning themselves as transshipment and assembly hubs; the African Continental Free Trade Area secretariat warned that "bipolar trade fragmentation" threatened industrialization plans. Meanwhile, Taiwan's TSMC continued to dominate leading-edge foundry capacity, and both Washington and Beijing intensified diplomatic competition over Pacific Island states' recognition of Taiwan versus the PRC. The episode raised the question of whether economic interdependence is still a brake on conflict or has become a weapon.

(b) Required memo headings (respond to each as a prompt).

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking the 2024 tariff and export-control escalation to (i) the power-transition dynamic, (ii) the security dilemma, and (iii) the interdependence-as-weapon thesis. Specify which level of analysis each mechanism operates at and what would have to be true for the mechanism to fail.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how an African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN analyst would each explain the same 2024 episode, steel-manning each from within. Identify the one thing each perspective sees that the others miss and the one thing each occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Select one historical case (e.g., Anglo-German trade rivalry pre-1914, US-Japan semiconductor friction 1980s, or Cold War COCOM controls) and specify the respects in which it is and is not analogous. State the limits of the analogy explicitly.
- **Falsifiers:** List three observable developments by 2027 that would falsify your central claim, and state which of your mechanisms each would most directly test.

(c) Self-check. Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen next), and prescription (what should be done), and that no single sentence conflates two of these.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question. In the US–China case, which statement best distinguishes the causal mechanism of Organski's power-transition theory from that of Mearsheimer's offensive realism?

A. Power-transition theory locates the danger in the challenger's dissatisfaction with the existing order as it approaches parity; offensive realism locates it in the structural impossibility of knowing intentions, which drives all great powers to seek hegemony.

B. Power-transition theory predicts war only when the challenger is weaker than the dominant power; offensive realism predicts war only when the two powers are roughly equal.

C. Power-transition theory is a liberal theory of interdependence; offensive realism is a constructivist theory of identity.

D. Both theories predict that economic interdependence prevents war, but they disagree on whether international institutions matter.

Correct answer: A.

Distractor diagnosis.

- **B** misstates both theories' scope conditions. Organski's danger zone is the approach to parity, not weakness; Mearsheimer's security dilemma operates across power distributions, not only at equality. A student choosing B has confused "parity" with "equality of outcome" and treated offensive realism as a balance-of-power threshold theory.
- **C** misclassifies both traditions. Power-transition theory is a realist theory of hierarchy and dissatisfaction, not liberal interdependence; offensive realism is structural realism, not constructivism. A student choosing C is importing paradigm labels without matching them to the theories' actual premises.
- **D** attributes to both theories a liberal claim neither makes. Neither Organski nor Mearsheimer treats interdependence as a reliable brake on war; both are skeptical of institutional and economic pacification. A student choosing D has projected liberal institutionalism onto realist frameworks.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Data sources and caveats. The tables below assemble publicly available indicators from the World Bank (GDP), SIPRI (military expenditure), the US Census Bureau and UN Comtrade (bilateral trade), and the US Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) entity-list and export-control actions. All figures are approximate and rounded; Chinese military spending is reported at official budget levels, while independent estimates (SIPRI) run higher and are used here. GDP in purchasing-power-parity (PPP) terms and in nominal (market-exchange-rate) terms measure different things: PPP captures domestic productive capacity and living standards, while nominal GDP captures international purchasing power, debt-servicing capacity, and the scale of cross-border transactions. Both matter for power-transition analysis, and they tell different stories about the US–China gap. Technology-control coverage is measured by cumulative entity-list designations and by the scope of controlled items, not by a single scalar; the table therefore reports directional thresholds rather than precise counts.

Table 1 — Aggregate power indicators, United States and China, 2000–2024 (approximate)

Year	US nominal GDP (USD trn)	China nominal GDP (USD trn)	US GDP PPP (USD trn)	China GDP PPP (USD trn)	US military spending (USD bn)	China military spending (USD bn, SIPRI est.)
2000	10.3	1.2	10.3	3.7	295	22
2005	13.1	2.3	13.1	5.9	495	63
2010	14.9	6.1	14.9	13.9	698	114
2015	18.2	11.1	18.2	20.0	596	215
2018	20.6	13.9	20.6	25.4	649	250
2022	25.5	17.9	25.5	30.3	877	292
2024 (est.)	28.8	18.5	28.8	33.0	916	314

Sources: World Bank World Development Indicators (GDP); SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. Figures rounded to one decimal for GDP and nearest billion for military spending.

Table 2 — Bilateral economic interdependence and technology controls, 2017–2024 (approximate)

Indicator	2017	2020	2022	2024 (est.)
US goods imports from China (USD bn)	505	435	536	427
US goods exports to China (USD bn)	130	124	154	148
Bilateral goods trade total (USD bn)	635	559	690	575
US goods trade deficit with China (USD bn)	375	311	382	279
Cumulative China-linked BIS Entity List designations	~100	~300	~600	~900+
Semiconductor export-control regime	minimal	partial (Huawei 2020)	Oct. 2022 rules	expanded 2023–24

Sources: US Census Bureau, Foreign Trade Division; BIS Entity List and October 7, 2022 interim final rule; subsequent BIS updates through 2024.

Table 3 — Structural chokepoints in US–China technology interdependence (approximate shares)

Chokepoint	Dominant actor	Approx. share	Source
Advanced logic fabrication (<7 nm)	Taiwan (TSMC)	~90%	Industry estimates
Electronic design automation (EDA) tools	US firms	~75–80%	SIA / industry
Rare-earth processing and refining	China	~90%	USGS / IEA
Lithium-ion battery cell production	China	~75%	BloombergNEF
US–China science co-publications (annual)	bilateral	~50,000+ (declining post-2019)	NSF / Scopus
Global fabless semiconductor design	US firms	~50%	SIA

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Describe the trajectory of the US–China power gap between 2000 and 2024 using both nominal and PPP GDP, and then compare it with the trajectory of military spending. Does the gap close faster in economic or in military terms, and what does that imply for Organski's claim that power transitions occur when the challenger's power approaches the dominant state's? Note specifically the 2015–2022 period, when Chinese nominal growth slowed while PPP estimates continued to rise.

2. **Level of analysis.** The October 2022 semiconductor export controls and the cumulative entity-list designations are state actions, but they operate through firm-level supply chains, individual researchers, and transnational production networks. At which level of analysis — individual, state, systemic, or transnational — is the technology war best explained, and why does the choice of level change the predicted outcome? Consider whether a systemic-level reading (bipolar competition) predicts decoupling, while a transnational-level reading (interdependence) predicts managed friction.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives reads Tables 1–3. The African perspective should foreground the costs of bipolar competition for development finance and the opportunities of multi-alignment; the Chinese perspective should read the data as evidence of legitimate catch-up and of US containment; the Russian perspective should read it as confirmation of multipolarity and of anti-hegemonic opportunity; the Western perspective should read it as evidence of strategic rivalry requiring managed competition; the UN perspective should read it as a test of Charter principles and of the risk of great-power conflict. Which perspective best explains the 2022–2024 decline in bilateral trade alongside rising entity-list designations?

4. **Interpretation.** Does the data support the "new cold war" framing, or does it support the "deep interdependence" framing? Use the trade totals, the deficit trajectory, and the chokepoint table to adjudicate. Specify what evidence would falsify each framing: for example, a sustained fall in bilateral trade below USD 300 bn with no substitution would support decoupling, while stable or rising trade alongside expanding controls would support managed interdependence.

5. **Limitation.** Identify three data limitations that could reverse or qualify your conclusions. At minimum, address (a) the gap between official and estimated Chinese military spending, (b) the difference

between nominal and PPP GDP for assessing international power, and (c) the absence of reliable data on technology-control evasion, smuggling, and third-country transshipment. Explain how each limitation biases the analysis toward either alarmism or complacency.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — The power-transition curve (Organski) with a Thucydides overlay.

What to draw. On a large sheet, draw two horizontal axes: the vertical axis labelled "Relative power (index, 1990 = 100)" and the horizontal axis labelled "Year, 1990–2040." Plot two smooth curves: a solid line for the United States that rises gently to a plateau around 2010 and then flattens or slightly declines; a dashed line for China that starts far below in 1990, crosses the US line somewhere between 2025 and 2035 (draw the crossing as a shaded band, not a single point, to signal uncertainty), and continues rising. Shade the band where the two curves are within 10–15 percent of each other in dark grey and label it "Danger zone / power-transition band." Add a vertical dashed line at the crossing labelled "Transition point (contested)."

Labels to place. Label the US curve "Dominant power (status quo)," the China curve "Challenger (rising power)," and annotate three historical markers along the x-axis: 2001 (WTO accession), 2018 (trade war begins), 2022 (semiconductor controls). Add a small box in the corner titled "Organski mechanism: challenger grows faster → power gap narrows → war risk peaks during transition, not after."

Perspective overlay to annotate. In the upper-left margin, write "Western reading (Allison): Thucydides Trap — 12 of 16 historical cases ended in war." In the lower-right margin, write "Chinese reading (Qin/Yan/Zhao): 'no Thucydides Trap' — relational order and moral legitimacy can manage transition." Draw a double-headed arrow between the two margin notes labelled "Same data, divergent causal attribution."

Visual 2 — The Taiwan security dilemma spiral.

What to draw. Draw two concentric circles. The inner circle is labelled "Taiwan Strait (contested space)." The outer circle is labelled "Regional security environment." Place two nodes on opposite sides of the inner circle: "PRC" on the left and "US/ROC" on the right. Draw curved arrows between them in a spiral pattern: PRC arrow → "military exercises / ADIZ incursions" → US/ROC arrow → "arms sales / freedom-of-navigation" → PRC arrow → "grey-zone coercion" → US/ROC arrow → "deterrence posture" → back to PRC. Each arrow should be thicker than the last to show escalation. In the centre of the inner circle, draw a small Taiwan silhouette labelled "Status quo ambiguity."

Labels to place. Along the spiral, label four rungs: (1) "Perception of threat," (2) "Defensive response," (3) "Counter-perception," (4) "Escalation." Add a box at the bottom: "Security dilemma (Herz/Jervis): defensive measures read as offensive → spiral." Add a second box: "Power-transition overlay: Taiwan as the 'most dangerous' flashpoint because it combines status inconsistency with alliance commitments."

Perspective overlay to annotate. Annotate the PRC-side arrows with "Chinese reading: anti-secession, sovereignty, US interference." Annotate the US/ROC-side arrows with "Western reading: deterrence, Taiwan Relations Act, 'strategic ambiguity.' " Annotate the spiral itself with "Russian reading: US hegemony provoking crisis; African reading: proxy cost of bipolar competition; UN reading: Charter Art. 2(4) and peaceful settlement."

Visual 3 — The technology interdependence web and chokepoints.

What to draw. Draw a network diagram with five nodes arranged in a pentagon: "US design (EDA, IP)," "Taiwan fab (TSMC)," "China assembly/test," "China rare-earth processing," and "Global markets." Connect them with thick lines labelled with flows: "design files," "wafers," "components," "raw materials," "finished goods." Place a red "X" or scissors icon on three edges to mark chokepoints: US EDA → China, China rare earths → US/Japan, Taiwan fab → global. Shade the nodes by actor: US nodes in blue, China nodes in red, Taiwan node in yellow, global node in grey.

Labels to place. Title the diagram "Managed interdependence, 2022–2024." Label each chokepoint with its control instrument: "BIS entity list / Oct. 2022 rules," "Export licensing / quota," "Strategic ambiguity + deterrence." Add a legend: solid line = flow, dashed line = restricted flow, X = active control.

Perspective overlay to annotate. Around the diagram, place five short margin notes: "African: chokepoints raise input costs for African manufacturing and green-transition minerals." "Chinese: US 'small yard, high fence' is containment in disguise." "Russian: sanctions architecture is a tool of hegemony." "Western: 'de-risking' not decoupling; controls are defensive." "UN: export controls must comply with WTO and Charter obligations; technology access is a development right." Draw a bracket grouping the last two notes labelled "Contested legal framing."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is power transition theory?	Organski (1958): power transitions occur when a rapidly growing challenger approaches the dominant state's power; war risk is highest during the transition, not after. Kugler extended with quantitative power indices. Scope: assumes a hierarchical international system with a single dominant power.
What is the Thucydides Trap?	Allison (2017): of 16 historical cases of a rising power challenging a ruling power, 12 ended in war. Mechanism: fear, honour, interest (Thucydides). Not deterministic — 4 cases avoided war.
What does offensive realism predict for US–China?	Mearsheimer (2001, 2014): great powers seek regional hegemony; the US will not tolerate a Chinese hegemon in Asia; bipolarity is unstable; conflict is structurally likely. Scope: assumes anarchy, offensive military advantage, uncertainty.
What is the Chinese relational/moral realist account?	Qin Yaqing (2018): relational theory — order built on relationships, not contracts. Yan Xuetong (2011): moral realism — legitimacy and humane authority (wangdao) shape power. Zhao Tingyang (2021): Tianxia — all-under-heaven as a universal political imagination. Together: transition can be managed through relational order; "no Thucydides Trap."

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the ‘new cold war’ framing?	Friedberg (2018) and others: US–China competition is structural, ideological, and long-term; engagement failed to liberalise China. Counter: interdependence (Keohane/Nye) makes full decoupling costly and unlikely.
What is the engagement vs containment debate?	Engagement (1990s–2010s): trade and institutions would socialise China. Containment (post-2017): strategic competition, decoupling in sensitive sectors. Middle position: “de-risking” / managed competition.
Why is Taiwan the flashpoint?	Combines status inconsistency (PRC claim vs de facto autonomy), alliance commitments (US Taiwan Relations Act), geographic proximity, and semiconductor chokepoint. Security dilemma + power transition overlap.
What do the data show on GDP?	China larger than US in PPP since ~2014–2016; US still larger in nominal terms. Gap narrowing but not closed in nominal; PPP gap widened in China’s favour.
What do the data show on military spending?	US spends ~3x China (SIPRI est.); China’s spending grew faster from a low base; official Chinese figures understate. Quality/technology gap persists.
What do the data show on trade?	Bilateral trade peaked ~2022 at ~USD 690 bn; declined to ~575 bn by 2024; deficit narrowed; controls expanded. Interdependence persists but is being managed/restricted.
What is the African perspective?	Costs of bipolar competition: aid conditionality, debt distress, proxy conflicts; opportunities: multi-alignment, non-aligned bargaining, mineral leverage, African Continental Free Trade Area. Grovogui, Mbembe, Aning.
What is the UN perspective?	Charter principles (sovereignty, non-use of force, peaceful settlement); Taiwan’s status as unresolved; risk of great-power conflict; need for dialogue mechanisms; development as a right.

Source log. Allison (2017); Mearsheimer (2001, 2014); Organski (1958); Kugler (power-transition extensions); Qin (2018); Yan (2011); Zhao (2021); Friedberg (2018); World Bank; SIPRI; US Census Bureau; BIS. Secondary: Herz (1950) and Jervis (1978) on the security dilemma; Keohane and Nye (1977, 2012) on interdependence; Grovogui (2006), Mbembe (2019), Aning (2020) on African vantage points.

Summary. US–China rivalry is best understood as a power transition in progress, but whether it produces war depends on mechanisms — security dilemma, alliance commitments, and technology chokepoints — that

are not captured by aggregate power indices alone. The data show a narrowing but unclosed gap, persistent and managed interdependence, and an expanding but incomplete control regime. The five perspectives disagree on whether the transition is manageable: Chinese relational theory and African multi-alignment see opportunity in multipolarity, while Western offensive realism and the Thucydides framing see structural danger, and the UN stresses Charter-based restraint.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Imagine two runners on a track. One has been ahead for decades and owns most of the equipment. The other is catching up fast, has more people, and is building its own equipment. The race is not just about speed; it is about who gets to set the rules of the track. The danger is highest not when the second runner is far behind, nor when it has clearly won, but in the middle, when the first runner fears losing and the second runner feels it deserves a say. That middle period is the power transition. Now add a narrow bridge on the track — Taiwan — that both runners claim. Even if neither wants to crash, the bridge makes a crash more likely because each runner's defensive move looks like an attack to the other. That is the security dilemma. The data show the second runner is still behind in money that counts internationally, but ahead in money that buys things at home, and the two runners still trade heavily even as they restrict each other's technology. So the race is real, the bridge is dangerous, but the runners are still tied together by the track itself.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. Three gaps remain in this explanation. First, it treats "power" as a single number, but military quality, alliance networks, and technological leadership are not captured by GDP. Second, it does not explain why the African perspective matters: the two runners' race reshapes finance, debt, and mineral markets for everyone else, and those effects are not visible in bilateral US–China data. Third, it assumes the security dilemma is symmetric, but the two sides have different political systems and different time horizons, which may make one side more risk-acceptant than the other.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading Organski (1958) confirms that the transition period, not the endpoint, carries the highest war risk, and that the challenger's satisfaction with the status quo matters as much as its power. Re-reading Allison (2017) confirms that the Thucydides Trap is a probability, not a destiny: four of sixteen cases avoided war, usually through accommodation or alliance restructuring. Re-reading Mearsheimer (2014) confirms that offensive realism predicts US resistance to Chinese regional hegemony but does not predict inevitable war; it predicts sustained competition. Re-reading Qin (2018) and Yan (2011) confirms that Chinese scholars argue relational legitimacy can lower transition risk, a claim that is theoretically coherent but empirically untested at this scale. Re-reading Friedberg (2018) confirms that the engagement-to-competition shift is dated to roughly 2017–2018 in US strategy documents. The Feynman analogy survives but must carry these qualifications.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. The runners-on-a-track analogy captures the transition dynamic and the bridge/flashpoint logic, but it fails in four ways. It implies two actors, whereas the system includes Taiwan, Japan, ASEAN, the EU, and African states as consequential agents. It implies a finish line, whereas power transitions are open-ended and reversible. It implies physical collision, whereas modern great-power conflict may be economic, cyber, or proxy rather than kinetic. And it cannot represent the interdependence that makes both runners' shoes in the other's factory. Use the analogy for the transition mechanism only; do not extend it to policy prescription.

Step 5 — Rewrite. US–China rivalry is a power transition in which a rising challenger approaches a dominant power's capabilities, raising war risk during the transition window; the risk is amplified by a security dilemma over Taiwan and by technology chokepoints, but is moderated by deep economic interdependence and by competing visions of international order. Whether the transition ends in conflict or managed competition depends on mechanisms — alliance credibility, domestic politics, and relational legitimacy — that aggregate power data alone cannot settle, and on perspectives that the bilateral frame systematically underweights, especially those of African, UN, and smaller-state actors.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L47	Definition	What is power transition theory?	Organski's theory holds that war is most likely when a rising challenger approaches parity with the dominant power, especially if it is dissatisfied with the status quo; Kugler later refined measurement and conditions. It is probabilistic and conditional, not a law of inevitability.	Western structural-realist framing; African analysts often stress that aggregate parity metrics can obscure developmental asymmetries.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L47	Mechanism	What is the Thucydides Trap?	Allison argues that structural stress arises when a rising power threatens to displace a ruling power; among sixteen historical cases, twelve ended in war. The mechanism is fear-driven escalation and preventive logic, not automatic destiny.	Chinese officials often reject inevitability; African scholars warn that great-power fear can be externalized as proxy costs.
L47	Mechanism	What does offensive realism predict for US-China relations?	Mearsheimer argues that anarchy and uncertainty push great powers to maximize relative power and seek regional hegemony; therefore the United States will resist Chinese hegemony in Asia. It predicts sustained balancing and competition, not necessarily immediate war.	Western lens; African critics often argue it overweights military power and underweights economic agency.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L47	Comparison	How does power transition theory differ from the security dilemma?	Power transition theory focuses on aggregate power shifts and the challenger's satisfaction with the order; the security dilemma focuses on how defensive measures by one state are perceived as threats by another. Both can operate simultaneously, and Taiwan illustrates both.	UN and African perspectives emphasize de-escalation and restraint rather than structural fatalism.
L47	Source	What is Qin Yaqing's relational theory?	Qin treats world politics as constituted by relations, processes, and identities rather than by atomistic units; it offers a non-Western ontology of international order. It does not deny power but reframes how order is produced and legitimated.	Chinese perspective; African scholars may find resonances with relational and community-based political thought.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L47	Source	What is Yan Xuetong's moral realism?	Yan argues that international leadership depends on moral capacity and humane authority, not only material power; legitimacy and political virtue shape durable order. It is a normative realist account rather than pure power politics.	Chinese perspective; Western skeptics often question how moral capacity can be measured or verified.
L47	Source	What is Zhao Tingyang's tianxia framework?	Zhao presents tianxia as a world-as-one-community framework that emphasizes inclusive order over a strictly Westphalian sovereignty model. It is philosophical and aspirational, not a description of current institutions.	Chinese perspective; African readers may compare it with pan-African unity ideals while noting risks of hierarchy.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L47	Application	Why is Taiwan a flashpoint in US-China rivalry?	Taiwan concentrates sovereignty ambiguity, military geography, semiconductor supply chains, and alliance commitments; it is a high-risk node where deterrence and reassurance must be balanced. Escalation remains contingent on signaling, domestic politics, and crisis management.	UN stresses Charter principles and peaceful settlement; African states often stress non-interference and stability.
L47	Mechanism	Does economic interdependence pacify US-China rivalry?	Trade and supply chains raise the costs of conflict but also create leverage, vulnerability, and weaponization; decoupling is partial, costly, and sector-specific. Interdependence is therefore not automatically pacifying.	African economies can face price shocks, supply disruptions, and technology-access constraints.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L47	Debate	What is the engagement-versus-containment debate?	One view holds that engagement failed to liberalize China and facilitated its rise; another holds that engagement reduced conflict and that containment risks a self-fulfilling rivalry. The evidence is mixed and time-dependent.	Western debate; many African states prefer non-exclusive partnerships that preserve strategic agency.
L47	Occlusion	Why is Thucydides Trap determinism misleading?	Treating the trap as destiny occludes agency, diplomacy, domestic politics, and institutional restraint; Allison himself frames it as a warning rather than fate. The better analytical question is which mechanisms escalate or de-escalate.	Chinese and African perspectives both stress agency and the costs of great-power fatalism.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L47	Adjudication	How should the 2018-2024 trade and technology war be explained?	Tariffs and export controls reflect strategic competition and security framing, but they also fragment supply chains and accelerate indigenous innovation. Neither pure containment nor pure engagement explains all measures.	African importers and technology users face access constraints and price effects.
L47	Visual	What does a power-transition curve show?	A graph of challenger versus dominant power capabilities over time highlights the parity zone as a period of elevated risk; satisfaction, alliances, and institutional ties modify that risk. It is an analytical heuristic, not a prediction.	Western quantitative framing; African scholars caution against metric bias and developmental blind spots.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L47	Reconstruction	What is African multi-alignment in this rivalry?	Many African states seek diversified partnerships to avoid forced alignment, leveraging rivalry for infrastructure, finance, and technology while managing debt and sovereignty risks. This is strategic agency rather than passivity.	African primary perspective; it reframes the rivalry as an arena of choice, not only bipolar pressure.
L47	Debate	Is “new cold war” an accurate frame?	The frame highlights ideological and systemic rivalry but can obscure differences from US-Soviet bipolarity, especially economic entanglement and Global South agency. It is a contested analogy rather than a settled description.	Russian and Chinese actors often reject it; African analysts warn of proxy pressures and alignment demands.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit

Competency	Score (0-100)	Evidence of Mastery	Gap to Close
Define power transition theory and its conditions	0-100	Can state Organski’s parity-and-dissatisfaction logic without determinism	Distinguish Kugler’s refinements from Organski’s original claim

Competency	Score (0-100)	Evidence of Mastery	Gap to Close
Explain offensive realism's causal mechanism	0-100	Can link anarchy, uncertainty, survival, and hegemonic ambition	Avoid conflating Mearsheimer's prediction with policy prescription
Reconstruct Qin, Yan, and Zhao on their own terms	0-100	Can separate relational, moral-realist, and tianxia arguments	Prevent reducing Chinese theories to Western realism
Analyze economic interdependence as mechanism	0-100	Can explain both pacifying and weaponizing effects	Specify sectoral differences such as semiconductors versus commodities
Evaluate engagement versus containment	0-100	Can identify strongest arguments on both sides	Add time-horizon and metric-specific evidence
Apply all five perspectives to US-China rivalry	0-100	Can reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN views	Ensure African perspective is primary, not an afterthought
Use levels of analysis correctly	0-100	Can separate individual, state, systemic, and transnational factors	Avoid collapsing domestic politics into systemic structure
Identify falsifiers for major claims	0-100	Can state what evidence would weaken a theory	Distinguish absence of war from falsification of risk mechanisms

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which theory in this lesson did I initially treat as more deterministic than its author intended, and what textual or logical cue should have corrected that?
2. When I reconstructed the African perspective, did I explain it from within African scholarly and political traditions, or did I merely append African examples to a Western theory?
3. Which of my claims about US-China rivalry would change if I shifted from nominal GDP to PPP GDP, or from aggregate military spending to specific capability domains?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"The Thucydides Trap means war between the US and China is inevitable."	Allison presents the trap as a structural warning and emphasizes agency, diplomacy, and choice; historical cases include non-war outcomes.	Allison (2017); the sixteen-case framework includes cases that did not end in war.
"Power transition theory says any rising power causes war."	The theory emphasizes parity plus dissatisfaction; a satisfied challenger or strong institutional binding can reduce risk.	Organski (1958); Kugler's refinements on conditions and measurement.
"Offensive realism is identical to Chinese strategic thinking."	Mearsheimer's theory is a Western structural theory; Chinese scholars such as Qin, Yan, and Zhao offer distinct ontological and normative frameworks.	Mearsheimer (2001, 2014); Qin (2018); Yan (2011); Zhao (2021).
"Economic interdependence automatically prevents conflict."	Interdependence can deter, but it can also create leverage, vulnerability, and escalation through sanctions and supply-chain weaponization.	Friedberg (2018); trade and technology-war evidence.
"Engagement clearly failed, so containment is the only rational policy."	Engagement had mixed effects across sectors and time horizons; containment carries risks of self-fulfilling rivalry and alliance strain.	Friedberg (2018); debate over engagement versus containment.
"African states are merely passive objects of US-China rivalry."	African actors exercise multi-alignment, bargaining, and institutional agency, while facing real costs from bipolar competition.	African perspective on multi-alignment and costs of bipolar competition.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Power transition; Thucydides Trap; parity; dissatisfaction	Rising challenger approaches dominant power; fear and preventive logic escalate	Organski (1958); Allison (2017)	Historical rising-ruling power cases; US-China capability trends	Inevitability versus agency	Sustained peaceful power shift; institutionalized burden-sharing	L5 realism; L14 transition
Offensive realism; hegemony; balancing	Anarchy and uncertainty drive relative-power maximization and resistance to regional hegemony	Mearsheimer (2001, 2014)	US balancing in Asia; China's regional military growth	Structural determinism versus diplomacy	Durable cooperation under anarchy; successful restraint	L5; L48 Indo-Pacific
Relational theory; moral realism; tianxia	Order produced through relations, legitimacy, and inclusive community rather than only coercion	Qin (2018); Yan (2011); Zhao (2021)	Chinese diplomatic discourse; "community of shared future"	Western universalism versus plural ontologies	Failure of relational or moral claims to shape behavior	L13 liberal order; L49 revisionism
Interdependence; decoupling; weaponization	Trade raises conflict costs but creates leverage and vulnerability; partial decoupling reshapes supply chains	Friedberg (2018)	Tariffs, export controls, semiconductor restrictions	Pacification versus weaponization	Full stable decoupling without escalation; restored trust	L18 interdependence; L52-56 techno-geopolitics

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Engagement; containment; deterrence; Taiwan risk	Policy oscillation between integration and restriction; ambiguity and signaling around sovereignty	Friedberg (2018); Allison (2017)	Taiwan Strait tensions; alliance commitments; tech controls	Engagement failure versus containment blowback	Verified liberalization; credible stable deterrence	L48; L49
African multi-alignment; bipolar costs; agency	Diversified partnerships reduce forced alignment; rivalry creates opportunities and shocks	African scholarly tradition	Infrastructure finance; debt; technology access; commodity shocks	Non-alignment versus strategic hedging	Sustained equitable partnerships; reduced proxy pressure	L14; L48; L52-56
UN Charter; peaceful settlement; great-power risk	Legal norms and crisis management constrain escalation but depend on power politics	UN perspective	Taiwan debates; Security Council paralysis risks	Law versus power	Effective collective security; de-escalation mechanisms	L13; L49

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Timing	Concrete Action
R1	Immediately after first study	Recite the five key ideas from memory, then check against the lesson; mark any idea you cannot state in two sentences.

Interval	Timing	Concrete Action
R2	24 hours	Redraw the power-transition curve and label the parity zone, satisfaction variable, and alliance modifier; explain one African and one Chinese perspective in your own words.
R3	72 hours	Write a 200-word adjudication of whether the 2018-2024 trade and technology war is better explained by containment or by structural rivalry; include one falsifier.
R4	1 week	Complete the Taiwan problem pair again without notes, then compare with the model answer; correct any level-of-analysis error.
R5	2 weeks	Teach the lesson's central puzzle aloud for five minutes, covering all five perspectives and ending with one adjudicated claim; log remaining gaps in the error-log.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can state power transition theory and its scope conditions without calling it inevitable.
- ☐ I can distinguish Organski's original claim from Allison's Thucydides Trap framing.
- ☐ I can explain Mearsheimer's offensive realism and its strongest counterargument.
- ☐ I can reconstruct Qin, Yan, and Zhao as distinct Chinese theoretical traditions.
- ☐ I can explain why interdependence can both deter and escalate conflict.
- ☐ I can present the engagement-versus-containment debate with evidence on both sides.
- ☐ I can analyze Taiwan through power transition and security-dilemma frameworks.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary, not as an add-on.
- ☐ I can steel-man Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
- ☐ I can use individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels of analysis correctly.
- ☐ I can identify at least one falsifier for each major claim in the lesson.
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in a memo.
- ☐ I can interpret GDP, military spending, trade, and export-control data without overclaiming.
- ☐ I can explain what each of the five perspectives occludes.
- ☐ I can produce an adjudicated claim rather than a mere summary.
- ☐ I have logged at least two misconceptions in the error-log.
- ☐ I can connect this lesson to L48, L49, and L52-56.
- ☐ I can explain why "new cold war" is a contested analogy.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Power transition and structural realism - Organski (1958) - Allison (2017) - Mearsheimer (2001) - Mearsheimer (2014)

Chinese international relations theory - Qin (2018) - Yan (2011) - Zhao (2021)

Interdependence, authoritarian challenge, and engagement - Friedberg (2018)

End of Lesson 47. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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49. Indo-Pacific Maritime Strategy and Alliance Architecture

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 48: Indo-Pacific Maritime Strategy and Alliance Architecture
Module	Module 8: Indo-Pacific, Systemic Rivalry, and Transnational Forces
Prerequisites	L25 (maritime strategy); L47 (US-China rivalry)
Interleaved links	Forward to L49 (institutional revisionism); L52 (semiconductors); L57 (space)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, maps, flashcards, worked example, problem pair
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is whether the maritime order of the Indo-Pacific is being reconstituted through a contest over geography itself, or whether the apparent contest is better understood as a redistribution of power within an order whose basic rules remain intact. The term "Indo-Pacific" has displaced "Asia-Pacific" in strategic discourse over the past decade, and that displacement is not merely lexical. It reorients the spatial frame of great-power competition from a Pacific-centered theater to a wider maritime system linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with consequences for which states count as central, which alliances matter, and which legal regimes are treated as authoritative. The lesson asks you to hold that construct open as an object of analysis rather than adopting it as a neutral descriptor, and to trace how its adoption interacts with China's anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) architecture, the reconfiguration of US alliance structures, the flashpoints of the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea, and the hedging strategies of middle powers.

This lesson sits at the intersection of two prior lessons and three future ones. It builds directly on L25, which established the classical and modern vocabulary of maritime strategy—sea control versus sea denial, the role

of chokepoints, the strategic significance of fleet composition—and on L47, which framed US-China rivalry as a structural condition rather than a bilateral quarrel. What L47 treated at the level of systemic polarity and economic interdependence, this lesson treats at the level of maritime materiality: hulls in the water, missile ranges, island chains, and the legal geography of exclusive economic zones. It also prepares the ground for L49 on institutional revisionism, because the maritime order is one of the principal sites where China's challenge to existing institutions is most concrete; for L52 on semiconductors, because the sea lanes of the Indo-Pacific carry the inputs and outputs of the digital economy; and for L57 on space, because maritime awareness increasingly depends on satellite constellations and because the same strategic logic of denial is migrating upward. You should read this lesson as a bridge between abstract systemic rivalry and the physical infrastructure of global order.

The lesson is organized around five key ideas that move from the abstract to the concrete and back again. The first idea treats the "Indo-Pacific" as a strategic construct, asking what work the term does and whose interests it serves. The second examines A2/AD and sea denial, focusing on China's layered defensive architecture and the first island chain as a geographic fact that both enables and constrains. The third analyzes alliance architecture—the hub-and-spokes system, the Quad, and AUKUS—as a set of institutional responses to the perceived erosion of US primacy. The fourth turns to the two flashpoints where abstraction meets crisis: the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. The fifth examines middle powers and hedging, with ASEAN centrality, India's strategic autonomy, and Japan's military normalization as three distinct modalities of navigating between Washington and Beijing. Each idea is developed through a causal claim, a mechanism, scope conditions, observable implications, and a brief perspective note across five traditions.

The African perspective is treated as primary throughout, not as a regional illustration of Western theory. The Indian Ocean is a lived strategic space for African littoral states, and the Indo-Pacific construct, by centering US-China rivalry, risks rendering African agency invisible. African scholarship—from Nkrumah's and Nyerere's non-alignment traditions to contemporary work on maritime security, port geopolitics, and strategic autonomy—offers a vantage that the other four perspectives systematically underweight. African states confront piracy, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, trafficking, and the militarization of chokepoints such as Bab el-Mandeb and the Mozambique Channel, while also navigating the port investments and naval presences of external powers. The African view reveals that the Indo-Pacific is not only a theater of great-power competition but also a space of extractive economies, fragile governance, and strategic choice, and that the language of "centrality" and "architecture" can obscure whose security is actually being secured. This vantage also illuminates why middle-power hedging resonates with longer African traditions of non-alignment and strategic autonomy, and why the importation of Indo-Pacific frameworks into African maritime policy is contested.

Methodologically, the lesson trains you to operate across levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—and to reconstruct five perspectives on any maritime claim before adjudicating among them. You will work through a worked example on the 2016 South China Sea arbitration ruling, a problem pair on AUKUS and the submarine question, and an independent memo task. The hinge question tests whether you can distinguish a description of naval balances from an explanation of alliance formation, a prediction of crisis, and a prescription for policy. The data lab supplies naval vessel counts, shipbuilding rates, freedom-of-navigation operation tallies, and trade flows through the South China Sea, and asks you to interpret them with explicit attention to what they can and cannot establish.

By the end of this lesson you should be able to do four things. First, you should be able to evaluate competing claims about the origins and consequences of the Indo-Pacific construct, specifying the mechanism through

which a geographic label becomes a strategic project. Second, you should be able to explain how A2/AD architectures alter the calculus of intervention and deterrence, with attention to scope conditions and to the difference between capability and intent. Third, you should be able to reconstruct the five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on any maritime development in the region, identifying what each contributes and what it occludes. Fourth, you should be able to produce a falsifiable assessment of a maritime flashpoint that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and that names the evidence that would change your conclusion. These capacities are the core of the lesson's assessment architecture and are tested in the worked example, the problem pair, the independent memo, and the hinge question.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. From L25 (maritime strategy): What is the analytical distinction between sea control and sea denial, and which historical case is most commonly invoked to illustrate the transition from one to the other?
2. From L25: How did Alfred Thayer Mahan's theory of sea power link fleet concentration, coaling stations, and national greatness, and what is the principal critique of Mahan's determinism?
3. From L25: What strategic function do maritime chokepoints perform, and why does their significance increase as naval reach extends?
4. From L47 (US-China rivalry): What are the three mechanisms through which US-China rivalry is characterized as structural rather than merely bilateral?
5. From L47: How does the security dilemma operate in the Taiwan Strait, and what makes it particularly acute in that theater?
6. From L47: Distinguish the engagement and containment strands in US China policy since the end of the Cold War, and identify one piece of evidence for each.

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Is the "Indo-Pacific" a neutral geographic descriptor that merely reflects economic integration, or is it a strategic construct that redistributes attention, resources, and legitimacy among states?
2. Does China's A2/AD architecture make armed conflict in the region more likely by lowering the cost of coercion, or less likely by raising the cost of intervention?
3. Are the deepening US alliances in the Indo-Pacific—AUKUS, the Quad, the hub-and-spokes system—stabilizing deterrents that preserve the status quo, or escalatory commitments that accelerate the security dilemma?
4. How should a middle power such as India or Indonesia balance between Washington and Beijing without surrendering strategic autonomy, and what does "ASEAN centrality" actually deliver?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Indo-Pacific**: A strategic-geographic construct linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans into a single theater of competition; contested as a neutral descriptor because it reorients attention away from "Asia-Pacific" and elevates certain states and alliances.
- **A2/AD (anti-access/area denial)**: A layered defensive strategy using missiles, submarines, mines, and sensors to prevent an adversary from entering or operating within a maritime theater; distinct from sea control in that it aims to deny rather than to command.

- **First island chain**: The arc of islands from Japan through Taiwan and the Philippines to Borneo that forms the geographic boundary of China's near-seas A2/AD envelope and the forward line of US and allied defense planning.
- **Hub-and-spokes**: The US alliance system in Asia in which Washington (the hub) maintains bilateral treaties with individual allies (the spokes), contrasting with the multilateral NATO model.
- **Quad**: The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue among the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, revived in 2017, focused on maritime security, infrastructure, and technology coordination.
- **AUKUS**: The 2021 trilateral security pact among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, centered on nuclear-powered submarine cooperation and advanced defense technology sharing.
- **UNCLOS**: The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the foundational treaty governing maritime zones, navigation rights, and dispute settlement.
- **Freedom of navigation (FONOP)**: Operational assertions by naval vessels challenging excessive maritime claims; in the Indo-Pacific most associated with US challenges to Chinese claims in the South China Sea.
- **Hedging**: A strategy in which a state maintains security ties with one great power while preserving economic and diplomatic flexibility with another, avoiding exclusive alignment.
- **Strategic autonomy**: A state's capacity to make independent foreign and security policy choices without subordination to a great power; central to Indian and French strategic discourse.
- **ASEAN centrality**: The principle that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations should remain the primary institutional convener and agenda-setter in regional security architecture.
- **Nine-dash line**: China's cartographic claim to most of the South China Sea, rejected in the 2016 arbitration ruling but maintained in practice.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives By the end of this lesson, students will be able to: (1) **Define** the "Indo-Pacific" as a contested strategic construct rather than a self-evident geographic region, distinguishing it from "Asia-Pacific" and from the legal maritime zones established by UNCLOS; (2) **Explain** the mechanism by which a naming and spatial-framing shift reorganizes alliance politics, naval planning, and economic statecraft across the Indian and Pacific Oceans; (3) **Analyze** how the construct's meaning changes across African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN vantage points, including what each perspective reveals and what it occludes; (4) **Evaluate** the scope conditions under which the Indo-Pacific framing stabilizes into durable institutions rather than remaining rhetorical; and (5) **Apply** the construct to a concrete case—such as the 2016 South China Sea arbitration or AUKUS—by tracing its effects across individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels of analysis. These objectives are assessable through short-answer definitions, mechanism-tracing essays, perspective-reconstruction exercises, and scenario-based policy memos.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The 'Indo-Pacific' as a strategic construct: geography, geopolitics, and contestation Bolded Causal Claim: The "Indo-Pacific" is not a neutral geographic label; it is a strategic construct that fuses the Indian and Pacific Oceans into one competitive arena, thereby privileging maritime connectivity, alliance coordination, and China-centered balancing over the older, more economically and ASEAN-centered "Asia-Pacific" imaginary.

Mechanism: The mechanism is discursive-spatial before it is material. By naming two oceans as one theater,

policymakers create a cognitive map in which chokepoints such as the Malacca Strait, the Bab el-Mandeb, the Mozambique Channel, and the first island chain become parts of a single strategic system. That map then licenses institutional integration: the renaming of U.S. Pacific Command as Indo-Pacific Command in 2018, the elevation of the Quad, the articulation of "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategies, and the alignment of naval, infrastructure, and technology policies across states that previously treated the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean as separate planning spaces. The construct also performs boundary work. It moves attention away from continental Eurasia and from ASEAN's institutional centrality toward maritime corridors, island chains, and sea-lane security. In this sense, the term does not merely describe geography; it reorganizes who counts as a regional actor, which threats appear urgent, and which alliances appear natural. Friedberg (2018) frames the underlying dynamic as the return of great-power competition in Asia, while Kaplan (2010) supplies an older geographic intuition: the Indian Ocean is not a peripheral sea but a connective space linking the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The Indo-Pacific construct operationalizes that intuition for contemporary rivalry.

Scope Conditions: The construct gains traction only where three conditions coincide: first, China's naval and commercial expansion makes maritime space politically salient; second, at least one major power—especially the United States, Japan, Australia, or India—has an interest in linking Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean planning; and third, regional states accept enough of the framing to participate in its institutions without fully surrendering their own geographic or diplomatic priorities. Where these conditions are absent, the term remains rhetorical. It is weaker in continental Central Asia, in landlocked African states, and in regions where ASEAN or the African Union insists on older spatial vocabularies. It is also contested when states fear that "Indo-Pacific" is a euphemism for containment, alliance encirclement, or the dilution of non-aligned and developing-country agendas.

Observable Implications: If the construct is politically consequential, one should observe renaming and reorganization of military commands; new or upgraded maritime exercises linking the Indian Ocean and Pacific; policy documents that replace or subordinate "Asia-Pacific" language; infrastructure initiatives framed as alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative; and diplomatic forums that include both Indian Ocean and Pacific actors. One should also observe resistance: Chinese officials rejecting the term as a "Cold War mentality" construct; ASEAN leaders insisting on "ASEAN centrality"; African and Indian Ocean states seeking to avoid subordination to either U.S. or Chinese maritime agendas; and UN or legal actors treating "Indo-Pacific" as a political, not juridical, category. Data on naval vessel counts, shipbuilding rates, freedom-of-navigation operations, and trade through the South China Sea—such as those tracked by the CSIS China Power Project—provide material indicators of the military and economic stakes attached to the construct, even though no dataset can by itself prove that the label caused the competition.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, the Indo-Pacific construct is neither simply a useful geographic correction nor merely a Western containment slogan; it is a reminder that the Indian Ocean has long been an African maritime space whose security, trade, and development are too often narrated from the outside. African scholarship and political thought—from Nkrumah's pan-Africanism and Nyerere's non-alignment to contemporary work on maritime security, extraversion, and strategic autonomy—treat the ocean not as an empty corridor between great powers but as a lived space of ports, fisheries, energy routes, and coastal communities. The African Union's maritime strategy and the blue-economy agenda reflect an attempt to move from being an object of external naval competition to a subject of regional ocean governance. The construct can help African states by drawing attention to Indian Ocean security, piracy, illegal fishing, and

chokepoint vulnerability, but it can also occlude African agency by subsuming African littorals into U.S.-China-India-Japan rivalry. States such as South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Mauritius face a double bind: they need external partners for maritime domain awareness and capacity, yet they risk becoming platforms for powers whose priorities are not identical to African development. The African perspective therefore asks whether "Indo-Pacific" can be appropriated for African strategic autonomy—through regional institutions, AU coordination, and Indian Ocean rim cooperation—or whether it will reproduce the older pattern in which Africa's coastline is treated as a theater for others' fleets.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats the Indo-Pacific as a politically loaded construct that rebrands containment in geographic language. From Beijing's standpoint, the older "Asia-Pacific" framework better captured a region whose economic center of gravity included China, and the newer term signals an attempt to build a U.S.-led coalition around China's periphery. Chinese officials and scholars emphasize sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the legitimacy of China's maritime claims and development; they also defend anti-access and area-denial capabilities as defensive responses to perceived encirclement. The construct is thus read not as neutral description but as strategic mobilization.

Russian: The Russian perspective interprets the Indo-Pacific as part of a broader U.S. effort to extend alliance and military infrastructure into new regions, analogous to NATO expansion in Europe. Moscow's critique stresses multipolarity, great-power equality, and resistance to U.S. primacy; it tends to view U.S.-led Indo-Pacific initiatives as destabilizing and as attempts to constrain both China and Russia. Russia's own Pacific and Indian Ocean interests, including its partnership with China, are framed as balancing against unilateral U.S. dominance.

Western: The Western perspective presents the Indo-Pacific as a necessary strategic correction to China's rise and as a framework for defending freedom of navigation, open sea lanes, and a rules-based maritime order. It emphasizes alliance architecture—hub-and-spokes relationships, the Quad, AUKUS—and treats maritime connectivity as a shared public good. Its strength is institutional and operational clarity; its risk is that it can conflate U.S. strategic preferences with universal rules, understating how regional states experience those preferences as pressure.

UN: The UN perspective is legal and institutional rather than geopolitical. UNCLOS provides the operative vocabulary—territorial sea, exclusive economic zone, continental shelf, high seas, and dispute settlement—but it does not recognize "Indo-Pacific" as a legal region. From this vantage point, the construct is a political overlay on a legal maritime order whose authority depends on consent, treaty obligations, and adjudication. The 2016 South China Sea arbitration illustrates both the possibilities and limits of that framework: legal rulings can clarify rights, but enforcement depends on state power and political will.

SECTION 2.3 — KEY IDEA 2: A2/AD and Sea Denial — China's Anti-Access Strategy and the First Island Chain

Bolded Causal Claim: China's anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) architecture converts the first island chain from a passive geographic feature into an active, layered military frontier, raising the cost and risk of US power projection across the Western Pacific to the point where regional deterrence rests on escalation rather than on assured conventional superiority.

Mechanism: The mechanism is cumulative cost imposition through overlapping kill chains. At its foundation sits a dense sensor and reconnaissance network—over-the-horizon radar, space-based ISR, maritime

patrol aircraft, and unmanned systems—that compresses the time between detection and engagement. Upon that foundation, China has layered long-range precision-strike systems, most prominently the DF-21D and DF-26 anti-ship ballistic missiles, whose maneuverable reentry vehicles are designed to target large surface combatants, including aircraft carriers, at ranges that extend well beyond the first island chain. These are complemented by land-attack cruise missiles, integrated air-defense systems such as the HQ-9 and imported S-400 batteries, a growing submarine force of both conventional (Song, Yuan, Type 039) and nuclear (Jin-class SSBN, Shang-class SSN) boats, extensive mine-warfare capabilities, and a maritime militia and coast guard that operate in the gray zone below the threshold of armed conflict. The first island chain—running from the Japanese archipelago through the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the northern Philippines, and down toward Borneo—functions as both the outer defensive perimeter of China's coastal heartland and the inner boundary of its denial zone. The strategic logic, articulated in Chinese military writings and analyzed by Western scholars such as Holmes and Yoshihara (2017), is not to defeat the US Navy in a symmetric engagement but to make intervention so costly, so uncertain, and so escalatory that Washington's political leadership concludes that the risks of forward deployment exceed the benefits. This is the classic A2/AD logic: deny access to the theater (anti-access) and, if access is achieved, degrade operations within it (area denial). The mechanism operates through risk calculus rather than through attrition: each additional layer—missiles, submarines, mines, cyber disruption of C4ISR—adds variance to US operational planning, forcing dispersal, hardening, and longer-range basing that themselves reduce US combat power. Friedberg (2018) emphasizes that this is not merely a military-technical problem but a strategic one: A2/AD erodes the credibility of US extended deterrence by making the defense of allies appear contingent on escalation to nuclear or long-range strike options that Washington may be unwilling to employ.

Scope Conditions: A2/AD is not universally effective; its power depends on several conditions. First, geographic proximity: the density and responsiveness of China's kill chains are highest within and immediately beyond the first island chain and degrade with distance across the Pacific. Second, intelligence and targeting: the system assumes persistent, accurate, and survivable ISR; if US counter-space, cyber, or electronic-warfare operations degrade China's sensor network, the missile threat becomes less precise. Third, escalation dynamics: A2/AD works best when the defender can credibly threaten escalation—conventional or nuclear—without triggering a full-scale war; if the US demonstrates a willingness to absorb initial losses and strike mainland targets, the cost-imposition logic weakens. Fourth, US force posture: distributed, hardened, and submarine-based US forces are less vulnerable than concentrated carrier strike groups; the US shift toward "distributed maritime operations" and "expeditionary advanced base operations" is a direct response. Fifth, alliance cohesion: if Japan, the Philippines, and Australia permit US access to their territory and waters, China's denial zone is perforated; if they hedge or deny access, A2/AD is strengthened. Sixth, industrial and technological competition: the balance depends on relative rates of shipbuilding, missile defense, and hypersonic development, which are themselves endogenous to the rivalry.

Observable Implications: The observable implications are substantial and multidirectional. On the Chinese side: sustained double-digit growth in defense spending for much of the 2000s and 2010s; the rapid expansion of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), which by the early 2020s had surpassed the US Navy in hull count; the construction of artificial islands in the Spratly and Paracel chains equipped with runways, radar, and missile batteries; the deployment of the DF-21D and DF-26; and the expansion of the maritime militia and coast guard as gray-zone instruments. On the US side: the 2018 National Defense Strategy's emphasis on great-power competition; the creation of the Marine Littoral Regiment; investments in longer-range anti-ship missiles (LRASM, SM-6); the "distributed lethality" concept; increased freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) in the South China Sea; and the AUKUS agreement's provision of nuclear-

powered submarines to Australia. Regionally: Japan's 2022 National Security Strategy and its commitment to raise defense spending to 2 percent of GDP; the Philippines' Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) expansion; and the proliferation of anti-ship missile acquisitions across the region. The CSIS China Power Project has documented the PLAN's shipbuilding trajectory and the growth of China's missile arsenal, providing empirical grounding for the claim that A2/AD is not merely doctrinal but material.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, A2/AD is not an abstract military-technical problem but a restructuring of the Indian Ocean maritime order that directly affects African littoral states' security and economic interests. The African perspective, drawing on scholarship that treats sovereignty and security as historically contested and externally shaped—Grovogui's analysis of sovereignty as a Eurocentric construct, Mbembe's work on the postcolony, and the tradition of African maritime strategy articulated in the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS)—reads A2/AD as a reminder that great-power competition reorganizes oceanic space in ways that marginalize African agency. The Indian Ocean is not merely a transit corridor for Asian commerce; it is the maritime frontier of East and Southern Africa, and the intensification of US-China naval competition there—evident in Djibouti's hosting of multiple foreign military bases, in the expansion of Chinese naval presence, and in the militarization of the western Indian Ocean—raises the prospect that African states will again be positioned as objects rather than subjects of maritime security. African scholars such as Aning and Danso have emphasized that maritime security in Africa is inseparable from the blue economy, from illegal fishing, and from the governance of exclusive economic zones; great-power A2/AD competition does not address these concerns and may divert attention and resources from them. The African perspective thus insists on strategic autonomy: African states must develop their own maritime domain awareness, their own naval capacity, and their own regional security architectures—such as the Yaoundé Code of Conduct and the Djibouti Code of Conduct—rather than becoming appendages of either US or Chinese maritime strategy. What this perspective reveals that others miss is that A2/AD is not only about deterring the United States; it is about who controls the Indian Ocean's chokepoints and sea lanes, and African states have a stake in ensuring that control is not monopolized by any external power.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats A2/AD not as an offensive strategy but as a defensive necessity rooted in historical vulnerability. The "century of humiliation" narrative, the memory of Western and Japanese naval coercion, and the geographic reality of a coastline exposed to maritime powers all inform a doctrine that seeks to prevent the recurrence of foreign intervention. From this vantage point, the first island chain is not a Chinese creation but a Western-imposed strategic geography; A2/AD is the means by which China reclaims strategic depth and protects its sovereignty, its territorial claims, and its economic lifelines. The critique of "Indo-Pacific" as a construct extends here: the framing of Chinese A2/AD as aggressive is, from Beijing's perspective, a projection of US anxiety about the erosion of unchallenged maritime dominance. Chinese strategists associated with the PLA's Academy of Military Science emphasize that China's maritime strategy is defensive in nature, aimed at protecting legitimate interests rather than at excluding others from international waters.

Russian: The Russian perspective views A2/AD through the lens of great-power competition and the critique of US unipolarity. Moscow sees Chinese A2/AD as a legitimate response to US military encirclement and as a contribution to the emergence of a multipolar order in which no single power can project force with impunity. Russian analysts have drawn parallels between Chinese A2/AD in the Western Pacific and Russian A2/AD capabilities in the Baltic, Black Sea, and Eastern Mediterranean—Kaliningrad-based missile systems, S-400

deployments, and submarine activity—treating both as defensive measures against NATO expansion. The Russian perspective occludes the concerns of regional states, particularly in Southeast Asia, that experience Chinese A2/AD as coercive, and it tends to conflate anti-hegemonic rhetoric with support for any state that challenges US power, regardless of its own regional behavior.

Western: The Western perspective, articulated by scholars such as Friedberg (2018) and Holmes and Yoshihara (2017), treats A2/AD as the central military challenge to US primacy in the Indo-Pacific. It emphasizes the erosion of US conventional deterrence, the vulnerability of carrier strike groups, and the need for technological and doctrinal adaptation. The Western perspective is strongest on mechanism and on the operational implications for US force planning; it is weakest in acknowledging that A2/AD is, from the Chinese perspective, a response to decades of US maritime dominance and that the "problem" of A2/AD is partly a problem of US expectations rather than of Chinese aggression alone. It also tends to understate the degree to which US allies in the region have their own agency and their own calculations about risk.

UN: The UN perspective approaches A2/AD through the lens of international law, particularly UNCLOS and the law of armed conflict. UNCLOS does not prohibit the development of defensive military capabilities, but it does establish rules regarding the use of force, the rights of navigation, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. From this vantage point, the concern is not A2/AD per se but the potential for miscalculation and escalation in contested waters, and the erosion of the legal framework that governs maritime conduct. The UN perspective emphasizes that military competition must be constrained by international law and that the development of A2/AD capabilities increases the risk of incidents at sea that could escalate beyond the control of the parties involved. It does not, however, provide a mechanism for enforcing restraint or for resolving the underlying territorial disputes that drive the competition.

SECTION 2.4 — KEY IDEA 3: Alliance Architecture — The Hub-and-Spokes System, the Quad, AUKUS

Bolded Causal Claim: The Indo-Pacific alliance architecture is transitioning from a Cold War hub-and-spokes bilateral system toward networked minilateralism (Quad, AUKUS), a shift that enhances deterrence through capability pooling and burden sharing but also fragments regional order, generates exclusionary dynamics, and risks converting defensive alliances into self-fulfilling security dilemmas.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through institutional layering and capability aggregation. The hub-and-spokes system, established in the early Cold War, positioned the United States as the central hub connected to bilateral alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand. This structure provided extended deterrence, forward basing, and interoperability, but it also created dependency, limited allied autonomy, and left gaps in regional coverage—particularly in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. The post-Cold War period saw a gradual thickening of this architecture through trilateral dialogues, defense cooperation agreements, and joint exercises, but the system remained fundamentally bilateral and US-centered. The Quad—comprising the United States, Japan, India, and Australia—represents a qualitative shift: a minilateral grouping that aggregates the capabilities of four major Indo-Pacific democracies without the formal treaty obligations of an alliance. Its mechanism is functional rather than institutional: working groups on vaccines, critical technologies, climate, and maritime domain awareness create habits of cooperation that lower the barriers to security coordination. The Quad's revival in 2017 and its elevation to leader-level summits from 2021 reflect a shared perception of Chinese assertiveness, but its members retain divergent interests—India's commitment to strategic autonomy, Japan's constitutional constraints, Aus-

tralia's economic dependence on China—that limit its coherence as a military alliance. AUKUS, announced in September 2021, goes further: it is a technology and capability-sharing pact that provides Australia with nuclear-powered submarines, and it encompasses cooperation on hypersonics, cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and undersea capabilities. Its mechanism is industrial and technological integration: by pooling resources and sharing sensitive capabilities, the three members aim to accelerate the development of advanced military technologies and to create a more capable and interoperable force. The combined effect of these layers is a shift from bilateral dependency to networked deterrence, in which the US is no longer the sole provider of security but one node in a web of overlapping partnerships. However, this networked architecture also generates new dynamics: exclusion of non-members (France, ASEAN states, South Korea), the risk of entanglement in conflicts not of a member's choosing, and the potential for arms racing as other states respond to the perceived threat of a more capable US-led coalition.

Scope Conditions: The effectiveness of this evolving architecture depends on several conditions. First, threat perception convergence: the Quad and AUKUS function only when members share a sufficiently similar assessment of the Chinese challenge; if threat perceptions diverge—as they did when India hesitated to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, or when Australia's economic interests in China create friction—the network weakens. Second, capability complementarity: AUKUS works because the US and UK possess nuclear submarine technology that Australia lacks; if technology sharing is restricted or if industrial capacity is insufficient, the pact's military value diminishes. Third, domestic politics: alliance commitments require sustained political support; changes in government in member states can alter priorities, as seen in the initial Australian enthusiasm for AUKUS under the Morrison government and the subsequent Labor government's continued but more cautious support. Fourth, regional acceptance: if ASEAN states perceive the new architecture as undermining their centrality or as provocative, they may resist or hedge, reducing the architecture's legitimacy and effectiveness. Fifth, US credibility: the entire system rests on the assumption that the United States will remain committed to the region; any signal of retrenchment—such as the Afghanistan withdrawal or debates over Taiwan—can weaken allied confidence. Sixth, the nuclear dimension: AUKUS involves the transfer of nuclear propulsion technology, which raises nonproliferation concerns and sets precedents that other states may seek to emulate.

Observable Implications: The observable implications are visible across the region. The hub-and-spokes system persists: the US-Japan alliance remains the cornerstone, with Japan's 2022 National Security Strategy committing to acquire counterstrike capabilities and raise defense spending; the US-Philippines alliance has been revitalized through EDCA expansion; and the US-Australia alliance has deepened through AUKUS. The Quad has institutionalized: four leader-level summits since 2021, working groups on critical and emerging technologies, maritime domain awareness, and supply chain resilience; the Malabar naval exercises have expanded to include all four members. AUKUS has generated concrete programs: the optimal pathway for Australia's nuclear-powered submarine acquisition, announced in March 2023, involving Virginia-class purchases and AUKUS-class construction; and the Pillar II advanced capabilities agenda. The diplomatic fallout is also observable: France's recall of its ambassadors to the US and Australia in September 2021; Indonesia and Malaysia's expressions of concern about nuclear proliferation and regional stability; and the broader debate about whether AUKUS undermines the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Regionally, South Korea has debated acquiring nuclear submarines; Japan has discussed hosting US nuclear weapons; and ASEAN has reiterated its centrality while struggling to maintain relevance in a region increasingly defined by great-power minilateralism. Think tanks such as CSIS have tracked these developments, documenting the shift from bilateral to networked security architecture.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on Indo-Pacific alliance architecture is shaped by the recognition that alliance systems in one region reshape security dynamics in others, and that African states have both interests and agency in how those systems evolve. Drawing on the tradition of non-alignment and strategic autonomy articulated by Nkrumah, Nyerere, and the Bandung Conference, and on contemporary African scholarship on security governance—Aning's work on African security architectures, Danso's analysis of African agency in international relations, and Grovogui's critique of the international order's Eurocentric foundations—the African perspective reads the Indo-Pacific alliance network as a potential source of both opportunity and risk. Opportunity: a multipolar alliance structure may create space for African states to diversify their security partnerships, to attract investment in maritime infrastructure, and to leverage their strategic position along Indian Ocean sea lanes. Risk: the intensification of great-power competition may lead to the militarization of the western Indian Ocean, the instrumentalization of African states as bases or partners in a conflict not of their making, and the diversion of resources from African-led security initiatives such as the African Standby Force and the African Union's maritime strategy. The African perspective is particularly attentive to the question of nuclear proliferation: AUKUS's transfer of nuclear propulsion technology to Australia sets a precedent that could be invoked by other states, including those in Africa, and that could complicate the nonproliferation regime on which African security depends. African states have historically been strong supporters of the NPT and of nuclear-weapon-free zones; the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (Pelindaba Treaty) is a concrete expression of this commitment. From this vantage point, the erosion of nonproliferation norms through AUKUS is not a distant concern but a direct threat to African security interests. What the African perspective reveals that others miss is that alliance architecture is not merely a regional arrangement but a global ordering mechanism whose effects ripple across the Indian Ocean and into Africa, and that African states must engage with it proactively rather than reactively.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats the Indo-Pacific alliance architecture as a US-led containment strategy designed to encircle China and to preserve American hegemony. From Beijing's vantage point, the Quad is an "Asian NATO" in embryo, AUKUS is a provocative transfer of nuclear technology that undermines the nonproliferation regime, and the hub-and-spokes system is a Cold War relic being repurposed for great-power competition. Chinese officials and scholars have argued that these arrangements are exclusionary, destabilizing, and contrary to the interests of regional states that seek cooperative rather than confrontational security. The critique of "Indo-Pacific" as a construct extends to the alliance architecture: the very term is seen as an attempt to stitch together disparate states into an anti-China coalition. This perspective occludes the genuine security concerns of China's neighbors and the degree to which Chinese assertiveness has driven the demand for stronger alliances; it also understates the agency of regional states in choosing to align with the United States.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames Indo-Pacific alliance expansion as part of a broader US strategy of global military encirclement that includes NATO expansion in Europe. Moscow views the Quad and AUKUS as instruments of US hegemony that threaten not only China but the principle of multipolarity itself. Russian analysts have drawn explicit parallels between NATO's eastward expansion and US alliance-building in the Indo-Pacific, arguing that both are destabilizing and that both provoke counterbalancing by the targeted state. Russia's own strategic partnerships with China—described as a "no-limits" partnership—position Moscow as a supporter of Beijing's resistance to US alliance architecture. The Russian perspective is strongest in its critique of the double standards of US alliance rhetoric—promoting a "rules-based order" while exempting allies from those rules—and in its attention to the global dimensions of regional alliance politics. It is weakest in its failure to acknowledge Russian actions in Ukraine and elsewhere that have themselves driven alliance consolidation, and in its tendency to treat all US alliances as equivalent regardless of their regional context.

Western: The Western perspective, articulated by scholars such as Friedberg (2018) and reflected in US strategic documents, treats the Indo-Pacific alliance architecture as a necessary and legitimate response to China's rise and assertiveness. It emphasizes the value of alliances in deterring aggression, sharing burdens, and maintaining a favorable balance of power. The Western perspective is strongest on the institutional and operational details of alliance management and on the strategic logic of deterrence; it is weakest in acknowledging the costs of alliance expansion—regional polarization, arms racing, and the potential for entanglement—and in recognizing that not all regional states share the US assessment of the Chinese threat. It also tends to understate the degree to which alliance architecture can become an end in itself, generating bureaucratic momentum that outpaces strategic coherence.

UN: The UN perspective approaches alliance architecture through the lens of international law and collective security. The UN Charter recognizes the right of states to individual and collective self-defense, and regional arrangements are permitted under Chapter VIII, but they must be consistent with the purposes and principles of the UN. From this vantage point, the concern is whether Indo-Pacific alliances contribute to or detract from international peace and security. The UN perspective emphasizes the importance of transparency, confidence-building, and the peaceful resolution of disputes; it is skeptical of arrangements that may be perceived as provocative or that may accelerate arms racing. The UN framework does not, however, provide a mechanism for regulating alliance formation or for ensuring that alliances serve collective rather than particular interests. The 2016 South China Sea arbitration and the broader UNCLOS framework remain the primary legal reference points, but their enforcement depends on state consent and political will.

SECTION 2.5 — KEY IDEA 4: The Taiwan Strait and South China Sea flashpoints

Bolded Causal Claim: The Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea are the two most probable loci of great-power military conflict in the Indo-Pacific because each combines an unresolved sovereignty dispute with dense commercial and military traffic and with alliance commitments that convert localized incidents into systemic crises.

Mechanism: The escalation mechanism operates through three nested channels. First, at the local level, both flashpoints feature contested sovereignty over features and waters that are simultaneously claimed by multiple states, creating a standing incentive for coercive signaling—ramming, water-cannoning, boarding, and the construction of artificial islands—short of war. Second, at the operational level, the presence of high-value military assets (carrier strike groups, submarines, missile batteries) in proximity to contested features compresses decision time and raises the probability of accidental or escalatory contact; Holmes and Yoshihara (2017) emphasize that China's A2/AD architecture is designed precisely to exploit this compression by making US intervention costly within the first island chain. Third, at the systemic level, alliance commitments—US obligations to Japan under the 1960 treaty, the Taiwan Relations Act's ambiguous security commitments, and the Philippines' Mutual Defense Treaty—create a commitment trap in which a local incident involving a US ally or partner can trigger alliance consultation and, potentially, intervention, thereby transforming a bilateral dispute into a US-China confrontation. The Taiwan Strait adds a distinctive economic mechanism: Taiwan's dominance in advanced semiconductor manufacturing means that any disruption to the strait carries immediate global supply-chain consequences, giving both sides incentives to act preemptively to secure or deny that capacity. The South China Sea adds a legal mechanism: the 2016 arbitration ruling under UNCLOS rejected China's nine-dash line claims, yet China's continued assertion of jurisdiction over the features and waters it controls means that the legal and the operational orders diverge,

producing a persistent gap between de jure and de facto authority that invites testing by all parties.

Scope Conditions: The flashpoint mechanism is most dangerous when three conditions coincide: (1) a change in the status quo that one side interprets as crossing a red line (a Taiwanese declaration of independence, a US naval transit paired with diplomatic upgrading, or a Philippine attempt to resupply a grounded vessel); (2) compressed decision time due to proximity and asset density; and (3) alliance commitments that are perceived as credible enough to deter but not so credible as to be automatically invoked, creating ambiguity that invites probing. The mechanism is less dangerous when diplomatic channels are open, when economic interdependence is high enough to raise the cost of escalation, and when both sides share an interest in avoiding uncontrolled escalation—conditions that have historically held but that erode as military capabilities mature and political trust declines. The mechanism does not imply that war is inevitable; it implies that the probability of inadvertent escalation is structurally elevated relative to other regions.

Observable Implications: If this causal claim holds, one should observe: (a) an increasing frequency of close encounters between military and coast-guard vessels in both flashpoints, documented by the CSIS China Power Project and by US Indo-Pacific Command incident reports; (b) a pattern of gray-zone coercion—actions below the threshold of armed conflict that nonetheless shift the factual baseline—such as the construction and militarization of artificial islands in the South China Sea and the normalization of PLA air and naval activity around Taiwan; (c) alliance signaling in response to incidents, including US freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs), Japanese and Australian statements, and Philippine resupply missions to Second Thomas Shoal; and (d) economic hedging by third parties, including the diversification of semiconductor supply chains away from Taiwan and the rerouting of shipping insurance and logistics. The 2016 arbitration ruling provides a natural experiment: despite the ruling's rejection of China's claims, China continued to control the features it occupied, and the ruling did not prevent subsequent militarization, suggesting that legal outcomes alone do not reshape operational realities without enforcement.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, which is primary, approaches the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea flashpoints through the lens of maritime security in the Indian Ocean and the strategic autonomy implications of great-power competition. African scholars and policymakers, drawing on the intellectual tradition of Nkrumah's non-alignment and Nyerere's ujamaa-informed diplomacy, view these flashpoints not as distant crises but as determinants of the maritime security environment in which African states operate. The Indian Ocean is the connective tissue between the Indo-Pacific flashpoints and African littoral states; disruptions in the South China Sea or Taiwan Strait propagate through shipping lanes, insurance markets, and energy prices to affect African economies. African states have a direct interest in the freedom of navigation and in the peaceful resolution of disputes, but they also resist the framing of these flashpoints as justifications for military blocs that could draw African states into great-power competition. The African vantage point reveals that the flashpoints are not merely regional disputes but nodes in a global maritime system whose stability affects all littoral states, and that the legal frameworks governing them—particularly UNCLOS—matter to African states because they provide the only multilateral basis for protecting maritime rights. The African perspective also cautions against the militarization of maritime disputes, noting that African states have historically suffered from the externalization of great-power competition into their waters.

The Chinese perspective treats both flashpoints as core sovereignty issues: Taiwan as an inalienable part of Chinese territory and the South China Sea features as historical Chinese possessions. From this vantage point, the flashpoints are not sources of instability but sites of legitimate Chinese assertion against foreign interference; the 2016 arbitration ruling is rejected as illegitimate because China did not consent to the

tribunal's jurisdiction. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that US military presence and alliance activities are the destabilizing factors, not Chinese actions.

The Russian perspective frames the flashpoints as evidence of US hegemonic overreach and alliance expansion; Moscow views US FONOPs and alliance commitments as provocative and as part of a broader strategy to contain both China and Russia. Russia's own experience with NATO expansion informs its reading of Indo-Pacific alliance architecture as similarly destabilizing.

The Western perspective, particularly the US view, treats the flashpoints as tests of the rules-based order: freedom of navigation, peaceful dispute resolution, and the security of allies. The Western framework emphasizes deterrence and alliance credibility as the mechanisms for preventing escalation, while acknowledging the risk of inadvertent conflict.

The UN perspective centers on UNCLOS and the 2016 arbitration ruling as the legal framework for resolving disputes; it emphasizes that the Convention provides mechanisms for peaceful settlement and that all parties should respect international law. The UN framework does not, however, provide enforcement mechanisms, leaving a gap between legal norms and operational realities that the flashpoints continually expose.

SECTION 2.6 — KEY IDEA 5: Middle powers and hedging — ASEAN centrality, India's strategic autonomy, and Japan's military normalization

Bolded Causal Claim: Middle powers in the Indo-Pacific manage great-power rivalry through hedging strategies that preserve strategic autonomy by maintaining simultaneous economic engagement with China and security alignment with the United States, with ASEAN centrality, India's strategic autonomy, and Japan's military normalization representing three distinct variants of this logic.

Mechanism: Hedging, as theorized in the international relations literature on small and middle powers, is a risk-management strategy that combines engagement and containment elements without fully committing to either. The mechanism operates through three channels. First, economic channel: middle powers maintain deep trade and investment ties with China because the economic cost of decoupling exceeds the security benefit, while simultaneously seeking US security guarantees to hedge against Chinese coercion. Second, institutional channel: middle powers invest in regional institutions—ASEAN, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum—that provide platforms for dialogue and for asserting collective agency, thereby reducing the binary choice between great powers. Third, military channel: middle powers modernize their armed forces and, in Japan's case, reinterpret constitutional constraints to enable collective self-defense and power projection, thereby increasing their own deterrent capability without fully aligning with US war plans. ASEAN centrality is the institutional expression of hedging: by insisting that regional initiatives be ASEAN-led and ASEAN-hosted, Southeast Asian states preserve a degree of agenda-setting power and prevent the region from being divided into exclusive blocs. India's strategic autonomy, rooted in the Non-Aligned Movement and refined through decades of balancing, manifests as multi-alignment: participation in the Quad alongside deep economic ties with China and Russia, and a refusal to join US-led sanctions or military coalitions that are not directly in India's interest. Japan's military normalization, accelerated under the Abe and Kishida governments, represents a shift from passive reliance on the US alliance toward active contribution to regional deterrence, including the acquisition of counterstrike capabilities and the relaxation of arms export restrictions. Each variant reflects a different assessment of the threat environment, domestic political constraints, and the value of US security guarantees.

Scope Conditions: Hedging is sustainable when three conditions hold: (1) the great powers are not yet in

open conflict, so that economic engagement with China does not trigger US sanctions or alliance rupture; (2) the middle power has sufficient economic and military capacity to make its alignment valuable to both sides, creating leverage; and (3) domestic politics permit a flexible foreign policy without excessive partisan polarization. Hedging becomes unsustainable when great-power competition hardens into blocs, when economic interdependence is weaponized (as in the case of Chinese economic coercion against Australia and South Korea), or when domestic politics demands clearer alignment. The mechanism also assumes that middle powers can accurately assess the intentions and capabilities of both great powers; misperception can lead to over- or under-hedging, with corresponding risks.

Observable Implications: If this causal claim holds, one should observe: (a) ASEAN's continued insistence on centrality in regional forums and its resistance to exclusive security arrangements, evidenced by the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (2019) and the rejection of AUKUS as an ASEAN-led initiative; (b) India's participation in the Quad alongside its refusal to join US sanctions against Russia and its continued purchase of Russian energy and weapons; (c) Japan's defense budget increases, the acquisition of Tomahawk missiles, and the reinterpretation of Article 9 to permit collective self-defense; (d) the proliferation of minilateral arrangements (Quad, AUKUS, the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative) that coexist with, rather than replace, broader multilateral frameworks; and (e) economic data showing continued high trade volumes between middle powers and China despite security tensions. The 2016 South China Sea arbitration ruling and its aftermath provide a test: ASEAN's muted response and the Philippines' subsequent pivot under Duterte illustrate how hedging can override legal victories when economic and security calculations shift.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective, which is primary, views middle-power hedging in the Indo-Pacific as both a model and a caution for African states navigating great-power competition. African scholarship, drawing on Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism and on Mamdani's work on the politics of naming, recognizes that hedging is a strategy available primarily to states with sufficient economic and military weight; most African states lack the capacity to hedge effectively and are instead subject to the pressures of great-power competition without the leverage to shape its terms. The African vantage point reveals that ASEAN centrality is not merely a Southeast Asian phenomenon but a template for how regional organizations can assert collective agency, and that African regional organizations—the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities—could learn from ASEAN's institutional strategies while adapting them to African contexts. India's strategic autonomy is of particular interest to African states because India's non-aligned tradition resonates with African diplomatic history, and because India's growing engagement with Africa through the India-Africa Forum Summit creates opportunities for partnership that do not require exclusive alignment. Japan's military normalization is viewed with more ambivalence: while Japan's economic engagement with Africa is welcomed, its military expansion raises questions about the militarization of the Indo-Pacific and its potential to draw African states into security commitments. The African perspective thus sees hedging as a rational strategy for capable middle powers but emphasizes that the international system's structure constrains the choices available to weaker states, and that the rhetoric of strategic autonomy can obscure the reality of asymmetric dependence.

The Chinese perspective views middle-power hedging as evidence that US alliance architecture is not universally accepted and that many states prefer engagement with China; it interprets ASEAN centrality as a rejection of US-led blocs and India's strategic autonomy as a refusal to join an anti-China coalition. China's own diplomacy emphasizes economic interdependence as the foundation of regional order and criticizes US efforts to militarize the region.

The Russian perspective sees hedging as a rational response to US hegemony and views middle-power auton-

omy as a check on unipolar dominance; Moscow's own partnerships with India and its outreach to ASEAN reflect an effort to cultivate relationships outside the US alliance system. Russia's critique of US alliance expansion extends to the Indo-Pacific, where it sees AUKUS and the Quad as destabilizing.

The Western perspective, particularly the US view, interprets hedging with ambivalence: it welcomes middle-power contributions to regional security (Japan's normalization, India's Quad participation) while worrying that hedging may dilute deterrence and provide China with economic leverage. The Western framework tends to frame the choice as binary—alignment or accommodation—and struggles to accommodate the strategic logic of non-alignment.

The UN perspective emphasizes that middle-power hedging should be conducted within the framework of international law and that regional institutions should contribute to peace and security; it views ASEAN centrality as consistent with the UN Charter's emphasis on regional arrangements under Chapter VIII, provided they do not undermine collective security. The UN framework does not, however, provide guidance on how states should balance competing great-power pressures, leaving a normative gap that hedging fills pragmatically.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on Indo-Pacific maritime strategy and alliance architecture does not begin with the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait. It begins with the Indian Ocean as an African space — a body of water whose western littoral is African, whose northern reaches wash the shores of the Horn and the Red Sea, and whose southern rim is shaped by the Cape of Good Hope and the Mozambique Channel. From this vantage, the "Indo-Pacific" is not a discovered geography but a constructed strategic imaginary, one that renders African littoral states visible only as peripheral objects of great-power competition while centering the maritime concerns of the United States, China, Japan, and India. The African perspective therefore insists on a prior question: whose ocean is the Indo-Pacific, and whose security does its architecture serve?

This question is not merely rhetorical. It is grounded in a long tradition of African political thought that treats sovereignty, development, and non-alignment as inseparable. Kwame Nkrumah's critique of neocolonialism — the argument that formal independence without economic sovereignty reproduces subordination — applies with particular force to maritime domains, where African states often lack the naval capacity to patrol their own exclusive economic zones, monitor illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, or interdict trafficking in arms, narcotics, and persons. Julius Nyerere's articulation of ujamaa and non-alignment was not isolationism but a principled refusal to be conscripted into bloc politics; it informs contemporary African strategic autonomy, which seeks to engage all powers without becoming a theater of their competition. Amílcar Cabral's insistence on "return to the source" — the recovery of indigenous analytical categories — underwrites the demand that African maritime security be theorized from African conditions rather than imported from Western sea-power doctrine.

The theoretical lineage here is distinct. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* established that African underdevelopment was not a natural condition but a historical product of extraction; applied to the maritime domain, this means that the contemporary weakness of African naval capacity is not an accident of geography but a legacy of colonial economies oriented toward extraction rather than coastal defense. Mahmood Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state — the colonial creation of separate legal and political regimes for "citizens" and "subjects" — illuminates why postcolonial maritime governance in Africa

often remains fragmented, with coastal communities governed by customary tenure systems that are poorly integrated with statutory maritime law. Jean-François Bayart's concept of "extraversion" — the strategic use of external resources and relationships by African elites — explains how African states navigate great-power competition not as passive victims but as agents seeking rents, security guarantees, and development finance, even as this navigation risks reproducing dependency.

The African perspective thus reconstructs maritime security as a development and livelihood issue before it is a great-power competition issue. The African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS 2050), adopted in 2014, and the Lomé Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (2016) frame the maritime domain in terms of the "blue economy" — sustainable exploitation of marine resources, coastal livelihoods, and regional integration. Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and off the Horn of Africa is understood not merely as a threat to international shipping but as a symptom of coastal underdevelopment, weak governance, and the collapse of artisanal fishing economies. Kwesi Aning's work on maritime security in West Africa emphasizes that effective responses require addressing root causes — poverty, unemployment, and state fragility — rather than purely naval interdiction. This is a contribution the other four perspectives largely occlude: they treat maritime security as a function of naval balance and alliance architecture, whereas the African perspective treats it as a function of coastal development and state capacity.

The African vantage point also reveals what the "Indo-Pacific" construct occludes about geography itself. The construct, popularized in strategic discourse by Shinzo Abe's 2007 address to the Indian Parliament and subsequently adopted by the United States, Australia, Japan, and India, draws a maritime arc from the western Pacific through the Indian Ocean to the eastern coast of Africa. Yet in practice, the strategic attention and alliance architecture it generates — the Quad, AUKUS, the hub-and-spokes system — concentrate on the western Pacific and the South China Sea. African littoral states of the Indian Ocean (Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Djibouti, Somalia) appear in this framing primarily as sites of great-power basing competition — the Chinese naval facility in Djibouti, the US base at Camp Lemonnier, the French presence in Réunion and Mayotte — rather than as sovereign actors with their own maritime strategies. The African perspective insists that the Indian Ocean is not merely a transit corridor for Indo-Pacific strategy but a space of African sovereignty, development, and security.

Strategic autonomy, in the African rendering, is not hedging in the sense that Western analysts often use the term — a tactical balancing between great powers. It is a principled commitment to non-alignment rooted in the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the Non-Aligned Movement, updated for a multipolar era. African states participate in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), engage with China's Belt and Road Initiative and its Maritime Silk Road, maintain security partnerships with the United States and France, and seek to avoid being drawn into US-China competition. This is not incoherence but a rational response to structural position: African states are too weak to balance great powers militarily, too dependent on trade and investment to afford alienation of any major partner, and too committed to sovereignty to accept subordination to any bloc. The African perspective thus contributes the insight that what Western analysts call "hedging" may be better understood as "strategic autonomy" — a normative commitment, not merely a tactical calculation.

The African perspective also draws on epistemic decolonization. Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui's work on sovereignty and international relations argues that the international order is not a neutral framework but a historically constructed hierarchy that privileges Western states; applied to maritime law, this means that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), while providing a legal framework, embeds assumptions about state capacity, technological capability, and maritime enforcement that favor developed states. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's critique of colonial epistemology — the argument that Western categories of

knowledge are not universal but culturally specific — extends to strategic studies, where concepts like "sea power," "deterrence," and "freedom of navigation" are treated as natural rather than as products of particular historical experiences. Sylvia Tamale's decolonial feminism adds that maritime security discourse is gendered: the securitization of maritime spaces affects women in coastal communities disproportionately, through the disruption of fishing livelihoods, the militarization of coastal zones, and the gendered dimensions of trafficking.

Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics — the power to determine who may live and who must die — illuminates the darker dimensions of Indo-Pacific maritime strategy from an African vantage. The militarization of the Indian Ocean, the proliferation of naval bases, and the securitization of maritime routes create zones of exception where African migrants, fishers, and coastal communities bear the costs of great-power competition. The Mediterranean and the Red Sea have become sites of mass death for African migrants; the Indian Ocean's militarization risks extending this logic. The African perspective thus asks not only who controls the sea but whose lives are expendable in the process.

What does the African perspective contribute that the other four cannot? First, it reveals the Indo-Pacific as a strategic construct with geographic exclusions, not a neutral description of a region. Second, it reframes maritime security as a development and livelihood issue, not merely a naval balance issue. Third, it offers strategic autonomy as a principled normative commitment with deep historical roots, not merely tactical hedging. Fourth, it exposes the colonial continuities in maritime governance and the epistemic assumptions embedded in strategic concepts. Fifth, it centers the human costs of maritime militarization on coastal communities and migrants.

What does it occlude? The African perspective may understate the genuine security dilemma dynamics that drive US-China competition; its emphasis on development and sovereignty may not fully address the coercive dimensions of Chinese maritime expansion in the South China Sea or the Taiwan Strait. It may romanticize non-alignment, understating the ways in which African states are already entangled in great-power competition through debt, basing agreements, and arms purchases. Its prescriptions — enhanced African naval capacity, regional maritime governance, blue economy development — are often aspirational given resource constraints. And its critique of the Indo-Pacific construct, while valid, may not offer a constructive alternative framework for addressing the very real security challenges in the western Pacific. The African perspective is strongest as a corrective and a complement, not as a standalone grand strategy.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on Indo-Pacific maritime strategy is organized around three core commitments: sovereignty and territorial integrity, the legitimacy of China's maritime claims, and the critique of the "Indo-Pacific" as a US-led containment construct. Steel-manned from within, this perspective is not merely reactive; it is grounded in a coherent strategic worldview that draws on China's historical experience, its reading of international law, and its assessment of the regional balance of power.

On sovereignty, China's position is that the South China Sea islands and their adjacent waters have been Chinese territory "since ancient times" — a claim articulated in official documents and maps, including the nine-dash line. The 2016 arbitration ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in *Philippines v. China* rejected this claim, ruling that China's historic rights claims were incompatible with UNCLOS and that the nine-dash line had no legal basis. China rejected the ruling as "null and void," arguing that the tribunal

lacked jurisdiction and that the ruling was a product of US manipulation. From the Chinese perspective, the ruling is not a neutral legal determination but a political act by a tribunal that China did not consent to and that reflects Western legal hegemony. This is not simply defiance; it is a principled (if contested) position on the limits of compulsory dispute settlement and the sovereignty of states over their territorial claims.

On A2/AD (anti-access/area denial), China's strategy is framed as defensive. The first island chain — running from Japan through Taiwan and the Philippines to Borneo — is seen as a geographic barrier that the United States and its allies use to contain China. China's development of anti-ship ballistic missiles (the DF-21D and DF-26), submarines, and integrated air defense systems is understood as a response to US naval dominance and the threat of intervention in a Taiwan contingency. Holmes and Yoshihara (2017) analyze this as China's pursuit of "sea denial" — the ability to prevent US forces from operating freely in the western Pacific — rather than "sea control." From the Chinese perspective, this is not expansionism but deterrence: the United States maintains a network of bases and alliances on China's periphery, and China is merely developing the capabilities to defend its coastline and prevent coercion.

The critique of the "Indo-Pacific" as a construct is central. Chinese analysts and officials argue that the term is a geopolitical project designed to contain China by linking the Pacific and Indian Oceans into a single strategic theater dominated by US alliances. The "free and open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) concept, advanced by the United States and Japan, is seen as code for US hegemony and alliance expansion. China prefers the term "Asia-Pacific," which it argues is more inclusive and less confrontational. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Maritime Silk Road are presented as alternatives to the Indo-Pacific framework — economic connectivity rather than military containment. The Chinese perspective thus contributes the insight that geographic concepts are not neutral but politically constructed, and that the Indo-Pacific framing serves particular strategic interests.

On alliance architecture, China views the hub-and-spokes system, the Quad, and AUKUS as instruments of containment. The Quad — comprising the United States, Japan, India, and Australia — is seen as an "Asian NATO" in embryo, despite its members' denials. AUKUS, with its provision of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, is viewed as a destabilizing escalation that undermines the nuclear non-proliferation regime and intensifies the arms race. China's perspective is that these alliances are not defensive but offensive, designed to maintain US primacy and constrain China's rise.

What does the Chinese perspective occlude? It tends to treat China's maritime claims as historically self-evident, understating the contested nature of sovereignty over the South China Sea and the legitimate security concerns of neighboring states. It frames A2/AD as purely defensive, obscuring its coercive implications for Taiwan and other claimants. It dismisses the Indo-Pacific as a US construct while advancing its own strategic concepts (BRI, community of shared future) that are equally politically motivated. And it underestimates the extent to which China's own actions — island-building, coast guard harassment, maritime militia operations — have driven regional states toward closer alignment with the United States.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on Indo-Pacific maritime strategy is shaped by Russia's broader critique of US-led unipolarity and its strategic partnership with China. Steel-manned from within, this perspective treats the Indo-Pacific as an extension of US containment strategy, analogous to NATO expansion in Europe, and views the alliance architecture as a threat to multipolarity and regional stability.

Russia's core argument is that the United States is constructing a global network of alliances and partnerships designed to maintain hegemony, and that the Indo-Pacific is the latest theater of this effort. The Quad, AUKUS, and the strengthening of the hub-and-spokes system are seen as instruments of containment not only of China but of Russia's own strategic interests. Russia's 2023 Foreign Policy Concept explicitly identifies the "Indo-Pacific" as a US construct and emphasizes Russia's commitment to a "Greater Eurasian Partnership" as an alternative. From the Russian perspective, the US is attempting to create an "Asian NATO" that would extend the logic of military blocs into a region that has historically resisted them.

On A2/AD and sea denial, Russia is ambivalent. It does not share China's specific maritime claims, but it supports China's right to develop defensive capabilities in response to US pressure. Russia's own military modernization — including its Pacific Fleet, based at Vladivostok, and its development of hypersonic weapons — is framed as a response to US and NATO encirclement. The Russian perspective thus aligns with China's critique of US maritime dominance while maintaining its own strategic interests in the Pacific, including its dispute with Japan over the Kuril Islands and its naval presence in the Sea of Japan and the Sea of Okhotsk.

On middle powers and hedging, Russia views ASEAN centrality with some sympathy, seeing it as a counterweight to US-led alliance structures. However, Russia is skeptical of ASEAN's ability to resist US pressure, particularly given the growing US-Philippines and US-Vietnam security relationships. Russia's own engagement with ASEAN — through the ASEAN-Russia Dialogue Partnership and the East Asia Summit — is framed as supporting multipolarity and a "polycentric" world order. India's strategic autonomy is viewed favorably, as India's refusal to fully align with the United States creates space for Russia-India cooperation, including in defense and energy.

On the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea, Russia officially supports China's position on Taiwan (the "one China" principle) and is critical of US arms sales to Taiwan and freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs). Russia views US FONOPs in the South China Sea as provocative and as violations of coastal state sovereignty. However, Russia's own interests in the region are limited; it is primarily concerned with the precedent that US alliance expansion sets for its own security environment.

What does the Russian perspective occlude? It tends to reduce all US strategic initiatives to containment, understating the genuine security concerns that drive US and allied policy — including China's island-building, coercion of neighbors, and military modernization. It aligns with China's position on maritime disputes without fully engaging with the legal arguments or the interests of smaller states. It overstates the coherence of a "multipolar" alternative, given Russia's own limited economic and military capacity in the Indo-Pacific. And it underestimates the extent to which its own actions — the invasion of Ukraine, nuclear saber-rattling — have accelerated the very alliance consolidation it criticizes.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective — encompassing the United States and its allies (Japan, Australia, the United Kingdom, France, and others) — is organized around the defense of a rules-based maritime order, freedom of navigation, and alliance architecture as instruments of deterrence and stability. Steel-manned from within, this perspective treats the Indo-Pacific as a region of vital strategic interest whose maritime order is threatened by China's coercive behavior and revisionist claims.

On the "Indo-Pacific" as a construct, the Western perspective treats it as a recognition of strategic reality, not

a geopolitical project. The term reflects the growing economic and strategic integration of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the rise of China as a maritime power, and the need for a coordinated response. The US "free and open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy, articulated in the 2017 National Security Strategy and elaborated in subsequent documents, emphasizes freedom of navigation, open markets, and respect for sovereignty. From this perspective, the Indo-Pacific is not containment but a positive vision for regional order.

On A2/AD and sea denial, the Western perspective — particularly as articulated by Friedberg (2018) and Holmes and Yoshihara (2017) — treats China's anti-access strategy as a direct challenge to US military access and regional stability. The first island chain is not a containment barrier but a geographic reality that China seeks to penetrate and dominate. China's island-building in the South China Sea, its development of anti-ship missiles, and its harassment of neighboring states' vessels are seen as coercive actions that undermine the rules-based order. The Western response includes FONOPs, enhanced forward presence, and the development of new capabilities (long-range precision strike, undersea warfare, distributed maritime operations) to maintain access and deterrence.

On alliance architecture, the Western perspective treats the hub-and-spokes system, the Quad, and AUKUS as essential instruments of deterrence and burden-sharing. The hub-and-spokes system — bilateral alliances between the United States and Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand — is seen as a proven framework for regional security. The Quad is viewed as a flexible, non-binding mechanism for coordinating on maritime security, infrastructure, and technology. AUKUS is understood as a deepening of the US-UK-Australia partnership, providing Australia with nuclear-powered submarines that enhance its ability to contribute to regional deterrence. The Western perspective acknowledges the costs — alliance management challenges, the risk of escalation, the strain on non-proliferation norms — but argues that these are outweighed by the need to maintain a favorable balance of power.

On the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea flashpoints, the Western perspective treats Taiwan as a critical node in the first island chain and a democratic partner whose security is tied to regional stability. The South China Sea is seen as a test case for the rules-based order: China's rejection of the 2016 arbitration ruling and its continued coercion of claimant states are viewed as undermining UNCLOS and international law. FONOPs are defended as necessary to uphold the principle that the seas are global commons, not subject to unilateral claims.

On middle powers and hedging, the Western perspective is ambivalent. It welcomes Japan's military normalization and India's growing strategic engagement, but is concerned about hedging by ASEAN states and others. The Western framework tends to frame the choice as binary — alignment or accommodation — and struggles to accommodate the strategic logic of non-alignment. It views ASEAN centrality as useful for regional diplomacy but insufficient for security, and it worries that hedging may dilute deterrence and provide China with economic leverage.

What does the Western perspective occlude? It tends to universalize its own strategic concepts — "freedom of navigation," "rules-based order," "deterrence" — treating them as neutral rather than as products of particular historical experiences and interests. It may understate the extent to which US actions — FONOPs, alliance expansion, arms sales — contribute to security dilemmas and regional tensions. It often frames middle-power hedging as a problem to be solved rather than a rational response to structural position. And it may not fully reckon with the human and environmental costs of maritime militarization in the region.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on Indo-Pacific maritime strategy is anchored in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the UN Charter's provisions on the peaceful settlement of disputes, and the broader framework of international law. Steel-manned from within, this perspective treats the maritime order as a legal construct, not a strategic one, and insists that disputes be resolved through legal mechanisms rather than coercion or alliance politics.

UNCLOS is the foundational document. Adopted in 1982 and in force since 1994, it establishes the legal framework for maritime zones — territorial seas, exclusive economic zones, continental shelves, and the high seas — and provides mechanisms for dispute settlement, including compulsory arbitration under Part XV. The 2016 arbitration ruling in *Philippines v. China* is the most significant application of this framework in the Indo-Pacific. The Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled that China's nine-dash line had no legal basis, that China's island-building violated the Philippines' sovereign rights, and that China's harassment of Philippine vessels was unlawful. From the UN perspective, this ruling is a landmark in the development of international maritime law and a validation of the UNCLOS dispute settlement system.

However, the UN perspective also acknowledges the limits of this framework. UNCLOS does not resolve sovereignty disputes over land territory; it provides a framework for maritime entitlements but cannot determine who owns the islands. China's rejection of the ruling highlights the enforcement gap: international law depends on state consent and compliance, and there is no supranational enforcement mechanism. The UN perspective thus recognizes that law alone cannot resolve geopolitical conflicts, but insists that it provides a normative baseline and a framework for peaceful settlement.

On A2/AD and sea denial, the UN perspective is cautious. It does not take a position on the legitimacy of military capabilities per se, but it emphasizes that the use of force or the threat of force in maritime disputes is prohibited by the UN Charter (Article 2(4)) and by UNCLOS. FONOPs are viewed as lawful exercises of navigational rights, but the UN perspective also notes that they can be provocative and that the line between lawful navigation and coercive demonstration is not always clear.

On alliance architecture, the UN perspective is ambivalent. The UN Charter recognizes the right of collective self-defense (Article 51) and the role of regional arrangements (Chapter VIII), but it also emphasizes that regional arrangements should not undermine collective security or the authority of the Security Council. The Quad, AUKUS, and the hub-and-spokes system are viewed as legitimate security arrangements, but the UN perspective warns that they can exacerbate security dilemmas and that they should be conducted transparently and in accordance with international law. The UN framework does not provide guidance on how states should balance competing great-power pressures, leaving a normative gap that hedging fills pragmatically.

On middle powers and hedging, the UN perspective emphasizes that middle-power hedging should be conducted within the framework of international law and that regional institutions should contribute to peace and security. It views ASEAN centrality as consistent with the UN Charter's emphasis on regional arrangements under Chapter VIII, provided they do not undermine collective security. The UN perspective supports the peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and legal mechanisms, and it views the 2016 arbitration ruling as a model for how maritime disputes can be addressed, even if compliance cannot be compelled.

On the Taiwan Strait, the UN perspective is constrained by the fact that Taiwan is not a UN member state and that the UN does not take a position on Taiwan's status. The UN framework emphasizes the peaceful resolution of cross-strait differences and the avoidance of the use of force. On the South China Sea, the UN perspective supports the application of UNCLOS and the peaceful settlement of disputes, and it has

welcomed the 2016 ruling as a contribution to the rule of law.

What does the UN perspective occlude? It tends to treat international law as a neutral framework, understating the ways in which law is shaped by power and the interests of dominant states. It may be overly optimistic about the capacity of legal mechanisms to resolve deeply political conflicts. It does not address the security dilemma dynamics that drive alliance formation and military modernization. And it may not fully reckon with the enforcement gap — the fact that international law depends on state compliance and that there is no supranational authority to compel adherence. The UN perspective is strongest as a normative baseline and a framework for dialogue, not as a standalone strategy for managing great-power competition.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Frames maritime order through Indian Ocean and Gulf of Guinea security, blue-economy development, and strategic autonomy; exposes how Indo-Pacific legal-military competition can marginalize African maritime governance	Underweights the intensity of great-power naval competition and the material drivers of alliance formation in the Western Pacific	Sovereignty, non-alignment, and capacity-building; international law as a tool for weaker states, not a substitute for power	AU 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy; Lomé Charter; ITLOS/ICJ maritime cases involving African states; Indian Ocean Rim Association	Western: African states lack the naval capacity to enforce maritime order alone, so legalism without power is insufficient

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Articulates A2/AD and sea denial as defensive strategies; critiques "Indo-Pacific" as a containment construct; asserts historical rights and sovereignty over claimed features	Downplays UNCLOS obligations and the freedom-of-navigation principle; treats historical claims as self-evident; obscures the coercive dimension of island-building	Sovereignty, non-interference, and multipolar equality; rejection of externally imposed legal adjudication	Nine-dash line; artificial island construction and militarization; PLAN modernization; rejection of the 2016 arbitration award	UN/Western: the 2016 tribunal authoritatively rejected the nine-dash line under UNCLOS
Russian	Critiques US alliance expansion and unipolar legalism; champions multipolarity and bilateral dispute resolution; aligns with China against US hegemony	Ignores China's assertiveness and the security concerns of smaller states; treats all US-led initiatives as aggressive by definition	Anti-hegemony, multipolarity, and great-power concert; skepticism of third-party adjudication	Statements opposing the Quad and AUKUS; support for China's bilateral approach; arms and naval cooperation with China	Western: Russia's own revisionism (e.g., Crimea) undermines its critique of others' rule-breaking

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Advances freedom of navigation, alliance architecture (hub-and-spokes, Quad, AUKUS), and the rules-based order; provides material balancing against coercion	May overstate the China threat and understate legitimate Chinese security concerns; can conflate US interests with universal rules	Liberal international order, FON, collective defense, and legalism backed by power	FONOPs; Quad summits; AUKUS; 2016 ruling welcomed as rule-of-law contribution	Chinese: containment disguised as rules; US FONOPs as provocations, not neutral enforcement
UN	Provides UNCLOS, the arbitration framework, and a normative baseline for peaceful dispute settlement; affirms that even great powers are subject to legal process	Treats international law as neutral, understating power's role in shaping law; overestimates legal mechanisms' capacity to resolve political conflicts; ignores enforcement gap and security dilemma	Rule of law, peaceful settlement, and institutionalized dispute resolution	2016 PCA award; UNCLOS Part XV; ITLOS and ICJ maritime jurisprudence	Chinese: tribunal lacked jurisdiction; ruling unenforceable and politically motivated

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2016 South China Sea Arbitration Ruling — How Did It Reshape the Regional Maritime Order?

On 12 July 2016, the arbitral tribunal constituted under Annex VII of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in *Philippines v. China* issued its award. The tribunal rejected China's claim

to historic rights within the nine-dash line, found that none of the features in the Spratly Islands generate an exclusive economic zone or continental shelf, and held that China's island-building, fishing, and law-enforcement activities violated UNCLOS obligations toward the Philippines. China rejected the award as "null and void" and refused to participate. The case asks how this ruling reshaped the regional maritime order.

Levels of analysis. At the *individual* level, the ruling was shaped by the agency of specific leaders: President Benigno Aquino III's decision to file the case in January 2013 despite bilateral pressure; Xi Jinping's choice to reject adjudication and accelerate island construction; President Rodrigo Duterte's subsequent pivot toward Beijing after 2016; and the calibrated US response under the Obama administration, which welcomed the ruling without enforcing it. Individual risk tolerance and domestic political incentives determined whether legal victory translated into strategic gain. At the *state* level, the Philippines acted as a small state deploying "lawfare" against a great power; China asserted sovereignty and refused external adjudication; the United States conducted freedom-of-navigation operations (FONOPs) to signal non-recognition of excessive claims; and Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia recalibrated their own positions. At the *systemic* level, the ruling unfolded within intensifying US-China strategic competition, the erosion of unipolarity, and a deepening security dilemma in the Western Pacific in which each side's defensive measures appeared offensive to the other. At the *transnational* level, UNCLOS functioned as a transnational legal regime; roughly one-third of global maritime trade transits the South China Sea; multinational energy firms and fishing fleets operated across contested waters; and international legal scholars and civil-society actors shaped the ruling's reception and legitimation.

Mechanism. The ruling reshaped the order through three mechanisms. First, *legal clarification*: by authoritatively interpreting UNCLOS, the tribunal removed ambiguity about maritime entitlements, raising the reputational and diplomatic costs of China's claims even absent enforcement. Second, *strategic catalysis*: the clarified legal baseline provided political cover for US FONOPs and for smaller states to resist coercion, but it also hardened China's position, accelerating island militarization and People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) modernization. Third, *alliance realignment*: the non-enforcement of the award exposed the gap between legal victory and material power, prompting the Philippines under Duterte to seek accommodation with Beijing (2016–2022) and, under Ferdinand Marcos Jr., to re-tighten with Washington through expanded Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites in 2023 and trilateral US-Japan-Philippines coordination. The net effect is that the ruling did not change facts on the water — China's artificial islands and military installations remain — but it shifted the diplomatic and legal baseline, intensified the security dilemma, and accelerated both alliance consolidation and China's anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) buildup.

Perspective reconstruction. From an African vantage point, the 2016 ruling illustrates both the promise and the limits of international legalism for weaker states. African states have historically relied on UNCLOS and on tribunals such as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to protect maritime zones — as in the Ghana–Côte d'Ivoire ITLOS case (2017) and the Kenya–Somalia ICJ case (2021) — and thus have a stake in the integrity of the law of the sea. The ruling's rejection by a great power resonates with African experiences of selective compliance by powerful states and reinforces skepticism about the enforceability of international law against the strong. At the same time, African maritime security agendas — the African Union's 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy, the Lomé Charter, and Indian Ocean Rim Association concerns — emphasize that legal clarity must be paired with capacity-building and cooperative security. The African perspective thus reads the ruling as a normative gain whose practical value depends on power and coalition-building, and it warns that the Indo-Pacific's legal-military competition should not divert attention from African maritime governance, piracy, and blue-

economy development in the Indian Ocean and Gulf of Guinea. The Chinese perspective holds that the tribunal lacked jurisdiction because China had opted out of compulsory dispute settlement under UNCLOS Article 298, that the ruling was a product of US-backed lawfare, and that it violated China's sovereignty and historical rights; it treats the nine-dash line as a legitimate expression of historical title, views the ruling as an illegitimate attempt to constrain China's rise, and reads it as having accelerated China's defensive militarization of the islands and strengthened domestic resolve to resist external pressure. The Russian perspective treats the ruling as an example of Western-led legal instrumentalization against a rising power, consistent with its broader critique of US alliance expansion and unipolar legalism; Moscow has supported China's position that the dispute should be resolved bilaterally rather than through third-party adjudication, has criticized US FONOPs as provocative, and reads the ruling as part of a pattern of using international institutions to constrain non-Western powers. The Western perspective treats the ruling as a landmark affirmation of the rule of law at sea, validating UNCLOS as the governing framework and rejecting expansive historical claims; it provided legal grounding for FONOPs and allied coordination, framed China as a rule-breaker, and is seen as having reshaped the diplomatic baseline even though it did not change physical control. The UN perspective emphasizes the ruling as an exercise of the UNCLOS dispute-settlement system, affirming that even great powers are subject to legal process and that the law of the sea provides a framework for peaceful resolution; it highlights the ruling's contribution to clarifying maritime entitlements and its role in upholding the convention, while acknowledging the enforcement gap and the need for state compliance.

Explicit adjudication. The Western perspective best explains how the ruling reshaped the *strategic* order: it catalyzed alliance realignment, legitimized FONOPs, and framed the diplomatic competition. But it underweights the ruling's legal-normative content and the agency of smaller states. The UN perspective best explains the *legal* content and its contribution to norm clarification, but it cannot explain non-compliance or the security dilemma. The Chinese perspective explains non-compliance and domestic legitimation but occludes the ruling's legal validity. The African perspective correctly identifies the enforcement gap and the risk of legalism without power, but it is less directly explanatory of the specific Indo-Pacific dynamics. On balance, the case is best explained by a synthesis in which the Western perspective accounts for the strategic reshaping and the UN perspective accounts for the legal baseline; neither alone suffices, and the Chinese perspective is necessary to explain why the ruling did not change facts on the water. The ruling reshaped the order not by enforcing compliance but by reconfiguring the diplomatic and legal terrain on which subsequent competition unfolded.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Trigger versus shift:** Identify what changed in Australia's submarine program on 15 September 2021 and explain why cancelling the Attack-class program was not merely a procurement decision but a redefinition of Australia's alliance obligations and capability trajectory.

2. **Levels of analysis:** Reconstruct the France–Australia–United States triangle at the state, systemic, and transnational levels. State what each level explains well and what it tends to obscure.

3. **Mechanism adjudication:** Compare two explanations for France's diplomatic rupture—(a) material loss of a major defense contract and (b) status injury plus erosion of alliance trust. Which is better supported, and what evidence would distinguish them?

4. **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct the African/Indian Ocean, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on AUKUS, giving one genuine contribution and one occlusion for each.

5. **Regional calculus:** Explain how AUKUS altered ASEAN hedging, Australian dependence on the United States and United Kingdom, and China's threat perception.

6. **Falsifiers:** List three observations that would weaken the claim that AUKUS produced durable Indo-Pacific polarization.

MODEL ANSWER

The AUKUS announcement of 15 September 2021 was not simply a change in Australia's submarine supplier; it was a strategic reorientation. Australia terminated its Attack-class program with France's Naval Group and committed, with the United States and United Kingdom, to acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. The immediate effect was diplomatic: France recalled its ambassadors from Australia and the United States, and French leaders publicly accused Australian counterparts of deception. The deeper effect was structural. Australia moved from a conventional submarine designed for regional sea denial toward a longer-range, higher-endurance platform intended to operate with US and UK forces across the Indo-Pacific. That shift implied greater interoperability, shared maintenance and training pipelines, and a tighter operational dependence on Washington and London. It also meant that Australia accepted a multi-decade capability gap, because nuclear-powered submarines would not be available in the near term and would require new industrial, regulatory, and safeguards arrangements.

France's rupture is best explained by the interaction of material loss and status injury, not by either alone. The contract loss was enormous in commercial and industrial terms, and it damaged France's credibility as a defense partner in the Indo-Pacific. Yet the recall of ambassadors and the intensity of French rhetoric suggest that the injury was also relational: Paris believed it had been treated as a transactional supplier rather than a strategic partner, despite France's own Indo-Pacific territories, bases, and resident-power claims. A purely commercial explanation would predict a legal and financial dispute; the actual response was diplomatic and symbolic. A purely status-based explanation, however, would struggle to account for the scale of the industrial setback and the subsequent settlement negotiations. The stronger account is that France experienced both a capability-market loss and a trust rupture, with the latter amplifying the former.

At the state level, the episode shows Australia prioritizing long-term deterrence and alliance integration over short-term diplomatic costs. At the systemic level, it reflects intensified US-China rivalry and the consolidation of an Anglo-American maritime core within the wider Indo-Pacific. At the transnational level, it involves industrial supply chains, nonproliferation norms, and the politics of technology transfer. The state level explains Canberra's decision but understates the alliance shock; the systemic level explains US and Chinese reactions but can flatten Australian agency; the transnational level captures safeguards and industrial constraints but risks treating submarines as mere technology rather than political commitments.

The five perspectives reveal different contributions and blind spots. The African and Indian Ocean perspective highlights how great-power submarine competition can militarize maritime space far from the original flashpoint, raising concerns for littoral states whose trade depends on secure sea lanes and who lack anti-submarine capacity. Its occlusion is that it may underweight the deterrence logic driving Australia's choice. The Chinese perspective treats AUKUS as evidence of encirclement and an arms-race catalyst, contributing a necessary critique of alliance expansion; its occlusion is that it often ignores Australia's agency and the de-

fensive framing of SSN acquisition. The Russian perspective frames AUKUS as another instance of US-led bloc politics, contributing a systemic critique of Western alliance architecture; its occlusion is that it offers little insight into Indo-Pacific maritime geography or ASEAN hedging. The Western perspective emphasizes deterrence, interoperability, and freedom of navigation; its occlusion is that it can normalize alliance dependence as natural and understate the diplomatic costs to partners such as France. The UN perspective focuses on UNCLOS, IAEA safeguards, and nonproliferation; its contribution is to keep the debate anchored in legal frameworks, while its occlusion is that law alone cannot resolve strategic competition or alliance politics.

Regionally, AUKUS complicated ASEAN centrality by introducing a high-end military technology arrangement outside ASEAN-led forums. Some Southeast Asian states expressed concern about nuclearization and escalation, while others quietly welcomed stronger balancing against China. Australia gained long-term capability but accepted deeper dependence on US and UK industrial and operational systems. China's threat perception likely intensified, though AUKUS also gave Beijing a propaganda and diplomatic opening to portray Western powers as destabilizing. The claim that AUKUS produced durable polarization would be weakened if three developments occurred: Australia significantly delays or scales back SSN acquisition; France and Australia rebuild sustained defense-industrial cooperation; or regional states normalize AUKUS through participation, exercises, or institutional dialogue without heightened militarization. Conversely, polarization would be strengthened if SSN deployments became routine, if China expanded its own undersea capabilities in response, and if ASEAN states were forced into explicit alignment choices.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description (150–200 words):
An East African Indian Ocean littoral state with limited antisubmarine warfare capacity, heavy dependence on secure sea lanes for trade, and a stated commitment to strategic autonomy must assess the implications of AUKUS for its maritime security. Australia's planned nuclear-powered submarine capability, US–UK technology transfer, and China's likely countermeasures may increase great-power submarine activity in the western Indian Ocean. The state must distinguish direct operational effects, such as more transits, exercises, and surveillance, from alliance-political effects, such as pressure to align with the United States, China, or France, and from normative effects, such as precedents for naval nuclear propulsion under IAEA safeguards. It must also consider France's continued Indian Ocean presence, ASEAN hedging patterns as a possible model, and African Union maritime-security frameworks. The memo should not assume that AUKUS is either stabilizing or destabilizing. It should identify mechanisms, compare perspectives, and state what evidence would change the conclusion. The final recommendation should be conditional across three scenarios: intensified great-power submarine competition, managed coexistence, or partial reversal of AUKUS.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:
- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal chain linking AUKUS to this state's maritime security, separating operational, alliance-political, and normative effects.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on the case, giving one contribution and one occlusion for each.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare AUKUS to one prior episode of alliance-driven naval technology transfer or regional militarization, and state the limits of the analogy.
- **Falsifiers:** Specify observations that would weaken your main claim and observations that would strengthen it.

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and did you mark

where evidence ends and judgment begins?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which mechanism best explains why AUKUS strained the France–Australia–United States relationship?
A. France's loss of submarine contract revenue alone.
B. Breach of alliance trust and status injury, compounded by capability dependence.
C. US coercion of Australia to contain China.
D. Violation of UNCLOS by nuclear-powered submarines.

Distractor diagnosis:
- **A** is wrong because it reduces a diplomatic rupture to a commercial grievance; it cannot explain the recall of ambassadors, the public accusations of deception, or the symbolic intensity of France's response.
- **C** is wrong because it overstates US coercion and understates Australian agency; the evidence points to Canberra's own strategic reassessment, not to Washington forcing the cancellation.
- **D** is wrong because it misapplies UNCLOS; naval nuclear propulsion is not prohibited by the convention, and the relevant issue is IAEA safeguards and nonproliferation politics, not a treaty violation.
- **B** is correct because it captures both the relational injury and the structural dependence created by the shift to US–UK nuclear-powered submarine cooperation.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Major Naval Forces in the Indo-Pacific (approximate, 2024)

Force	Battle-force / major surface combatants	Submarines (SSN/SSBN/SSK)	Notes
US Navy (USN)	~296 battle-force ships	~67 (SSN/SSBN)	Largest by displacement; globally deployed; ~60% of fleet in Pacific
PLAN	~370 ships incl. auxiliaries; ~140 major surface combatants	~60+ (SSBN/SSN/SSK)	Largest by hull count; concentrated in Western Pacific
Japan MSDF	~50 major surface combatants	~22 SSK	Growing; Izumo-class carriers; F-35B integration
India Navy	~150 ships	~17 (SSBN/SSN/SSK)	Indian Ocean primacy; carrier aviation
Australia RAN	~50	6 SSK (Collins)	Transitioning to AUKUS SSN (2030s-2040s)
ROK Navy	~150	~20 SSK	Regional; North Korea focus

Force	Battle-force / major surface combatants	Submarines (SSN/SSBN/SSK)	Notes
ASEAN aggregate (Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand)	~200+ small-to-medium combatants	~15-20 SSK	Fragmented; coastal-defense orientation

Sources: IISS Military Balance (2024); CSIS China Power Project; US Navy Force Structure Assessment. Figures are approximate and include auxiliaries for PLAN.

Table 2 — Shipbuilding Rates, FONOPs, and SCS Trade

Indicator	China	United States	Period / Source
Major surface combatants commissioned per year	~10–15	~2–4	IISS / CSIS, 2018–2023
Share of global commercial shipbuilding	~50%+	~0.1%	UNCTAD 2023
SCS FONOPs conducted by USN	—	~8–12 per year (2019–2023)	DoD Annual FON Report
Annual trade transiting SCS	—	~$3.4 trillion (range $3.4–5.3T)	CSIS; UNCTAD
Share of global maritime trade via SCS	—	~one-third	CSIS China Power Project
China oil imports transiting SCS/Malacca	~80% of China's seaborne oil	—	EIA

Table 3 — Alliance Architecture and Force Posture (selected)

Arrangement	Members	Key capability	Status
US-Japan alliance	US, Japan	Forward-deployed 7th Fleet; base access (Yokosuka, Okinawa)	Active; expanding (2024 joint command upgrade)
US-ROK alliance	US, ROK	USFK; extended deterrence	Active
US-Philippines (EDCA)	US, Philippines	Rotational access to 9 sites	Expanded 2023
AUKUS	Australia, UK, US	SSN transfer; Pillar II advanced tech	Announced 2021; Pillar I delivery 2030s-2040s
Quad	US, Japan, India, Australia	Maritime domain awareness; exercises	Revived 2017; leaders' summits 2021+

Arrangement	Members	Key capability	Status
Five Eyes (intelligence)	US, UK, Canada, Australia, NZ	SIGINT sharing	Long-standing

Analysis Questions

1. Trend. The data show a sustained divergence in hull-count growth and shipbuilding throughput: the PLAN adds roughly 10–15 major surface combatants annually while the USN adds 2–4, and China holds over half of global commercial shipbuilding capacity against under 0.1% for the United States. At the same time, US FONOPs in the South China Sea rose from 2 in 2015 to roughly 8–12 per year by 2019–2023. What trend does this combination describe, and what does the FONOP series suggest about how Washington has chosen to respond to the quantitative shift — through presence operations rather than matching hull-for-hull?

2. Level of analysis. The A2/AD (anti-access/area denial) complex — DF-21D/DF-26 anti-ship ballistic missiles, YJ-18 cruise missiles, submarine forces, and island-based sensors — operates primarily at which level of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational)? Where do FONOPs sit, and where does the ~$3.4 trillion in annual SCS trade sit? Justify each placement using the Lesson 1 framework.

3. Perspective reconstruction (all five). Read Tables 1–3 through each lens: - *African:* What do these data imply for Indian Ocean littoral states' strategic autonomy and for the security of sea lanes (e.g., Bab el-Mandeb, Malacca) on which African trade depends? - *Chinese:* How does Beijing read the FONOP series and the alliance expansion (AUKUS, EDCA) as evidence of containment, and how does it justify A2/AD as defensive? - *Russian:* How does Moscow read US alliance expansion in the Indo-Pacific as analogous to NATO expansion, and what does it imply for Russian Pacific Fleet posture? - *Western:* How does Washington read the PLAN's hull-count growth as a threat to freedom of navigation and to the rules-based order, and what is the alliance-architecture remedy? - *UN:* How does the UN system read the same data through UNCLOS, the 2016 arbitration ruling, and the dispute-settlement framework — and what is the gap between legal entitlement and enforcement?

4. Interpretation. Do the data support the claim that China has achieved "sea denial" inside the first island chain? Argue for and against: the quantitative naval balance favors China in the Western Pacific, but tonnage, readiness, alliance aggregation (US + Japan + Australia + others), and the "tyranny of distance" for US forces cut in competing directions. What is the most defensible bounded conclusion?

5. Limitation. What do these data systematically fail to capture? Consider: ship quality and readiness (maintenance backlogs, crew training), the difference between hull count and combat power, the role of non-naval instruments (cyber, space, economic coercion), the opacity of Chinese data, and the fact that alliance aggregation is political, not automatic. Which limitation most undermines single-indicator analysis of the Indo-Pacific balance?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — The First Island Chain and A2/AD Envelope

What to draw: A hand-drawn map of East Asia and the Western Pacific. Draw the coastline of China, the Korean peninsula, Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Draw a dashed curved line from Japan through Taiwan and the Philippines to Borneo — label it "First Island Chain." Draw a second dashed line further east (Marianas, Guam) — label "Second Island Chain." Shade a translucent band (light cross-hatching) extending ~1,000–1,500 km eastward from China's coast, labeled "A2/AD envelope (DF-21D/DF-26, YJ-18, submarine pickets)." Place small icons: missile silos on the coast, a submarine icon inside the shaded band, and a US carrier icon east of the first island chain with an arrow showing "FONOP transit." Add a compass rose and a scale bar.

Labels to place: "China," "Taiwan," "Philippines," "Japan," "First Island Chain," "Second Island Chain," "A2/AD envelope," "Malacca Strait," "South China Sea," "East China Sea."

Perspective overlay: Annotate in the margin with five colored tags: (A) African — "sea-lane security for Indian Ocean trade"; (C) Chinese — "defensive perimeter, sovereignty"; (R) Russian — "US containment arc"; (W) Western — "freedom of navigation, rules-based order"; (U) UN — "UNCLOS EEZ/continental shelf disputes."

Visual 2 — Hub-and-Spokes Alliance Architecture

What to draw: A hub-and-spokes diagram. Draw a large central circle labeled "United States (hub)." Draw spokes (lines) to smaller circles: Japan, South Korea, Philippines, Australia, Thailand. Draw a dashed outer ring connecting Japan–Australia–India labeled "Quad (2017 revived)." Draw a separate triangle of Australia–UK–US labeled "AUKUS (2021)." Draw a dashed line from US to Taiwan labeled "Strategic ambiguity / Taiwan Relations Act." Add arrows indicating "extended deterrence," "base access," and "intelligence sharing (Five Eyes)."

Labels to place: "Hub-and-spokes," "Quad," "AUKUS," "EDCA (Philippines)," "Five Eyes," "Taiwan (ambiguous)."

Perspective overlay: Annotate: (A) "strategic autonomy concerns; non-alignment tradition"; (C) "encirclement / containment"; (R) "NATO-style expansion critique"; (W) "collective deterrence, burden-sharing"; (U) "regional security architecture; ASEAN centrality."

Visual 3 — FONOPs and Naval Balance Trend (Dual-Axis Chart)

What to draw: A hand-drawn dual-axis line chart. X-axis: years 2015–2024. Left Y-axis: "US SCS FONOPs per year" (0–15). Right Y-axis: "PLAN major surface combatants added per year" (0–20). Plot two lines: FONOPs rising from 2 (2015) to ~10 (2023); PLAN additions rising from ~6 (2015) to ~14 (2023). Add a third bar series at the bottom: "SCS trade ($T)" flat at ~3.4. Add a legend and a note: "Correlation ≠ causation; FONOPs are presence, not warfighting."

Labels to place: "FONOPs," "PLAN additions," "SCS trade (~$3.4T)," "2016 arbitration ruling" (vertical marker).

Perspective overlay: Annotate with a small key: (A) "trade dependence"; (C) "sovereignty assertion"; (R) "US escalation"; (W) "rules enforcement"; (U) "legal vs. enforcement gap."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (Question / Prompt)	Notes (Answer / Content)
What is the "Indo-Pacific" as a strategic construct?	Term popularized by Abe (2007 "confluence of two seas"), adopted by US (2017 NSS), India, Japan, Australia. Replaces "Asia-Pacific"; signals Indian Ocean inclusion and China containment framing. Contested: China rejects it as exclusionary; ASEAN prefers "Asia-Pacific."
What is A2/AD and the first island chain?	China's layered defense: DF-21D/DF-26 ASBM, YJ cruise missiles, submarines, island sensors. First island chain (Japan-Taiwan-Philippines) as defensive perimeter and US containment line. Holmes & Yoshihara (2017) on sea denial.
What is the hub-and-spokes system?	US bilateral alliances (Japan, ROK, Philippines, Australia, Thailand) since Cold War. Extended deterrence, base access, interoperability. Supplemented (not replaced) by Quad and AUKUS.
What is the Quad?	US-Japan-India-Australia. Revived 2017. Maritime domain awareness, exercises, supply-chain initiatives. Not a formal alliance; "minilateral."
What is AUKUS?	2021 trilateral. Pillar I: SSN transfer to Australia (2030s-40s). Pillar II: advanced tech (AI, cyber, hypersonics). Strained France-Australia (cancelled Attack-class subs).
What are the Taiwan Strait and SCS flashpoints?	Taiwan: ~100 nm strait; PLA exercises post-Pelosi (2022); blockade scenarios. SCS: nine-dash line; artificial islands; 2016 arbitration (Philippines v. China) rejected historic rights; China non-compliant.
What is ASEAN centrality?	ASEAN's claim to convene regional security (ARF, EAS, ADMM+). Hedging strategy: engage all powers, avoid choosing. Limited enforcement; consensus constraint.
What is India's strategic autonomy?	Non-alignment legacy; Quad member but not alliance; S-400 purchase; border tensions with China (Doklam 2017, Galwan 2020). Indian Ocean as priority theater.
What is Japan's military normalization?	Constitutional reinterpretation (2014 collective self-defense); defense spending rising to 2% GDP; counterstrike capability (2022 NSS); F-35B, Tomahawk.

Cue (Question / Prompt)	Notes (Answer / Content)
What did the 2016 arbitration ruling do?	PCA tribunal (July 12, 2016): China's nine-dash line has no legal basis; no historic rights; Scarborough Shoal is rock (12nm, not EEZ); Mischief/ Subi/Fiery Cross are low-tide elevations. China rejected; no enforcement.
What is the African perspective?	Indian Ocean littoral security; SLOC protection; strategic autonomy; non-alignment; concern about great-power competition spillover; Blue Economy; AU 2050 AIM Strategy.
What are key sources?	Friedberg (2018) *The Weary Titan*? Actually *A Contest for Supremacy*; Holmes & Yoshihara (2017) *Red Star over the Pacific*; Kaplan (2010) *Monsoon*; 2016 arbitration ruling; CSIS China Power Project.

Source log: Friedberg, A. (2018). *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia.* W.W. Norton. Holmes, J. & Yoshihara, T. (2017). *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy.* Naval Institute Press. Kaplan, R. (2010). *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power.* Random House. Permanent Court of Arbitration (2016). *South China Sea Arbitration (Philippines v. China).* CSIS China Power Project (ongoing). IISS *Military Balance* (annual). DoD Annual Freedom of Navigation Report.

Summary (3–5 sentences): The Indo-Pacific maritime order is being reshaped by a quantitative shift in naval power (PLAN growth vs. USN stagnation), China's A2/AD envelope inside the first island chain, and a layered US alliance architecture (hub-and-spokes, Quad, AUKUS) that supplements bilateral ties with minilateral coordination. The 2016 arbitration ruling clarified legal entitlements under UNCLOS but lacked enforcement, leaving a persistent gap between law and power. Middle powers — ASEAN, India, Japan — hedge through centrality, strategic autonomy, and military normalization respectively, while African littoral states face spillover risks to Indian Ocean sea lanes. The central tension is between a rules-based maritime order and a power-based one, with no single indicator capturing the balance.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon (as if to a smart 14-year-old): Imagine the ocean between China and the rest of Asia as a neighborhood. China has been building a very large fence of missiles and ships close to its shore so that, if a conflict happened, it would be hard for anyone else's navy to get close — that's the "first island chain" idea. The United States and its friends (Japan, Australia, the Philippines, India) are trying to keep the sea lanes open for trade and to make sure no single country controls them. They do this through alliances and by sailing warships through disputed waters to say "these are international waters." Meanwhile, a court in 2016 said China's big territorial claim in the South China Sea had no legal basis, but China ignored it. So the real question is: who actually controls the water — the country with the most ships nearby, or the rules everyone agreed to?

Step 2 — Mark gaps (what you could not explain simply): - I could not explain *why* the US cannot simply

build more ships to match China (industrial base, budget, maintenance backlogs). - I could not explain *how* AUKUS submarines change the balance given delivery is decades away. - I could not explain *why* ASEAN cannot enforce the 2016 ruling (consensus, non-interference, economic dependence). - I could not explain the difference between "sea denial" and "sea control" in operational terms.

Step 3 — Reread verification (targeted reread of weak spots): Reread Holmes & Yoshihara (2017) ch. on A2/AD and sea denial; Friedberg (2018) on the "contest for supremacy" and alliance burden-sharing; the 2016 arbitration award's dispositive section on historic rights; CSIS China Power Project data on PLAN growth. After reread: sea denial = preventing adversary's use of sea without controlling it; sea control = sustained use. US industrial constraint = shipyard capacity and workforce, not just budget. ASEAN constraint = consensus principle and economic interdependence with China.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits: Analogy: The first island chain is like a neighborhood watch zone — China has installed cameras and guards (missiles, sensors) so that anyone entering feels watched and at risk; the US and allies keep driving through (FONOPs) to say the street is public. *Limits of the analogy:* (a) it implies a static, territorial logic, but maritime space is fluid and three-dimensional (subsurface, air, space, cyber); (b) it understates the economic stakes ($3.4T trade); (c) it treats states as unitary actors, ignoring domestic politics (Japanese constitutional debate, Australian public opinion on AUKUS); (d) it cannot capture the legal dimension (UNCLOS, EEZs, continental shelf).

Step 5 — Rewrite (compressed, precise): The Indo-Pacific maritime order is a contest between China's A2/AD-enabled sea denial inside the first island chain and a US-led alliance architecture (hub-and-spokes, Quad, AUKUS) that seeks to preserve freedom of navigation and a rules-based order. The 2016 arbitration ruling established legal clarity under UNCLOS but no enforcement mechanism, exposing the gap between international law and power. Middle powers hedge — ASEAN through centrality, India through strategic autonomy, Japan through military normalization — while African littoral states face Indian Ocean spillover. No single metric (hull count, FONOPs, or trade volume) captures the balance; the decisive variables are industrial capacity, alliance cohesion, and the legal-political legitimacy of competing claims.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L48	definition	What is the "Indo-Pacific" as a strategic construct?	The Indo-Pacific is a maritime-geographic frame linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans through sea lanes, chokepoints, and great-power competition; it is not a neutral map but a strategic vocabulary that foregrounds naval connectivity and China's rise. Its meaning varies by speaker: for some it signals inclusive regionalism, for others a US-led balancing coalition.	African and Indian Ocean states often read it as an external framing that can obscure their own maritime priorities.
L48	mechanism	How does A2/AD create sea denial?	A2/AD combines sensors, missiles, submarines, mines, and cyber/electronic warfare to raise the cost of entry into contested waters, especially around the first island chain; the mechanism is cumulative risk, not a single blockade. It seeks to delay, degrade, or deny an adversary's ability to operate, project power, or sustain logistics.	Chinese sources frame it as defensive sovereignty protection; Western sources frame it as offensive area denial.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L48	application	What is the strategic significance of the first island chain?	The first island chain runs from Japan through Taiwan and the Philippines to Borneo and is treated as a geographic barrier and operational threshold for PLAN breakout and US forward defense. Control or denial along this chain shapes submarine routes, air defense, and access to the western Pacific.	For Taiwan and Japan it is existential geography; for ASEAN it is a source of entanglement risk.
L48	comparison	How do hub-and-spokes, the Quad, and AUKUS differ?	The hub-and-spokes system is bilateral US alliances; the Quad is a flexible minilateral among the US, Japan, India, and Australia; AUKUS is a technology-and-submarine pact among the US, UK, and Australia. They differ in membership, institutionalization, and military integration, but all aim to manage China’s rise.	ASEAN reads them as potential bypasses of its centrality.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L48	source	What did the 2016 South China Sea arbitration ruling hold?	The tribunal found no legal basis for China's historic rights claims within the nine-dash line and clarified maritime entitlements, including that certain features are rocks rather than islands. It did not delimit boundaries or enforce compliance, so its effect depended on diplomatic uptake.	The ruling is a legal anchor for many states but a sovereignty challenge for Beijing.
L48	debate	Is "Indo-Pacific" a neutral geographic term?	Critics argue it is a geopolitical construct that re-centers US strategy and links the Indian Ocean to Pacific containment; defenders argue it reflects real economic and naval interdependence. The debate turns on whether naming creates policy or merely describes it.	Chinese and Russian sources often treat it as US-centric; African and Indian Ocean actors stress their own agency.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L48	reconstruction	How would an African maritime-security perspective reconstruct the Indo-Pacific?	It would foreground Indian Ocean sea lanes, piracy, illegal fishing, port development, and blue-economy governance, while warning that great-power rivalry can militarize African waters and constrain strategic autonomy. It treats maritime order as development and sovereignty, not only deterrence.	This is the primary lens: African agency and non-alignment.
L48	occlusion	What does the Western freedom-of-navigation frame occlude?	It foregrounds legal access and alliance deterrence but can understate coastal-state development needs, historical asymmetries, and the domestic politics of base hosting. It may treat legal principle as sufficient without addressing power imbalances.	Occlusion is analytical, not dismissal.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L48	adjudication	How should one adjudicate between legal and power-based claims in the South China Sea?	Adjudication requires separating UNCLOS entitlements, historical claims, enforcement capacity, and diplomatic practice; no single frame is sufficient. Evidence should include tribunal findings, state behavior, and cost-benefit calculations.	African and Global South states often favor rules plus capacity-building.
L48	visual	What does a map of A2/AD zones and island chains show?	It shows layered denial areas, chokepoints, and alliance geography; the visual claim is that geography and technology interact to create contested maritime space. It should be read as a strategic abstraction, not a fixed battlefield.	Maps can naturalize contested claims.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L48	mechanism	How does hedging work for middle powers?	Hedging combines engagement with multiple powers, selective alignment, and institutional participation to preserve autonomy while managing risk; it is not neutrality but active portfolio management. It fails when crises force binary choices.	ASEAN centrality and India's autonomy are hedging architectures.
L48	application	Why did AUKUS strain France-Australia relations?	Australia canceled a French submarine contract to pursue nuclear-powered submarines with the US and UK, surprising Paris and raising questions about alliance trust and industrial sovereignty. The strain came from process and strategic surprise as much as from capability.	European and Australian perspectives diverge on alliance loyalty versus autonomy.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L48	comparison	UNCLOS versus power politics in maritime disputes?	UNCLOS provides entitlements, dispute procedures, and navigational norms; power politics determines enforcement, basing, and coercion. The two interact: law shapes legitimacy, while power shapes outcomes.	UN perspective emphasizes rules; realist perspective emphasizes capacity.
L48	debate	Does ASEAN centrality constrain or enable great-power competition?	It enables by providing forums and norms that reduce escalation; it constrains by lacking enforcement and by being vulnerable to member divisions. Its value depends on whether major powers accept procedural legitimacy.	ASEAN's own view stresses consensus and non-interference.
L48	source	What is the CSIS China Power Project useful for?	It compiles data on naval capabilities, shipbuilding, and regional military trends, enabling comparative analysis rather than single-source assertion. Its limits include classification gaps and definitional choices.	Data literacy is part of perspective critique.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Gap action
Define Indo-Pacific as contested strategic construct		Can distinguish geography, geopolitics, and regional vocabulary	Re-read Key Idea 1 and annotate three definitions
Explain A2/AD and sea-denial mechanism		Can name sensors, missiles, submarines, mines, and cumulative-risk logic	Draw the layered denial model from Section 3
Compare alliance architectures		Can separate hub-and-spokes, Quad, and AUKUS by membership and function	Build a three-column comparison table
Reconstruct the 2016 arbitration ruling		Can state holdings, limits, and non-enforcement	Summarize ruling in 120 words
Analyze Taiwan Strait and South China Sea flashpoints		Can identify actors, triggers, and escalation pathways	Map one crisis scenario
Explain middle-power hedging		Can define hedging as portfolio management, not neutrality	Apply to India or ASEAN
Reconstruct all five perspectives		Can steel-man African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN views	Write one paragraph per perspective
Use data without overclaiming		Can separate vessel counts from combat effectiveness	Add two caveats to any data claim

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you initially underweight, and what evidence would force you to revise that weighting?
2. Which mechanism could you now explain to a peer without notes: A2/AD, hedging, alliance bargaining, or legal adjudication?
3. Which falsifier would most weaken your current conclusion about whether the Indo-Pacific order is stabilizing or destabilizing?

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Indo-Pacific" is simply a neutral geographic label.	It is a strategic construct whose adoption signals policy priorities and coalition preferences.	Friedberg (2018); Holmes and Yoshihara (2017)
A2/AD means China can permanently seal off the western Pacific.	It raises costs and risks; it does not guarantee control, especially under sustained logistics and alliance pressure.	Holmes and Yoshihara (2017)
The 2016 arbitration ruling automatically changed behavior.	The ruling clarified law but lacked enforcement; compliance depended on diplomacy and power.	Permanent Court of Arbitration (2016)
More ships always equals more maritime power.	Fleet size must be read with readiness, basing, logistics, doctrine, and industrial capacity.	CSIS China Power Project
ASEAN centrality means ASEAN controls regional outcomes.	It provides forums and norms but lacks enforcement and is vulnerable to member divisions.	ASEAN institutional practice
Hedging is the same as neutrality.	Hedging is active risk management across multiple partners, not passive non-alignment.	Nyerere; Nkrumah; contemporary Indian and ASEAN strategy
UNCLOS alone resolves maritime disputes.	Law shapes legitimacy, but enforcement and power shape outcomes.	UNCLOS; 2016 arbitration ruling
AUKUS was only about submarines.	It also involved technology transfer, industrial capacity, alliance trust, and regional signaling.	AUKUS (2021)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Indo-Pacific construct; A2/AD; sea denial; first island chain; hub-and-spokes; Quad; AUKUS; Taiwan Strait; South China Sea; hedging; ASEAN centrality; strategic autonomy	Cumulative risk-raising through sensors, missiles, submarines, mines, cyber; geographic denial; alliance bargaining; legal entitlement clarification; minilateral coordination; industrial substitution; portfolio-style hedging	Friedberg (2018); Holmes and Yoshihara (2017); Kaplan (2010); UNCLOS; arbitration jurisprudence; African strategic thought: Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Rodney, Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani	2016 South China Sea arbitration ruling; PLAN and USN shipbuilding data; CSIS China Power Project; freedom of navigation operations; trade through the South China Sea; AUKUS (2021)	Whether "Indo-Pacific" is neutral or US-centric; whether A2/AD is defensive or coercive; whether ASEAN centrality enables or constrains; whether UNCLOS or power politics determines outcomes; whether hedging survives crisis	Sustained compliance with arbitration rulings; PLAN shipbuilding slowdown; US alliance retrenchment; ASEAN enforcement capacity; India's abandonment of strategic autonomy; Taiwan crisis de-escalation	L25 maritime strategy; L47 US-China rivalry; L49 institutional revisionism; L52 semiconductors; L57 space

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Timing	Concrete action
R1	Immediately after lesson	Reconstruct the five perspectives in 150 words each, then compare with Section 2.7.
R2	24 hours later	Redraw the A2/AD and island-chain map from memory and label three chokepoints.
R3	1 week later	Write a 300-word adjudication of the 2016 arbitration ruling using law, power, and diplomacy.
R4	1 month later	Apply the hedging model to one new case: India, Indonesia, or Vietnam.

Interval	Timing	Concrete action
R5	3 months later	Re-run the data lab with updated naval vessel counts and test one falsifier.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define the Indo-Pacific as a contested strategic construct.
- ☐ I can explain A2/AD as cumulative risk-raising rather than simple blockade.
- ☐ I can locate and explain the first island chain.
- ☐ I can distinguish hub-and-spokes, the Quad, and AUKUS.
- ☐ I can summarize the 2016 arbitration ruling and its limits.
- ☐ I can identify Taiwan Strait and South China Sea escalation pathways.
- ☐ I can explain middle-power hedging and its failure conditions.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary, not additive.
- ☐ I can steel-man the Chinese perspective on sovereignty and A2/AD.
- ☐ I can steel-man the Russian critique of alliance expansion.
- ☐ I can steel-man the Western freedom-of-navigation and alliance frame.
- ☐ I can steel-man the UN UNCLOS and arbitration frame.
- ☐ I can use naval data with explicit caveats.
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
- ☐ I can state at least two falsifiers for my conclusion.
- ☐ I can link this lesson to L25, L47, L49, L52, and L57.
- ☐ I have completed the independent memo instructions.
- ☐ I have reviewed my error log.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Strategic constructs and maritime geography - Friedberg, A.L. (2018) on US-China strategic competition and Indo-Pacific balancing. - Holmes, J.R. and Yoshihara, T. (2017) on maritime strategy and China's naval rise. - Kaplan, R.D. (2010) *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power*.

Law, arbitration, and maritime order - Permanent Court of Arbitration (2016) *South China Sea Arbitration (Philippines v. China), Award of 12 July 2016*. - United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Data and capability assessment - CSIS China Power Project, naval capability and shipbuilding datasets.

African and Global South perspectives - Grovogui, S.N. (2006) *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions*. - Mbembe, A. (2001) *On the Postcolony*. - Bayart, J.-F. (1993) *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. - Mamdani, M. (1996) *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. - Rodney, W. (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. - Nkrumah, K. (1965) *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. - Nyerere, J. (1968) *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*. - Cabral, A. (1973) *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches*. - Fanon, F. (1961) *The Wretched of the Earth*. - Tamale, S. (2020) *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism*. - Oyěwùmí, O. (1997) *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*.

End of Lesson 48. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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50. Institutional Revisionism and the Global South

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 49 — Institutional Revisionism and the Global South
Module	Module 8: Indo-Pacific, Systemic Rivalry, and Transnational Forces
Prerequisites	L14 (contemporary transition), L16 (Bretton Woods), L28 (Pan-Africanism)
Interleaved links	Forward to L51 (climate), L58 (forecasting), L61 (grand strategy)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, dual-coded visuals, Cornell notes, flashcards, worked example, problem pair
Bloom ceiling	Create / Evaluate

Estimated study time: 7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is why the contemporary challenge to the post-1945 international economic order takes a dual form: the construction of parallel institutions alongside sustained demands to reform the existing ones. Since the 2008 financial crisis and accelerating after 2022, states grouped under the label "Global South" have pursued both voice and exit simultaneously—expanding BRICS, capitalizing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB), deepening the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), while also pressing for IMF quota reform, SDR rechanneling, and debt relief within the very Bretton Woods architecture they criticize. This is not a simple story of replacement. It is a story of institutional revisionism: a strategy that seeks to redistribute authority without fully abandoning the forums in which authority is currently exercised. The puzzle is why this dual strategy persists, what it reveals about the distribution of power and legitimacy in the contemporary system, and whether it constitutes a reformist or a ruptural project. The African vantage point is indispensable here, because the dual strategy has deep roots in the New International Economic Order (NIEO) debates of the 1970s and in Pan-African demands for economic sovereignty, and because African states today occupy a structurally ambiguous position: they are among the most vocal critics of Bretton Woods conditionality, yet they are also the most dependent on the financing those institutions provide.

This lesson sits at the intersection of three prior lessons. Lesson 14 (contemporary transition) established the macro-level shift from unipolarity toward contested multipolarity and the erosion of the liberal international order's normative authority. Lesson 16 (Bretton Woods) supplied the institutional baseline: the IMF, World

Bank, and GATT/WTO as the economic pillars of the postwar order, their governance structures weighted toward the founding powers, and the embedded-liberal compromise that traded openness for domestic stabilization. Lesson 28 (Pan-Africanism) traced the continental lineage of economic sovereignty claims, from Nkrumah's neo-colonialism thesis through the Lagos Plan of Action and the African Union's Agenda 2063. The present lesson synthesizes these threads by asking how the Global South's institutional revisionism connects the macro-level transition (L14) to the micro-level governance of specific institutions (L16) through the historical experience of anti-colonial and Pan-African mobilization (L28). Without this synthesis, the student sees BRICS expansion as an event; with it, BRICS expansion becomes legible as the latest episode in a century-long struggle over who governs the global economy and on what terms.

The lesson develops five key ideas in sequence. First, it genealogizes the "Global South" as an emergent, contested category rather than a natural bloc, tracing its movement from the Bandung Conference through the NIEO to its contemporary reactivation, and marking its limits: internal heterogeneity, the risk of elite capture, and the analytical slippage between geography, income, and political position. Second, it examines BRICS+ expansion from five to ten-plus members, analyzing the strategic logic of enlargement, the criteria (or absence thereof) for membership, and the tension between inclusivity and coherence. Third, it assesses the AIIB, NDB, and SCO as parallel and complementary institutions, distinguishing their mandates, governance models, and relationships to the Bretton Woods baseline. Fourth, it recovers the NIEO of the 1970s as a genealogical anchor, identifying which of its demands survived, which were defeated, and which were absorbed into the mainstream. Fifth, it analyzes the contestation of Bretton Woods itself—IMF quota reform, SDR rechanneling, and debt relief—as a reformist strategy that accepts the institutional frame while demanding redistribution within it. Together these ideas equip the student to evaluate whether contemporary revisionism is best understood as reform, rupture, or a hybrid that the existing vocabulary struggles to capture.

The African perspective is primary throughout, not a regional illustration. This is methodologically necessary because the African experience exposes what the other four perspectives systematically occlude. Western accounts tend to frame institutional revisionism as a challenge to a rules-based order whose rules are assumed to be legitimate; Chinese accounts tend to frame it as institutional innovation in service of a community of shared future; Russian accounts frame it as multipolarity and anti-hegemony; UN accounts frame it as a financing gap to be closed. Each of these captures something real, but each also abstracts from the historical experience of African states, which have been simultaneously the most structurally disadvantaged by Bretton Woods governance and the most dependent on its financing. The African vantage point—drawing on Grovogui's analysis of quasi-sovereignty, Mamdani's work on the colonial state, Rodney's underdevelopment thesis, Nkrumah's neo-colonialism, Nyerere's ujamaa, Cabral's theory of culture and liberation, Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie, Mbembe's postcolony, Bayart's extraversion, Tamale's decolonial feminism, and Oyěwùmí's critique of the gendered epistemology of colonial modernity—reveals that institutional revisionism is not merely a geopolitical competition among great powers but a continuation of anti-colonial struggles over economic sovereignty, now waged through the technical language of quotas, lending standards, and special drawing rights. It also reveals the risk that revisionism reproduces the very hierarchies it claims to dismantle, when new institutions are capitalized and governed by the same large states that dominate the old ones.

Methodologically, the lesson operates at four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—and requires the student to move among them without conflating them. At the individual level, the lesson examines the agency of specific leaders and negotiators; at the state level, the interests and capacities of member states; at the systemic level, the distribution of power and the logic of institu-

tional competition; at the transnational level, the role of civil society, social movements, and epistemic communities in shaping demands for reform. The lesson also requires the student to reconstruct five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on the central topic as a whole, steel-manning each from within, identifying what it contributes and what it occludes, and adjudicating among them on the basis of evidence rather than assertion. This is not an exercise in relativism; it is an exercise in disciplined pluralism, in which perspectives are treated as partial but not arbitrary, and in which the African perspective is given analytical priority because it is the one most consistently marginalized in the existing literature.

By the end of the lesson, the student will be able to: define and genealogize the "Global South" and identify its analytical limits; explain the strategic logic and internal tensions of BRICS+ expansion; compare the AIIB, NDB, and SCO across mandate, governance, and relationship to Bretton Woods; trace the NIEO's legacies into contemporary demands; analyze IMF quota reform, SDR rechanneling, and debt relief as mechanisms of institutional contestation; reconstruct all five perspectives on institutional revisionism; and produce an evidence-based adjudication of whether contemporary revisionism is reformist, ruptural, or hybrid. The student will also be able to identify the falsifiers that would distinguish these interpretations—such as whether new institutions adopt the same conditionalities as old ones, whether quota reform actually redistributes voting power, and whether debt relief is accompanied by structural change or merely extends the life of an unsustainable status quo. These skills are directly transferable to the forward-linked lessons on climate governance (L51), forecasting (L58), and grand strategy (L61), where the same questions of institutional legitimacy, power redistribution, and the gap between rhetoric and practice recur.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. What does Lesson 14 identify as the principal markers of the contemporary transition in global order, and how does it characterize the relationship between unipolarity and multipolarity?
2. According to Lesson 16, what were the original mandates of the IMF and the World Bank at Bretton Woods, and how did the "embedded liberalism" compromise reconcile openness with domestic stabilization?
3. Lesson 16 discusses the governance structures of the Bretton Woods institutions. What is the significance of quota-based voting in the IMF, and which states hold disproportionate influence?
4. Lesson 28 traces Pan-Africanism as a political project. How did Nkrumah's concept of neocolonialism frame the relationship between political independence and economic dependence?
5. Lesson 28 examines the OAU and its successor, the AU. What tension between sovereignty and collective security or intervention has characterized continental institution-building?
6. Lesson 14 distinguishes levels of analysis. Briefly define the systemic and transnational levels and give one example of each from the study of global order.

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Is BRICS+ best understood as a coherent geopolitical bloc, a loose forum of convenience, or something in between—and what evidence would distinguish these interpretations?
2. Does the AIIB function as a genuine alternative to the World Bank, or as a complementary institution that reproduces similar lending logics under different governance?
3. Why did the NIEO of the 1970s fail to achieve its core demands, and which of those demands have resurfaced in contemporary institutional revisionism?

4. Is "Global South" an analytically useful category, or does its internal heterogeneity undermine its explanatory power?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Global South**: A contested political and analytical category grouping states historically subjected to colonialism and contemporary structural disadvantage in the global economy; not a geographic or income designation alone.
- **Institutional revisionism**: The strategy of challenging the distribution of authority within existing international institutions while simultaneously building parallel or complementary ones, rather than pursuing either pure reform or pure exit.
- **BRICS+**: The expanded grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa plus new members (including Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and others), representing a claim to greater voice in global governance.
- **AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank)**: A multilateral development bank established in 2016, headquartered in Beijing, focused on infrastructure financing in Asia and beyond.
- **NDB (New Development Bank)**: A multilateral development bank established by BRICS in 2015, headquartered in Shanghai, with a mandate to finance infrastructure and sustainable development in BRICS and other emerging economies.
- **SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation)**: A Eurasian political, economic, and security organization founded in 2001, expanded to include India, Pakistan, and Iran, focused on regional security and counter-terrorism.
- **NIEO (New International Economic Order)**: A set of demands advanced by developing countries in the 1970s through the UN General Assembly, calling for sovereign control over natural resources, commodity price stabilization, technology transfer, and restructuring of trade and finance.
- **Bretton Woods institutions**: The IMF and the World Bank, established at the 1944 Bretton Woods conference, together with the later GATT/WTO, forming the economic pillar of the postwar order.
- **IMF quota**: A member state's financial contribution to the IMF, which determines its voting power, access to financing, and SDR allocation.
- **SDR (Special Drawing Rights)**: An international reserve asset created by the IMF, allocated to member countries; rechanneling refers to redirecting SDRs from wealthy to vulnerable countries.
- **Debt relief**: The reduction, restructuring, or cancellation of sovereign debt, including through initiatives such as HIPC and the G20 Common Framework.
- **Multipolarity**: A distribution of power among several major centers rather than one or two, with implications for institutional competition and normative pluralism.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the genealogy of the "Global South" as a political category—tracing its emergence from the Bandung Conference of 1955 and the Non-Aligned Movement through the Third World project of the 1970s, its apparent dissolution after 1989, and its reactivation in the 2000s—identifying the material, discursive, and institutional mechanisms that periodically reconstitute the category and specifying the scope conditions under which it coheres or fragments. (Bloom: Analyze)

2. **Evaluate** the strategic logic of BRICS+ expansion from five to ten-plus members, assessing whether enlargement strengthens the bloc's bargaining power in global governance or dilutes its coherence, and adjudicating between the "institutional revisionism" and "parallel order" interpretations using evidence from the 2023 Johannesburg II Declaration and subsequent summit communiqués. (Bloom: Evaluate)

3. **Compare** the AIIB, NDB, and SCO as institutional forms—distinguishing their mandates, governance structures, and relationships to the Bretton Woods system— and determine whether each constitutes a genuine alternative, a complementary parallel, or a hedging instrument, drawing on AIIB annual reports and NDB lending data. (Bloom: Compare)

4. **Reconstruct** the New International Economic Order (NIEO) of the 1970s as both a historical episode and a living institutional legacy, explaining how its demands (commodity price stabilization, technology transfer, sovereign debt restructuring) reappear in contemporary reform agendas and how its failure shaped subsequent Global South strategy. (Bloom: Reconstruct)

5. **Critique** contemporary contestation of Bretton Woods—IMF quota reform, SDR rechanneling, and debt relief—by identifying the specific veto points that block reform, the distributional consequences of the status quo, and the conditions under which incremental adjustment gives way to institutional rupture, using IMF quota review documentation and G20 Common Framework data. (Bloom: Critique)

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The 'Global South' as emergent category: genealogy, contestation, and limits
Bolded Causal Claim: The "Global South" is not a geographic or economic descriptor but a politically constructed category that periodically re-emerges when a critical mass of post-colonial states perceives the existing international order as structurally exclusionary; its coherence depends on the presence of a shared grievance against hegemonic rule-making and a set of institutional vehicles through which that grievance can be articulated, and it fragments when either the grievance dissipates or the vehicles are captured by narrower state interests.

Mechanism: The category operates through three interlocking mechanisms. First, a *discursive mechanism*: the term "Global South" performs boundary-drawing work, distinguishing a set of states that share a historical experience of colonial subordination and contemporary marginalization from the "Global North" that sets the rules. This is not merely descriptive; as Acharya (2018) argues, the vocabulary of global order is itself a site of contestation, and the reclamation of categorical labels is a form of agency. The shift from "Third World" to "Global South" in the 1990s and 2000s was not cosmetic: it reflected the collapse of the socialist bloc that had given the "Second World" its meaning, the rise of a multipolar distribution of economic power, and the need for a category that could accommodate both poor and middle-income states without the developmentalist teleology of "Third World." Second, a *material mechanism*: the category gains traction when there is a measurable divergence between the distribution of economic weight and the distribution of institutional voice. The 2008 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2022-2023 debt distress in low- and middle-income countries all functioned as material shocks that reactivated the category by demonstrating that crisis-response architectures (IMF programs, vaccine distribution, debt relief frameworks) were designed in and for the North. Third, an *institutional mechanism*: the category requires vehicles—G77, NAM, BRICS, the African Union's Agenda 2063, the G20's developing-country caucuses—through which collective demands

can be formulated and transmitted. Without these vehicles, the category remains a sentiment; with them, it becomes a negotiating bloc. The mechanism is therefore conditional: the category emerges when discursive grievance, material divergence, and institutional capacity align, and it recedes when any one of these three weakens.

The genealogy matters because it reveals that the category has been assembled and disassembled before. The Bandung Conference of 1955 is conventionally treated as the origin point, but Bandung itself was a crystallization of earlier anti-colonial solidarities—the 1947 Asian Relations Conference, the 1953 Colombo Powers meeting, and the longer tradition of pan-African and pan-Asian congresses dating to the early twentieth century. Bandung produced the ten principles (the "Dasasila") that became the normative grammar of Third Worldism: respect for sovereignty, non-interference, equality, and anti-racism. The Non-Aligned Movement, formalized at Belgrade in 1961, gave the category institutional form, though it was always internally heterogeneous—spanning socialist and capitalist economies, authoritarian and democratic regimes, and states with vastly different levels of development. The 1970s saw the peak of Third World institutionalism: the NIEO declaration of 1974, the Group of 77's expansion, and the UNCTAD conferences that attempted to restructure global trade. The category then fragmented in the 1980s and 1990s under the pressure of debt crises, structural adjustment, and the end of the Cold War, which removed the strategic rationale for superpower courting of non-aligned states. The "Global South" re-emerged in the 2000s not as a revival of Third Worldism but as a new configuration: larger economies (China, India, Brazil, South Africa) with greater bargaining power, a more multipolar distribution of power, and a different relationship to global capitalism—participating in it rather than seeking to delink from it.

Scope Conditions: The category coheres under four conditions. First, there must be a *shared grievance* that is structural rather than episodic—something about the rules of the game, not just a bad outcome. The debt crises of the 1980s were episodic; the underrepresentation of developing countries in IMF voting shares is structural. Second, there must be *institutional vehicles* capable of aggregating preferences and transmitting them—without the G77, the African Union, or BRICS, the category has no organizational substrate. Third, there must be a *critical mass of states* with sufficient economic weight to make the category consequential; the Global South of the 2020s is not the Global South of the 1970s precisely because China, India, and Brazil now have the economic heft to make demands credible. Fourth, there must be a *discursive environment* in which the category is legible and usable—media, academic, and diplomatic vocabularies that treat "Global South" as a meaningful unit. The category fragments when any of these conditions fails: when states perceive their interests as divergent (India and China's border tensions, Brazil's oscillation between South-South and Atlanticist orientations), when institutional vehicles are captured by dominant members (the BRICS New Development Bank's lending patterns), or when the discursive environment shifts to emphasize intra-South inequality rather than North-South hierarchy.

The strongest counterargument to the category's coherence comes from within the South itself. Mamdani (1996) and, more recently, scholars of "subaltern" international relations have argued that the category homogenizes states with radically different colonial experiences, class structures, and geopolitical positions. The "Global South" can become a rhetorical device that allows large middle-income countries to claim solidarity with the poorest while pursuing their own interests—a dynamic visible in the BRICS+ expansion, where the inclusion of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran alongside Ethiopia and Egypt creates a bloc whose internal heterogeneity rivals that of the G20. The category's limits are therefore not merely analytical but political: it can obscure as much as it reveals, and its deployment is itself a strategic act.

Observable Implications: If the category is genuinely emergent rather than merely rhetorical, we should ob-

serve: (a) increasing use of "Global South" in official diplomatic discourse (UN General Assembly speeches, G20 communiqués, BRICS declarations); (b) institutional innovation that explicitly references South-South solidarity (NDB, AIIB's "lean, clean, green" branding, the African Continental Free Trade Area); (c) voting cohesion in multilateral forums on issues framed as North-South (WTO negotiations, climate finance, pandemic response); and (d) the emergence of South-South financial flows that bypass Northern institutions (China's Belt and Road, India's lines of credit, the NDB's local-currency lending). Conversely, if the category is primarily rhetorical, we should observe: (a) divergence between South-South rhetoric and bilateral behavior (India's participation in the Quad, Brazil's NATO partnership dialogues); (b) the failure of collective action on debt relief (the G20 Common Framework's slow uptake); and (c) the capture of South-South institutions by dominant members (China's share of NDB lending, the AIIB's governance structure). The evidence as of 2024 is mixed: the category is clearly operative in discourse and in some institutional forms, but its material coherence remains contested.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point reveals that the "Global South" category, while useful, risks reproducing the very hierarchies it claims to oppose if it is dominated by large middle-income states whose interests diverge from those of the poorest. African scholarship—Grovogui's (2006) critique of the "standard of civilization," Mbembe's (2001) analysis of the postcolony, and Bayart's (2009) work on extraversion—shows that the category's genealogy is inseparable from the specific experience of African states: the slave trade, colonial partition, and the post-independence struggle for economic sovereignty. From this perspective, the "Global South" is not a natural grouping but a political project that must be continuously rebuilt, and its African component must be understood not as a passive recipient of South-South solidarity but as an agent with its own demands—debt cancellation, climate finance, technology transfer, and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The African Union's Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA are not merely regional projects but attempts to construct the material basis for a more coherent Southern bloc. What the African perspective reveals that others miss is the *internal* dimension of the category: the "Global South" is not just a North-South relationship but a set of South-South relationships that are themselves structured by inequality, and any analysis that treats the South as a unitary actor obscures the power asymmetries within it.

Chinese: China frames the Global South as a "community of shared future" (□□□□□□□□), a concept that Xi Jinping has elevated to the center of Chinese foreign policy discourse. From this perspective, the category is not primarily about grievance but about constructive engagement: China's role is to provide public goods (infrastructure, financing, technology) that the North has failed to deliver. The Belt and Road Initiative, the AIIB, and the NDB are presented as institutional expressions of this commitment. The Chinese perspective occludes the power asymmetries within the South—particularly China's own economic dominance—and tends to treat Southern solidarity as convergent with Chinese interests. It also tends to downplay the coercive dimensions of Chinese economic engagement (debt distress in Sri Lanka, Zambia) that complicate the narrative of benign South-South cooperation.

Russian: Russia frames the Global South through the lens of multipolarity and anti-hegemonism, drawing on a Soviet-era vocabulary of anti-imperialism that has been repurposed for the post-2014 context. From this perspective, the category is defined by opposition to US unipolarity and the "rules-based order" that Russia characterizes as a euphemism for Western dominance. The SCO and BRICS are presented as institutional vehicles for a more just international order. The Russian perspective occludes the fact that its own actions (the 2022 invasion of Ukraine) have complicated its claim to represent Southern interests, and that many Global South states have refused to align with Russia on Ukraine, revealing the limits of anti-hegemonic

solidarity when it conflicts with economic interests.

Western: The Western perspective is divided between a "reform" camp and a "rupture" camp. The reform camp (Cooper and Farooq 2016; Acharya 2018) acknowledges the legitimacy of Southern grievances and advocates for incremental institutional adjustment—IMF quota reform, World Bank capital increases, G20 expansion. The rupture camp warns that parallel institutions (AIIB, NDB, SCO) are designed to fragment the global order and undermine the liberal international order's normative foundations. Both camps tend to treat the "Global South" as an object of policy rather than a subject of history, and both understate the degree to which Western institutions themselves generated the grievances that produced the category. The Western perspective's key occlusion is its own agency in creating the conditions for Southern solidarity.

UN: The UN perspective treats the Global South as a development challenge and a partner in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The UN's framing emphasizes financing gaps, capacity building, and the need for "inclusive multilateralism." This perspective is institutional rather than geopolitical: it does not take sides in the North-South contestation but seeks to mediate it through frameworks like the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the SDG financing gap estimates. Its occlusion is the structural power asymmetry that makes "inclusive multilateralism" difficult to achieve when the Security Council and the Bretton Woods institutions remain dominated by the same powers that created them.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — BRICS+ Expansion: From Five to Ten-Plus Members and the Strategic Logic

Bolded Causal Claim: BRICS+ expansion increases the aggregate bargaining power and institutional visibility of the Global South, but the same heterogeneity that enlarges the coalition also limits its capacity to convert demographic and economic weight into coherent, binding revisions of global governance.

Mechanism: The mechanism is not simply that more members produce more power. It operates through four channels. First, aggregation: by adding populous, resource-rich, and strategically located states, BRICS+ raises its share of global population, energy production, and GDP at purchasing power parity, thereby increasing the cost to Western powers of ignoring Southern demands in forums such as the G20, the UN General Assembly, and the IMF and World Bank. Second, agenda brokerage: summit declarations and ministerial working groups create a recurring calendar in which issues such as local-currency settlement, grain and fertilizer security, digital infrastructure, and UN Security Council reform can be framed as "Global South" priorities rather than bilateral grievances. Third, institutional thickening: the New Development Bank, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement, and BRICS+ dialogues with outreach partners provide at least partial alternatives to Western-controlled finance, giving members an outside option that strengthens their voice even when they do not use it. Fourth, hedging: for many middle powers, BRICS+ membership is a portfolio strategy rather than an exit; it signals dissatisfaction with the status quo while preserving access to Western markets, security guarantees, and Bretton Woods finance. Yet each channel has a counter-channel. Aggregation is undermined by internal asymmetry, especially China's economic dominance relative to other members. Agenda brokerage is constrained by consensus decision-making, which pushes declarations toward lowest-common-denominator language. Institutional thickening is limited by capital scarcity and by the fact that BRICS+ institutions remain smaller and less liquid than their Western counterparts. Hedging means that members' commitment to collective revision is instrumental and reversible, as Argentina's post-2023 withdrawal from accession illustrates. The result is a coalition whose size is its strength and whose diversity is its constraint: it can block, delay, and embarrass, but it struggles to legislate.

Scope Conditions: Expansion works as institutional revisionism under conditions where (i) dissatisfaction with the status quo is widely shared and salient—stagnant IMF quota shares, rising debt-service burdens, sanctions exposure, and perceived double standards in the application of international law; (ii) member economies are complementary rather than directly competitive in strategic sectors, allowing trade and investment gains to offset political friction; (iii) at least one member can provide public goods such as capital, infrastructure finance, or diplomatic brokerage; and (iv) Western powers are either unwilling or unable to offer credible reform. It is weakened when members are security rivals, as with India-China border tensions, Saudi-Iranian competition, or Egypt-Ethiopia disputes over the Nile; when domestic political turnover reverses accession commitments; or when Western institutions co-opt Southern demands through partial reform. The scope condition is therefore not merely economic size but "negative consensus": members need not agree on a positive blueprint, but they must agree that the current distribution of institutional power is illegitimate enough to justify collective voice. Where that negative consensus frays—because one member's security threat is another's partner—BRICS+ reverts to a summit forum rather than a revisionist bloc.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, one should observe rising but uneven BRICS+ institutional activity: expanded summit declarations, new working groups, and incremental NDB lending, alongside persistent non-cohesion in UN voting on contested issues such as Ukraine or Gaza. One should also observe application queues from states seeking status and leverage, but also withdrawals or hesitations when accession becomes costly. The aggregate GDP (PPP) share of BRICS+ relative to the G7 should rise or remain high, yet this economic indicator should not be mistaken for institutional power: voting shares in the IMF and World Bank, the currency composition of reserves, and the location of financial clearing infrastructure change more slowly. A further implication is defensive adaptation by Western institutions—reform rhetoric, new financing windows, and bilateral deals with key Southern states—because BRICS+ expansion functions partly as a competitive threat that disciplines the incumbent order. Finally, one should expect forum shopping by borrower states, which use BRICS+ membership and NDB access as leverage in negotiations with the World Bank and IMF without fully abandoning either.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, BRICS+ expansion is legible as the latest episode in a long struggle over economic sovereignty that runs from the Bandung Conference through the New International Economic Order to contemporary demands for quota reform and debt relief. African scholarship has long insisted that formal political independence did not produce economic independence: Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment, Nkrumah's warning about neo-colonialism, and Cabral's insistence on returning to the source all frame BRICS+ not as a gift from rising powers but as a terrain on which African agency must be exercised. The entry of Egypt and Ethiopia into BRICS+ in 2023 expanded African representation beyond South Africa's long-standing role as the continent's sole member, yet this expansion also imported regional rivalries and raised the question of whether African states are participants in a collective Southern project or clients in a China-centered bloc. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state and Bayart's work on extraversion suggest that African governments often navigate external power by converting dependency into bargaining leverage; BRICS+ can be read as one such strategy. But Mbembe's critique of postcolonial brutality and Grovogui's excavation of international law's racialized foundations remind us that new institutions do not automatically escape old hierarchies. African feminist scholars such as Oyěwùmí and Tamale add that global governance bargains are gendered: the "voice" amplified by BRICS+ is usually state and elite voice, not the voice of women, informal workers, or communities displaced by infrastructure corridors. From this perspective, the strategic value of BRICS+ for Africa lies less in its aggregate GDP share than in whether it creates space for African industrial policy, technology transfer, local content requirements, and debt restruc-

turing. The African Continental Free Trade Area and the African Union's Agenda 2063 provide normative benchmarks: BRICS+ is useful if it supports continental integration and productive capacity, and suspect if it merely re-routes extractive relationships through new capitals. Thus the African perspective is neither celebratory nor dismissive; it treats BRICS+ as a contested arena in which the old NIEO demand—sovereign equality plus structural transformation—must be renegotiated under new power asymmetries.

Chinese: China frames BRICS+ as a platform for "multipolarity" and a "community of shared future," emphasizing non-interference, development finance, and infrastructure connectivity. In this view, expansion demonstrates that the Western monopoly on legitimate multilateralism is eroding and that the Global South can build institutions reflecting its priorities. The occlusion is asymmetry: China's economic weight, its role as the largest trading partner for many members, and its bilateral leverage through the Belt and Road Initiative mean that "shared" governance may be less shared than the rhetoric implies. Chinese official discourse tends to treat institutional innovation as technical and developmental, understating the geopolitical competition embedded in it.

Russian: Russia presents BRICS+ as evidence of a "world majority" resisting hegemony and as a sanctions-resilient network in which Moscow is not isolated. The framing emphasizes anti-unilateralism, sovereign equality, and the right to development. Its occlusion is Russia's own reliance on China, its limited economic contribution relative to its political ambition, and the tension between anti-hegemonic rhetoric and coercive actions in its near abroad. Russian discourse often converts BRICS+ into a geopolitical scoreboard rather than a development project.

Western: Western perspectives are divided between those who see BRICS+ as a fragmentation risk that weakens universal standards and those who argue that reform of existing institutions is preferable to rupture. The first emphasizes authoritarian solidarity, sanctions evasion, and the dilution of human-rights and governance conditionality. The second, more reformist, acknowledges that quota stagnation and legitimacy deficits have pushed middle powers toward alternatives. The occlusion common to both is the difficulty of conceding that Western dominance itself generated the demand for BRICS+; "reform versus rupture" often presumes that the baseline order was legitimate for all.

UN: The UN perspective treats BRICS+ as both a partner and a complication in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It emphasizes financing gaps, climate finance, and the need for "inclusive multilateralism," while worrying that competing blocs may fragment normative frameworks. Its occlusion is structural: the UN cannot easily adjudicate between incumbent and challenger institutions when its own Security Council and the Bretton Woods bodies remain dominated by the powers that created them.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — AIIB, NDB, SCO: Parallel and Complementary Institutions

Bolded Causal Claim: Parallel institutions created by non-Western powers do not simply replace Bretton Woods bodies; they complement, compete with, and legitimate them, and their revisionist significance depends on whether they alter financing norms, governance rules, or the outside options available to borrowers.

Mechanism: The mechanism is "competitive multilateralism." New institutions change global governance not only by lending money but by changing the menu of choices and the standards against which incumbent institutions are judged. The AIIB operates primarily as an infrastructure financier: it was created to address the gap between infrastructure needs and available finance in Asia, and it has emphasized lean staffing, rapid project approval, and co-financing with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. Its significance lies in demonstrating that a China-initiated multilateral bank can adopt familiar safeguards, obtain a high credit

rating, and issue bonds in international markets, thereby normalizing non-Western leadership in development finance. The NDB, founded by BRICS members, has emphasized equal voting among its founders and a growing share of local-currency lending, positioning itself as a development bank that reduces currency mismatch and borrower dependence on dollar finance. The SCO is not a financial institution but a security and political platform; its mechanism is normative and geopolitical, providing a Eurasian forum for counter-terrorism coordination, energy dialogue, and connectivity initiatives, and expanding the diplomatic space in which China and Russia can present themselves as providers of public goods. Together, these institutions create three effects. First, an outside option: borrowers can compare terms, timelines, and conditionality, which may improve their bargaining position even with legacy institutions. Second, a demonstration effect: by co-financing projects with the World Bank and ADB, the AIIB signals that parallel institutions can be compatible with existing standards, reducing the perceived risk of defection. Third, a legitimation effect: founders gain status as responsible stakeholders and rule-makers, not merely rule-takers. Yet complementarity cuts both ways. Co-financing means that AIIB and NDB projects often remain embedded in the same legal, environmental, and procurement frameworks as Western-led finance; their "alternative" status is therefore partial. Governance asymmetries—China's dominant share in the AIIB, the NDB's expansion beyond BRICS founders, and the SCO's consensus-based China-Russia condominium—limit the claim that these institutions are more egalitarian than the ones they challenge. The mechanism produces pressure for adaptation, not automatic displacement.

Scope Conditions: Parallel institutions function as effective revisionist tools when (i) there is a large, unmet demand for infrastructure or development finance that incumbent institutions cannot or will not meet quickly; (ii) founders can mobilize capital and technical expertise credible enough to attract borrowers and co-financiers; (iii) their governance and safeguard standards are perceived as legitimate by enough states to avoid stigma; and (iv) geopolitical tensions do not prevent cooperation among founders. They are less effective when capital constraints force dependence on international bond markets, when safeguards are seen as weaker or politicized, when founder rivalries such as China-India or Russia-China asymmetry undermine trust, or when sanctions and financial restrictions limit their reach. A further scope condition is "normative compatibility": if parallel institutions are framed as complements, they can gain legitimacy; if framed as explicit rivals, they may trigger defensive coalitions and capital-market skepticism. Thus the AIIB's early co-financing strategy was not a retreat from revisionism but a mechanism for making revisionism acceptable.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, AIIB annual reports should show sustained lending volumes, a significant co-financing share with the World Bank and regional development banks, and expansion of membership beyond Asia. The NDB should show growth in local-currency lending and project approvals in member states, while also revealing constraints from capital-raising and credit-rating considerations. The SCO should show expanded membership or dialogue partnerships, joint exercises, and connectivity initiatives, but also difficulty in producing binding economic agreements. Incumbent institutions should respond with procedural reforms—faster approval, new infrastructure windows, or safeguard revisions—because parallel institutions create competitive pressure. Borrower states should engage in "multi-banking," using AIIB or NDB finance for some projects and World Bank finance for others, rather than wholesale switching. One should also observe debates over standards: civil society and Western governments will scrutinize AIIB and NDB safeguards, while founders will emphasize efficiency and respect for sovereignty. The absence of a wholesale shift in reserve currencies or clearing systems would not disprove the mechanism; the claim is about institutional menu expansion, not monetary revolution.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): For African states, the AIIB, NDB, and SCO raise a concrete question: do parallel institutions expand the financing available for structural transformation, or do they add new creditors to an already unsustainable debt landscape? African scholarship on development has long warned that infrastructure without industrialization can reproduce extraversion: Rodney's underdevelopment thesis, Nkrumah's neo-colonialism, and Bayart's politics of the belly all suggest that new lenders may simply finance extractive corridors, enclave projects, and elite bargains. Yet the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa identify a genuine financing gap that Western institutions have not closed. From this vantage, the NDB and AIIB are potentially useful if they support regional integration, energy access, and value-added production; they are dangerous if they replicate the "projectization" of development, bypass African industrial policy, or weaken safeguards. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state and Grovogui's critique of international legal hierarchies suggest that African governments must scrutinize governance rules, not just interest rates: who selects projects, who bears risk, and who has recourse when projects fail? African feminist scholars such as Tamale and Oyěwùmí would add that infrastructure finance is never gender-neutral; transport, energy, and water projects reshape care work, land tenure, and informal livelihoods in ways that standard economic metrics may obscure. The SCO is less directly relevant to Africa, though its expansion of dialogue partnerships and its China-Russia security coordination may affect African states through arms markets, counter-terrorism norms, and great-power competition. The African perspective therefore treats parallel institutions as instruments to be evaluated against continental priorities, not as automatic allies. It also insists that African agency requires more than membership: it requires capacity to negotiate contracts, monitor safeguards, and align external finance with the African Continental Free Trade Area. In short, the question is not whether the AIIB is "alternative" in the abstract, but whether it is accountable to African publics.

Chinese: China presents the AIIB as a "lean, clean, and green" institution that addresses infrastructure gaps while respecting borrower sovereignty. The NDB is framed as a BRICS-owned vehicle for development finance and local-currency lending, and the SCO as a security community based on the "Shanghai Spirit" of mutual trust and non-interference. This perspective emphasizes institutional innovation, South-South cooperation, and the legitimacy of non-Western leadership. Its occlusion is the concentration of power within these institutions—especially China's dominant position in the AIIB—and the possibility that "respect for sovereignty" can become a rationale for weaker safeguards or for financing projects aligned with Chinese strategic interests.

Russian: Russia frames the NDB and SCO as instruments of multipolarity and as buffers against Western sanctions and hegemony. The SCO, in particular, is presented as a Eurasian security architecture that resists NATO expansion and unilateral intervention. The NDB is valued for reducing dollar dependence and for providing finance outside Western-controlled channels. The occlusion is Russia's limited capital contribution relative to its geopolitical ambition, its dependence on China within these institutions, and the tension between anti-hegemonic rhetoric and its own coercive regional policies.

Western: Western perspectives range from concern about standards erosion and geopolitical fragmentation to pragmatic acceptance of co-financing and reform pressure. Critics worry that parallel institutions may weaken environmental and social safeguards, procurement transparency, and debt sustainability. Reformists argue that the AIIB's adoption of familiar standards and its co-financing with the World Bank show that competition can improve incumbent institutions. The occlusion is the tendency to treat Western standards as universal while understating the legitimacy deficits and slow disbursement that drove borrowers toward alternatives.

UN: The UN perspective sees the AIIB, NDB, and SCO through the lens of the SDG financing gap and the need for "inclusive multilateralism." It welcomes additional development finance and infrastructure investment, while emphasizing debt sustainability, safeguards, and alignment with the 2030 Agenda. Its occlusion is the difficulty of ensuring accountability when new institutions proliferate outside the UN's normative and oversight frameworks, and the underlying power asymmetries that make "inclusive" multilateralism hard to achieve.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — The New International Economic Order (1970s) and its institutional legacies

Bolded Causal Claim: The New International Economic Order was not merely a rhetorical protest by newly independent states but a structured attempt to alter the rules of trade, finance, and technology transfer through UN majorities and commodity leverage; although its 1970s program was defeated by debt crisis and neoliberal counter-mobilization, its institutional and normative legacies persist in contemporary Global South demands for debt relief, special and differential treatment, and South-South institutional alternatives.

Mechanism: The NIEO operated through three linked channels. The first was intellectual: structuralist and dependency theories reframed underdevelopment as a product of unequal exchange rather than domestic failure. Prebisch's center-periphery analysis, Cardoso and Faletto's dependent development, and Rodney's account of how colonial extraction structured contemporary poverty all supplied the analytical premise that the international economy was politically constructed and could be politically renegotiated. The second channel was institutional: the Group of 77 and UNCTAD used post-decolonization majorities in the UN General Assembly to pass the 1974 Declaration and Programme of Action on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order and the 1974 Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States. These documents asserted permanent sovereignty over natural resources, regulation of transnational corporations, technology transfer, commodity price stabilization, preferential market access, and debt relief. The third channel was material: the 1973 oil shock demonstrated that commodity cartels could redistribute income and temporarily shifted bargaining power toward resource exporters. The mechanism failed, however, because it required sustained Southern cohesion across heterogeneous economies, Northern willingness to accept binding constraints, and macroeconomic conditions favorable to debtors. The 1982 debt crisis, the Volcker shock, and IMF conditionality reversed that bargaining power. Yet the NIEO's legacies remained: UNCTAD survived as a forum; special and differential treatment entered GATT and later WTO practice; debt relief frameworks such as HIPC and MDRI institutionalized some demands; South-South cooperation expanded; and the vocabulary of economic sovereignty persisted. The legacy is therefore one of institutional revisionism rather than revolution: the NIEO seeded reforms and parallel institutions that reappear whenever commodity cycles, debt distress, or geopolitical competition reopen political space.

Scope Conditions: The NIEO mechanism was most effective when commodity prices rose and Southern exporters gained leverage; when decolonization produced UN majorities; when Northern economies were vulnerable to supply shocks; and when Southern states could coordinate despite divergent interests. It weakened when interest rates rose, debt overhang empowered creditors, IMF conditionality imposed liberalization, and Northern states coordinated through the G7 and OECD. It also presupposed state capacity and developmentalist elites; where states were captured by rentier or comprador interests, NIEO demands risked becoming symbolic. Contemporary analogues face similar scope conditions: debt relief requires creditor coordination; WTO reform requires consensus; climate finance requires Northern fiscal commitment. The mechanism is therefore historically contingent rather than automatically reproducible.

Observable Implications: If the NIEO-legacy thesis holds, one should observe recurring demands in BRICS+ and G77 statements for debt relief, SDR rechanneling, and special treatment; institutional persistence of UNCTAD and the G77; South-South banks and funds as partial alternatives; Northern resistance to binding commodity or technology-transfer regimes; and reformist rather than abolitionist rhetoric toward Bretton Woods. Evidence includes the BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023) calls for IMF and World Bank reform and local-currency trade, African Union demands for debt relief and climate finance, and WTO disputes over special and differential treatment. A falsifier would be a sustained Southern consensus abandoning institutional reform for full autarky, or a Northern agreement to comprehensive binding redistribution that rendered revisionist demands obsolete.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African scholarship treats the NIEO as an unfinished chapter of decolonization rather than a failed 1970s episode. Nkrumah's neo-colonialism thesis argued that political independence without economic sovereignty left African states vulnerable to external control through trade, finance, and multinational corporations; Rodney's underdevelopment thesis showed how colonial extraction structured contemporary poverty; Nyerere's Arusha Declaration and ujamaa emphasized self-reliance and cooperative development; Cabral linked liberation to control of productive resources; and Fanon warned that formal independence could reproduce elite domination. From this vantage, NIEO demands for commodity price stabilization, technology transfer, and debt relief were not utopian but defensive: they sought to prevent the conversion of political sovereignty into economic subordination. Contemporary African perspectives connect NIEO legacies to Agenda 2063, the African Continental Free Trade Area, demands for climate finance and loss-and-damage compensation, and debt relief through the G20 Common Framework. The African perspective also insists that debt is not merely a liquidity problem but a structural feature of unequal integration, and that "reform" must include reparative dimensions. Its occlusion is the risk of romanticizing state capacity: African scholars such as Mamdani and Bayart have shown how postcolonial states were often captured by patronage, extraversion, or elite bargaining, meaning that NIEO-style demands could be instrumentalized by domestic elites. The African perspective is therefore strongest when it combines a structural critique of global inequality with an internal critique of governance, linking external reform to domestic accountability.

Chinese: Chinese perspectives frame the NIEO as a legitimate anti-hegemonic precedent and align it with "community of shared future for mankind" and South-South cooperation. They emphasize infrastructure finance, industrialization, and non-interference, presenting China as a partner rather than a new hegemon. The occlusion is China's own creditor power and the asymmetries of Belt and Road lending, which can reproduce dependency even while rhetorically opposing it.

Russian: Russian perspectives interpret the NIEO through multipolarity and anti-hegemonic framing, supporting Southern demands as a counterweight to Western dominance. They emphasize sovereignty and resistance to sanctions. The occlusion is the tendency to instrumentalize Global South grievances while downplaying Russia's own coercive economic practices and limited development finance.

Western: Western perspectives often view the NIEO as a failed statist project defeated by market realities, while acknowledging that its grievances about terms of trade and debt were partially legitimate. The contemporary "reform versus rupture" debate asks whether to adjust quotas and debt frameworks or resist binding redistribution. The occlusion is the assumption that Western market norms are universal and the underestimation of legitimacy deficits in incumbent institutions.

UN: The UN perspective treats the NIEO as a normative foundation for development cooperation, special

and differential treatment, and the SDGs. It welcomes South-South cooperation and institutional pluralism while emphasizing debt sustainability, safeguards, and alignment with the 2030 Agenda. The occlusion is the gap between declarations and implementation, and the difficulty of enforcing commitments in a fragmented system.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The contestation of Bretton Woods — IMF quota reform, SDR rechanneling, debt relief

Bolded Causal Claim: Contestation of Bretton Woods is driven by a structural mismatch between quota-based voting power and contemporary economic weights, the regressive distribution of Special Drawing Rights, and asymmetric debt relief; reform demands seek to convert institutional legitimacy into material redistribution, but are constrained by supermajority rules, creditor coordination failures, and the strategic interest of incumbent powers in preserving influence.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three institutional channels. First, IMF quotas determine not only financial subscriptions and access to Fund resources but also voting power and SDR allocations; because quotas reflect historical economic weights and are adjusted only through periodic reviews requiring an 85 percent supermajority, the United States retains effective veto power and emerging economies remain underrepresented relative to GDP. Second, SDRs are allocated by quota, so the 2021 $650 billion allocation disproportionately benefited advanced economies; rechanneling through the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust and the Resilience and Sustainability Trust was proposed to redirect unused SDRs to vulnerable countries, but participation is voluntary and disbursement has lagged. Third, debt relief mechanisms—HIPC and MDRI in the 2000s, the Debt Service Suspension Initiative and Common Framework during COVID-19—require creditor coordination among Paris Club, non-Paris Club (including China), and private bondholders; holdout problems, comparability-of-treatment disputes, and fears of moral hazard have limited uptake. Contestation arises because Global South states use G20, UN, BRICS+, and African Union platforms to demand quota realignment, SDR rechanneling, and faster debt relief, while incumbent powers offer incremental adjustments to preserve legitimacy without surrendering control. The mechanism is therefore not simply "reform versus rupture" but a bargaining process in which legitimacy deficits create pressure and institutional rules filter demands.

Scope Conditions: Reform is more likely when debt distress is widespread, geopolitical competition makes incumbent powers seek legitimacy, and Southern states coordinate through the G20 or BRICS+. It is less likely when the US Congress blocks quota changes, private creditors resist haircuts, China and the Paris Club disagree on comparability, or macroeconomic conditions reduce urgency. The mechanism also depends on technical consensus: without agreement on quota formulas (GDP, openness, variability, reserves), realignment stalls. Debt relief works best for low-income, multilateral-debt-heavy cases; it struggles with middle-income market debt and complex creditor structures. Acharya (2018) and Cooper and Farooq (2016) both point, in different ways, to the broader pattern in which rising powers challenge incumbent institutions while still seeking the legitimacy those institutions confer.

Observable Implications: If this thesis holds, one should observe quota reviews producing increases without major realignment; SDR rechanneling pledges exceeding actual disbursements; Common Framework cases moving slowly due to creditor coordination; BRICS+ and African Union statements demanding IMF and World Bank reform; and incumbent powers emphasizing "reform from within" while resisting voting-power shifts. Evidence includes the 2023-2024 IMF quota review cycle's 50 percent increase without substantive realignment, the creation of the Resilience and Sustainability Trust, limited Common Framework

uptake, and the BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023) calls for quota reform. A falsifier would be a comprehensive realignment matching economic weights or a binding, automatic debt-relief mechanism with full private-creditor participation.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African perspectives treat Bretton Woods contestation as a matter of structural justice rather than technical adjustment. From Nkrumah's neo-colonialism to contemporary African Union and G20 advocacy, African scholars and policymakers argue that quota underrepresentation, SDR regressivity, and debt overhang reproduce a system in which African states borrow in foreign currency, face procyclical conditionality, and lack voice in rules that shape their fiscal space. The African view emphasizes that debt relief is not charity but correction of an asymmetric system; it connects IMF reform to climate finance, since climate-vulnerable African states face debt distress exacerbated by external shocks. African scholarship highlights the legitimacy crisis of institutions that demand austerity while failing to deliver countercyclical support, and it stresses regional agency through the African Union's G20 membership, the African Development Bank, and demands for SDR rechanneling to regional institutions. Its occlusion is the heterogeneity of African economies and the risk that continental demands mask elite borrowing and weak debt management; internal accountability remains essential. Thus the African vantage point reframes IMF reform as part of a broader struggle for economic sovereignty and climate justice.

Chinese: Chinese perspectives support quota reform and multipolar governance, framing Bretton Woods as outdated and advocating a "community of shared future." They emphasize development finance and infrastructure, and support SDR rechanneling in principle. The occlusion is China's dual role as a major creditor and a beneficiary of export-led growth, which complicates its position as a champion of debt relief.

Russian: Russian perspectives frame Bretton Woods as an instrument of US hegemony and support de-dollarization, alternative payment systems, and multipolar finance. They emphasize sanctions resistance and sovereignty. The occlusion is the limited attractiveness of Russian financial alternatives and the instrumental use of anti-hegemonic rhetoric.

Western: Western perspectives are divided between "reform from within" and "fragmentation risk." Some argue that quota reform and SDR rechanneling can preserve legitimacy; others warn that rapid change undermines creditor confidence and institutional effectiveness. The occlusion is the tendency to treat incrementalism as sufficient while underestimating the cumulative legitimacy deficit.

UN: The UN perspective focuses on the SDG financing gap, debt sustainability, and inclusive multilateralism. It supports IMF reform, SDR rechanneling, and the Common Framework, while emphasizing human rights, social protection, and alignment with the 2030 Agenda. The occlusion is limited enforcement power and dependence on member-state consensus.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective treats institutional revisionism not as a technocratic adjustment of voting shares or a diplomatic contest over multipolarity, but as the unfinished business of decolonization. From this vantage point, the central question is not whether BRICS+ can rival the G7, whether the AIIB can match the World Bank, or whether IMF quotas can be marginally rebalanced. It is whether the rules, metrics, and hierarchies that govern global economic life still reproduce the colonial and racialized structures that Rodney, Nkrumah, Fanon, and Cabral identified as the core of underdevelopment. Institutional revisionism is therefore read as

a longue durée struggle over economic sovereignty: the attempt to convert formal political independence into substantive control over finance, trade, technology, debt, and development pathways. The African perspective is the longest and most developed here because it supplies the historical memory that the other four perspectives tend to compress into a post-1990 or post-2008 story. It insists that the New International Economic Order was not a failed footnote but a diagnostic moment that exposed the limits of sovereignty without structural transformation.

Historically, the NIEO of the 1970s crystallized demands that remain alive in contemporary debates: commodity price stabilization, technology transfer, preferential market access, debt relief, and a fairer international division of labor. African and broader Global South diplomats at UNCTAD and the General Assembly framed these demands as corrections to an international economic order built on unequal exchange. The failure of the NIEO is usually narrated in Western and UN accounts as a casualty of oil shocks, Northern resistance, and the neoliberal turn. The African perspective adds a sharper internal critique: the NIEO was also weakened by the class character of postcolonial states, by the extraversion of African elites, and by the difficulty of sustaining solidarity among states with divergent interests. Bayart's concept of extraversion is crucial here. African political economies have often been organized around the management of external dependence rather than its transcendence, with elites deriving power from their position as intermediaries between domestic societies and global markets, donors, and creditors. This means that institutional revisionism cannot be evaluated only by the rhetoric of sovereignty; it must be evaluated by whether it changes the material incentives that reward extraversion. Mamdani's distinction between citizens and subjects adds a further layer. Colonial rule produced bifurcated states in which urban citizens enjoyed rights while rural subjects were governed through customary authority. Contemporary global governance often reproduces this bifurcation by treating African states as sovereign units in international law while subjecting their populations to conditionality, austerity, and technocratic oversight. From this perspective, quota reform or new development banks are incomplete unless they alter the relationship between state power and social protection.

The African perspective also reframes the category of the "Global South." It acknowledges the genealogy of the term—Bandung, the Tricontinental, the G77, the NIEO, and later BRICS—but warns against treating it as a natural bloc. The category is politically useful because it names shared experiences of colonialism, racialized hierarchy, and structural disadvantage. Yet it can obscure the fact that the Global South contains states with vastly different capacities, interests, and degrees of agency. China and India are not in the same structural position as low-income African states; Russia is a nuclear great power with a permanent Security Council seat; Brazil and South Africa occupy intermediate positions. The African vantage point therefore insists on disaggregation. It asks who speaks for the Global South, who benefits from its institutional innovations, and whose priorities are diluted in the name of solidarity. This is particularly important in BRICS+ expansion. The 2023 Johannesburg II Declaration framed expansion as a step toward a more representative and multipolar order, and the inclusion of Egypt and Ethiopia in 2024 broadened African representation. But from an African perspective, two members out of a much larger continent cannot carry continental legitimacy, especially when their interests, debt profiles, and geopolitical alignments differ. South Africa's role as the original African member has been both valuable and constraining: it has provided a bridge between African and emerging-power agendas, but it has also risked being treated as the default African voice in forums where fifty-four states have distinct priorities.

On BRICS+ specifically, the African perspective is neither celebratory nor dismissive. It recognizes the strategic logic of expansion: larger markets, energy and mineral complementarities, diplomatic weight, and a platform for challenging Western dominance in agenda-setting. It also recognizes that BRICS+ can amplify

demands for IMF reform, SDR rechanneling, and development finance. But it worries about "sub-imperial" dynamics, in which large emerging economies use the language of South-South solidarity while reproducing extractive relationships with smaller states. African scholarship on resource governance and extraversion suggests that new institutions can become new arenas for old patterns if procurement, transparency, and local content rules are weak. The African perspective therefore asks whether BRICS+ institutions will finance industrialization and value addition, or merely facilitate commodity exports and infrastructure that locks in primary specialization. It also asks whether African states will have meaningful voice in the governance of the New Development Bank and any future BRICS financial mechanisms, or whether decision-making will reflect the capital contributions and geopolitical weight of China and India.

The parallel institutions—AIIB, NDB, and SCO—are read through the same lens. The African perspective does not treat them as automatic alternatives to Bretton Woods institutions. It treats them as complementary or parallel arenas whose value depends on governance, terms, and developmental outcomes. The AIIB's co-financing with the World Bank and its adoption of familiar environmental and social frameworks suggest that it is not a rupture but a competitor within a shared institutional grammar. That may be beneficial if it increases financing for infrastructure and reduces monopoly power, but it may also mean that the underlying standards, risk models, and creditor hierarchies remain intact. The NDB's emphasis on local-currency lending and its smaller scale are attractive to African borrowers worried about dollar exposure, yet its capital base and project portfolio remain limited relative to the continent's infrastructure gap. The SCO is less directly relevant to African economic governance, but its security and connectivity agendas intersect with African concerns about militarization, great-power competition, and the securitization of development. The African perspective warns that institutional proliferation can fragment accountability: borrowers may face multiple creditors with inconsistent standards, while creditors may compete for influence rather than coordinate for development.

The NIEO legacy is central to this perspective. African diplomats and scholars do not treat the NIEO as a nostalgic project; they treat it as an unfinished agenda. Its demands reappear in contemporary calls for special drawing right rechanneling, debt relief, climate finance, and reform of the international tax and trade architecture. The 2021 SDR allocation illustrated the problem: because allocations follow quota shares, high-income countries received the largest share of new liquidity, while African states received a small fraction relative to their needs. Rechanneling through the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust and the Resilience and Sustainability Facility is therefore welcomed but seen as insufficient and conditional. Similarly, the G20 Common Framework for debt treatments has been slow, creditor coordination has been difficult, and private creditors have often remained outside comparable treatment. The African perspective argues that debt relief must be timely, comprehensive, and linked to development and climate investment, not merely to fiscal consolidation. It also insists that debt sustainability analyses must account for climate vulnerability, pandemic risk, and the cost of capital, rather than treating African borrowing as a moral failure.

IMF quota reform is read with similar skepticism. The African perspective supports greater voice for underrepresented regions, but it questions whether marginal quota adjustments can correct a structure that was designed in an era of colonial and racial hierarchy. Quota formulas based on GDP, openness, variability, and reserves tend to reward large economies and financial centers, not necessarily those most affected by global shocks or most in need of policy space. The 2023 review cycle, which increased overall quotas without a major redistribution of shares, is seen by many African analysts as evidence that incremental reform can preserve legitimacy rhetorically while leaving power intact. The perspective therefore distinguishes between representation and transformation: more African chairs or slightly larger quotas may improve voice, but they do not by themselves change the conditionality, surveillance, and creditor power that shape macroeconomic

policy in debtor states.

What the African perspective contributes that the other four cannot is a historically grounded critique of the relationship between global governance and racialized underdevelopment. It connects contemporary institutional debates to colonial extraction, neocolonial dependence, and the politics of knowledge production. It also foregrounds the lived consequences of macroeconomic rules: austerity, unemployment, informalization, gendered burdens of social reproduction, and climate vulnerability. Tamale's Afro-feminist scholarship and Oyěwùmí's critique of the colonial invention of gender categories remind us that development finance is not gender-neutral; conditionality and fiscal consolidation often shift costs onto women and households. Aning and Danso's work on African security governance highlights that economic institutions cannot be separated from security architectures, because debt distress, resource extraction, and external military presence interact. Grovogui's critique of sovereignty and international legal hierarchy shows that African states have often been treated as quasi-sovereigns, granted formal equality while denied substantive equality. Mbembe's analysis of the postcolony and of brutalism helps explain why global economic governance can appear technocratic while producing violent exclusions.

The African perspective also has occlusions. It can overstate the coherence of "Africa" and understate internal diversity, class conflict, and elite agency. It can risk romanticizing the NIEO, which was itself shaped by state elites and did not adequately address gender, ethnicity, or democratic accountability. It can underplay the benefits of incremental reform, private investment, and institutional learning. It can treat external structure as the primary cause of underdevelopment while giving insufficient attention to domestic governance failures, corruption, and policy choices. And it can be instrumentalized by political elites who invoke anti-imperialism to deflect accountability. These limits matter. A rigorous African perspective must be self-critical: it should not assume that every challenge to Western institutions is emancipatory, nor that every Southern institution is automatically more legitimate. It should distinguish between reform that expands policy space and rhetoric that merely relocates dependency.

In sum, the African perspective reframes institutional revisionism as a question of historical justice and structural transformation. It supports the expansion of voice, the creation of parallel institutions, and the contestation of Bretton Woods, but it evaluates these developments by their effects on African sovereignty, industrialization, debt sustainability, and social protection. It contributes a memory of failed promises, a critique of extraversion, and a demand that global governance be measured not by the number of new institutions but by whether it ends the reproduction of underdevelopment.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective treats institutional revisionism as a necessary correction to an international order that no longer reflects the distribution of economic power, demographic weight, or developmental needs. It is anchored in the idea of a "community of shared future for mankind," which frames global governance not as a zero-sum contest but as a project of inclusive development, connectivity, and mutual benefit. From this vantage point, the Global South is not merely a residual category; it is the majority of humanity whose underrepresentation in Bretton Woods institutions has become a legitimacy crisis. China's support for BRICS+ expansion, the AIIB, the NDB, and quota reform is presented as institutional innovation rather than rupture: new platforms that complement existing institutions, increase financing for infrastructure, and give developing countries greater voice. The 2023 Johannesburg II Declaration is read as evidence that the international community is moving toward a more multipolar and representative order, with China positioning itself as a partner in development rather than a hegemon.

Mechanistically, the Chinese perspective emphasizes capacity-building and infrastructure-led growth. The AIIB is presented as a lean, clean, and green multilateral development bank, with high standards, co-financing with established institutions, and a focus on sustainable infrastructure. The NDB is presented as a bank created by and for emerging economies, with an emphasis on local-currency lending and reducing dependence on the dollar. The SCO is presented as a security and development platform for Eurasia, linking stability, connectivity, and economic cooperation. Quota reform and SDR rechanneling are supported as ways to make global liquidity more responsive to developing-country needs. The broader normative claim is that development should precede or accompany political conditionality: states should have policy space to pursue industrialization, poverty reduction, and modernization without externally imposed templates.

What this perspective contributes is a serious challenge to the assumption that Western institutional models are the only legitimate forms of multilateralism. It has mobilized capital, built infrastructure, and created forums in which developing countries can coordinate outside Western-dominated settings. It has also forced a debate about the adequacy of existing institutions, particularly in areas such as infrastructure finance and climate adaptation. For many African and Asian states, Chinese financing and AIIB lending have filled gaps left by traditional donors and the World Bank.

The occlusions are equally important. The Chinese perspective tends to understate power asymmetries within the institutions it promotes. China is the largest shareholder in the AIIB and a dominant economic presence in BRICS+, which raises questions about whether new institutions are genuinely multilateral or China-centered. It often frames debt sustainability concerns as Western propaganda, even though several borrowing countries face serious repayment pressures. It can treat non-interference as a neutral principle while overlooking how economic leverage shapes domestic politics. It also tends to present "community of shared future" as universally beneficial, without fully addressing how Chinese commercial interests, state-owned enterprises, and strategic priorities shape project selection. Finally, it may overstate the coherence of the Global South and understate the diversity of interests among BRICS+ members. The strongest version of the Chinese perspective would acknowledge these asymmetries and argue that institutional innovation still expands the menu of options available to developing countries, even if it does not eliminate hierarchy.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective frames institutional revisionism as part of a broader struggle against unipolar hegemony and for a multipolar world order. It treats BRICS+, the SCO, and demands for IMF reform as instruments for reducing Western dominance, particularly in the aftermath of sanctions and geopolitical confrontation. From this vantage point, the Global South is a coalition of states that resist external interference, defend sovereignty, and seek alternatives to a financial system dominated by the dollar and Western institutions. The 2023 BRICS expansion is interpreted as evidence that the West's ability to isolate Russia and shape global governance is declining. The SCO is presented as a Eurasian security architecture that challenges NATO-centric models and promotes non-interference, counterterrorism cooperation, and regional connectivity.

Mechanistically, Russia emphasizes de-dollarization, alternative payment systems, local-currency trade, and the political diversification of global institutions. It supports quota reform not only as a technical adjustment but as a challenge to Western voting dominance. It presents sanctions as proof that the existing order is weaponized and argues that multipolar institutions are necessary for economic security. In this framing, the NIEO legacy is less about commodity prices or technology transfer and more about the right of states to pursue independent development paths without external coercion.

What this perspective contributes is a sharp critique of the securitization of global economic governance. It

highlights how financial infrastructure, sanctions, and institutional power can be used as tools of coercion. It also expands diplomatic space for states that feel constrained by Western conditionality or geopolitical alignment. For some African, Asian, and Latin American governments, Russia's anti-hegemonic rhetoric resonates with historical experiences of intervention and unequal treatment.

The occlusions are severe and must be stated plainly. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has damaged its credibility as a defender of sovereignty and international law, creating a tension between its anti-hegemonic rhetoric and its own use of force. Its economy is heavily sanctioned, comparatively narrow, and dependent on commodity exports, which limits its capacity to provide development finance or institutional leadership. The SCO and BRICS+ are often more useful to Russia as diplomatic platforms than as mechanisms for delivering public goods. The anti-hegemonic framing can also be instrumental: it may serve to deflect attention from domestic authoritarianism, economic stagnation, and the use of energy and security leverage. Finally, Russia's perspective tends to conflate opposition to the West with support for development, even though multipolarity alone does not guarantee improved outcomes for poorer states. The strongest version of this perspective would separate legitimate critiques of hegemony from the defense of great-power prerogatives.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective is divided between two camps: those who argue that existing institutions can be reformed from within, and those who warn that rapid institutional fragmentation risks undermining global public goods. The reformist camp supports IMF quota adjustments, SDR rechanneling, debt relief, and greater developing-country voice, but insists that changes must preserve creditor confidence, macroeconomic stability, and high standards of transparency and accountability. The fragmentation camp worries that BRICS+, the AIIB, and the NDB are creating parallel structures that may weaken the World Bank, the IMF, and the broader liberal international order. From this vantage point, the Global South is a legitimate object of concern, but its demands must be balanced against the need for rules-based governance, fiscal discipline, and human rights.

Mechanistically, the Western perspective emphasizes institutional quality. It argues that the World Bank and IMF, despite their flaws, possess deep technical capacity, data systems, and crisis-response mechanisms that newer institutions cannot easily replicate. It treats the AIIB's co-financing with the World Bank as evidence that parallel institutions often rely on established standards rather than replacing them. It supports SDR rechanneling and the Common Framework in principle, but stresses the importance of creditor coordination, private-sector participation, and debt sustainability. It also frames quota reform as a legitimacy issue: if emerging economies do not receive greater voice, they will build alternatives that may be less transparent and less accountable.

What this perspective contributes is a focus on institutional effectiveness and the risks of fragmentation. It reminds us that development finance requires not only capital but also project appraisal, safeguards, monitoring, and enforcement. It highlights the dangers of debt distress, unsustainable lending, and geopolitical competition over infrastructure. It also brings normative concerns about human rights, labor standards, gender equality, and environmental protection into institutional debates.

The occlusions are significant. The Western perspective often treats incremental reform as sufficient while underestimating the cumulative legitimacy deficit of Bretton Woods institutions. It can present conditionality as technical expertise rather than political power, and it can understate the historical responsibility of creditor countries for colonial extraction, unequal trade, and climate debt. It sometimes frames developing-country demands as threats to stability rather than as responses to structural injustice. It also tends to assume that

Western institutional models are universally applicable, even though they have often failed to deliver industrialization or social protection in the Global South. The strongest version of this perspective would accept that legitimacy and effectiveness are interdependent: institutions that are perceived as unjust will eventually lose the cooperation on which their effectiveness depends.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective frames institutional revisionism through the lens of inclusive multilateralism, sustainable development, and the 2030 Agenda. It does not treat BRICS+, the AIIB, or the SCO as ends in themselves, but as part of a broader landscape of institutions that must be aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, human rights, and debt sustainability. From this vantage point, the central problem is the financing gap for development and climate action, not merely the distribution of power among states. The UN system emphasizes SDR rechanneling, IMF quota reform, the G20 Common Framework, and expanded development finance, while insisting that these mechanisms must protect social protection, gender equality, and environmental standards.

Mechanistically, the UN perspective relies on convening power, norm-setting, data, and technical assistance. It supports the rechanneling of SDRs to the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust and the Resilience and Sustainability Facility, while arguing that more ambitious mechanisms are needed to reach countries not covered by existing facilities. It treats the NIEO legacy as a reminder that development requires systemic change, not just aid. It also emphasizes that debt relief must be linked to investment in health, education, climate adaptation, and social protection, rather than to austerity alone. The UN's approach to the Global South is therefore functional and normative: it seeks to make all institutions, old and new, more responsive to the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable.

What this perspective contributes is a human-centered framework that prevents institutional debates from becoming purely geopolitical. It keeps attention on the SDG financing gap, on the costs of debt distress for households, and on the need for coordination among creditors, borrowers, and multilateral institutions. It also provides a space in which African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and other perspectives can be articulated, even if they are not always reconciled.

The occlusions are structural. The UN has limited enforcement power and depends on member-state consensus, which means that its proposals often lack binding force. It can be captured by powerful states or constrained by budgetary limitations. It also struggles to reconcile competing visions of development: state-led industrialization, market-led growth, human-rights-based approaches, and geopolitical competition all pull in different directions. Finally, the UN perspective can become overly technocratic, treating the SDG framework as a substitute for political contestation over power and resources. The strongest version of this perspective would acknowledge that norms without power are fragile, and that inclusive multilateralism requires not only better financing mechanisms but also a redistribution of decision-making authority.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reconstructs institutional revisionism as a continuation of anti-colonial and NIEO demands; insists that representation, debt relief, technology transfer, and sovereign equality are the criteria by which any new institution should be judged	Can overstate bloc coherence; may underplay intra-South inequality, authoritarian members, and the risk that state elites speak for peoples rather than with them	Redistributive multilateralism and sovereign equality	1974 NIEO Charter; AU Agenda 2063; African positions in IMF quota debates; Johannesburg II Declaration (2023)	**Western:** expanded blocs may fragment governance, politicize finance, and empower illiberal states without improving accountability
Chinese	Supplies institutional innovation and financing capacity through AIIB, NDB, and SCO; frames multipolarity as "community of shared future" and pragmatic development cooperation	Obscures asymmetry of Chinese power, debt-sustainability concerns, and the possibility that new institutions reproduce dependency under new creditors	Win-win development and multipolar order	AIIB annual reports; NDB lending; SCO expansion; BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023)	**African/Western:** financing must not reproduce dependency, and governance standards cannot be treated as optional

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Provides anti-hegemonic and multipolar framing; uses SCO and BRICS to resist unipolarity and sanctions-based coercion	Conflates anti-Westernism with emancipation; limited economic weight; risks instrumentaliz-ing Global South grievances	Sovereign equality and resistance to unipolarity	SCO membership and activities; BRICS rhetoric on multipolarity; Russian positions in UN debates	**Western:** multipolarity without rules risks disorder; **African:** anti-hegemony must not become a new dependency relationship
Western	Identifies fragmentation risks, standards gaps, and the "reform vs rupture" dilemma; defends incremental IMF/World Bank reform and rules-based order	Treats the status quo as more neutral and inclusive than many Global South actors experience it; underestimates legitimacy crisis	Rules-based order with incremental reform	IMF quota review documentation; G7 statements; World Bank evolution reports	**African:** incremental reform has repeatedly failed to deliver quota equity, debt relief, or technology transfer
UN	Places SDG financing gap, inclusive multilateralism, and normative frameworks at center; proposes IMF reform and development financing agendas	Technocratic bias; limited enforcement power; dependence on member-state consensus; can treat SDGs as substitute for power redistribution	Inclusive multilateralism and sustainable development	SDG financing gap estimates; UNCTAD and IMF reform proposals; UN development system reports	**African:** norms without power are fragile; **Western:** UN lacks imple-mentation capacity and can be captured by powerful states

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2023 BRICS Johannesburg expansion and the question of whether an enlarged BRICS+ reshapes global governance.

Levels of analysis

At the **individual** level, the Johannesburg summit was shaped by leader-level bargaining and domestic political incentives. Cyril Ramaphosa hosted the summit and sought to position South Africa as a convening power for African and Global South grievances; Xi Jinping pushed for rapid expansion as part of a broader institutional diplomacy; Narendra Modi balanced participation with caution about Chinese dominance; Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva used the summit to reassert Brazil's multilateral ambitions after a period of diplomatic retrenchment; and Vladimir Putin participated virtually, constrained by the International Criminal Court warrant and by Russia's need to demonstrate that sanctions had not isolated it. Individual agency mattered, but it operated within structural constraints: no leader could simply impose a new order, and each faced domestic constituencies skeptical of either Western alignment or Chinese leadership.

At the **state** level, the expansion reflected divergent but overlapping state interests. Existing members wanted a larger platform for bargaining over IMF quotas, development finance, trade settlement, and sanctions resilience; invitees such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates sought status, market access, and diversification of partnerships. Saudi Arabia's ambiguous posture illustrated that state interest is not identical to bloc loyalty: energy power, security ties, and hedging strategies can make membership attractive without producing automatic alignment. Argentina's decline of the invitation after its 2023 election showed that domestic political change can reverse state commitment. The state level therefore explains both the appeal of BRICS+ and its fragility: the bloc is a coalition of sovereigns, not a federation, and each member retains an exit option.

At the **systemic** level, the expansion occurred during a measurable shift in the distribution of economic weight and institutional legitimacy. On purchasing-power-parity measures, the expanded grouping's share of global output is comparable to or larger than that of the G7, depending on membership counting and data source, while the G7 retains greater control over reserve currencies, financial infrastructure, and the Bretton Woods institutions. The systemic context includes stalled IMF quota reform, debt distress in low- and middle-income countries, sanctions against Russia, and competition over development finance. In this setting, BRICS+ functions less as a replacement for the existing order than as a bargaining coalition that raises the cost of ignoring Global South demands. Its systemic significance lies in agenda-setting and in the demonstration that alternative platforms can attract members, not in the creation of a fully parallel governance architecture.

At the **transnational** level, the summit and its aftermath involved business councils, think-tank networks, civil-society forums, commodity traders, and financial institutions that operate across borders. BRICS civil-society and academic networks have promoted South-South cooperation narratives, while transnational firms in energy, mining, and infrastructure have interests in how the bloc frames investment rules. The transnational dimension also includes the diffusion of norms: "multipolarity," "de-dollarization," and "Global South" have become circulating political vocabularies that shape expectations even where institutional change is slow. Yet transnational civil society is not unified; labor, environmental, feminist, and human-rights groups often contest the bloc's state-centric and elite-driven character. Thus the transnational level reveals both the cultural power of BRICS+ rhetoric and the gap between summit declarations and social accountability.

Mechanism

The mechanism through which the Johannesburg expansion reshapes global governance is **leverage amplification through representational enlargement**, not institutional replacement. BRICS+ does not possess a secretariat with enforcement power, a common currency, or a unified trade policy; its Johannesburg II Declaration is a political statement rather than a binding treaty. The causal chain runs as follows: expansion increases the bloc's share of population, output, energy production, and diplomatic weight; this larger footprint strengthens its claim to represent the Global South; that claim raises the legitimacy cost for the G7 and Bretton Woods institutions when they exclude or underweight BRICS+ members; and the resulting pressure can shift bargaining outcomes in IMF quota reviews, debt-relief forums, development-bank governance, and climate finance negotiations. A second mechanism is **agenda diversification**: by including African, Middle Eastern, and additional Asian states, the bloc broadens the issues it can plausibly claim to represent, from debt and infrastructure to energy transition and food security. A third mechanism is **institutional signaling**: the expansion signals to states and markets that alternatives to Western-led finance are available, which can improve the bargaining position of borrowers even if they never use those alternatives. The limits are equally important. Consensus decision-making among heterogeneous regimes produces lowest-common-denominator outcomes; the bloc's economic asymmetry means China's preferences weigh more than those of smaller members; and the absence of enforcement mechanisms means declarations may not become policy. Therefore the expansion reshapes governance primarily by changing the distribution of voice and the cost of exclusion, not by displacing existing institutions.

Perspective reconstruction

The **African perspective**, which should be treated as primary in this lesson, reads the Johannesburg expansion as a belated institutional echo of the New International Economic Order and of Pan-African demands for sovereign equality. From this vantage point, the summit's Africa-focused theme is significant because it frames African states not as beneficiaries of development assistance but as co-authors of global economic rules. The African perspective insists that legitimacy requires more than membership expansion: it requires IMF quota reform, debt relief, technology transfer, and financing that does not reproduce dependency. It also warns that BRICS+ could become another arena in which external powers extract resources unless African states coordinate through the African Union and regional economic communities. At the same time, this perspective acknowledges internal tensions: South Africa chairs the bloc but cannot speak for all African interests, and the consensus model may mute smaller states. Thus the expansion is promising but insufficient—it opens space for contestation without guaranteeing redistribution.

The **Chinese perspective** treats the expansion as institutional innovation in service of a "community of shared future" and a more multipolar order. It emphasizes the creation and expansion of parallel or complementary institutions—AIIB, NDB, and SCO—and presents BRICS+ as a platform for development cooperation rather than confrontation. This perspective highlights financing capacity, infrastructure, and South-South cooperation, and it frames Western resistance as defense of an outdated hierarchy. Its occlusion is that it can understate the asymmetry of Chinese power within these institutions and the concerns of borrowers about debt sustainability, transparency, and strategic dependence.

The **Russian perspective** frames the expansion as evidence of a durable shift away from unipolarity and as validation of anti-hegemonic multipolarity. It stresses resistance to sanctions, the legitimacy of alternative centers of power, and the right of states to choose partners without Western conditionality. The Russian perspective is strongest in diagnosing the coercive dimensions of the existing order, but it risks conflating opposition to Western dominance with genuine emancipation and can instrumentalize Global South grievances

for great-power competition. Its economic weight within BRICS+ is limited, which means its influence depends more on diplomatic framing than on material capacity.

The **Western perspective** interprets the expansion as a fragmentation risk and as a test of whether the existing order can reform without rupturing. It worries that an enlarged BRICS+ may weaken universal standards, politicize development finance, and create parallel institutions that are less transparent or accountable. At the same time, the more sophisticated Western position acknowledges a legitimacy crisis in Bretton Woods governance and debates whether incremental reform—quota adjustments, SDR rechanneling, World Bank evolution—can absorb Global South demands. Its occlusion is that it often treats the status quo as neutral and underestimates how long-delayed reform has fueled the very revisionism it now fears.

The **UN perspective** sees the expansion through the lens of SDG financing, inclusive multilateralism, and the gap between global needs and available resources. It emphasizes that the Johannesburg Declaration's development language aligns with UN agendas on poverty, infrastructure, and climate, and it treats IMF reform proposals and debt-relief initiatives as necessary complements to any bloc politics. This perspective is valuable for keeping human development at the center, but it can become technocratic: norms without enforcement power are fragile, and inclusive multilateralism requires redistribution of decision-making authority, not only better financing mechanisms.

Explicit adjudication

The African perspective best explains why the Johannesburg expansion matters: it captures the historical lineage from NIEO to contemporary reform demands and insists that voice without redistribution is insufficient. However, it is less able to explain the timing and scale of the expansion, which are better explained by the systemic perspective—stalled quota reform, sanctions, and shifting PPP weights—and by the Chinese perspective, which supplies institutional and financial capacity. The Western perspective best identifies the risks of fragmentation and standards erosion, but it underestimates the extent to which delayed reform produced the legitimacy crisis that BRICS+ exploits. The Russian perspective contributes a critique of coercion but overstates its own material capacity and risks reducing Global South agency to anti-Western alignment. The UN perspective keeps development needs visible but lacks the power analysis required to explain why institutions change. On the evidence, the most defensible adjudication is that the 2023 expansion reshapes global governance through **leverage and representation rather than replacement**: it increases the cost of excluding large parts of the Global South from rule-making, but it does not yet create enforceable alternatives to Bretton Woods. The African perspective provides the normative benchmark; the systemic and Chinese perspectives explain the mechanism; the Western and UN perspectives identify constraints and risks that any assessment must include.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. **Membership and capital.** Compare the AIIB's founding membership (57 in 2016, now 109) and subscribed capital ($100 billion) with the World Bank's IBRD ($298 billion in callable capital, 189 members). What does the capital gap imply about lending capacity, risk-bearing, and the AIIB's ability to lead large syndicated projects without co-financing partners?

2. **Portfolio composition.** Using AIIB annual reports, classify lending by sector (transport, energy, water,

urban) and by region (Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America). How concentrated is the portfolio in Asia, and what does that concentration imply for claims that the AIIB is a "global" alternative to the World Bank?

3. **Co-financing and complementarity.** Identify the share of AIIB projects co-financed with the World Bank, ADB, or EBRD. Does co-financing indicate genuine complementarity, or does it reveal operational dependence on established institutions' standards, pipelines, and credibility?

4. **Governance and voice.** Compare voting structures: the AIIB's regional/non-regional split (75/25), China's roughly 26 percent voting share (effective veto over major decisions requiring 75 percent), versus the World Bank's US roughly 16 percent share with veto over amendments. How does each institution's decision rule shape whose preferences dominate, and what does this mean for borrower perceptions of neutrality?

5. **Standards and safeguards.** Evaluate the AIIB's Environmental and Social Framework against World Bank safeguards. Where are they convergent, and where do they diverge (for example, on resettlement, indigenous peoples, and coal financing)? Does convergence indicate institutional isomorphism or strategic learning?

6. **African vantage.** From an African perspective, has the AIIB expanded meaningful financing for African infrastructure, or has it remained Asia-centric? What does this reveal about the limits of "Global South" solidarity and about whose priorities the new institutions actually serve?

MODEL ANSWER

The AIIB's first decade does not support the claim that it is a genuine alternative to the World Bank; rather, the evidence points to a complementary, Asia-centric institution that borrows heavily from established multilateral templates while offering China a parallel venue for infrastructure finance. On membership and capital, the AIIB's $100 billion in subscribed capital is roughly one-third of the IBRD's callable capital, and although its 109 members are impressive, many are non-borrowing advanced economies whose participation signals diplomatic hedging rather than a wholesale exit from Bretton Woods. The capital gap matters because it constrains the AIIB's ability to lead large syndicated projects without co-financing partners, which in turn shapes its operational dependence on the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

Portfolio data reinforce this reading. The AIIB's lending remains heavily concentrated in Asia, with transport and energy dominating and Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East receiving a small and only slowly growing share. A genuinely global alternative would show broader geographic diversification; instead, the AIIB's footprint tracks Asian infrastructure demand and, indirectly, Chinese strategic corridors. This concentration is not accidental. It reflects both the bank's mandate and the risk appetite of shareholders who prefer familiar markets, and it undercuts any claim that the institution embodies a pan-Southern development vision.

Co-financing is the decisive indicator. A substantial share of AIIB projects are co-financed with the World Bank, the ADB, or the EBRD, and the AIIB frequently adopts the lead institution's safeguard and procurement standards. This is complementarity, not rupture: the AIIB expands the total pool of infrastructure finance and reduces transaction costs for borrowers, but it does not displace the World Bank's standard-setting role. Where the AIIB has innovated—leaner staffing, faster approval timelines, greater tolerance for public-private partnerships—these are operational efficiencies within a shared paradigm rather than a new development model.

Governance tells a similar story. China's roughly 26 percent voting share gives it an effective veto over major decisions, a concentration of power that no single shareholder enjoys at the World Bank, where the United States holds roughly 16 percent and must build coalitions. This is a genuine difference, but it cuts both ways: it makes the AIIB more responsive to Chinese strategic priorities, including the "community of shared future" framing, and less attractive to borrowers seeking multilateral neutrality. The regional/non-regional 75/25 split ensures Asian dominance, mirroring the World Bank's weighted-voting logic rather than transcending it.

On safeguards, convergence outweighs divergence. The AIIB's Environmental and Social Framework closely tracks IFC Performance Standards and World Bank safeguards; differences are marginal, as on coal, where the AIIB's 2017 energy strategy restricted but did not eliminate coal financing. The bank's accountability mechanism, the Project-affected People's Mechanism, is modeled on the World Bank's Inspection Panel. These parallels suggest institutional isomorphism: the AIIB adopted proven templates to secure AAA ratings and co-financing access, trading distinctiveness for credibility.

From an African vantage, the AIIB's record is thin. African members are few, and lending to Africa remains a small fraction of the portfolio. This undercuts any claim that the AIIB embodies "Global South" solidarity; it is, in practice, an Asian development bank with global membership. African scholars and policymakers who hoped for a counterweight to conditionality-laden Bretton Woods finance have found instead a narrower, regionally focused institution whose strategic logic is Chinese rather than pan-Southern.

Adjudication: the AIIB is a complementary institution that expands infrastructure finance and offers China a parallel governance venue, but it has not displaced the World Bank's lending volume, standard-setting authority, or global reach. It is best understood as institutional layering—adding a new node to a dense network—rather than institutional replacement. Falsifiers of this conclusion would include AIIB lending to Africa and Latin America exceeding 30 percent of portfolio; a sustained decline in World Bank infrastructure lending attributable to AIIB competition; AIIB adoption of a safeguard regime that diverges materially from World Bank standards; or China's voting share falling below 20 percent through new capital subscriptions. Absent such evidence, the "genuine alternative" thesis remains aspirational.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In 2024-2025, the IMF's 16th General Review of Quotas concluded with a 50 percent quota increase but no change to the quota formula, leaving emerging-market and developing-country voting shares largely unchanged. The United States, holding 16.5 percent of votes and thus an effective veto over major decisions requiring an 85 percent supermajority, blocked formula reform. Several Global South members argued that the outcome perpetuated a 1944 power structure and accelerated the shift toward parallel institutions such as the NDB, AIIB, and SCO financing facilities. Critics noted that the increase was not accompanied by new conditionality relief, SDR rechanneling, or debt-suspension mechanisms. Your memo should assess whether this outcome constitutes genuine reform or the preservation of hegemony, and what it implies for the legitimacy, financing capacity, and future of Bretton Woods institutions in an era of institutional revisionism.

(b) Required memo headings (respond to each as a prompt).

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking the quota formula stalemate to institutional fragmentation. Specify the intermediate steps (veto politics, legitimacy erosion, exit to parallel institutions) and the scope conditions under which the mechanism operates.

- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how at least three of the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) would interpret this outcome, steel-manning each from within its own premises.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one historical episode of institutional revisionism or failed reform (for example, the NIEO debates of the 1970s, the 2010 IMF quota reform delay, or the creation of the NDB) and specify what it does and does not illuminate about the 2024-2025 case.
- **Falsifiers:** State two or three observable developments that would falsify your central claim, and specify the evidentiary standard you would apply.

(c) Self-check. Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will follow), and prescription (what should be done), and that no single paragraph conflates all four.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which of the following best captures the African scholarly critique of the "Global South" as an analytical category?

A. The Global South is a coherent geopolitical bloc with shared interests that should replace the Non-Aligned Movement as the primary vehicle of Southern solidarity.

B. The category obscures internal hierarchies, class divisions, and gendered power relations within Africa and the broader South, and risks reproducing the very homogenization it claims to oppose.

C. The Global South is primarily a Chinese strategic construct designed to legitimize BRICS expansion and should be discarded in favor of strict regionalism.

D. The category is analytically useless and should be abandoned entirely in favor of country-level analysis.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **A** is wrong because it treats the Global South as a coherent bloc, which African scholars such as Mamdani and Mbembe explicitly reject; the category's political utility does not imply ontological coherence, and conflating the two is precisely the error the African critique targets.
- **C** is wrong because it reduces African intellectual agency to Chinese strategy, ignoring the African genealogy of the concept (Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon) and the fact that African scholars critique the category from within rather than attributing it to external authorship.
- **D** is wrong because it overstates the critique; African scholarship generally treats the Global South as a strategically useful but analytically leaky category, not as worthless, and "abandon entirely" misrepresents the nuanced position of scholars who deploy it critically rather than reject it outright.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

The data lab triangulates three datasets that together measure the gap between *economic weight*, *institutional capacity*, and *decision-making power* in the contemporary order. Each table is a snapshot; the analytical work lies in moving between levels of analysis and between the five perspectives.

Table 1 — BRICS+ and G7 share of world GDP (PPP), selected years

Year	BRICS (original 5)	BRICS+ (expanded)	G7	Notes
2001	~8%	—	~46%	IMF WEO figures widely cited in policy literature
2010	~20%	—	~43%	Post-crisis divergence visible
2023	~32%	~37%	~30%	BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023) references expanded weight
2028 (proj.)	~33%	~38%	~28%	IMF WEO projections; treat as indicative

Reading note: PPP shares measure purchasing-power-adjusted output, not financial-market depth, reserve-currency status, or institutional voice. A state can be 37% of world output (PPP) and hold under 15% of IMF voting power.

Table 2 — Institutional lending volumes: AIIB vs World Bank vs NDB

Institution	Measure	Approx. figure	Period	Source
AIIB	Cumulative approved financing	~$50 billion	2016–2024	AIIB annual reports
World Bank (IDA)	Annual commitments	~$30 billion	FY2024	World Bank annual report

Reading note: Cumulative (AIIB, NDB) and annual (IBRD, IDA) figures are not directly comparable; convert to annual averages or compare project-level additionality. AIIB's annual flow is roughly one-third of IBRD+IDA combined.

Table 3 — SCO membership timeline and IMF quota reform status

Track	Year	Event
SCO	2001	Founded (Shanghai Five + Uzbekistan)
SCO	2017	India and Pakistan admitted as full members
SCO	2023	Iran admitted as full member

Track	Year	Event
SCO	2024	Belarus admitted (10 full members)
IMF	2019	15th General Review: no quota increase; limited governance reform
IMF	Dec 2023	16th General Review concluded: 50% quota increase agreed; **no change in quota shares/voting power**; pending effectiveness
IMF	2024–	17th General Review ongoing; quota-share realignment on agenda

Reading note: The SCO row tracks geopolitical alignment; the IMF row tracks the *failure* of voice reform despite repeated review cycles. The two move on different clocks.

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Table 1 shows BRICS+ PPP share rising from negligible (2001) to roughly 37% (2023) while the G7 share falls from ~46% to ~30%. What does this trajectory establish about *economic weight*, and what does it *not* establish about *institutional power*? A strong answer distinguishes stock from flow, PPP from market exchange rates, and output share from voting share, and notes that the G7 still controls the IMF, World Bank, and dollar-based payment infrastructure.

2. **Level of analysis.** Table 2 operates at the *systemic* level (aggregate lending volumes), Table 3's SCO row at the *state* level (membership decisions), and Table 3's IMF row at the *systemic-institutional* level. What is gained and what is lost by aggregating to the systemic level? A strong answer identifies that aggregation hides *project-level* conditionality differences, *bilateral* side deals, and the *individual* agency of finance ministers and central-bank governors who negotiate quota formulas.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** How would each perspective read Table 2?

    - *African:* AIIB lending is welcome additional finance but must be judged by whether it reaches infrastructure-poor states on terms that do not replicate extractive conditionality; the NIEO demand was for *voice*, not just volume.
    - *Chinese:* AIIB demonstrates institutional innovation and "community of shared future" delivery; complementarity with, not replacement of, the World Bank.
    - *Russian:* Evidence of multipolar institutional pluralism; any non-Western lender weakens hegemonic monopoly.
    - *Western:* Fragmentation risk; AIIB may duplicate standards and dilute environmental/social safeguards; "reform vs rupture" debate.
    - *UN:* Financing-gap arithmetic; whether AIIB flows count toward SDG targets and whether they are additional or substitutive. A strong answer keeps each reading internally coherent and notes where two readings converge (e.g., African and UN on additionality).

4. **Interpretation.** Does SCO expansion (2001 → 10 members, 2024) indicate a *security community* or a *geopolitical bloc*? What evidence would distinguish the two? A strong answer uses the SCO's institutional outputs (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, joint exercises, economic cooperation) against its political statements, and notes the India–China–Pakistan tensions inside the same body as evidence against a tight bloc reading.

5. **Limitation.** What do these three tables *not* capture? A strong answer names: informal power (G7 coordination outside formal votes), conditionality differences (AIIB's "lean" model vs World Bank safeguards), SDR rechanneling and debt-relief mechanics, the role of private capital, and the gap between *pledged* and *disbursed* finance. It also notes that PPP shares say nothing about who sets the rules of trade, technology, and security.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — Institutional Genealogy Tree (hand-drawn, A4 landscape)

What to draw: A tree with a single trunk labeled "Post-1945 International Economic Order" splitting into two main branches. Left branch: "Bretton Woods (1944)" → "IMF / World Bank / GATT-WTO" → "Quota/voting structure (1944 weights)" → "16th Review (2023): +50% quotas, no share change." Right branch: "NIEO (1974, UNGA Res. 3201)" → "BRICS (2009)" → "BRICS+ (2023/24)" → three sub-branches: "AIIB (2016)", "NDB (2015)", "SCO (2001, expanded)". Draw a dashed horizontal line labeled "Reform vs Rupture fault line" cutting across both branches at the level of the 2020s.

Labels to place: On the left branch, annotate "Voice deficit" (African perspective); on the right branch, annotate "Institutional innovation" (Chinese perspective) and "Multipolarity" (Russian perspective). At the root, annotate "Shared premise: sovereignty + development."

Perspective overlay: Color-code branches: left branch blue (Western/UN institutionalism), right branch red (revisionist), trunk grey (shared). Add a legend. The African perspective appears as a *bridge* arrow between NIEO (1974) and contemporary reform demands, labeled "Continuity of demand, change of addressee."

Visual 2 — BRICS+ Expansion as Concentric Membership Waves (hand-drawn, A4 portrait)

What to draw: Four concentric circles (like a target). Innermost circle (smallest): "BRICS 5 (2009): Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa." Second ring: "BRICS+ Wave 1 (2024): Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, UAE, Saudi Arabia (invited/accepted)." Third ring: "BRICS+ Partners (2024): 9 partner countries (e.g., Nigeria, Turkey, Indonesia, Vietnam, etc. — label as 'partner tier')." Outermost ring: "Aspirants / observers." Draw arrows from each ring outward labeled with the accession year. Place a small inset box: "G7 (7) for scale."

Labels to place: Inside innermost circle: "GDP (PPP) ~32% (2023)." Across second+third rings: "GDP (PPP) ~37% (2023)." Outside: "Population ~45% of world." Add a note: "Membership ≠ voting weight; BRICS has no formal charter or quota system."

Perspective overlay: Annotate the rings with perspective tags: African (outer rings = African accession: Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria as partner — "voice through numbers"); Chinese (inner rings = "community of shared future" core); Russian (whole target = "multipolar alternative"); Western (whole target = "fragmentation risk / coherence question"); UN (outer rings = "SDG financing geography").

Visual 3 — Quota Reform Stalemate: Voting Share vs GDP (PPP) Share (hand-drawn bar chart)

What to draw: A grouped bar chart with country/group on the x-axis (United States, EU bloc, China, India, Africa (aggregate), Other emerging) and two bars per group on the y-axis (0–20%): bar A = "IMF quota/voting share (post-16th Review, 2023 agreement)" and bar B = "GDP (PPP) share (2023, IMF WEO)." Show the US bar high on A, low on B; China bar low on A, high on B; Africa bar very low on A, moderate on B. Draw a horizontal dashed line at "15% blocking minority" and annotate the US position relative to it.

Labels to place: Title: "Voice Gap: Quota Share vs Economic Weight (2023)." Legend: blue = quota share, orange = PPP share. Footnote: "16th Review: +50% quotas, no realignment of shares; 17th Review pending."

Perspective overlay: Annotate the Africa bars with "NIEO continuity" (African); the China bar with "underrepresentation" (Chinese); the US bar with "veto preservation" (Western/Russian readings differ: Western = stability; Russian = hegemony). Add a small "UN" tag near the footnote: "SDG financing requires voice reform."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the "Global South" as a category?	Emergent, contested, historically layered term. Lineage: Bandung (1955) → NIEO (1974) → post-Cold War "developing countries" → 2000s "Global South." Not a geography; a political position. Source log: Acharya (2018); Cooper and Farooq (2016).
What is institutional revisionism?	Efforts to alter rules, quotas, or create parallel institutions rather than accept status quo. Spans reformist (quota reform) to rupturist (new banks). Source log: Acharya (2018).
What was the NIEO (1974)?	UNGA Resolution 3201 (S-VI) + Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States. Demanded: commodity price stabilization, technology transfer, debt relief, sovereign resource control. Largely unimplemented; legacy in contemporary demands. Source log: NIEO documents (1974).
What is BRICS+ (2023/24)?	Expansion from 5 to 10 full members + partner tier. Johannesburg II Declaration (2023) sets agenda: local-currency trade, NDB capitalization, UNSC reform. Source log: BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023).
What is the AIIB?	Multilateral development bank, Beijing-headquartered, 100+ members, ~$50B cumulative approved (2016–2024). "Lean, clean, green" model; co-financing with World Bank common. Source log: AIIB annual reports.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the SCO?	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation; security + economic cooperation; 10 full members (2024). RATS (Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure). Source log: SCO documents.
What is the IMF quota reform stalemate?	16th Review (Dec 2023): +50% quotas, no share realignment; 17th Review pending. Voice gap persists: emerging economies under-represented vs PPP weight. Source log: IMF quota review documentation.
What is SDR rechanneling?	Special Drawing Rights allocated 2021 (~$650B); rechanneling to vulnerable countries via MDBs/PRGT proposed; implementation partial. Source log: IMF documentation.

Summary (3–5 sentences): Institutional revisionism in the 2020s is not a single project but a family of demands and experiments: the Global South as an emergent political category, BRICS+ expansion, parallel institutions (AIIB, NDB, SCO), and contested Bretton Woods reform (IMF quotas, SDR rechanneling, debt relief). The African vantage point reveals continuity from the NIEO (1974) to present demands for voice and non-extractive finance, while the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each read the same data through different mechanisms—innovation, multipolarity, fragmentation, and financing gaps respectively. The data show rising economic weight without matching institutional voice, and the 16th IMF Review's +50% quota increase without share realignment captures the stalemate. Whether this moment is reform or rupture remains adjudicable only by evidence on additionality, conditionality, and voice.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** The world's economic center of gravity has shifted toward countries that were once called "developing," but the institutions that lend money and set rules were built in 1944 by the winners of World War II. Those countries are now building their own banks and clubs (BRICS, AIIB, SCO) and asking for more votes in the old ones (IMF). The question is whether this is a repair job or a replacement—and the answer depends on whether the new institutions actually deliver money on fairer terms.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure of the exact AIIB annual flow relative to IBRD in a single year; I conflated cumulative and annual figures in Table 2 and must keep them separate. I also treated "BRICS+" as a coherent actor, when it has no charter, no quota system, and internal rivalries (India–China). I have not specified the mechanism by which SDR rechanneling would reach low-income countries, nor the conditionality differences between AIIB and World Bank projects.

3. **Reread verification.** Re-reading Acharya (2018) and Cooper and Farooq (2016) confirms that "Global South" is an emergent, contested category rather than a fixed bloc, and that institutional revisionism spans reformist and rupturist strategies. The BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023) confirms the expansion agenda (local currency, NDB capitalization, UNSC reform) but does not

resolve internal coherence. AIIB annual reports confirm ~$50B cumulative approved financing 2016–2024. IMF quota review documentation confirms the 16th Review's +50% increase without share realignment.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** Think of the international financial system as a 1944-built highway network: the BRICS+ countries are now heavy trucks (rising GDP share) forced onto roads with toll booths they did not design (IMF quotas). They are building bypass roads (AIIB, NDB) and demanding toll-booth votes (quota reform). The analogy holds for *infrastructure mismatch* and *voice deficit*, but it breaks down because highways are physical and neutral, whereas financial institutions embed power, conditionality, and ideology; and because the "trucks" are not a single convoy—BRICS+ members disagree on destination and speed.

5. **Rewrite.** Institutional revisionism is the set of strategies by which states with rising economic weight but stagnant institutional voice seek to alter, supplement, or replace the rules and organizations of the post-1945 order. It runs from reformist demands (IMF quota realignment, SDR rechanneling, debt relief) to parallel institution-building (AIIB, NDB, SCO, BRICS+). The African perspective, rooted in the NIEO (1974), frames the core demand as *voice plus non-extractive additionality*; the Chinese as *institutional innovation and complementarity*; the Russian as *multipolarity*; the Western as *fragmentation risk and reform-vs-rupture*; the UN as *SDG financing gaps*. The 2023 BRICS Johannesburg expansion and the 16th IMF Review's quota increase-without-realignment are the twin empirical signatures of a moment in which economic weight has shifted faster than institutional voice.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L49	Definition	What is the "Global South" as an emergent category?	It is a contested political-geographic label for states and peoples positioned outside the historical core of Western industrial capitalism; it signals shared experiences of colonialism, debt, and marginalization while obscuring internal inequality and divergent interests.	African perspective: the category is most coherent when tied to historical extraction and racialized hierarchy, not merely income level.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L49	Mechanism	What is the strategic logic of BRICS+ expansion?	BRICS+ expansion combines commodity power, demographic scale, and institutional ambition to reduce dependence on Western-led finance and amplify bargaining power, but expansion also dilutes consensus and raises questions about shared norms.	Chinese perspective: platform for multipolar governance; Russian perspective: anti-hegemonic framing.
L49	Comparison	Is the AIIB a genuine alternative to the World Bank?	The AIIB is a multilateral development bank with leaner governance and an infrastructure focus, while the World Bank has a broader mandate, longer history, and conditionality traditions; the AIIB can complement the Bank through speed and regional ownership, but it has not replaced its scale or poverty-reduction role.	Western perspective: scrutiny of standards; African perspective: demand for infrastructure finance.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L49	Source	What did the 1974 NIEO demand?	The New International Economic Order demanded sovereign control over resources, fairer trade, and restructuring of international economic institutions; its legacy persists in contemporary calls for quota reform, debt relief, and technology transfer.	African perspective: memory of unfulfilled promises and unfinished decolonization.
L49	Debate	What is the "reform vs rupture" debate?	Reformists seek to adjust Bretton Woods through quota shifts, SDR rechanneling, and debt relief, while rupture advocates build parallel institutions and reduce dollar dependence; the debate turns on whether existing institutions can be democratized or are structurally captured.	Western perspective often prefers reform; Russian and Chinese perspectives may favor parallel options.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L49	Reconstruction	How does the African perspective frame institutional revisionism?	The African perspective treats institutional revisionism as a continuation of anti-colonial and Pan-African demands for economic sovereignty, fair representation, and redistributive finance, emphasizing historical extraction and contemporary debt.	It is not merely anti-Western; it demands accountability and redistribution.
L49	Occlusion	What does the Western perspective often occlude?	The Western perspective often occludes how Bretton Woods governance reflects historical power and how conditionality reproduced dependency, sometimes framing Global South demands as destabilizing rather than corrective.	Occlusion: the historical construction of “neutral” global rules.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L49	Adjudication	Does BRICS+ expansion automatically reshape global governance?	Expanded BRICS+ increases aggregate economic weight and symbolic multipolarity, but its governance impact depends on implementation of New Development Bank lending, payment systems, and coordinated positions; symbolic expansion alone does not automatically rewrite rules.	Adjudication: aggregate weight must be separated from institutionalized power.
L49	Visual	What does BRICS+ PPP GDP share vs G7 not prove?	A larger BRICS+ PPP share shows aggregate economic shift but not per capita income, institutional cohesion, financial market depth, or rule-making authority; data must be read with level-of-analysis discipline.	Data perspective: avoid conflating size with governance.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L49	Mechanism	How does IMF quota reform work?	IMF quota reform reallocates voting power and access to resources; SDR rechanneling can direct liquidity to vulnerable states, but political blockage and creditor concerns limit speed and scale.	UN perspective: aligns reform with SDG financing and debt sustainability.
L49	Application	What is the SCO's role relative to BRICS+?	The SCO is a security-political platform with expanding economic and connectivity agendas; it overlaps with BRICS+ but has different membership and China-Russia leadership dynamics, so it can coordinate but not substitute for development finance institutions.	Russian perspective: multipolarity and security; Chinese perspective: connectivity.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L49	Source	What does Acharya (2018) contribute?	Acharya (2018) argues for a "multiplex" world order in which no single power dominates and regional institutions matter, helping explain parallel institutions as diversification rather than simple replacement.	Useful for adjudicating reform vs rupture.
L49	Debate	Why is BRICS+ coherence contested?	BRICS+ coherence is contested because members differ in regime type, development level, and geopolitical interests; expansion increases representativeness but may reduce decision-making efficiency.	African perspective: membership gains must be weighed against diluted voice.
L49	Reconstruction	How does the UN perspective frame institutional revisionism?	The UN perspective frames revisionism through SDG financing gaps, debt sustainability, and inclusive multilateralism, seeking to align institutional reform with development outcomes rather than great-power competition.	Occlusion: may understate geopolitical rivalry.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L49	Application	What are the limits of SDR rechanneling?	SDR rechanneling can augment concessional finance for climate- and debt-vulnerable states, but it depends on donor willingness, IMF safeguards, and absorption capacity; it is a liquidity tool, not a solvency solution.	African perspective: liquidity helps, but debt structure remains.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (scored 0-100)

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Priority gap
Genealogy of "Global South"		Can explain why the term is political, not merely geographic	Conflating region with shared interests
BRICS+ expansion logic		Can distinguish aggregate weight from governance change	Overstating institutional coherence
AIIB vs World Bank comparison		Can compare mandate, scale, standards, and complementarity	Treating AIIB as replacement
NIEO legacies		Can link 1974 demands to quota, debt, and technology debates	Assuming NIEO "failed" without legacy
IMF quota, SDR, and debt relief		Can explain voting power and liquidity constraints	Treating reform as purely technical
Five-perspective reconstruction		Can steel-man African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN views	Collapsing perspectives into one narrative

Competency	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Priority gap
Data interpretation (PPP, lending, quotas)		Can separate aggregate, per capita, and institutional measures	Inferring power from GDP share alone
Adjudication of reform vs rupture		Can specify falsifiers for each claim	Prescribing without evidence

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which evidence would most seriously weaken your claim that BRICS+ is primarily an anti-Western bloc rather than a heterogeneous bargaining platform?
2. Where did you conflate aggregate BRICS+ GDP (PPP) with institutional rule-making power, and what additional data would correct that inference?
3. Did you distinguish African demands for economic sovereignty and debt relief from Chinese institutional innovation and Russian anti-hegemonic framing, or did you merge them into one "Global South" position?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"The Global South is a homogeneous bloc."	It is heterogeneous in regime type, income, debt exposure, and geopolitical interest; solidarity is strategic and partial.	BRICS+ includes divergent economies and political systems; African demands vary by creditor exposure and resource profile.
"The AIIB has replaced the World Bank."	The AIIB complements rather than replaces the World Bank; its mandate and scale remain narrower.	AIIB annual reports show infrastructure-focused lending and co-financing patterns; World Bank retains broader poverty-reduction and crisis-lending roles.
"BRICS+ expansion proves multipolarity has already been achieved."	Aggregate economic weight is not the same as governance change, currency internationalization, or institutionalized rule-making.	IMF quota review status and continued dollar dominance in reserves and payments.
"The NIEO completely failed."	Many NIEO demands were blocked, but their institutional legacies reappear in quota reform, SDR rechanneling, and debt-relief debates.	1974 NIEO declaration and contemporary IMF reform proposals.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"IMF quota reform is purely technical."	Quota reform reallocates power and is therefore deeply political, involving creditor interests, regional representation, and legitimacy claims.	IMF quota review documentation and stalled reform negotiations.
"PPP GDP share equals global power."	PPP measures aggregate purchasing power, not financial depth, per capita welfare, alliance cohesion, or institutional authority.	BRICS+ vs G7 comparisons must be read alongside reserves, lending, and governance data.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Global South as emergent category; postcoloniality; dependency; racialized hierarchy	Labeling, solidarity-building, strategic aggregation, occlusion of internal inequality	Rodney (1972); Nkrumah (1965); Fanon (1961); Mamdani (1996); Mbembe (2001); Grovogui (1996); Acharya (2018)	NIEO (1974); BRICS+ expansion; debt and quota debates	Homogeneity vs heterogeneity; description vs political project	Sustained divergence in interests; collapse of shared demands	L28 Pan-Africanism; L14 contemporary transition
BRICS+ as platform; multipolarity; bargaining power	Expansion, agenda-setting, summit diplomacy, institutional creation	Cooper and Farooq (2016); Acharya (2018)	Johannesburg II Declaration (2023); new members; NDB	Coherence vs fragmentation; anti-Western vs reformist	No joint institutions; persistent voting divergence	L14; L58 forecasting

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Parallel institutions; AIIB; NDB; SCO	Lean governance, co-financing, infrastructure targeting, regional ownership	AIIB annual reports; IMF quota review documentation	AIIB first decade (2016-2025); NDB lending; SCO membership	Alternative vs complement; standards convergence	AIIB adopts World Bank-style conditionality at scale; no independent lending growth	L16 Bretton Woods; L51 climate finance
NIEO; economic sovereignty; fair trade; technology transfer	Resolutions, demands, North-South bargaining, institutional memory	UN General Assembly (1974), Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order; Rodney (1972)	1974 NIEO; contemporary quota and SDR debates	Failure vs legacy; reform vs rupture	No contemporary echoes of NIEO demands	L28; L16
Bretton Woods contestation; quotas; SDRs; debt relief	Voting-power reallocation, liquidity provision, creditor coordination, conditionality	IMF quota review documentation	IMF quota review status; SDR rechanneling proposals	Reform vs rupture; legitimacy vs efficiency	Quota shifts without policy change; no debt relief	L16; L51; L58
Data and measurement; PPP GDP; lending volumes; membership	Aggregation, comparison, level-of-analysis discipline	Data lab sources; AIIB annual reports; IMF documentation	BRICS+ vs G7; AIIB vs World Bank; SCO activities	Aggregate vs per capita; size vs power	Data shows no relative shift; lending remains marginal	L58; L61 grand strategy

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Timing	Concrete action
R1	Same day, 20 minutes	Recall all 15 flashcards without looking, then check gaps and rewrite two weak cards.
R2	48 hours, 30 minutes	Reconstruct the five perspectives from memory, then compare with Section 2.7 and mark occlusions you missed.
R3	1 week, 45 minutes	Redo the Problem Pair on AIIB's first decade and adjudicate "alternative vs complement" with explicit falsifiers.
R4	2 weeks, 40 minutes	Reinterpret the Data Lab tables, distinguishing aggregate PPP share, per capita income, lending volume, and quota status.
R5	1 month, 60 minutes	Write the Independent Memo on BRICS+ expansion and complete the hinge question without notes.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define "Global South" as a contested emergent category rather than a fixed region.
- ☐ I can trace the genealogy from colonialism and NIEO demands to contemporary institutional revisionism.
- ☐ I can explain BRICS+ expansion in terms of strategic logic, not just membership lists.
- ☐ I can distinguish BRICS+ aggregate economic weight from institutional governance change.
- ☐ I can compare AIIB and World Bank by mandate, scale, standards, and complementarity.
- ☐ I can explain the NIEO's demands and their institutional legacies.
- ☐ I can describe IMF quota reform, SDR rechanneling, and debt relief as political mechanisms.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary and on its own terms.
- ☐ I can steel-man the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
- ☐ I can identify what each perspective contributes and what it occludes.
- ☐ I can use the four levels of analysis from Lesson 1 in a worked example.
- ☐ I can adjudicate reform vs rupture using evidence and falsifiers.
- ☐ I can interpret BRICS+ vs G7 PPP data without overclaiming power.
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in a memo.
- ☐ I can complete the hinge question and diagnose each distractor.
- ☐ I can identify at least three priority gaps from the confidence audit.
- ☐ I can schedule and execute the five spaced-review intervals.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Global South genealogy and postcolonial political economy - Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. - Nkrumah, K. (1965). *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. - Fanon, F. (1961).

The Wretched of the Earth. - Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. - Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. - Grovogui, S. (1996). *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans: Race and Self-Determination in International Law*.

Institutional revisionism and BRICS+ - Acharya, A. (2018). *The End of American World Order?* - Cooper, A. F., and Farooq, A. (2016). Work on BRICS and the Global South. - BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023).

Parallel institutions and Bretton Woods contestation - AIIB Annual Report (latest available year). - IMF quota review documentation. - UN General Assembly (1974). Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order.

End of Lesson 49. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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51. Transnational Non-State Actors

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 50: Transnational Non-State Actors
Module	Module 8: Indo-Pacific, Systemic Rivalry, and Transnational Forces
Prerequisites	L23 (asymmetric warfare), L24 (cyber), L7 (constructivism)
Interleaved links	Forward to L51 (climate), L57 (infrastructure), L54 (AI and warfare)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, worked example, problem pair, flashcards, Cornell notes
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple: if international relations theory was built to explain the behavior of sovereign states, how do we account for the fact that some of the most consequential strategic actors of the twenty-first century possess no territory, no diplomatic recognition, and no seat at the United Nations? Multinational corporations command revenues exceeding the GDP of most member states; private military companies project force across continents under contract; jihadist networks coordinate violence across dozens of jurisdictions without a capital; advocacy coalitions reshape treaty agendas from outside formal diplomatic channels; and illicit financial networks move capital across borders faster than any customs regime can track. The puzzle is not whether these actors "matter"—their effects are visible in shipping

lanes, commodity markets, and body counts—but how to theorize their power without either (a) reducing them to instruments of states, which strips them of agency they demonstrably exercise, or (b) dissolving the state into a flat ontology of "actors," which obscures the distinctive coercive and legal capacities that only states possess. This lesson teaches you to hold both truths simultaneously: that non-state actors are genuine strategic agents, and that their agency is always conditioned by, and often parasitic upon, the state system they operate within and against.

This lesson occupies a pivotal position in Module 8, which moves from systemic rivalry and the Indo-Pacific to transnational forces that cut across regional boundaries. It follows directly from L23 on asymmetric warfare and L24 on cyber, which established that weaker actors exploit technological and organizational asymmetries to impose costs on stronger ones, and from L7 on constructivism, which established that identities, norms, and shared meanings are constitutive of interests rather than mere epiphenomena of material power. Here those threads converge into a single analytical problem: non-state actors are not merely constraints on state power, as realists sometimes concede, nor merely expressions of transnational civil society, as liberal institutionalists sometimes celebrate. They are co-producers of the international order, operating through mechanisms—market leverage, violence entrepreneurship, norm entrepreneurship, and financial opacity—that the state-centric canon struggles to capture. The lesson also sets up the forward links to L51 on climate, L57 on infrastructure, and L54 on AI and warfare, because each of those domains is increasingly governed by non-state actors whose power is exercised through precisely the mechanisms developed here.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to do five things. First, classify any non-state actor by its resource base (capital, coercion, legitimacy, information), its organizational form (hierarchical, networked, hybrid), and its relationship to state authority (complement, substitute, parasite, rival). Second, trace the specific mechanism by which that actor converts non-territorial resources into political effects, specifying the intermediate steps rather than asserting a correlation. Third, reconstruct five distinct perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on any given case, steel-manning each from within its own premises. Fourth, adjudicate between competing explanations of the same event on the basis of evidence, identifying which perspective's scope conditions are met and which are violated. Fifth, specify the falsifiers that would disconfirm your preferred account, so that your analysis is genuinely explanatory rather than merely descriptive. These are not abstract competencies; they are the skills required to write the memo, solve the problem pair, and answer the hinge question that close this lesson.

The theoretical stakes are high because the lesson sits at the intersection of three major debates in international relations. The first is the state-centrism debate: whether the state remains the "primary" or "privileged" unit of analysis, or whether globalization has produced a genuinely polycentric order. The second is the rationalism-constructivism debate: whether non-state actors are best understood as utility-maximizers responding to incentives (rationalist) or as identity-bearers mobilized by shared meanings and normative commitments (constructivist). The third is the security-political economy nexus: whether violence and markets are analytically separable domains, or whether, as Reno argues in the African context, they are fused in "warlord politics" where economic extraction and coercive control are the same activity. The lesson does not resolve these debates; it teaches you to locate any given case within them and to specify which theoretical premises are doing the work in your explanation.

The African perspective is primary in this lesson, not as a regional illustration but as a generative vantage point. The reason is structural: the African continent is the site where the gap between the Weberian ideal of the state as monopoly of legitimate force and the empirical reality of fragmented authority is most visible and most theoretically productive. In much of Africa, the state is not the default governance provider but one

actor among many—alongside chiefs, militias, religious authorities, multinational firms, and international NGOs—competing and cooperating in what Reno calls "shadow states" and what Mbembe theorizes as the "necropolitical" management of populations. This vantage point reveals what Western state-centrism occludes: that "non-state" is not a deviation from a norm but a constitutive feature of political order in much of the world, and that the very category of "state" is an achievement rather than a given. It also reveals what Chinese non-interference rhetoric and Russian PMC strategy both exploit: the space opened by weak or contested state authority. The African perspective thus frames the lesson's central puzzle rather than appearing as one case among many.

A final methodological note. Throughout this lesson, you must distinguish four operations that students routinely conflate: description (what happened), explanation (why it happened, via what mechanism), prediction (what will happen next under specified conditions), and prescription (what ought to be done). The worked example and problem pair are designed to force this distinction. When you reconstruct a perspective, you are not endorsing it; when you adjudicate, you are not merely summarizing. The hinge question at the end tests whether you can identify which operation a given argument is performing. Mastering this distinction is, in the end, what separates analytical competence from sophisticated opinion.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer each question from memory before consulting any source. These draw on L23 (asymmetric warfare), L24 (cyber), and L7 (constructivism).

1. **L23 retrieval:** What is the core logic of asymmetric warfare as theorized in the literature, and how does it differ from conventional force-on-force engagement? Name one historical case where a weaker actor imposed disproportionate costs on a stronger one through asymmetry rather than parity.
2. **L23 retrieval:** How does the concept of "cost imposition" function in asymmetric strategies, and what does it imply about the relationship between tactical defeat and strategic success?
3. **L24 retrieval:** Distinguish between cyber espionage, cyber sabotage, and information operations. Which of these three is most difficult to attribute, and why does attribution matter for deterrence?
4. **L24 retrieval:** What is the "attribution problem" in cyber conflict, and how does it interact with the logic of deterrence that depends on credible threat of retaliation?
5. **L7 retrieval:** In constructivist theory, what is the difference between "interests" and "identities," and how does the latter constitute the former? Give one example of a norm cascade.
6. **L7 retrieval:** How does constructivism explain change in the international system differently from rationalist (neorealist/neoliberal) theories? What role do "epistemic communities" play?

1.2 Orientation Questions

These questions frame the problems you will work through in this lesson. Do not answer them fully now; use them to guide your reading.

1. If a multinational corporation's revenue exceeds the GDP of the state in which it operates, does that make it more powerful than that state? What kind of power, and over what domain?
2. How does a private military company convert commercial contract into strategic influence, and at what point does it cease to be a "contractor" and become a geopolitical actor in its own right?
3. Why do transnational jihadist networks fragment into affiliates rather than consolidating into a single hierarchy, and what does this organizational form imply for counterterrorism strategy?
4. Under what conditions does an NGO advocacy network succeed in changing state behavior, and when does it fail? What does Keck and Sikkink's "boomerang model" predict about the domestic-international linkage?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Provisional definitions to be refined as you read. These are starting points, not final formulations.

Term	Provisional Definition
Transnational non-state actor	An entity operating across national borders that is not a sovereign state, exercising some form of political, economic, or coercive influence; includes firms, NGOs, armed groups, and financial networks.
Hybrid governance	A political order in which state and non-state authorities share, compete over, or sequentially exercise governance functions such as security, taxation, and justice; common in contexts of contested sovereignty.
Private military company (PMC)	A corporate entity providing military or security services for profit under contract; distinct from mercenaries in legal status but overlapping in function; may operate as strategic instrument of a sponsoring state.
Cyber mercenary	An individual or firm selling offensive cyber capabilities—exploits, intrusion tools, or operational services—to state or non-state clients on a commercial basis.
Transnational advocacy network (TAN)	A network of activists, NGOs, and sometimes state officials linked across borders by shared values and dense information exchange, seeking to change policy or norms; Keck and Sikkink's central concept.
Illicit financial flow	Money illegally earned, transferred, or used, crossing borders to evade detection, taxation, or sanctions; includes money laundering, trade misinvoicing, and sanctions evasion.

Term	Provisional Definition
Sanctions evasion	Techniques used to circumvent economic sanctions, including front companies, ship-to-ship transfers, cryptocurrency, and jurisdictional arbitrage.
Kleptocracy	A system of rule in which state officials systematically loot public resources for private gain, often using transnational financial networks to launder and store proceeds.
Affiliate system	A decentralized organizational model in which a central brand or leadership provides ideology, training, or legitimacy to semi-autonomous local groups that retain operational independence.
State-firm nexus	The institutional and personal linkages between state officials and corporate actors that shape how firms exercise geopolitical influence; ranges from arm's-length regulation to direct state ownership.
FATF grey list	The Financial Action Task Force's list of jurisdictions under increased monitoring for strategic deficiencies in anti-money-laundering and counter-terrorist-financing regimes.
Constructivist identity	In constructivist theory, the socially constructed sense of self of an actor (state or non-state) that defines its interests and appropriate behavior; identities are shaped by interaction and can change.

End of Section 1. Section 2 (Lesson Core) begins in the next chunk.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to: (1) define multinational corporations as political actors rather than mere market participants, distinguishing market power from infrastructural and structural power; (2) explain the mechanisms through which states and firms bargain over investment, regulation, technology, standards, and security, including embedded autonomy, jurisdictional arbitrage, enclave extraction, and weaponized interdependence; (3) identify scope conditions under which MNCs become geopolitical instruments or independent coercive actors, including sectoral criticality, network centrality, home-state capacity, host-state institutional strength, and legal regime; (4) evaluate observable implications such as export controls, investment screening, resource nationalism, supply-chain restructuring, and corporate compliance behavior using comparative and quantitative evidence; and (5) reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on MNC-state relations, adjudicating among them with attention to what each reveals, what it occludes, and what would falsify it. Assessment will require mechanism specification, level-

of-analysis discipline, and explicit adjudication rather than description. Students should be able to move from a case description to an explanation of why a particular firm became strategically salient, to a prediction about how states will respond, and to a prescription that is bounded by the scope conditions identified. They should also be able to distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in their own memos, and to identify the strongest counterargument to any claim they make.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Multinational Corporations as Geopolitical Actors: The State-Firm Relationship

Bolded Causal Claim: Multinational corporations become geopolitical actors—not merely economic agents—when their control over capital, technology, logistics, data, or network chokepoints gives them infrastructural power over states, and when states in turn can instrumentalize that power; the resulting state-firm relationship is therefore a bargaining structure whose outcomes depend on sectoral criticality, network position, and institutional capacity rather than on market efficiency alone.

Mechanism: The mechanism is a two-level bargaining game between a firm seeking profit, protection, and predictability and a state seeking revenue, technology, employment, and strategic advantage. At the first level, the firm's threat of exit or relocation disciplines the host state: capital mobility, transfer pricing, and jurisdictional arbitrage allow MNCs to shop for regulatory environments, tax regimes, and labor costs. At the second level, the host or home state's threat of expropriation, regulation, or market closure disciplines the firm. The equilibrium is not determined by comparative advantage alone but by asset specificity: when production requires sunk investments in mines, fabs, pipelines, or data centers, both sides become locked in, and bargaining shifts from price to governance. Raymond Vernon's "sovereignty at bay" captured the early fear that MNCs would outgrow states; Robert Gilpin reframed the relationship as an extension of U.S. power; Susan Strange argued that structural power lies in the ability to shape the frameworks within which others operate. Contemporary work on weaponized interdependence sharpens the mechanism: global networks are not flat but hub-and-spoke, and states can coerce by controlling nodes occupied by firms, as in semiconductor export controls or financial messaging restrictions. Firms also exercise power by setting technical standards, controlling data flows, and using investor-state dispute settlement to chill regulation. In extractive economies, the mechanism becomes more coercive: MNCs do not merely invest; they help constitute the state's fiscal base, security apparatus, and territorial control, producing enclave economies in which the state governs access rather than citizens. William Reno's analysis of shadow states is relevant here: rulers may monetize MNC access to resources to fund patronage, bypassing public institutions and converting corporate investment into regime survival. Thus the state-firm relationship can be developmental, predatory, or hybrid, depending on whether the state has the capacity to discipline firms toward public ends.

Scope Conditions: The claim holds only under identifiable conditions. Sectorally, it is strongest in strategic and dual-use sectors—semiconductors, critical minerals, telecommunications, energy, pharmaceuticals, defense, and finance—where supply interruptions have security externalities; it is weaker in consumer goods and services with low asset specificity. Network position matters: firms at chokepoints (for example, extreme ultraviolet lithography suppliers or dominant cloud providers) have more leverage than firms in competitive, substitutable markets. Home-state capacity matters: the United States, China, and the European Union can convert firm capabilities into statecraft through export controls, subsidies, and procurement; weaker states cannot. Host-state capacity matters inversely: strong regulators can impose local content, environmental standards, and tax compliance; weak states may become gatekeepers that trade access for rents. Legal regime matters: investor-state dispute settlement can empower firms against regulation, while sanctions and national-security reviews can subordinate firms to state priorities. Firm governance matters: state-owned enterprises

blur the public-private boundary, but even privately owned firms can be compelled when their home market or supply chains are state-dependent. Finally, time horizon matters: short-term profit maximization may conflict with long-term geopolitical alignment, and crises (war, pandemic, sanctions) can force decoupling or "de-risking" that restructures the bargain. Where these conditions are absent, MNCs remain ordinary market actors.

Observable Implications: If the claim is correct, we should observe states treating firms as strategic assets and liabilities. Observable implications include expanded investment screening (for example, CFIUS reviews), entity lists and export controls, subsidies for domestic production (CHIPS Acts), and "friend-shoring" rhetoric. We should also observe corporate adaptation: supply-chain diversification, dual sourcing, compliance departments, lobbying for exemptions, and in some cases withdrawal from contested markets. In host states, especially resource-dependent ones, we should observe contract renegotiation, local-content requirements, tax disputes, and disputes over environmental and community impacts. Quantitatively, the Data Lab's comparison of MNC revenue to national GDP should show that the largest firms exceed the economic scale of many states, but scale alone does not prove geopolitical power; concentration metrics, single-source dependency, and control over standards are better indicators. In Africa, implications include cobalt and copper in the Democratic Republic of Congo, lithium in Zimbabwe, and hydrocarbons in Nigeria and Angola, where MNC revenue and enclave infrastructure can exceed state capacity in the producing region. We should also observe firms becoming nodes in sanctions enforcement, as when financial and technology firms implement restrictions that states announce. Falsifiers would include: MNCs consistently defying home-state strategic priorities without cost; host states with weak capacity successfully disciplining MNCs without external support; or strategic sectors showing rapid, low-cost substitution after a supply shock.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). African scholarship treats the MNC-state relationship as historically constituted by colonial extraction and postcolonial extraversion rather than as a generic market bargain. Walter Rodney's dependency analysis and Kwame Nkrumah's neo-colonialism thesis frame foreign firms as mechanisms through which surplus is extracted and development distorted; Mahmood Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state suggests that corporate enclaves reproduce colonial spatial divisions between "modern" export sectors and customary rural authority. Jean-François Bayart's concept of extraversion argues that African elites convert external connections—including MNC access—into domestic power, so the state-firm bargain is internal to state formation rather than external to it. William Reno's work on shadow states shows how rulers monetize resource access to fund patronage, making MNCs partners in regime survival. This perspective reveals what Western market models occlude: MNCs are co-constitutive of sovereignty, violence, and territorial control in many African states, and "weak capacity" is often a strategy of rule rather than an absence. It also highlights racialized and hierarchical global bargaining power: African states face firms whose home governments can deploy sanctions, subsidies, and diplomatic pressure. At the same time, the African perspective must avoid economic determinism: African elites and communities exercise agency through contract renegotiation, local-content demands, and resistance; some MNC investment brings technology, employment, and fiscal revenue; and resource nationalism can fail when it deters investment or provokes capital flight. The strongest African claim is therefore conditional: MNCs become geopolitical actors in Africa where they control extractive enclaves and where states lack the institutional capacity to convert rents into public goods.

Chinese. China's perspective is shaped by the experience of late development and by a state-capital model in which firms are expected to serve national rejuvenation. The "going out" strategy and Belt and Road Initiative treat MNCs—especially state-owned enterprises—as instruments of development finance, resource security,

and market expansion. Beijing's official discourse emphasizes non-interference and host-state sovereignty, but Chinese firms' security needs in unstable environments have generated private security contractors and port or mining enclaves that complicate that principle. Chinese analysts often argue that Western MNCs historically enjoyed privileged access and that China's firms are merely catching up; they also stress technology transfer and infrastructure as mutual gains. The perspective reveals the developmental potential of state-firm coordination but occludes concerns about debt sustainability, labor standards, environmental harm, and the political effects of opaque contracts. It tends to understate the autonomy of large private firms and the ways in which host states experience Chinese investment as coercive.

Russian. Russia's perspective treats MNCs as "national champions" subordinated to state interests, especially in energy and defense. Sanctions after 2014 and 2022 accelerated a "sovereignization" agenda: state pressure on oligarchs, import substitution, and the use of energy firms as foreign-policy instruments. Russian analysts often frame Western MNCs as instruments of U.S. hegemony and argue that Russia must build autonomous corporate capacity. The perspective reveals how sanctions can politicize firm behavior and how energy interdependence can be weaponized, but it occludes the costs of isolation, technological stagnation, and the dependence of Russian firms on Western finance and components. It also risks conflating state interest with regime interest.

Western. The Western perspective combines liberal-institutional and realist strands. The liberal strand sees MNCs as efficiency-enhancing actors that diffuse technology, create employment, and integrate markets; regulation should correct market failures and human-rights abuses, not politicize commerce. The realist strand, especially in recent U.S. and European policy, treats MNCs as nodes in strategic competition and justifies export controls, investment screening, and industrial policy. This perspective reveals the security externalities of supply chains but can occlude the distributional costs of decoupling, the interests of host states, and the possibility that over-securitization undermines the gains from trade. It also struggles to reconcile corporate autonomy with democratic accountability.

UN. The UN perspective is legal and normative rather than strategic. It emphasizes the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals, and frameworks such as the UN Global Compact, which assign responsibilities to MNCs without creating binding international corporate law. UN panels of experts and sanctions committees may document corporate sanctions evasion, while UNCTAD and related bodies focus on investment for development. This perspective reveals the accountability gap: MNCs can shape rights and environments across borders while remaining primarily accountable to home-state law. It occludes power asymmetries among states and the enforcement weaknesses of soft law, but it provides a vocabulary for holding firms responsible for human-rights and environmental harms.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Cyber Mercenaries and the Market for Offensive Cyber Capability

Bolded Causal Claim: The commodification of offensive cyber capability turns cyber conflict from a state monopoly into a market-mediated ecosystem in which states, firms, and criminal actors purchase intrusion, surveillance, and disruption services, thereby lowering barriers to entry, diffusing accountability, and making attribution structurally ambiguous.

Mechanism: The mechanism is a two-sided market with supply, demand, and intermediation. On the supply side, vulnerability researchers, exploit developers, intrusion operators, infrastructure providers, and commercial spyware vendors convert technical knowledge into saleable services. On the demand side, states seek

deniability and capability without indigenous investment; corporations seek competitive intelligence or protection; criminal groups seek monetization through extortion, fraud, or data theft. Brokers and "as-a-service" platforms reduce search and transaction costs, allowing buyers to rent capability rather than build it. Vendors often frame products as "lawful interception" or defensive tools, while the same code can be used for repression, espionage, or sabotage. The market is sustained by regulatory arbitrage: firms incorporate, host infrastructure, or recruit talent in jurisdictions with weak export controls, permissive corporate law, or limited oversight. Because attribution in cyberspace is already probabilistic, the insertion of a private intermediary creates a "cut-out" between the ultimate beneficiary and the operation. The state can plausibly deny; the vendor can claim lawful use; the operator can claim independent contracting. This diffusion of agency weakens deterrence, because retaliation requires confidence about who acted and under whose authority. The market also distorts vulnerability disclosure: high prices for zero-days incentivize hoarding and resale rather than reporting to vendors or defenders, so the stock of unpatched vulnerabilities becomes a tradable asset. Over time, the market professionalizes: subscription models, service-level agreements, customer support, and rebranding after sanctions. The result is not merely more attacks, but a changed political economy of cyber power in which capability is rented, deniability is priced, and accountability is fragmented across borders.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism operates most strongly where internet infrastructure is transnational, legal regimes are fragmented, and demand for covert access is high. It requires states or firms willing to pay premium prices for intrusion capability, and suppliers able to move talent, code, and infrastructure across jurisdictions. It is reinforced by dual-use ambiguity: the same exploit can be sold for "authorized" surveillance, criminal intrusion, or state espionage. It weakens where export controls are enforced, where procurement is transparent, where liability attaches to vendors, and where targets have strong defensive capacity. It also depends on the continued profitability of data theft, extortion, and political surveillance; if monetization declines or attribution improves, the market contracts. Not all cyber conflict is mercenary: many states maintain in-house units, and many firms sell only defensive services. The mercenary model thrives especially where secrecy, deniability, and speed matter more than legal accountability.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include the proliferation of commercial spyware targeting journalists, activists, opposition politicians, and officials; the growth of ransomware-as-a-service ecosystems with affiliates and revenue-sharing; the public identification of private vendors in threat-intelligence reporting; sanctions and export-control designations against spyware firms; and the rebranding or relocation of vendors after regulatory pressure. One also observes diplomatic friction when surveillance tools cross borders, defensive cost inflation for targeted organizations, and the emergence of national regulations attempting to license or restrict offensive cyber services. The market's existence is visible not only in attacks but in price structures, recruitment patterns, and the legal language used to justify sales. Where the mechanism is strong, attribution reports increasingly name private actors rather than states alone, and policy debates shift from "which state attacked?" to "which market supplied the capability?"

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective is primary because African states and societies experience cyber mercenaries as both consumers and targets of a market they rarely control. Security services may procure surveillance technology to monitor dissent, while journalists, activists, and opposition figures face intrusion with limited legal recourse. African scholarship on sovereignty, hybrid governance, and digital extraction suggests that cyber mercenarism can reproduce older patterns of externalized control in a new technical register: capability is imported, data is extracted, and accountability is displaced to foreign vendors and opaque procurement chains. The African vantage point also highlights regulatory asymmetry: African markets may be penetrated by spyware and ransomware while African regulators lack the technical capacity, legal frameworks, or bargaining power to constrain vendors. This perspective reveals

that cyber mercenaries are not only a security problem but a sovereignty problem, because they allow external and domestic actors to surveil populations without democratic authorization. It occludes less when it is attentive to African agency, including local technologists, civil-society watchdogs, and regional efforts to build cyber capacity, but it insists that market-driven cyber power must be judged by its effects on vulnerable publics rather than only by interstate deterrence.

The Chinese perspective emphasizes cyber sovereignty, state control over information infrastructure, and suspicion of Western dominance in standards, platforms, and threat attribution. It tends to view unregulated private offensive actors as destabilizing and supports state-led governance, export controls, and platform regulation, while also treating Western sanctions and attribution claims as potentially politicized. The Russian perspective treats cyber capability as an instrument of asymmetric competition and plausible deniability, often blurring the boundary between state units, criminal networks, and patriotic hackers. It is skeptical of Western norms that would constrain Russian leverage while leaving Western intelligence advantages intact. The Western perspective foregrounds human rights, export controls, sanctions, and the rule of law, seeking to regulate vendors and protect dissidents, but it also contains demand from Western agencies for similar capabilities, creating a tension between market restriction and security procurement. The UN perspective approaches cyber mercenaries through norms of responsible state behavior, human-rights law, and multi-stakeholder processes; it provides vocabulary for accountability but lacks binding enforcement, leaving a gap between normative condemnation and market practice.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Transnational Jihadist Networks: Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and the Affiliate System

Bolded Causal Claim: Transnational jihadist networks persist and adapt not primarily through centralized command but through a franchising logic in which ideology, brand, and selective material support convert local insurgencies into nodes of a global movement, so that territorial defeat of a core does not eliminate the network's capacity to inspire, recruit, finance, and attack.

Mechanism: The mechanism is ideological franchising combined with operational decentralization. Al-Qaeda historically operated as a vanguard: a relatively small cadre of experienced militants sought spectacular attacks against "far enemies," while affiliates such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, and Al-Shabaab pledged allegiance and gained brand recognition, training, and sometimes funding. The affiliate model allowed the core to project power without maintaining large standing forces. ISIS then innovated by seizing territory, declaring a caliphate, and building a bureaucratic state apparatus that attracted foreign fighters and generated revenue through taxation, oil, extortion, and smuggling. After territorial loss, ISIS shifted toward a provincial model, encouraging affiliates and inspired actors to continue under its brand. In both cases, the key mechanism is not top-down micromanagement but the combination of a portable ideology, a recognizable brand, selective resource flows, and local grievances. Local groups adopt the global narrative because it offers legitimacy, recruits, and access to transnational networks; the global brand gains reach because local groups provide manpower, territory, and operational initiative. Decentralization is not a weakness but an adaptation: when counterterrorism pressure kills leaders or disrupts finance, affiliates and inspired individuals can continue. Digital propaganda, encrypted communication, and diaspora networks lower the cost of coordination and recruitment. Financing is diversified: donations, kidnapping for ransom, criminal activity, hawala transfers, and, where territory is held, taxation and resource extraction. State collapse or weak governance provides permissive environments, while sectarian polarization and political exclusion provide grievances. Competition between Al-Qaeda and ISIS can intensify violence as groups seek to prove loyalty and relevance through attacks. The network therefore

behaves less like a corporation with a headquarters and more like a franchise system in which brand value, ideological screening, and local initiative combine to produce resilience.

Scope Conditions: This mechanism is strongest where states are weak or collapsed, where political exclusion and sectarian grievance are acute, and where digital connectivity allows propaganda and recruitment to cross borders. It requires ideological entrepreneurs capable of framing local conflicts as part of a global struggle, and it benefits from diaspora communities, foreign fighter flows, and permissive financial channels. It is weaker where states provide inclusive governance, where counterterrorism is combined with political reform, and where local populations reject jihadist rule. Not all Islamist movements become transnational jihadists; many remain national or local, and some explicitly reject global brands. The franchising model also depends on the continued credibility of the brand: if the core is discredited by defeat, atrocities, or ideological splits, affiliates may defect or rebrand. Finally, territorial control is not necessary for persistence, but it can amplify resources and legitimacy; conversely, territorial loss can force a return to insurgency and inspiration-based violence.

Observable Implications: The observable implications include attacks claimed by affiliates far from any core territory; shifts in allegiance from Al-Qaeda to ISIS or vice versa; the persistence of violence after the loss of a caliphate or safe haven; regionalization of conflict in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere; and the continued relevance of foreign fighter mobilization and returnee monitoring. One also observes counterterrorism dilemmas: decapitation strikes may disrupt leadership but not local capacity; military campaigns may displace rather than defeat networks; and overbroad security measures may deepen grievances. Financial indicators include sanctions listings, asset freezes, and assessments of terrorist-financing vulnerabilities. Humanitarian indicators include displacement, civilian casualties, and the erosion of state services in contested areas. Where the mechanism is strong, the defeat of a central leadership does not produce a durable reduction in attacks, because the brand and ideology continue to mobilize local actors.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective is primary because transnational jihadist networks in Africa are not simply imported threats; they are embedded in local political economies, governance gaps, and regional conflicts. In the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, groups such as Al-Shabaab, Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin, and ISIS affiliates have exploited state weakness, pastoral and farmer tensions, ethnic marginalization, and the uneven reach of central governments. African scholarship on warlord politics, hybrid governance, and the political construction of religious identity helps explain why jihadist brands gain traction: they offer order, dispute resolution, protection, or revenue in places where the state is absent or predatory. Reno (2011) is useful for understanding how non-state armed actors can become alternative governance structures, while Mamdani's work on the political construction of Muslim identity reminds analysts not to treat "jihadism" as a primordial cultural essence. The African vantage point reveals that counterterrorism framed as a purely military or intelligence problem often misses the local bargains, grievances, and governance deficits that make franchising possible. It also highlights sovereignty tensions: external military interventions may weaken networks tactically while undermining the legitimacy of African states and regional institutions. This perspective occludes less when it recognizes African agency, including community resilience, religious leadership, and regional security cooperation, but it insists that African populations are not merely battlegrounds for global ideologies.

The Chinese perspective treats transnational jihadist networks primarily as threats to state stability, territorial integrity, and development corridors, especially where they intersect with regions linked to the Belt and Road Initiative. It favors state-centric counterterrorism, non-interference in internal affairs, and coopera-

tion with host governments, while framing extremism as a security and development problem rather than a human-rights or governance issue. The Russian perspective sees jihadist networks as both a genuine security threat and an opportunity to justify intervention, expand influence, and compete with Western powers. It emphasizes state sovereignty, military solutions, and the use of private military companies, while often rejecting Western conditionality and human-rights criticism. The Western perspective combines counterterrorism, intelligence cooperation, sanctions, and military force with a liberal-institutional emphasis on democracy, human rights, and development; it has generated extensive legal frameworks and sanctions regimes, but it is vulnerable to critique for overmilitarization, civil-liberties erosion, and the unintended consequences of intervention. The UN perspective centers on Security Council sanctions regimes, counterterrorism conventions, international humanitarian law, and the tension between security imperatives and human-rights protections. It provides a multilateral vocabulary and listing mechanisms, including those targeting Al-Qaeda and ISIS, but enforcement depends on member states, and its frameworks can be criticized for vague definitions, due-process weaknesses, and the risk of legitimizing repression under the banner of counterterrorism.

SECTION 2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — NGOs and advocacy networks: Keck and Sikkink's transnational advocacy model

Bolded Causal Claim: Transnational advocacy networks (TANs) alter state behavior and international normative standards by mobilizing information, framing issues, and leveraging domestic–international pressure linkages—most characteristically through the "boomerang pattern"—when domestic political channels are blocked or unresponsive.

Mechanism: Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's *Activists Beyond Borders* (1998) defines a transnational advocacy network as a set of actors working internationally on an issue, sharing values, exchanging information and services, and pressuring states and other targets. The network's components are heterogeneous: domestic and international NGOs, social movements, foundations, media organizations, churches, trade unions, consumer organizations, parts of intergovernmental organizations, and even sympathetic officials within states. What binds them is not formal hierarchy but shared principled ideas and the exchange of politically usable information. The central causal mechanism is the boomerang pattern: when a state represses or ignores domestic activists, those activists bypass the state and appeal to international allies; those allies then pressure the offending state (and its allies, donors, or trading partners) from outside; the resulting international pressure raises the domestic cost of repression and can reopen space for local challengers. Keck and Sikkink identify four political strategies through which TANs operate. Information politics is the generation, verification, and dissemination of credible, politically usable information—often the network's most important resource, because states and publics cannot easily dismiss well-documented claims. Symbolic politics frames issues in terms of existing norms, values, and identities, making abstract harms concrete and morally legible. Leverage politics uses material power—aid, trade, investment, military assistance—channeled through sympathetic states or institutions to alter a target's cost-benefit calculus. Accountability politics holds actors to their own stated commitments, laws, and international obligations, turning formal promises into enforceable standards. Complementing this framework, Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) model the "life cycle" of international norms: emergence, in which norm entrepreneurs (often TANs) persuade states to adopt new standards; cascade, in which adoption accelerates through socialization and pressure; and internalization, in which the norm becomes taken for granted and embedded in law and practice. TANs are thus not merely lobbyists but norm entrepreneurs that can shift the "logic of appropriate-

ness" governing state conduct. The mechanism is relational and discursive rather than material in the first instance: it works by changing what counts as legitimate, by making violations visible and costly, and by creating coalitions that bridge domestic and international arenas.

Scope Conditions: The boomerang mechanism operates only where several conditions hold. First, there must be credible, verifiable information; TANs that traffic in unsubstantiated claims lose the epistemic authority on which leverage depends. Second, there must be access to international forums, media, and at least one powerful state or institution willing to apply leverage; networks facing a fully insulated target with no external dependencies are largely ineffective. Third, domestic partners must possess local legitimacy and organizational capacity; TANs cannot substitute for absent grassroots actors. Fourth, the issue must be one on which international norms are contested but not wholly settled—human rights, environmental protection, women's rights, landmines—rather than core security interests of great powers, where sovereignty claims are strongest. The model's scope is also limited by internal critiques. Clifford Bob (2005) argues that transnational advocacy is a competitive "market" in which movements must market themselves to Northern gatekeepers, privileging photogenic, easily framed causes over structurally complex ones. R. Charli Carpenter (2007) shows agenda-setting biases: certain harms (e.g., child soldiers, landmines) attract attention while others (e.g., male civilian casualties, older children) are marginalized, revealing that TANs do not simply respond to need but construct it. Further, "NGOization" can professionalize and depoliticize movements, substituting donor-driven project cycles for radical politics, and Northern-dominated networks can impose liberal-individualist frames that clash with communal, religious, or sovereignty-based claims. The strongest counterargument, then, is that TANs are not neutral norm entrepreneurs but politically situated actors whose influence depends on asymmetries of attention, funding, and epistemic power; they can amplify some voices while silencing others, and their successes (treaty ratifications, policy shifts) do not always translate into durable behavioral change on the ground.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, one should observe TAN campaigns preceding and correlating with measurable normative shifts: the anti-apartheid movement and sanctions; the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and the 1997 Ottawa Treaty; women's rights advocacy and CEDAW ratifications and the Beijing Platform; human rights campaigns in Latin America documented by Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink (1999); debt-relief mobilization (Jubilee 2000) and Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiatives; and the campaign for the International Criminal Court. Observable indicators include treaty ratification rates, policy and legislative changes, naming-and-shaming indices, shifts in state rhetoric, and the creation of new international institutions. Failures and limits are equally observable: campaigns that stall where targets are powerful and insulated (e.g., great-power resistance to human-rights scrutiny); contested or politicized information undermining credibility; and gaps between formal commitment and implementation. The model predicts not automatic success but conditional influence shaped by leverage, credibility, and framing.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective (primary) treats transnational advocacy as a terrain of both empowerment and contestation: African movements—from anti-apartheid to debt relief, women's rights, and climate justice—have been genuine norm entrepreneurs, yet African scholars stress that "civil society" is often donor-driven and that Northern NGOs can override local priorities; the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Banjul Charter, 1981) and African Union mechanisms reflect African agency in norm-setting, while Grovogui's work on sovereignty and international law highlights the ambivalence of African engagement with externally generated standards, and Mbembe's analyses of the postcolony warn against the NGOization of politics; the boomerang pattern in Africa (e.g., Nigerian Ogoni activists, Kenyan women's movements) reveals TANs as sites of struggle over epistemic authority and sovereignty, not merely liberal norm diffusion. The Chinese perspective is state-centric: NGOs are viewed as extensions

of state purpose or as potential vectors of foreign interference, "people-to-people" diplomacy is preferred to autonomous advocacy, and Western-funded NGOs are suspected of regime-change activity; yet China has expanded its own NGO participation in UN forums and BRI-related civil society, emphasizing development rights over civil-political rights and treating TANs as instruments of Western soft power. The Russian perspective is deeply suspicious of Western NGOs as regime-change instruments (the "color revolutions"), underwriting "foreign agent" laws and state-sponsored GONGOs, while also deploying advocacy networks for compatriot and geopolitical purposes; it frames TANs as tools of liberal normative hegemony rather than neutral civil society. The Western perspective is the canonical home of the Keck-Sikkink model: TANs are norm entrepreneurs advancing human rights, democracy, and environmental protection through information and leverage, though internal critiques (Bob, Carpenter) acknowledge power asymmetries, agenda biases, and accountability deficits. The UN perspective partners with NGOs through ECOSOC consultative status and human-rights mechanisms (UPR, treaty bodies), relying on TANs for information and monitoring, while navigating tensions between state sovereignty, access, and legitimacy; its frameworks provide multilateral vocabulary but depend on member-state consent.

SECTION 2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Illicit financial networks: money laundering, sanctions evasion, and kleptocracy

Bolded Causal Claim: Illicit financial networks convert political power and criminal proceeds into durable wealth and influence by exploiting gaps in global financial regulation, thereby eroding state capacity, distorting markets, and undermining sanctions and governance regimes.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three interconnected channels. First, money laundering converts illicitly obtained funds into apparently legitimate assets through the classic stages of placement (introducing cash into the financial system), layering (obscuring origins through complex transactions), and integration (reinvesting in legitimate enterprises). The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has codified these stages and the "risk-based approach" to anti-money-laundering (AML) and counter-terrorist-financing (CFT), establishing standards that states are expected to implement. Second, kleptocracy: ruling elites extract rents from state resources and convert them into private wealth held offshore, using shell companies, trusts, real estate, and professional gatekeepers (lawyers, accountants, bankers). William Reno (2011) analyzes how "shadow states" and warlord politics in Africa rest on the fusion of public authority and private accumulation, where rulers treat the state as a resource to be looted and externalized. Moisés Naím (2005) frames the broader phenomenon as the rise of illicit networks—of crime, terror, and corruption—that exploit globalization's open borders, financial integration, and technological connectivity while evading state control. Third, sanctions evasion: targeted states and actors use front companies, trade-based money laundering, correspondent-banking gaps, cryptocurrency, and informal value-transfer systems (hawala) to circumvent restrictions. The mechanism is enabled by structural features of global finance: secrecy jurisdictions, weak enforcement in peripheral nodes, complicit or negligent gatekeepers, and the sheer volume and speed of cross-border flows that overwhelm monitoring. The causal chain runs from political power or criminal opportunity → extraction → concealment → integration into legitimate markets → durable influence and impunity. Illicit networks thus do not merely accompany globalization; they are parasitic on its infrastructure and, in some accounts, constitutive of it.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism flourishes where regulatory gaps intersect with demand for concealment. Key scope conditions include: the existence of secrecy jurisdictions and weak AML regimes; the

availability of professional enablers willing to construct opaque structures; technological tools that outpace regulation (cryptocurrency, encrypted communications); and the complicity or incapacity of political elites in source and destination countries. The mechanism is constrained where FATF mutual evaluations, beneficial-ownership registries, and international cooperation raise the cost of concealment; where investigative journalism (Panama Papers, Pandora Papers) exposes networks; and where asset-recovery mechanisms operate. Strong counterarguments challenge the framing itself. Critics argue that "illicit" is defined by Western-dominated standards that criminalize flows from the Global South while legitimizing the structural violence of global finance; that major Western financial centers are themselves enablers of kleptocracy (London property, Delaware shell companies, Swiss banking); and that FATF's grey/blacklists are applied unevenly, punishing weak states while powerful ones escape scrutiny. Others note that sanctions evasion often harms civilian populations more than targeted elites, and that the "shadow state" literature risks exoticizing African politics while ignoring the global architecture that makes extraction profitable. The strongest objection, therefore, is that illicit financial networks are not aberrations external to global capitalism but are embedded in its legal and institutional infrastructure; addressing them requires reforming the centers, not just policing the peripheries.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, one should observe: large-scale capital flight from resource-rich and conflict-affected states; the concentration of kleptocratic assets in Western real estate and financial centers; FATF grey/blacklist designations correlating with weak AML regimes; sanctions-evasion cases involving Russia, Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela; asset seizures and recovery efforts (e.g., Abacha funds, Dos Santos assets); and investigative revelations (Panama Papers 2016, Pandora Papers 2021) mapping networks of shell companies. Metrics include illicit financial flow estimates (UNCTAD/UNODC), FATF mutual evaluation scores, asset-recovery statistics, and sanctions-enforcement actions. One should also observe unintended consequences: de-risking by banks that cuts off legitimate actors in high-risk jurisdictions; civilian harm from sanctions; and the displacement of illicit flows to less regulated channels when one node is closed.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): The African perspective (primary) places kleptocracy and capital flight at the center of African political economy: Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment, Bayart's "politics of the belly," Reno's shadow states, and Mbembe's necropolitics all illuminate how rulers extract and externalize wealth, while the complicity of Western financial centers in receiving stolen assets reveals that illicit finance is a transnational system, not an African pathology; FATF listings can appear as external imposition that punishes weak states without reforming enabling centers, and African demands for asset recovery and beneficial-ownership transparency (e.g., the African Union's work on illicit financial flows, the Mbeki panel) reflect a push for accountability that targets both domestic elites and global enablers; the African vantage reveals that "illicit" networks are often the operating system of postcolonial states, not deviations from them. The Chinese perspective emphasizes anti-corruption campaigns (Xi Jinping's) and state-led capital controls, while expressing concern about BRI financial integrity and money laundering; it is suspicious of Western sanctions as geopolitical tools and of FATF as a Western-dominated body, yet it has strengthened domestic AML frameworks and cooperates selectively; non-interference limits external scrutiny of Chinese-linked flows. The Russian perspective treats sanctions evasion as a survival strategy under Western pressure, with oligarchic networks and state capture blurring public and private; it critiques Western financial hegemony and the extraterritorial reach of U.S. sanctions, while its own financial system has been shaped by sanctions-driven adaptation (parallel imports, alternative payment systems); the PMC-oligarch nexus illustrates how illicit and strategic networks intertwine. The Western perspective is the canonical home of AML/CFT frameworks, FATF, and sanctions as tools of liberal order; it emphasizes

rule of law, transparency, and asset recovery, but is vulnerable to critique for enabling kleptocracy through its own financial centers and for uneven enforcement that burdens the Global South. The UN perspective centers on the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), Security Council sanctions regimes, and Panel of Experts monitoring; it provides multilateral vocabulary and listing mechanisms, but enforcement depends on member states, and its frameworks face criticism for vague definitions, due-process weaknesses, and the risk that anti-corruption and AML agendas are instrumentalized for political ends.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on transnational non-state actors begins from a premise that the other four perspectives tend to treat as background: the state itself, in much of the continent, has never been the Weberian monopoly on legitimate violence that Western IR theory assumes as its baseline. From this premise, the entire taxonomy of "non-state actors" appears differently. What Western, Chinese, Russian, and UN frameworks classify as deviations from a state-centric norm—warlords, militias, jihadist affiliates, private military companies, transnational criminal networks, advocacy NGOs, and multinational extractive firms—are, in the African experience, not external intrusions upon a pre-existing state order but constitutive elements of the political order itself. African scholarship has spent decades theorizing this condition, and its insights reframe every one of the five key ideas in this lesson.

The theoretical lineage runs through several distinct but converging traditions. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) established the structuralist premise that Africa's integration into the global economy was not a neutral market process but a historically specific extraction of surplus, in which European capital and African comprador elites jointly produced underdevelopment. Kwame Nkrumah's concept of neocolonialism extended this: formal political independence masked continued economic and military subordination, exercised not only by states but by multinational corporations, financial institutions, and covert operations. Julius Nyerere's reflections on ujamaa and non-alignment added a normative register—African socialism as an alternative to both capitalist and communist blocs—while Amílcar Cabral's writings on national liberation emphasized that the struggle was not merely against colonial armies but against the entire social structure that colonialism produced, including the class alliances that would outlast formal independence. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) supplied the psychological and violent dimensions: decolonization was not a legal transfer of sovereignty but a rupture, and the postcolonial state inherited the colonial apparatus of coercion, often turning it against its own population. These thinkers do not merely describe African cases; they offer a theory of how transnational power operates through, rather than against, local structures.

Jean-François Bayart's *The State in Africa* (1993) and subsequent work on the "politics of the belly" and the "criminalization of the state" (Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou, 1999) provide the crucial bridge to contemporary non-state actor analysis. Bayart argued that African states are not "failed" versions of Western states but operate according to a different logic: extraversion, in which political elites mobilize external resources—aid, investment, military support, illicit rents—to maintain domestic power. In this framework, the boundary between state and non-state, licit and illicit, public and private, is not a line to be policed but a zone of negotiation. The "rhizome state" is penetrated by transnational networks—MNCs, diaspora financiers, jihadist recruiters, NGO donors, PMC contractors—and these networks are not external threats to sovereignty but media through which sovereignty is exercised. This is the African contribution that Western state-failure

discourse systematically occludes: what looks like absence of state capacity is often a particular mode of statecraft.

Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) adds the institutional architecture. The colonial state was bifurcated: a "modern" civic sphere for settlers and a "customary" sphere for natives, governed through chiefs. Postcolonial states inherited this duality, producing a citizenship that is ethnically differentiated and a sovereignty that is internally fragmented. Transnational non-state actors exploit this fragmentation: jihadist groups recruit along ethnic and religious fault lines; PMCs contract with factions rather than states; MNCs negotiate with customary authorities for land and minerals; NGOs channel resources through ethnic or religious civil society organizations. The African perspective thus insists that non-state actor proliferation is not a security problem to be solved by strengthening the state but a political condition produced by the historical structure of the state itself.

Siba Grovogui's work on sovereignty and international law (*Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*, 1996) pushes further: the international legal order that defines "statehood" and "non-state actor" status is itself a product of colonial racial hierarchy. The Montevideo criteria for statehood, the UN Charter's Article 2(4) prohibition on force, and the Geneva Conventions' distinction between state and non-state belligerents all encode a Eurocentric ontology that renders African political forms illegible or illegal. From this vantage, the UN's IHL obligations for non-state actors, the FATF's AML standards, and the Security Council's sanctions regimes are not neutral technical frameworks but instruments of a particular, historically situated order that has consistently denied African sovereignty while demanding African compliance. This is not a rejection of international law but a demand for its decolonization—a theme developed by Sylvia Tamale in her call for decolonization and Afro-feminism (2020) and by Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí in her critique of the gendered, Eurocentric categories through which African social life is apprehended.

Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* (2003, 2019) provides the philosophical capstone. Mbembe argues that sovereignty, in the postcolony, is exercised as the power to dictate who may live and who must die—not only by states but by a constellation of actors including militias, warlords, and corporate security forces. The "becoming-black of the world" suggests that techniques of domination developed in the colony are now globalized. Applied to transnational non-state actors, necropolitics implies that the violence of jihadist networks, PMCs, and illicit financial flows is not an aberration but a modality of contemporary sovereignty. Mbembe's later work on the "brutalism" of contemporary capitalism connects MNC extractivism to the destruction of African life-worlds, framing corporate actors not as neutral economic agents but as participants in a necropolitical order.

Applied to the five key ideas:

First, multinational corporations. In the African perspective, MNCs are not merely geopolitical actors in a state-firm rivalry; they are historically constitutive of the African state's form. The extractive industries—cobalt in the DRC, oil in Nigeria, gold in South Africa, coltan in Rwanda's sphere of influence—create enclave economies that bypass national development and generate parallel sovereignties. The state-firm relationship is often one of mutual predation: firms provide rents that sustain regimes; regimes provide security and legal cover that sustain firms. Reno (2011) documented how warlords in Sierra Leone and Liberia operated as shadow states, taxing diamond extraction and contracting with MNCs. The African perspective thus reveals what Western FDI frameworks occlude: that MNC presence can be a mechanism of state fragmentation rather than development, and that "good governance" conditionality often ignores the structural incentives that make predation rational.

Second, cyber mercenaries and offensive cyber capability. Africa is less a producer than a target and a market for surveillance technology. The Pegasus spyware revelations (2021) showed Israeli firm NSO Group's tools deployed against African journalists, opposition figures, and activists in countries including Rwanda, Morocco, and Togo. Chinese surveillance systems—Huawei's "Safe City" projects, Hikvision cameras—are embedded in African urban governance. The African perspective frames this not as a technical cybersecurity issue but as digital colonialism: the extraction of data and the outsourcing of coercion to foreign firms, with African states as intermediaries. Indigenous African cyber capacity is limited, but non-state actors—hacktivist collectives, diaspora networks—also operate. The occlusion in Western cyber discourse is the assumption that the primary threat is state-on-state espionage; the African reality is that cyber tools are instruments of domestic repression and transnational extraction, often with Western or Chinese corporate origins.

Third, transnational jihadist networks. Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haram and its ISWAP faction in the Lake Chad basin, and the JNIM/AQIM constellation in the Sahel are not simply branches of a global terrorist franchise. African scholarship (Aning and Danso, 2013) emphasizes their embeddedness in local political economies: pastoralist conflicts, state neglect of peripheries, ethnic grievances, and the collapse of rural livelihoods. The "affiliate system" that Western counterterrorism frames as a command-and-control hierarchy is, on the ground, a loose network of local actors who adopt global jihadist branding for local purposes. The African perspective reveals what the GWOT framework occludes: that military responses (French Operation Barkhane, US drone strikes, AU missions) often exacerbate the grievances that drive recruitment, and that "counterterrorism" can become a resource for authoritarian regimes to suppress dissent. The African Union's African Peace and Security Architecture and regional economic communities represent an alternative, sovereignty-respecting approach, but they are underfunded and politically constrained.

Fourth, NGOs and advocacy networks. Keck and Sikkink's (1998) "boomerang model"—in which domestic NGOs blocked by repressive states appeal to international networks to pressure their governments—has African variants. African women's movements, human rights organizations, and environmental groups have used transnational advocacy to advance causes from anti-apartheid to land rights. But the African perspective also documents the "NGO-ization" of civil society: donor dependency, professionalization, and the displacement of radical politics by project-based service delivery. Tamale's feminist critique warns that universal human rights frames can override African epistemologies and impose Western gender categories. The African vantage thus both affirms the Keck-Sikkink model's descriptive power and critiques its normative assumptions: transnational advocacy can amplify African voices, but it can also ventriloquize them.

Fifth, illicit financial networks. The African perspective on money laundering, sanctions evasion, and kleptocracy is perhaps its most distinctive contribution. Rodney's structuralism and Bayart's extraversion converge on a claim that Western AML frameworks systematically misdiagnose the problem. Illicit financial flows from Africa—estimated by the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the AU at tens of billions of dollars annually, exceeding foreign aid and FDI combined—are not primarily the product of African criminality but of a global financial architecture that enables capital flight. Tax havens, shell companies, and correspondent banking relationships in London, New York, Dubai, and Geneva are the infrastructure of African kleptocracy. The FATF grey-listing of African states, from this vantage, appears as a disciplinary mechanism that punishes the periphery for systemic failures of the center. The African perspective thus reveals what the Western AML/CFT framework occludes: that "illicit" finance is not a deviation from global capitalism but one of its modalities, and that anti-corruption agendas can be instrumentalized to constrain African policy space while leaving Western financial centers untouched.

What the African perspective contributes that the other four cannot is a historically grounded, structurally critical theory of non-state actors as constitutive of, rather than external to, political order. It reveals the colonial genealogy of the state/non-state distinction, the extraversion of African political economies, and the complicity of global financial and corporate structures in producing the very phenomena that Western frameworks treat as African pathologies. What it occludes is less a blind spot than a deliberate bracketing: it tends to underweight the agency of great powers in shaping non-state actor dynamics (treating them as systemic background rather than strategic choice), and its structural critique can struggle to generate actionable policy prescriptions beyond "decolonize." It also risks romanticizing community-level and customary governance, which can be as exclusionary and violent as state institutions. The African perspective is thus not a replacement for the other four but a necessary corrective: without it, transnational non-state actor analysis remains trapped in a state-centric ontology that misrecognizes the very phenomena it seeks to explain.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

China's approach to transnational non-state actors is anchored in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, particularly non-interference in internal affairs, and in a developmentalist framing that treats sovereignty and stability as preconditions for economic growth. This perspective is not merely defensive; it is a coherent alternative to the Western liberal-interventionist model, with distinct implications for each of the five key ideas.

On multinational corporations, China's state-firm relationship is the inverse of the Western liberal model. Chinese SOEs and private firms operating abroad—Huawei, ZTE, CNPC, CNOOC, COSCO—are instruments of state strategy, coordinated through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the "going out" policy. The state does not merely regulate firms; it directs them toward strategic sectors (ports, telecoms, minerals, energy) and provides diplomatic and financial backing. From the Chinese perspective, this is not "state capitalism" as a deviation but a legitimate development model: the state ensures that corporate activity serves national interest rather than shareholder value alone. The occlusion is the lack of transparency and accountability: Chinese firms have been implicated in corruption, environmental degradation, and labor abuses in Africa and Latin America, and the non-interference principle prevents Beijing from conditioning investment on governance standards. The Western critique of "debt-trap diplomacy" is rejected as a smear, but Chinese scholars acknowledge that BRI security concerns—piracy in the Gulf of Aden, terrorism in Pakistan, instability in the Sahel—have forced a partial retreat from strict non-interference toward "protective" deployments (PLA base in Djibouti, private security companies guarding BRI projects).

On cyber mercenaries and offensive cyber capability, China's perspective is shaped by its own experience as a target of Western surveillance and by its strategic interest in information sovereignty. The "Great Firewall" and the Cybersecurity Law (2017) reflect a view that the internet is not a global commons but a domain of national sovereignty. China has been accused of sponsoring APT groups that conduct espionage and intellectual property theft; Beijing denies state direction and frames these as criminal or patriotic actors. The market for offensive cyber capability is viewed with alarm when Western firms sell to actors targeting Chinese interests, but Chinese firms also participate in the global cybersecurity market. The occlusion is the asymmetry: China demands sovereignty over its own information space while its firms and state-linked actors operate aggressively abroad, and the non-interference principle is selectively applied.

On transnational jihadist networks, China's perspective is dominated by the Xinjiang question and the perceived threat of Uyghur militancy. The East Turkestan Islamic Movement, now often labeled the Turkistan Islamic Party, has been cited by Beijing as a justification for mass detention and surveillance in Xinjiang. China's engagement with jihadist-affected regions (Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Sahel) is framed through coun-

terterrorism cooperation and economic development. The BRI's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is vulnerable to attacks by Baloch and jihadist groups, prompting Chinese security involvement. The occlusion is the conflation of legitimate political dissent with terrorism, and the use of counterterrorism discourse to justify human rights abuses that the Western and UN perspectives condemn.

On NGOs and advocacy networks, China's perspective is deeply suspicious. The Foreign NGO Law (2017) requires registration and police oversight, reflecting a view that Western-funded NGOs are instruments of "color revolution" and subversion. Keck and Sikkink's advocacy model is read not as civil society empowerment but as a tool of Western interference. Chinese scholars emphasize "people-to-people" exchanges and state-directed civil society as alternatives. The occlusion is the suppression of domestic advocacy that could address corruption, environmental harm, and labor rights—issues that Chinese NGOs might otherwise pursue.

On illicit financial networks, China's perspective combines strict capital controls with selective anti-corruption enforcement. The anti-corruption campaign under Xi Jinping has targeted officials who moved assets abroad. China participates in FATF and has strengthened AML laws, but enforcement is uneven and politically directed. The BRI has been associated with corruption scandals, and Chinese banks have been fined for sanctions violations. The occlusion is the instrumentalization of anti-corruption: it targets political rivals while leaving systemic channels—underground banking, trade-based money laundering, real estate investment in Western cities—partially intact. The Chinese perspective contributes a state-centric, development-first approach that challenges Western liberal universalism, but it occludes accountability, transparency, and the rights of individuals and communities affected by state and corporate power.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

Russia's perspective on transnational non-state actors is shaped by its post-Soviet experience of state collapse, its strategic rivalry with the West, and its self-conception as a civilizational pole in a multipolar order. The central instrument is the private military company, particularly Wagner Group and its successor Africa Corps, which Russia has deployed as a deniable, cost-effective tool of foreign policy in Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic, Mali, and Sudan.

On multinational corporations, Russia's state-firm relationship reflects a post-Soviet oligarchic structure in which strategic sectors (energy, defense, mining) are dominated by state-linked firms (Gazprom, Rosneft, Rostec, Alrosa). These firms are geopolitical instruments: Gazprom's pipeline politics, Rosneft's oil diplomacy, and Rostec's arms exports. The Russian perspective treats corporate activity as an extension of state power, not a separate sphere. Sanctions since 2014 and 2022 have accelerated this fusion, forcing Russian firms into shadow networks and alternative payment systems. The occlusion is the corruption and inefficiency of state-directed capitalism, and the dependence on Western technology and finance that sanctions have exposed.

On cyber mercenaries, Russia has cultivated a distinctive model: patriotic hackers and criminal groups operate with tacit state tolerance or direction, providing deniable offensive capability. The market for cyber mercenaries is viewed as a legitimate arena of competition; Russian scholars frame Western accusations as hypocrisy given NSA and CIA operations. The "sovereign internet" law (2019) and disconnection tests reflect a view that information infrastructure is a strategic asset. The occlusion is the blurring of criminal and state activity, which undermines rule of law and enables ransomware attacks that harm civilians globally.

On transnational jihadist networks, Russia's perspective is shaped by the Chechen wars and the Syrian intervention. Moscow frames its counterterrorism as defense against a global jihadist threat that the West, by

supporting "moderate rebels" in Syria, inadvertently strengthened. The Wagner Group's deployment in Syria and Africa is justified as counterterrorism assistance to sovereign governments. The occlusion is the instrumentalization of counterterrorism: Russian operations in Syria and Africa have targeted not only jihadists but political opponents and civilians, and the "counterterrorism" label has been used to justify authoritarian consolidation.

On NGOs and advocacy networks, Russia's perspective mirrors China's suspicion. The "foreign agent" law (2012, expanded 2022) requires NGOs receiving foreign funding to register as foreign agents, reflecting a view that Western-funded civil society is a vector of regime change. Keck and Sikkink's advocacy model is read as a mechanism of Western interference, particularly after the color revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. The occlusion is the suppression of domestic accountability and the closure of space for independent civil society, which weakens governance and enables corruption.

On illicit financial networks, Russia's perspective is paradoxical. Moscow has been a target of Western sanctions and AML enforcement, and Russian elites have developed sophisticated sanctions-evasion networks—shadow fleets, cryptocurrency, trade-based laundering, and the use of third countries. The Russian perspective frames these as defensive measures against illegitimate Western coercion. Simultaneously, Russia has used illicit financial networks as offensive tools: funding political parties, media outlets, and paramilitary groups abroad. The occlusion is the denial of agency: Russian state and non-state actors are active participants in global illicit finance, not merely victims of Western overreach. The Russian perspective contributes a multipolar, anti-hegemonic framing that challenges Western monopoly on defining legitimate force and finance, but it occludes accountability, human rights, and the distinction between defensive sovereignty and predatory statecraft.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on transnational non-state actors is the canonical framework of contemporary IR: a state-centric, liberal-institutional order in which non-state actors are deviations to be regulated, sanctioned, or countered. It is the home of the GWOT, the FATF, the sanctions architecture, and the liberal critique of corporate power. Its strength is its institutional density; its weakness is its tendency to universalize a historically specific order.

On multinational corporations, the Western perspective treats the state-firm relationship as a governance problem: how to align corporate behavior with public interest through regulation, antitrust, export controls, and human rights due diligence. The US CHIPS Act, the EU Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, and CFIUS screening reflect a view that firms are economic actors subject to state oversight. But the perspective also acknowledges that MNCs are geopolitical actors: the "weaponization of interdependence" (Farrell and Newman) describes how states leverage corporate networks (SWIFT, semiconductor supply chains) for coercion. The occlusion is the complicity of Western financial centers and corporate headquarters in enabling kleptocracy and tax evasion; the "rules-based order" often exempts its own firms.

On cyber mercenaries, the Western perspective has shifted from laissez-faire to alarm. The market for offensive cyber capability—NSO Group's Pegasus, Hacking Team, Candiru—was initially tolerated as a private-sector innovation. Revelations of abuse against journalists, activists, and politicians prompted US export controls (Commerce Department Entity List, 2021) and EU scrutiny. The perspective treats cyber mercenaries as a market failure requiring regulation, but struggles with the dual-use nature of cyber tools and the role of Western intelligence agencies as customers and enablers. The occlusion is the assumption that regulation can contain a market that is structurally global and deniable.

On transnational jihadist networks, the Western perspective is defined by the GWOT and its evolution. The 9/11 attacks produced a framework—UNSCR 1373, the 1267 sanctions regime, military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq—that treated jihadist networks as a global threat requiring a global response. Keck and Sikkink's advocacy model was adapted: counterterrorism networks of states, NGOs, and international organizations. The perspective has evolved toward "countering violent extremism" and stabilization, acknowledging that military force alone is insufficient. The occlusion is the blowback: interventions in Iraq, Libya, and Syria destabilized regions and fueled jihadist recruitment; the "terrorist" label has been applied to legitimate resistance movements; and the GWOT's human rights costs (torture, drone strikes, mass surveillance) undermined the liberal values it claimed to defend.

On NGOs and advocacy networks, the Western perspective is the natural home of Keck and Sikkink's (1998) model. Transnational advocacy networks—human rights, environmental, women's rights—are celebrated as agents of norm change, operating through information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics. The boomerang model describes how domestic NGOs bypass repressive states by appealing to international allies. The perspective's occlusion is its optimism: it underestimates the co-optation of NGOs by donors, the depoliticization of radical demands, and the backlash from states that view advocacy as interference. It also tends to treat Western NGOs as neutral arbiters rather than actors with their own interests and blind spots.

On illicit financial networks, the Western perspective is the canonical home of AML/CFT. The FATF, the UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention, and national laws (US Bank Secrecy Act, EU AML directives) constitute a dense regulatory architecture. The perspective emphasizes rule of law, transparency, and asset recovery. Its occlusion is well-documented: Western financial centers (London, New York, Delaware, Switzerland) are the destination for illicit flows; enforcement is uneven and politically selective; and the compliance burden falls disproportionately on developing countries. The "liberal-institutional critique" from within acknowledges these failures but frames them as implementation gaps rather than structural features.

The Western perspective contributes institutional capacity, normative frameworks, and a self-critical tradition. Its occlusion is the tendency to treat its own order as universal, to exempt its own centers from the standards it imposes on others, and to conflate Western interests with global public goods.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on transnational non-state actors is institutional and legalistic: it seeks to extend the international legal order—designed for states—to non-state actors through Security Council resolutions, conventions, and expert bodies. Its strength is multilateral legitimacy; its weakness is dependence on member-state enforcement and the political constraints of consensus.

On multinational corporations, the UN perspective has evolved from the failed 1970s New International Economic Order debates to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011, Ruggie). The framework is "protect, respect, remedy": states protect human rights, firms respect them, and victims have access to remedy. The UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights monitors implementation. The perspective acknowledges that MNCs are geopolitical actors but frames their accountability through voluntary and soft-law mechanisms. The occlusion is the lack of binding enforcement: the treaty on business and human rights remains under negotiation, and the Guiding Principles rely on corporate self-regulation and state willingness.

On cyber mercenaries, the UN perspective is nascent. The Group of Governmental Experts and the Open-

Ended Working Group have developed norms for responsible state behavior in cyberspace, including that states should not knowingly allow their territory to be used for cyberattacks. The applicability of IHL to cyber operations is debated. The UN has not yet developed a specific framework for commercial spyware or cyber mercenaries, though the Human Rights Council has addressed surveillance. The occlusion is the gap between norm development and enforcement: states disagree on attribution, thresholds, and the status of non-state cyber actors.

On transnational jihadist networks, the UN perspective is most developed. UNSCR 1267 (1999) and 1373 (2001) established the sanctions regime against Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and later ISIS, with the 1267 Committee (now the ISIL/Da'esh and Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee) maintaining a consolidated list. The Counter-Terrorism Committee and CTED monitor implementation. The UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2006) emphasizes a comprehensive approach including root causes. The occlusion is well-known: due-process weaknesses in listing and delisting, the conflation of counterterrorism with counter-insurgency, and the risk that sanctions are instrumentalized by powerful states. The UN's IHL framework struggles with non-state belligerents: Common Article 3 and Additional Protocol II apply to non-international armed conflicts, but the status of transnational jihadist fighters remains contested.

On NGOs and advocacy networks, the UN perspective provides institutional access through ECOSOC consultative status, which allows NGOs to participate in UN processes. The UN has been a site of advocacy success: the landmine ban, the ICC, the women's rights agenda. But the perspective also reflects state control: NGO accreditation is politically contested, and states have used ECOSOC mechanisms to exclude critical organizations. The occlusion is the gap between participatory rhetoric and state-dominated practice.

On illicit financial networks, the UN perspective centers on UNCAC (2003), the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC, 2000), and the work of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). The Security Council has imposed sanctions on individuals and entities involved in sanctions evasion and illicit finance (e.g., DPRK, Iran, Libya). UN Panels of Experts monitor implementation. The FATF, though not a UN body, is recognized by the UN and its standards are incorporated into UN frameworks. The occlusion is enforcement dependence: the UN lacks independent enforcement capacity, and its frameworks are only as effective as member states' willingness to implement them. The UN perspective contributes multilateral legitimacy and a universal vocabulary, but its effectiveness is constrained by the very state sovereignty it seeks to regulate.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reveals non-state actors as governance providers and hybrid political orders; treats sovereignty as negotiated rather than given; centers African agency and the costs borne by African littoral states	Risks romanticizing hybridity; may understate coercive and violent dimensions of armed groups; can obscure accountability deficits	Plural sovereignty; African agency; critique of external intervention and state-centrism	Reno (2011) on warlord politics; Mamdani on the colonial state; hybrid governance in Somalia and the Sahel	Western: hybrid governance can legitimate armed groups that violate human rights and understate the need for accountable institutions
Chinese	Emphasizes economic connectivity and development; non-interference protects sovereignty; BRI frames stability as commercial infrastructure	Understates human rights and accountability; treats non-state actors mainly as threats to commerce; can shield abusive regimes	Sovereignty, non-interference, development-first	BRI port investments; Saudi–Iran mediation (2023); Red Sea shipping concerns	African/Western: non-interference can shield abusive regimes; economic framing ignores political grievances
Russian	Demonstrates PMCs as flexible instruments of state power; multipolar challenge to Western dominance; exploits gaps in Western accountability	Obscures state control; conflates state and private violence; deniability undermines accountability	Multipolarity; great-power prerogative; deniability	Wagner in CAR, Mali, Sudan; Africa Corps transition	Western/UN: PMCs evade IHL; deniability undermines accountability and rule of law

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Legal-institutional frameworks; sanctions; counterterrorism; human rights; IHL; rule of law	State-centrism; assumes Westphalian norms universal; may ignore root causes and local legitimacy	Liberal international order; rule of law; human rights	FATF standards; UN sanctions regimes; counterterrorism frameworks	African: frameworks applied selectively; counterterrorism can justify intervention
UN	Multilateral legitimacy; universal vocabulary; sanctions regimes; FATF standards; IHL obligations for non-state actors	Enforcement dependence; constrained by state sovereignty; politicized implementation	Collective security; universal norms	Security Council resolutions; Panels of Experts; UNCAC/UNTOC	African/Russian: enforcement is politicized; great powers exempt themselves

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The 2023–2025 Houthi Attacks on Red Sea Shipping

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the attacks turn on decisions by Houthi leadership—above all Abdul-Malik al-Houthi and the movement's military commanders—to link maritime violence to the Gaza war, framing strikes as solidarity with Palestinians and as pressure for a ceasefire. Individual agency matters: the timing, target selection (commercial versus naval vessels), and rhetorical justification were choices, not structural necessities, and they reveal how a non-state leader can convert a regional conflict into a global economic shock. At the state level, the case is embedded in Yemen's fragmented sovereignty, Iran's material support to the Houthis, Saudi Arabia's security concerns, Egypt's dependence on Suez Canal revenues, and the US/UK decision to launch strikes; states provide weapons, intelligence, basing, and legal cover, and the Houthi movement itself exercises de facto state-like authority over territory and population. At the systemic level, the attacks expose the vulnerability of a US-led maritime order and a globalized just-in-time supply chain to disruption by a comparatively weak actor; they also register the shift toward multipolarity, in which non-state actors can exploit great-power distraction and the diffusion of precision-strike technology. At the transnational level, the case is irreducibly cross-border: Iranian support networks, Hezbollah-linked technical assistance, global shipping firms and insurers, and the rerouting of trade around the Cape of Good Hope all operate beyond any single state's jurisdiction, making the crisis a transnational problem that no state can solve alone.

Mechanism. The core mechanism is chokepoint coercion through asymmetric cost imposition. The Houthis

exploited the Bab el-Mandeb strait—roughly thirty kilometers wide at its narrowest—and the southern Red Sea to threaten commercial shipping with comparatively cheap systems (anti-ship missiles, drones, explosive boats) against which defense requires expensive naval assets and sustained patrols. Because the cost of a single successful strike or even a near-miss is catastrophic for a container vessel, and because insurance markets price risk rapidly, the mere threat of attack forced major carriers to suspend transits and reroute around the Cape of Good Hope, adding roughly two weeks to Asia–Europe voyages. The mechanism runs through several linked channels: (1) physical threat to hulls and crews; (2) insurance and reinsurance repricing that made Red Sea transits commercially unviable; (3) carrier decisions driven by liability and crew safety rather than by state directive; (4) Suez Canal revenue collapse for Egypt; and (5) a naval coalition response (Operation Prosperity Guardian, US/UK strikes from January 2024) that raised the military stakes without fully restoring commercial confidence. The Houthis thus converted localized violence into global economic leverage: a non-state actor with limited conventional power imposed costs on the world economy disproportionate to its resources, using geography and market psychology as force multipliers. The attacks also carried a signaling function—demonstrating solidarity with Gaza and claiming a role in the "axis of resistance"—which sustained domestic legitimacy and recruitment even as the military effect on Israel itself was marginal.

Perspective reconstruction. From the African perspective, which must be read first and at length, the Houthi case is not an exotic anomaly but a variant of a familiar pattern: armed movements exercising de facto sovereignty and providing (or disrupting) order in spaces where the state is weak or contested. African scholarship—Reno on warlord politics, Mamdani on the colonial state's bifurcated sovereignty, Bayart on the "politics of the belly," and Grovogui on the international as a site of African agency—would read the Houthis as a hybrid political order whose authority is negotiated with populations, external patrons, and rival factions rather than derived from Westphalian recognition. The Red Sea is an African-adjacent space: Yemen faces Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia across a narrow strait, and African littoral states bear direct costs—Egypt's Suez revenues, Djibouti's port traffic, the risk of piracy resurgence off Somalia—while having little voice in the US-led military response. The African vantage thus reveals two things the other perspectives miss: first, that "non-state actor" is often a misnomer for a de facto state-like authority whose legitimacy is local and performative; second, that the security architecture responding to the crisis (coalition strikes, naval patrols) reproduces a pattern in which African and Arab coastal populations absorb the costs of order defined by external powers. The case also resonates with African experiences of non-state violence in the Sahel and the Horn, where state weakness, external intervention, and armed group governance intertwine, and where the line between "terrorist," "insurgent," and "governance provider" is politically contested rather than analytically clear.

From the Chinese perspective, the attacks threaten a maritime corridor central to the Belt and Road Initiative and to China's Europe-bound trade; Beijing's non-interference doctrine keeps it out of the US-led coalition, yet China benefits from the freedom of navigation that US naval power secures, producing a free-rider tension. Chinese shipping (COSCO among others) rerouted, and Beijing emphasized de-escalation and a Gaza ceasefire rather than military action, consistent with its preference for political solutions and its interest in not antagonizing Iran. The Chinese vantage contributes an economic-connectivity framing and a critique of military escalation, but it occludes the question of how to protect commerce when diplomacy fails and underplays the Houthis' agency by treating them as a variable in great-power management.

From the Russian perspective, the crisis is read as evidence of Western overreach and the fragility of the US-led order: Moscow criticized US/UK strikes as violations of sovereignty and used the episode to position itself as a defender of multipolarity, while Russian shipping and interests in the region (including

long-standing interest in a Red Sea naval facility) were affected. Russia does not control the Houthis, but the disruption serves its narrative that Western maritime dominance is contestable and that non-state actors can impose costs on the liberal order. The Russian vantage contributes a critique of unilateral military action and highlights great-power hypocrisy, but it occludes accountability for violence and treats the Houthis instrumentally.

From the Western perspective, the attacks are a threat to freedom of navigation and global commerce requiring a collective security response; the US and UK framed strikes as defensive, invoked self-defense, and assembled a coalition, while also maintaining sanctions on Houthi leaders and supporting UN processes. The Western framing supplies legal vocabulary (UNCLOS, self-defense) and institutional response capacity, but it tends to treat the Houthis as a security problem to be managed rather than as a political actor with grievances, and it risks overestimating what military force can achieve against a dispersed, ideologically motivated movement.

From the UN perspective, the crisis sits atop an existing sanctions architecture (Security Council resolutions 2140 and 2216 on Yemen) and a humanitarian catastrophe; the UN emphasizes IHL obligations for all parties, including non-state actors, mediation by the Special Envoy, and the protection of civilian shipping and aid flows. The UN vantage contributes multilateral legitimacy and a humanitarian lens, but its effectiveness is constrained by Council divisions and by the gap between resolutions and enforcement.

Adjudication. Which perspective best explains the case? The central puzzle is how a non-state actor reshaped global shipping, and on that question the transnational/systemic lens—combined with the African hybrid-governance insight—carries the most explanatory weight. The mechanism of chokepoint coercion only works because of transnational interdependence (shipping, insurance, supply chains) and because the Houthis exercise de facto sovereignty over a coastal territory that no state fully controls, a condition the African perspective theorizes better than the state-centric Western or UN frames. The Western perspective best explains the response (coalition strikes, sanctions) but occludes the actor's capacity and the local political roots of its authority; the Chinese and Russian perspectives illuminate great-power positioning but treat the Houthis as a variable in interstate competition rather than as an autonomous actor. If forced to choose a single best explanation, the African hybrid-governance perspective best accounts for why the Houthis could act at all, while the systemic/transnational perspective best accounts for why their actions mattered globally; neither alone suffices, and the Western security framing, though dominant in policy, is the most incomplete because it mistakes a symptom for the disease. What the best explanation misses is the specifically ideological and religious dimension of Houthi mobilization—individual-level commitment and transnational Shia networks—which the five perspectives here underweight relative to material and institutional factors.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. **Mechanism identification.** The Wagner Group's transformation from a Russian private military company into a strategic instrument of foreign policy is often described as "plausible deniability." Evaluate whether this label captures the actual mechanism, or whether the relationship is better understood as principal-agent delegation with high monitoring costs, or as a hybrid of state capture and commercial extraction. Specify the observable implications of each mechanism.

2. **Levels of analysis.** Analyze the Wagner/Africa Corps case at all four levels: individual (Yevgeny Prigozhin, field commanders, local brokers), state (Russian Ministry of Defense, FSB, host governments), systemic (post-Cold War order, sanctions architecture, great-power competition), and transnational (PMC networks, gold and diamond smuggling routes, mercenary labor markets).

3. **African perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct, from within, how host governments in Mali, the Central African Republic, and Burkina Faso have framed PMC presence. Is it sovereignty assertion against Western conditionality, a security bargain, or resource extraction? What does this vantage point reveal that Western counterterrorism framing misses?

4. **Western perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct the Western framing: sanctions, counterterrorism, liberal-institutional critique. What does it capture and what does it occlude?

5. **Adjudication.** On the evidence available through 2025, does the Wagner/Africa Corps case support the claim that PMCs are instruments of Russian state power, or the claim that they are autonomous commercial enterprises that occasionally align with state interests? Adjudicate with evidence.

6. **Falsifiers.** State two pieces of evidence that, if observed, would force you to revise your adjudication in task 5.

MODEL ANSWER

The Wagner Group's evolution into a strategic instrument of Russian foreign policy is best understood not through the single label of "plausible deniability" but through a layered mechanism that combines principal-agent delegation with commercial extraction and, after June 2023, direct state absorption. The causal claim is that Moscow used Wagner as a low-cost instrument to project power into spaces where conventional military deployment was politically or legally costly, while allowing the firm to self-finance through resource extraction. The mechanism runs as follows: the Russian state provided political cover, weapons, and intelligence; Wagner provided deniable force and local security services; host governments provided mining concessions and basing rights; and the resulting revenue streams reduced the fiscal burden on Moscow while creating a constituency within the Russian security apparatus with a stake in continued engagement. Scope conditions include weak host-state capacity, the presence of extractable resources, and a sanctions environment that makes conventional arms transfers visible. Observable implications include the pattern of Wagner deployments following French or UN withdrawals, the correlation between PMC presence and gold or diamond concessions, and the post-Prigozhin rebranding as "Africa Corps" under direct Ministry of Defense control, which suggests that the deniability function diminished once the instrument had proven its value.

At the individual level, Yevgeny Prigozhin operated as both entrepreneur and political broker, cultivating relationships with African leaders and Russian security elites simultaneously; his death in August 2023 and the subsequent absorption of Wagner into the Africa Corps under the Ministry of Defense indicates that the individual-level principal had become a liability to the state principal. At the state level, the Russian Ministry of Defense and FSB provided the enabling environment, while host governments in Mali, the Central African Republic, and Burkina Faso traded sovereignty concessions for security guarantees. At the systemic level, the post-2014 sanctions architecture and the erosion of the unipolar order created demand for alternatives to Western security provision, and the PMC model offered a template that other powers could emulate. At the transnational level, gold smuggling networks, mercenary labor markets drawing on veterans from Syria and Libya, and the offshore financial infrastructure that launders extractive revenues all sustained the enterprise beyond any single state's control.

The African perspective reconstructs PMC presence as a sovereignty bargain rather than a neocolonial imposition. From within, Malian and Central African leaders have framed Wagner's arrival as a rejection of Western conditionality—human rights benchmarks, governance reforms, and the perceived failures of French Operation Barkhane and the UN MINUSMA mission. The African vantage point reveals what Western counterterrorism framing misses: that PMC demand is endogenous to African security dilemmas and to the delegitimation of Western military presence, not merely a Russian imposition. It also reveals the hybrid governance reality in which non-state security providers become embedded in local political economies, sometimes displacing state functions and sometimes reinforcing them. The occlusion in this perspective is the long-term cost: resource extraction, civilian harm documented by UN panels of experts, and the erosion of accountability mechanisms that even weak democratic institutions might provide.

The Western perspective frames Wagner through sanctions, counterterrorism, and liberal-institutional critique. It captures the documented links between Wagner and Russian state structures, the human rights abuses, and the threat to democratic governance. Its occlusion is the failure to account for why African governments invited Wagner in the first place—the security vacuum and the conditionality fatigue that preceded PMC arrival. The UN perspective, operating through Security Council sanctions regimes and panels of experts, documents violations of arms embargoes and international humanitarian law but lacks enforcement capacity; FATF frameworks address the financial flows but depend on host-state cooperation that is often absent.

Adjudicating between "instrument of state power" and "autonomous commercial enterprise," the evidence through 2025 favors the hybrid interpretation with a tilt toward state instrumentality. The post-Prigozhin absorption into the Africa Corps under direct Ministry of Defense control is decisive: a genuinely autonomous enterprise would not have been so smoothly nationalized. Yet the commercial extraction dimension—gold concessions in the Central African Republic, diamond and timber deals—persisted after nationalization, suggesting that the revenue model is structurally embedded and not merely a byproduct of state direction. The strongest counterargument is that Prigozhin's mutiny in June 2023 demonstrated genuine autonomy and that the Africa Corps rebranding represents state capture of a previously independent asset rather than proof of prior control. On balance, however, the pattern of deployments tracking Russian strategic interests—Mali after the French withdrawal, Sudan during the civil war, Libya in support of Haftar—indicates that commercial extraction was the financing mechanism, not the strategic purpose.

Two falsifiers would revise this adjudication. First, if documentary evidence emerged showing that Wagner deployments were initiated by host governments without Russian state coordination and that Moscow consistently opposed them, the "autonomous enterprise" interpretation would strengthen. Second, if the Africa Corps were dissolved or withdrawn following a change in Russian strategic priorities while host governments retained the commercial contracts, this would suggest that the commercial dimension had become independent of state direction. Absent such evidence, the case supports treating PMCs as hybrid instruments in which state direction and commercial extraction are mutually reinforcing, with the balance shifting toward state control after 2023.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

Case description. In 2023-2024, investigations by Citizen Lab, Amnesty International, and the European Parliament documented the use of commercial spyware—Pegasus and successor products—by multiple governments against journalists, opposition figures, and civil society actors across at least forty countries. The NSO Group, an Israeli firm, and a growing field of competitors operate in a market where offensive cyber

capability is sold as a service, with export licenses granted by home governments and resale through intermediaries in third countries. Several purchasers appear on the FATF grey list, and the market has persisted despite the US Commerce Department's blacklisting of NSO Group in 2021 and the EU's proposed spyware regulation. The case raises the question of whether commercial spyware is best understood as a transnational non-state actor in its own right, as an instrument of state power delegated through market mechanisms, or as a market failure that existing regulatory frameworks cannot contain.

Memo headings (respond to each as a prompt):

- **Mechanism:** Identify and specify the causal mechanism linking the commercial spyware market to state power projection. State scope conditions and observable implications.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct all five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on this case in 3-5 sentences each, steel-manned from within.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one historical case of a transnational non-state actor serving as a delegated instrument of state power, and specify what transfers and what does not.
- **Falsifiers:** State two pieces of evidence that would force you to revise your mechanism claim.

Self-check: Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what follows), and prescription (what should be done), and that no single paragraph conflates two of these.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which of the following best captures the mechanism by which transnational non-state actors most consistently convert structural opportunity into strategic influence?

A. By replacing the state entirely in zones of weak governance, becoming the sole provider of security and services.

B. By occupying the gap between state capacity and transnational demand, converting regulatory arbitrage into durable leverage.

C. By achieving formal recognition in international law, which grants them standing equivalent to states.

D. By relying exclusively on ideological mobilization to override material interests.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses:

- **A** confuses non-state actor presence with state replacement. Most transnational non-state actors complement, parasitize, or hybridize with states rather than replace them; the "failed state" narrative overstates the autonomy of non-state providers and understates their dependence on state toleration or sponsorship.
- **C** conflates legal personality with strategic influence. Most transnational non-state actors operate precisely by avoiding formal recognition; legal standing is neither necessary nor sufficient for influence, and many of the most consequential actors (PMCs, spyware firms, jihadist affiliates) derive leverage from operating in legal grey zones.
- **D** overstates ideational factors. Even jihadist networks and advocacy NGOs depend on material

resources, organizational infrastructure, and opportunity structures; ideology alone rarely sustains transnational action, and materialist mechanisms are required to explain variation in outcomes.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — MNC revenue and state-capacity comparisons (illustrative, rounded, circa 2023–2024)

Entity / comparator	Annual revenue or GDP (USD, billions)	What the comparison can show	What it cannot show
Walmart revenue	~650	A single firm's sales can exceed the GDP of mid-sized states	Revenue is gross sales, not value added, profit, or coercive capacity
Amazon revenue	~575	Platform firms operate across jurisdictions at scale	It does not mean Amazon governs territory or commands force
Apple revenue	~383	Technology firms concentrate intangible assets and tax-base mobility	It does not measure employment, welfare, or state legitimacy
State Grid (China) revenue	~550	State-owned enterprises blur public/private boundaries	Ownership and control differ from market-listed MNCs
Sweden GDP	~586	Useful benchmark for "firm larger than state economy" claims	GDP is value added, not a measure of state power
Belgium GDP	~624	Helps calibrate claims about corporate scale	Does not imply corporate sovereignty
Poland GDP	~811	Shows that even very large firms remain smaller than major economies	Scale alone does not determine geopolitical influence

Source note: figures are rounded from publicly reported corporate revenues and standard national-accounts benchmarks; verify exact values before citation. The point of the table is order-of-magnitude reasoning, not a ranking of power.

Table 2 — Cyber-mercenary and offensive-cyber market estimates

Segment	Estimated scale	Evidentiary basis	Key limitation
Commercial spyware vendors	Low single-digit billions USD annually, highly uncertain	Investigative reporting, export-control cases, leaked contracts	Firms rebrand, shell companies obscure ownership, and contracts are confidential
Zero-day exploit brokers	Tens to low hundreds of millions USD	Bug-bounty platforms, broker advertisements, court documents	Prices are secret; "exclusive" sales are not publicly auditable
Hack-for-hire services	Fragmented; no reliable global total	Law-enforcement indictments, platform takedowns	Many operations are criminal, informal, and undercounted
State procurement of offensive cyber capability	Classified; likely larger than commercial market	Budget opacity, procurement secrecy	Cannot be separated cleanly from intelligence budgets
Defensive and compliance spending	Much larger than offensive market	Corporate cybersecurity budgets, regulatory filings	Defensive spending is not a proxy for offensive capability

Source note: estimates are ranges, not audited market totals. Treat them as indicators of commercialization, not as precise measurements.

Table 3 — FATF pressure and terrorist-activity indicators

Indicator	What it captures	Illustrative reading	Major limitation
FATF black list	Jurisdictions subject to countermeasures	DPRK, Iran, Myanmar in recent plenaries	List changes; membership reflects diplomatic as well as technical assessment
FATF grey list	Jurisdictions under increased monitoring	20+ jurisdictions in recent cycles, including several African and Asian states	Grey-listing can reflect capacity gaps as much as political will
Designated terrorist groups	Legal status under national/UN regimes	Dozens of groups across regions	Designation is political and varies by jurisdiction
Attack counts by region	Frequency of violent events	Concentration in conflict zones and fragile states	Underreporting, definitional variation, and state violence may be excluded

Indicator	What it captures	Illustrative reading	Major limitation
Affiliate expansion	Organizational spread of jihadist networks	ISIS- and Al-Qaeda-linked groups in Africa and Middle East	"Affiliation" can mean branding, command, or loose inspiration
Maritime incident counts	Disruption to shipping lanes	Red Sea attacks, rerouting, insurance spikes	Counts conflate attempted, successful, and intercepted attacks

Source note: FATF lists are current only as of the latest plenary; terrorist-activity metrics depend on dataset definitions and should not be read as objective counts of "terrorism."

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Looking at Table 1, what trend do MNC revenue-to-GDP comparisons reveal about the relationship between private economic scale and state capacity? Does the trend imply that large firms are becoming "more powerful than states," or does it show something narrower about mobility, market concentration, and regulatory arbitrage? Specify the mechanism.

2. **Level of analysis.** For each of the five actor types in this lesson—MNCs, cyber mercenaries, jihadist networks, NGOs/advocacy networks, and illicit financial networks—identify the primary level of analysis at which it operates (individual, state, systemic, transnational). Which actor type most clearly straddles two levels, and what evidence would distinguish a transnational explanation from a state-centric one?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each perspective would read Tables 1–3:

   - **African:** hybrid governance, non-state security provision, sovereignty costs, and the gap between formal state capacity and lived authority.
   - **Chinese:** non-interference, BRI route security, state-firm coordination, and suspicion of Western sanctions extraterritoriality.
   - **Russian:** PMCs as strategic instruments, deniability, sanctions evasion, and great-power competition.
   - **Western:** liberal-institutional regulation, counterterrorism, sanctions, and market-governance norms.
   - **UN:** Security Council sanctions, FATF standards, IHL obligations, and humanitarian access. Which perspective best explains the *data-generation process* behind FATF lists and terrorist-activity metrics, and which best explains the *political consequences* of those lists?

4. **Interpretation.** Does grey-listing primarily function as (a) a technical compliance tool, (b) a sovereignty-sensitive form of economic coercion, or (c) a hybrid of both? Use Table 3 and specify the scope conditions under which each interpretation holds. What would falsify the claim that FATF listing is merely technocratic?

5. **Limitation.** What do terrorist-activity metrics and maritime-incident counts systematically miss? Consider underreporting, definitional politics, state violence, and the difference between "attacks" and

"strategic effects." How would your answer change if the unit of analysis were shifted from events to networks?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Transnational Actor Power Map" (hand-drawn scatter plot) What to draw: Draw a large rectangle. On the horizontal axis, label left-to-right: "Low state regulatory capacity / weak territorial control" to "High state regulatory capacity / strong territorial control." On the vertical axis, label bottom-to-top: "Low transnational reach" to "High transnational reach." Divide the space into four quadrants with light grid lines.

Points to plot and label: - Top-left quadrant: "Jihadist affiliate networks," "Cyber-mercenary vendors," "Illicit finance nodes." - Top-right quadrant: "MNCs with home-state backing," "Large NGOs/advocacy networks," "State-owned enterprises." - Bottom-left quadrant: "Local militias," "Informal brokers." - Bottom-right quadrant: "Domestic firms," "State agencies."

Arrows to draw: From "Local militias" upward to "Jihadist affiliate networks" (radicalization/affiliation); from "Domestic firms" upward to "MNCs" (internationalization); from "Cyber-mercenary vendors" rightward toward "State procurement" (state absorption).

Perspective overlay to annotate: - African: shade the top-left quadrant and label "Hybrid governance zone: authority without full state control." - Chinese: draw a dashed line from "BRI corridors" across the top-right and top-left, labeled "Route security and non-interference tension." - Russian: annotate top-left with "Deniable strategic instruments." - Western: annotate top-right with "Regulatory and sanctions targets." - UN: place a small box in the center labeled "Sanctions, FATF, IHL, humanitarian access."

Caption to write beneath: "Transnational reach is not the same as state power; the map separates mobility from authority."

Visual 2 — "Houthi Maritime Disruption Causal Chain" (hand-drawn flowchart) What to draw: Draw six boxes in a left-to-right chain, connected by arrows: 1. "Houthi attacks on Red Sea shipping" 2. "Vessel rerouting around Cape of Good Hope" 3. "Longer transit times and higher fuel costs" 4. "Freight and insurance premium spikes" 5. "Consumer and industrial price effects" 6. "Naval coalition response and escalation risk"

Side boxes to attach: - Above Box 1: "Non-state actor with state-linked capabilities" - Below Box 2: "Supply-chain chokepoint" - Above Box 5: "Food and energy security effects" - Below Box 6: "Deterrence vs. escalation dilemma"

Levels-of-analysis labels: Place small tags beside boxes: - Box 1: "Transnational / sub-state" - Box 2: "Systemic" - Box 3–5: "Transnational economic" - Box 6: "State and systemic"

Perspective overlay to annotate: - African: "Port economies, import prices, and food security." - Chinese: "BRI route security and commercial shipping interests." - Russian: "US naval overstretch and multipolar opportunity." - Western: "Freedom of navigation and alliance burden-sharing." - UN: "Maritime law, civilian protection, and humanitarian corridors."

Feedback loop to draw: Draw a curved arrow from Box 6 back to Box 1 labeled "Retaliation can reinforce mobilization."

Caption to write beneath: "A non-state actor can reshape systemic trade flows without controlling territory beyond its launch areas."

Visual 3 — "Wagner/Africa Corps as Strategic Instrument" (hand-drawn network diagram) What to draw: Place a central node labeled "Kremlin / security services." Draw arrows to a second node labeled "PMC command structure." From the PMC node, draw arrows to three nodes: "African host regime," "Local armed groups," and "Resource concession sites." Draw a return arrow from "Resource concession sites" to "PMC funding / logistics." Draw a separate arrow from "Kremlin / security services" to "Information operations," then to "Host-regime legitimation."

Labels on arrows: - Kremlin → PMC: "Deniable force projection" - PMC → Host regime: "Regime security" - Host regime → PMC: "Access and basing" - PMC → Resource sites: "Protection" - Resource sites → PMC funding: "Revenue" - Kremlin → Information operations: "Narrative support"

Perspective overlay to annotate: - African: "Hybrid governance: security provided outside formal state monopoly." - Chinese: "Non-interference norm tested by security externalities." - Russian: "Strategic depth with plausible deniability." - Western: "Sanctions, accountability gaps, and mercenary prohibition." - UN: "IHL, mercenary conventions, and Panel of Experts monitoring."

Caption to write beneath: "The PMC is not merely a firm; it is a networked instrument linking force, resources, and narrative."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (answer, evidence, source log)
What is a transnational non-state actor?	An organization or network that operates across borders and exercises political, economic, coercive, or normative influence without being a sovereign state. Key distinction: transnational reach ≠ statehood. Sources: Keck and Sikkink (1998); Naim (2005).
How do MNCs become geopolitical actors?	Through scale, supply-chain position, technology control, tax mobility, and home-state alignment. Revenue comparisons show scale but not authority. Source log: corporate financial reports; World Bank national accounts.
What is the cyber-mercenary market?	A commercial market for offensive cyber capability, including spyware, exploit brokers, and hack-for-hire services. It converts state-grade capability into purchasable services. Sources: Singer (2003) on privatized force; export-control and investigative reports.

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (answer, evidence, source log)
How do jihadist networks organize transnationally?	Through ideology, branding, affiliate relationships, and local insurgent integration. Affiliation ranges from command to inspiration. Sources: UN Panel of Experts reports; conflict datasets.
What is Keck and Sikkink's advocacy model?	Transnational advocacy networks use information politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics to change state behavior. Source: Keck and Sikkink (1998).
What are illicit financial networks?	Systems for laundering, sanctions evasion, and kleptocratic wealth protection. They exploit gaps between jurisdictions and weak enforcement. Sources: FATF reports; Naim (2005).
What does FATF listing do?	It raises compliance costs, signals risk, and can restrict market access. It is technical in form but political in effect. Source log: FATF reports.
Why is the African perspective primary here?	African cases show hybrid governance, non-state security provision, and sovereignty as practice rather than only legal status. Sources: Reno (2011); African scholarship on hybrid orders.
How does China frame non-state actors?	Through non-interference, BRI security, and state-firm coordination; concern about external sanctions and route disruption. Source log: Chinese policy statements; BRI security discourse.
How does Russia use PMCs?	As deniable instruments for regime security, resource access, and great-power competition. Source log: Reno (2011); UN Panel of Experts reports.
What is the Western liberal-institutional critique?	Emphasizes sanctions, counterterrorism, market regulation, and accountability; risks over-securitizing non-state actors. Source log: FATF; UN sanctions regimes.
What is the UN perspective?	Security Council sanctions, FATF standards, IHL obligations, and humanitarian access; seeks universal rules for non-state conduct. Source log: UN Panel of Experts reports.

Summary (3–5 sentences): Transnational non-state actors operate across borders through markets, networks, violence, advocacy, and illicit finance. Their power must be analyzed by mechanism and level of analysis, not by scale alone. Data on corporate revenue, cyber markets, FATF lists, and terrorist activity are politically constructed and require perspective-aware interpretation. The African vantage point is especially important because it reveals hybrid governance and the practical limits of state sovereignty. No single perspective fully captures both the data-generation process and the political consequences of transnational non-state power.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Transnational non-state actors are groups, companies, or networks that cross borders and influence politics even though they are not governments. Some sell goods, some sell hacking tools, some fight, some advocate, and some move dirty money. States try to regulate them, but their cross-border nature makes control difficult.

2. **Mark gaps.** My first explanation risks treating all non-state actors as equally powerful and equally "non-state." It also risks confusing sales revenue with political power, and treating terrorist-incident counts as objective facts rather than data produced by definitions, reporting, and politics.

3. **Reread verification.** Rechecking the key ideas: MNC power is about position and mobility, not just size; cyber mercenaries commercialize offensive capability; jihadist networks vary from command to inspiration; advocacy networks work through information and leverage; illicit networks exploit jurisdictional gaps. The data lab confirms that estimates are uncertain and lists are political instruments.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** A useful analogy is a multinational franchise: local branches operate under a shared brand and rules, but ownership, control, and accountability vary. The analogy helps explain networked organization, but it breaks down because franchises do not usually use violence, evade sanctions, or claim political authority.

5. **Rewrite.** Transnational non-state actors are cross-border networks whose influence depends on specific mechanisms—market position, commercialized coercion, ideological affiliation, advocacy leverage, or illicit finance. Their power is real but bounded, and the data used to measure it are themselves shaped by political and institutional choices.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L50	Definition	What is a transnational non-state actor (TNSA)?	An actor operating across borders without sovereign statehood that exercises governance, coercion, or influence through networks rather than territory; includes MNCs, NGOs, PMCs, terrorist networks, and illicit financial networks.	African perspective stresses these actors often fill governance vacuums left by weak or captured states.
L50	Mechanism	How do MNCs become geopolitical actors?	Through control of critical supply chains, technology standards, and capital flows, firms shape state preferences and can be weaponized by home governments via sanctions compliance and export controls.	Western perspective treats this as market power; Chinese perspective emphasizes industrial policy and state-firm coordination.
L50	Application	What is Keck and Sikkink's boomerang model?	When domestic channels are blocked, activists bypass the state to international allies who pressure the home state, creating transnational advocacy networks that reframe local issues as international norms.	Western liberal-institutional lens; African scholars note asymmetry in whose voices get amplified.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L50	Comparison	How does Wagner/Africa Corps differ from traditional mercenaries?	It combined combat, resource extraction, and political influence under Russian state direction, blurring private commercial and strategic functions into a single hybrid instrument.	Russian perspective: strategic instrument; African perspective: hybrid governance and sovereignty erosion.
L50	Source	What is Naim's (2005) core argument in *Illicit*?	Global illicit networks (drugs, arms, people, money) exploit globalization's infrastructure and outpace state enforcement, creating a parallel global economy.	Western security framing; African perspective emphasizes demand-side drivers and historical extraction.
L50	Debate	Are PMCs a privatization of war or an extension of state power?	Singer (2003) argues PMCs marketize force; critics counter that states retain control via contracting, regulation, and deniability, making PMCs extensions of state power.	Russian use of Wagner shows state-directed hybridity rather than pure market logic.
L50	Mechanism	What drives the cyber mercenary market?	Offensive cyber capability is commodified and sold to states and non-state buyers, lowering barriers to entry and enabling plausible deniability for sponsors.	Western perspective: arms-control challenge; Chinese/Russian: sovereignty and information security.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L50	Reconstruction	What is the African perspective on non-state security?	Non-state actors often provide security and services where states are absent; legitimacy derives from performance and patronage, not formal sovereignty (Reno 2011).	Occludes Western state-centric frameworks that treat non-state order as mere disorder.
L50	Occlusion	What does the UN perspective tend to occlude?	Focus on state compliance and sanctions regimes can understate how non-state actors reshape governance on the ground.	UN: Security Council sanctions, FATF, IHL obligations for non-state actors.
L50	Adjudication	When does a non-state actor become a strategic instrument of a state?	When funding, command, and political objectives align with state interests while maintaining deniability; evidence includes Wagner in Africa and contested Houthi-Iran links.	Requires distinguishing correlation from command; African perspective stresses local agency.
L50	Visual	What is the FATF grey/blacklist function?	FATF identifies jurisdictions with weak AML/CFT controls; listing raises compliance costs and can trigger capital flight and de-risking by banks.	African states are disproportionately listed; raises sovereignty and development concerns.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L50	Source	What does Reno (2011) argue about warlord politics?	Warlords and non-state actors govern through shadow economies and external patronage; state collapse is not absence of order but an alternative order.	African perspective primary; challenges Western state-failure narratives.
L50	Mechanism	How do illicit financial networks enable sanctions evasion?	Shell companies, trade-based laundering, and crypto channels move value across borders, undermining sanctions and enabling kleptocracy.	FATF reports; UN Panel of Experts reports.
L50	Application	What did the 2023-2025 Houthi attacks demonstrate?	A non-state actor disrupted global shipping via Red Sea attacks, forcing rerouting and raising insurance costs, demonstrating transnational leverage without statehood.	All five perspectives; African: Red Sea littoral states affected.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (scored 0-100)

Concept	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence Basis	Gap to Close
Defining transnational non-state actors			
MNC-state geopolitical relationship			
Cyber mercenary market dynamics			
Transnational jihadist affiliate system			
Keck and Sikkink boomerang model			

Concept	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence Basis	Gap to Close
Illicit financial networks and sanctions evasion			
African hybrid governance perspective			
UN sanctions and FATF frameworks			

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to steel-man from within, and what evidence would change your view?
2. Can you state the mechanism by which a non-state actor converts network position into strategic leverage, without naming a specific case?
3. Where did you conflate description (what happened) with explanation (why it happened) in your memo draft?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Non-state actors are weak because they lack territory.	Network position, not territory, is the relevant resource; non-state actors can coerce globally (Houthis, cyber mercenaries).	Houthi Red Sea disruption 2023-2025; cyber mercenary market estimates.
PMCs are purely private market actors.	States direct, fund, and shield PMCs for deniability; Wagner/Africa Corps functioned as Russian strategic instrument.	UN Panel of Experts reports; Reno (2011).
FATF listings are neutral technical assessments.	Listings have distributional effects; African states disproportionately listed, raising sovereignty and development concerns.	FATF reports; African scholarship on de-risking.
NGOs always empower local voices.	Transnational advocacy can amplify some voices over others; boomerang politics may bypass local agency.	Keck and Sikkink (1998); African critiques of advocacy asymmetry.
Illicit networks are separate from the formal economy.	Illicit and licit networks are intertwined through trade-based laundering and shell companies.	Naim (2005); FATF reports.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Transnational non-state actors (TNSAs); MNCs as geopolitical actors; cyber mercenaries; jihadist affiliate system; transnational advocacy networks; illicit financial networks	State-firm weaponization via sanctions/export controls; commodification of offensive cyber capability; boomerang politics; state-directed PMC hybridity; trade-based laundering and shell companies	Keck and Sikkink (1998) boomerang model; Naim (2005) illicit networks; Reno (2011) warlord politics; Singer (2003) Corporate Warriors	Houthi Red Sea attacks 2023-2025; Wagner/Africa Corps in Africa; FATF grey/blacklists; UN Panel of Experts reports	Privatization of war vs. state extension; NGO empowerment vs. voice asymmetry; FATF neutrality vs. distributional bias; state failure vs. alternative order	No measurable shipping disruption despite attacks; PMC operations independent of state direction; advocacy networks without domestic anchors; illicit flows uncorrelated with sanctions	L23 asymmetric warfare; L24 cyber; L7 constructivism; L51 climate; L57 infrastructure; L54 AI and warfare

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 20 min):** Re-read Section 2.7 African perspective and flashcards 1-5; recite the five perspectives from memory.
- **R2 (Day 3, 30 min):** Redo the Problem Pair (Wagner/Africa Corps) from scratch without notes; compare to model answer.
- **R3 (Day 7, 45 min):** Complete the Independent Memo (Houthi case) under timed conditions; check against the four required headings.
- **R4 (Day 14, 30 min):** Reconstruct the comparison matrix (Section 2.7.6) from memory; verify against the lesson.
- **R5 (Day 30, 20 min):** Feynman compression: explain transnational non-state actors to a non-expert in 3 minutes; log gaps in error-log.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define a transnational non-state actor and distinguish it from a domestic non-state actor.
☐ I can explain the mechanism by which MNCs become geopolitical actors.
☐ I can describe the cyber mercenary market and its implications for state power.
☐ I can outline the transnational jihadist affiliate system (Al-Qaeda, ISIS).
☐ I can apply Keck and Sikkink's boomerang model to a case.
☐ I can explain how illicit financial networks enable sanctions evasion.

- ☐ I can steel-man the African perspective on hybrid governance and non-state security.
- ☐ I can steel-man the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
- ☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives on the lesson's central topic.
- ☐ I can adjudicate between competing explanations using evidence.
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in my memo.
- ☐ I can identify falsifiers for each key claim.
- ☐ I can use the four levels of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational).
- ☐ I have completed the Data Lab analysis questions.
- ☐ I have drawn or described the three dual-coded visuals.
- ☐ I have filled in Cornell notes and the summary.
- ☐ I have logged at least three errors in the error-log.
- ☐ I can pass the hinge question without hesitation.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Transnational advocacy and NGOs - Keck, M. E., and Sikkink, K. (1998). *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Cornell University Press. - Risse, T., Ropp, S. C., and Sikkink, K. (eds.) (1999). *The Power of Human Rights*. Cambridge University Press.

Illicit networks and global crime - Naim, M. (2005). *Illicit: How Smugglers, Traffickers, and Copycats Are Hijacking the Global Economy*. Doubleday. - FATF (various years). *Mutual Evaluation Reports and High-Risk Jurisdictions*. FATF.

Private military companies and warlord politics - Singer, P. W. (2003). *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*. Cornell University Press. - Reno, W. (2011). *Warfare in Independent Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

African perspectives on hybrid governance - Grovogui, S. N. (2006). *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*. Palgrave Macmillan. - Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press.

UN and sanctions frameworks - United Nations Security Council Panel of Experts reports (various country mandates). - UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). *World Drug Report* (annual).

End of Lesson 50. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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52. Climate Geopolitics

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 51: Climate Geopolitics
Module	Module 8: Indo-Pacific, Systemic Rivalry, and Transnational Forces
Prerequisites	L19 (resources), L17 (world-systems), L49 (Global South)

Field	Value
Interleaved links	Forward to L53 (critical minerals), L57 (biosecurity), L61 (grand strategy)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, visual anchor, Cornell notes, flashcards, worked example, problem pair
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Climate change is conventionally taught as a problem of atmospheric physics: greenhouse gases accumulate, temperatures rise, and humanity must collectively reduce emissions. That framing is not wrong, but it is radically incomplete, and its incompleteness is itself a political fact. The central puzzle of this lesson is not whether warming is occurring — the IPCC AR6 assessment reports (2021–2023) have settled that question with high confidence — but why states that broadly accept the same physical science disagree so fundamentally about who caused the problem, who must pay for it, who gets to develop, and who decides. Climate geopolitics is the study of how a biophysical process becomes a terrain of international contestation over sovereignty, responsibility, and survival. The lesson asks you to stop treating climate as an exogenous shock to an otherwise stable international order and to start treating it as a force that is actively restructuring that order — reshaping alliances, redefining security, redistributing vulnerability, and renegotiating the terms of global capitalism.

This lesson sits at a deliberate intersection in the curriculum. Module 8 addresses Indo-Pacific rivalry, systemic competition, and transnational forces; climate is all three simultaneously. It is transnational because the atmosphere is a global commons that no state can fence. It is systemic because differential vulnerability and differential responsibility are reordering power relations between North and South, and between rising and declining powers. It is Indo-Pacific because the region contains both the world's largest emitter (China), the world's largest historical emitter (the United States), the most climate-vulnerable small island states, and the critical mineral supply chains on which decarbonization depends. The prerequisites — L19 on resources, L17 on world-systems, L49 on the Global South — are not decorative. L19 supplies the resource-competition lens: climate policy is, among other things, a contest over who controls the inputs to a green economy. L17 supplies the structural lens: climate vulnerability maps onto core-periphery relations established through colonial extraction. L49 supplies the agential lens: the "Global South" is not a passive victim of warming but a political coalition that has forced loss and damage onto the multilateral agenda. The forward links — L53 on critical minerals, L57 on biosecurity, L61 on grand strategy — extend the analysis: decarbonization requires minerals whose extraction reproduces colonial patterns; climate interacts with pandemic risk through zoonotic spillover and food system stress; and climate is now embedded in national security doctrines from the US National Security Strategy to NATO's climate security agenda.

By the end of this lesson you will be able to do five things that you could not do before. First, you will be able to analyze climate negotiations not as technical exercises in emissions accounting but as geopolitical bargaining over historical responsibility, development rights, and financial transfers. Second, you will be able to reconstruct five distinct perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — on climate

geopolitics, steel-manning each from within its own premises, and identifying what each reveals and what each occludes. Third, you will be able to apply the concept of hydro-hegemony to transboundary river disputes, using the Nile, Mekong, and Tigris-Euphrates cases as comparative material. Fourth, you will be able to evaluate the politics of loss and damage finance, including the 2022–2023 COP27/COP28 negotiations that established the Loss and Damage Fund, and to assess whether that fund represents a genuine shift in climate justice or a managed concession. Fifth, you will be able to adjudicate between competing explanations of the same event — for instance, whether a given climate-security initiative is best understood as genuine risk management, as securitization that depoliticizes justice claims, or as great-power competition dressed in green.

The theoretical lineage you will draw on is substantial and contested. On climate as threat multiplier, the foundational work is Barnett (2003), who argued that climate change amplifies existing vulnerabilities rather than creating new conflicts ex nihilo, and Busby (2018), who examined how climate interacts with state fragility and governance capacity. On hydro-hegemony, the key framework is Zeitoun and Warner's (2006) theory of hydro-hegemony, which treats transboundary water not as a neutral resource but as a site of power asymmetry structured by riparian position, material power, and ideational framing. On loss and damage, the relevant literature spans climate justice scholarship, the UNFCCC's own evolving architecture, and the advocacy of Global South coalitions. On securitization, the Copenhagen School (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998) provides the theoretical vocabulary, though its application to climate has been heavily contested by scholars who warn that securitization can close down democratic deliberation. On just transition, the literature connects decarbonization to labor politics, industrial policy, and the geopolitics of critical minerals. None of these theories is presented here as settled truth; each carries scope conditions and counterarguments that you are expected to weigh.

The African perspective is primary in this lesson, and that primacy is methodological, not merely representational. The standard Western framing of climate change as a "global commons problem" requiring collective action and cost-sharing treats all parties as symmetrically situated agents who happen to have different emission levels. The African vantage point — reconstructed from within through the scholarship of Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, and Oyěwùmí — reveals this symmetry as fictive. It shows that climate vulnerability in Africa is not a natural fact but a historical product of colonial extraction, cash-crop economies, and externally imposed development models. It shows that "adaptation finance" and "loss and damage" are not charity but partial restitution for a debt incurred by the industrialized North. And it shows that the language of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR), while legally enshrined in the UNFCCC, is constantly diluted in practice by Northern pressure to universalize obligations. What the African perspective reveals that the other four miss is the constitutive role of colonial history in producing present vulnerability, and the way in which climate finance discourse can reproduce dependency even while claiming to remedy it.

A final methodological note. Throughout this lesson you will be asked to distinguish four operations: description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen), and prescription (what should happen). These are routinely conflated in climate discourse — a description of rising temperatures becomes a prescription for a particular policy, or an explanation of Northern responsibility becomes a prediction of Southern inaction. The worked example on COP27/COP28 and the problem pair on the Nile dispute are designed to train you in keeping these operations separate and in recognizing when an argument smuggles one into another. The data lab gives you quantitative material to ground your claims; the visual anchor gives you spatial and relational scaffolding; the Feynman compression and Cornell notes force you to reconstruct the argument in your own voice. Climate geopolitics is a field where the stakes are existential

and the rhetoric is overheated; the discipline this lesson cultivates is the ability to reason carefully when the pressure to conclude is greatest.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer each question from memory before consulting notes. These draw on lessons already completed.

1. **(L19 — Resources)** What is the "resource curse," and how does it connect to state capacity and regime type? Give one African or Middle Eastern example.
2. **(L17 — World-Systems)** In world-systems theory, what distinguishes the core from the periphery, and through what mechanism does unequal exchange reproduce the gap between them?
3. **(L49 — Global South)** How does the "Global South" function as a political category rather than merely a geographic one? Name one coalition or forum through which it acts collectively.
4. **(L1 — Levels of Analysis)** Name the four levels of analysis used in this curriculum and give one example of a climate-relevant claim at each level.
5. **(L19 — Resources)** What is hydro-hegemony, and which riparian position (upstream or downstream) typically confers structural advantage in transboundary water disputes?
6. **(L49 — Global South)** In decolonial framing, what is the difference between "climate justice" and "climate charity," and why does the distinction matter for finance negotiations?

1.2 Orientation Questions These questions frame the lesson's central puzzles. You need not answer them fully now; they will guide your reading.

1. Why do cumulative historical emissions and current annual emissions produce different rankings of state responsibility, and which metric does each major negotiating bloc prefer?
2. Is loss and damage finance best understood as charity, insurance, or reparations — and what changes in the negotiation if the frame shifts from one to another?
3. How does securitizing climate change alter who governs the response, and what democratic or justice claims might be displaced in the process?
4. What does the Nile dam dispute reveal about power asymmetries in transboundary water governance that a purely technical "water management" framing would obscure?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach Provisional definitions to be refined as you work through the lesson.

- **Threat multiplier:** A factor that does not by itself cause conflict or crisis but amplifies existing vulnerabilities — poverty, weak governance, resource scarcity — so that climate stress produces disproportionate harm. Associated with Barnett (2003) and Busby (2018).
- **Hydro-hegemony:** The asymmetric control of transboundary water resources by a riparian state that leverages its geographic position, material power, and discursive framing to secure disproportionate water access. Associated with Zeitoun and Warner (2006).
- **Loss and damage:** The harms from climate change that cannot be avoided through mitigation or adaptation, including irreversible losses (lives, ecosystems, cultural heritage) and recoverable damages (infrastructure, livelihoods). A contested category in UNFCCC negotiations.

- **Common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR):** The principle, enshrined in the 1992 UNFCCC, that all states share responsibility for climate change but that developed countries bear greater obligation because of their historical emissions and greater capacity. Constantly renegotiated in practice.
- **Climate securitization:** The framing of climate change as an existential security threat, which can mobilize resources and attention but may also shift governance from civilian to military institutions and depoliticize justice claims. Drawn from the Copenhagen School.
- **Just transition:** The principle that decarbonization must not impose disproportionate costs on workers, communities, or countries that depend on fossil fuel economies, and that the benefits of green transformation must be shared equitably.
- **Adaptation finance:** Financial transfers from developed to developing countries to support measures that reduce vulnerability to climate impacts, as distinct from mitigation finance (emissions reduction) and loss and damage finance (compensation for unavoidable harm).
- **Mitigation:** Actions that reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions, including energy transition, efficiency improvements, and carbon sinks.
- **Climate justice:** A framework that links climate change to historical responsibility, human rights, and equity, insisting that those who contributed least to the problem should not bear the greatest burden of its consequences.
- **Carbon colonialism:** The critique that Northern climate policies — such as large-scale land acquisitions for carbon offsets or biofuel plantations in the Global South — reproduce colonial patterns of extraction under a green veneer.
- **Upstream / downstream:** Riparian positions along a river; upstream states control flow volume and timing, while downstream states depend on releases they cannot compel, creating structural power asymmetry.
- **Climate reparations:** The demand that industrialized countries compensate developing countries for historical emissions and resulting damages, framing loss and damage not as charity or insurance but as debt. Prominent in African and broader Global South advocacy.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

After completing this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the causal mechanisms through which climate stress translates into migration, food insecurity, and armed conflict, distinguishing direct biophysical impacts from socially mediated pathways and specifying the intermediate variables—livelihood collapse, price spikes, displacement, and institutional failure—that carry the effect from environmental shock to political outcome.

2. **Evaluate** the scope conditions under which the "threat multiplier" framing holds, using comparative case evidence to identify where climate stress produces conflict, where it produces adaptation, and where it produces neither, and to articulate the methodological debate between deterministic and probabilistic interpretations of the climate-conflict link.

3. **Compare** the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on climate security, identifying for each its core causal claim, its preferred policy instrument, and the empirical or normative blind

spot it introduces, while reconstructing each position from within rather than judging it by external standards.

4. **Apply** the threat-multiplier framework to a novel case—specifying the observable implications, the level of analysis at which the mechanism operates, and the evidence that would falsify the claim—while distinguishing description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in the student's own analysis.

5. **Critique** the securitization of climate response, tracing how the framing of climate as a security threat reallocates authority from civilian to military institutions, reshapes resource flows, and distributes costs and benefits asymmetrically across the Global North and Global South.

Each objective is assessable through a memo, case analysis, or structured comparison; the student should be able to move between levels of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational) without conflating them, and to hold competing explanations in tension before adjudicating on evidence.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Climate as a threat multiplier: migration, food security, conflict

Bolded Causal Claim: Climate change does not, by itself, cause war or mass displacement; rather, it acts as a *threat multiplier* that amplifies pre-existing vulnerabilities—poverty, weak institutions, ethnic or resource grievances, and livelihood dependence on climate-sensitive sectors—thereby raising the probability of food insecurity, forced migration, and armed conflict in contexts where those vulnerabilities are already present, while leaving relatively unaffected those societies with diversified economies and robust adaptive capacity.

Mechanism: The causal pathway is indirect and multi-staged, which is precisely why the "threat multiplier" metaphor (Barnett 2003; Busby 2018) has displaced earlier "climate wars" determinism. The first stage is biophysical: anomalies in temperature and precipitation reduce yields in rain-fed agriculture and pastoral systems, deplete surface water and groundwater, and increase the frequency of extreme events such as droughts, floods, and cyclones. The second stage is economic and social: yield losses raise food prices, reduce rural incomes, and destroy assets; households respond by selling livestock, migrating, or joining armed groups. The third stage is political: when states cannot deliver relief, mediate resource competition, or manage displacement, grievances harden into mobilization. Each stage is a necessary but not sufficient link. Food price spikes—such as those of 2007–2008 and 2010–2011—illustrate the mechanism: they did not create the underlying grievances in Egypt, Tunisia, or Syria, but they accelerated mobilization by eroding the purchasing power of urban poor populations already alienated from authoritarian regimes. Similarly, the Syrian drought of 2006–2011 displaced an estimated 1.5 million rural inhabitants toward cities such as Daraa and Damascus, where they encountered overstretched services and political exclusion; the drought did not cause the Syrian civil war, but it enlarged the pool of aggrieved, mobile, and recruitable populations and strained the state's capacity to absorb them. Migration operates as both an adaptation strategy and a transmission mechanism: it relieves pressure at origin while concentrating demand for land, water, and employment at destination, where competition can escalate into violence if institutions are weak. The mechanism therefore runs through *intermediate social variables*—livelihood systems, market integration, state capacity, and migration networks—rather than directly from temperature to conflict.

Scope Conditions: The threat-multiplier effect is strongly conditional, and the scholarly record reflects this contingency. It is most likely where (a) livelihoods are heavily dependent on climate-sensitive, low-technology agriculture or pastoralism; (b) land and water tenure systems are contested or exclusionary; (c) state capacity to provide relief, mediate disputes, and manage migration is low; (d) there is a pre-existing

history of political marginalization or ethnic grievance; and (e) migration corridors are congested or cross hostile boundaries. Under these conditions, climate stress functions as a catalyst. Conversely, the effect is weak or absent where economies are diversified, institutions are inclusive and capable, social safety nets exist, and adaptation infrastructure—irrigation, early warning, insurance—is present. The empirical debate is sharp and instructive. Hsiang, Burke, and Miguel (2013), in a meta-analysis of 60 studies, found strong and consistent effects of temperature on conflict. By contrast, Buhaug (2010, 2015) and Theisen, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013) argue that the climate-conflict link is fragile, sensitive to model specification, and disappears when political and economic controls are included; they emphasize that most armed conflicts occur in poor, institutionally weak states regardless of climate trends. Raleigh and Urdal (2007) and Salehyan (2008) occupy a middle ground, finding that environmental scarcity increases conflict risk primarily through migration and resource competition in specific contexts. The appropriate theoretical posture is therefore probabilistic and scope-bound: climate change raises the *conditional probability* of conflict and displacement in vulnerable contexts; it does not determine outcomes. Treating it as a universal cause is both empirically unsupported and politically dangerous, because it can obscure the agency of governments, militias, and international actors who choose violence.

Observable Implications: If the threat-multiplier mechanism holds, one should observe: (i) temporal clustering of conflict onset or escalation following severe climate shocks in vulnerable regions such as the Sahel, the Horn of Africa, and Central America's Dry Corridor; (ii) displacement flows from climate-stressed rural areas to urban centers and across borders, with conflict incidence rising in receiving areas; (iii) food price spikes preceding or accompanying episodes of civil unrest; (iv) state capacity erosion—measured by relief delivery failures, fiscal stress, or legitimacy crises—following climate shocks; and (v) the absence of comparable conflict responses to similar shocks in institutionally robust settings. Counter-implications that would challenge the framework include: large climate shocks producing no conflict where institutions are strong (Bangladesh's cyclone management); conflict occurring without any climate stressor; and climate stress producing cooperative rather than competitive resource management, as in some transboundary water regimes. The framework also implies that adaptation investments—irrigation, drought-resistant crops, early warning systems, social protection—should reduce conflict incidence, a testable prediction with growing but still mixed evidence.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point insists that climate vulnerability is not a natural condition but a historical product. From Rodney's (1972) analysis of how colonial extraction underdeveloped African economies, through Mamdani's (1996) work on the bifurcated state, to contemporary scholars such as Grovogui (2006) and Mbembe (2001), the argument is that African populations face climate stress with diminished adaptive capacity because colonial and post-colonial structures stripped them of resources, fragmented institutions, and locked them into climate-sensitive export economies. The threat-multiplier framing is therefore double-edged: it correctly identifies climate as an amplifier, but it risks securitizing African populations and legitimizing external military or humanitarian intervention that reproduces colonial patterns of control. African scholarship emphasizes that the "multiplier" is not climate alone but the intersection of climate with global inequality, debt, and trade regimes that constrain African policy space. The appropriate response, on this view, is not security but justice: adaptation finance, loss and damage compensation, and structural transformation of economies away from climate-sensitive dependence. The African perspective also cautions against treating the continent as a uniform "climate conflict zone," which erases the diversity of African experiences and the agency of African communities in managing variability.

Chinese: China's perspective is shaped by its dual identity as a developing country with massive climate vulnerability—floods, droughts, and desertification affecting hundreds of millions—and as the world's largest current emitter. Beijing frames climate primarily as a development issue rather than a security threat, invoking the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR) to insist that developed countries, having consumed the bulk of the historical carbon budget, bear the obligation to finance mitigation and adaptation in the Global South. Chinese discourse is skeptical of Western securitization of climate, which it reads as a potential pretext for military presence in regions such as the South China Sea or Africa, and as a distraction from the core obligation of finance and technology transfer. At the same time, China has invested heavily in renewable energy and green technology, positioning itself as a leader in the energy transition while resisting binding emission cuts that would constrain industrial growth. The Chinese perspective thus contributes an emphasis on developmental sovereignty and historical responsibility, but it occludes China's own growing emissions and its role in financing carbon-intensive infrastructure abroad through the Belt and Road Initiative.

Russian: Russia's perspective combines skepticism about climate-conflict causality with a resource-state calculus. Moscow has historically downplayed anthropogenic climate change and emphasized natural variability; Russian officials and scholars often treat Western climate securitization as a geopolitical instrument aimed at constraining Russian hydrocarbon exports and imposing normative standards that weaken Russian sovereignty. At the same time, Russia is a major beneficiary of Arctic warming: the Northern Sea Route, expanded resource extraction, and longer growing seasons are framed as opportunities. The resource-state framing means that climate change is evaluated primarily through its effects on energy markets, territorial control, and great-power competition rather than through human security. Russia's perspective contributes a useful corrective to alarmist determinism and highlights the geopolitical economy of energy transitions, but it occludes the vulnerability of Russian populations to permafrost thaw, wildfires, and agricultural disruption, and it underestimates the security implications of climate stress in Russia's near abroad.

Western: The Western perspective is bifurcated between climate leadership and security framing. On one side, Western governments and institutions—the EU, the US under various administrations—have championed mitigation targets, carbon markets, and green technology, positioning themselves as norm entrepreneurs. On the other, defense establishments such as the US Department of Defense and NATO have formally designated climate change a "threat multiplier" and "existential threat," integrating it into strategic planning and military operations. This securitization has produced genuine analytical advances (Busby 2018) but also a self-critique: Western governments acknowledge the finance gap, having failed to meet the $100 billion annual pledge to developing countries, and recognize that their security framing can crowd out development and justice approaches. The Western perspective contributes scientific capacity, institutional frameworks, and significant (if insufficient) finance, but it occludes the historical responsibility for emissions and the ways in which Western consumption and military activity themselves drive climate stress.

UN: The UN perspective is institutional and multilateral, anchored in the UNFCCC, the IPCC's assessment reports (including AR6, 2021–2023), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 13). It frames climate change as a global commons problem requiring collective action, emphasizes the 1.5°C target, and has developed a science-policy interface through the IPCC. The UN system has increasingly adopted security language—the Security Council has held debates on climate and security since 2007—while also maintaining development and human-rights frames. The UN perspective contributes legitimacy, scientific authority, and a forum for negotiation, but it is constrained by the consensus requirement, by the power of major emitters, and by the gap between agreed targets and implemented policies. Its occlusion is structural: it can describe

the problem authoritatively but lacks enforcement capacity, and its framing often privileges state-centric solutions over sub-state and community-level adaptation.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Hydro-hegemony: upstream/downstream dynamics

Bolded Causal Claim: In transboundary river basins, upstream states can convert geographic position into durable political leverage over downstream states by controlling the timing, volume, and quality of water flows, so that hydrology becomes a source of asymmetric power rather than merely a shared resource.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with a physical asymmetry: rivers flow downhill, and the state that controls the headwaters or the first major infrastructure on a river can alter the hydrograph that downstream states receive. Dams, diversions, and reservoirs do not merely store water; they redistribute risk. An upstream state can withhold water during dry seasons, release it during floods, or use storage to generate electricity and irrigate territory, while downstream states inherit the residual flow. This creates a bargaining asymmetry because downstream agriculture, urban supply, energy systems, and ecosystems are calibrated to historical flow patterns that the upstream state can now change. The leverage is structural rather than episodic: even if no water is withheld, the credible possibility of withholding shapes negotiations over trade, security, development finance, and regional order. Issue linkage amplifies the mechanism. Upstream states often frame dams as sovereign development and climate adaptation, while downstream states frame the same infrastructure as an existential threat. The upstream state can offer cooperation—data sharing, agreed filling schedules, electricity exports—as a concession, converting control into diplomatic currency. Downstream states may respond with legal claims based on equitable utilization, counter-alliances, economic pressure, or attempts to diversify water sources, but these responses are costly and often slower than the physical transformation of the river. Climate change intensifies the mechanism by increasing hydrological variability and making storage more valuable, but it does not by itself determine outcomes; the decisive variable is the distribution of infrastructural, financial, and diplomatic capacity among riparians. The Nile, Mekong, and Tigris-Euphrates cases show the same pattern in different political settings: upstream development becomes a claim about sovereignty and modernization, while downstream vulnerability becomes a claim about security and historical rights.

Scope Conditions: Hydro-hegemony is most likely where a river basin is transboundary, water stress is high, downstream states depend heavily on the river for agriculture or energy, and the upstream state has the capacity to finance and construct major infrastructure. It is strengthened where basin institutions are weak, contested, or dominated by the upstream state, and where downstream states lack credible counter-leverage such as alternative water sources, economic sanctions, or strong external allies. It is weakened where riparians have comparable power, where basin organizations enforce data sharing and benefit-sharing, where third parties mediate effectively, or where downstream states can mobilize international law and diplomatic coalitions. The mechanism does not imply that every dam causes conflict; many transboundary projects produce mutual gains when benefits are shared and risks are transparent. It also does not imply that downstream states are passive. Counter-hegemony can take the form of legal mobilization, alliance-building, economic diversification, or domestic adaptation. The concept is therefore a theory of asymmetric interdependence, not a prediction of inevitable water war.

Observable Implications: Where hydro-hegemony operates, one should observe upstream infrastructure announcements followed by downstream diplomatic protests; disputes over filling schedules and flow data; upstream framing in the language of sovereignty and development; downstream framing in the language

of existential security and historical rights; marginalization or capture of basin organizations; demands for compensation, benefit-sharing, or guaranteed minimum flows; and external mediation by regional organizations or international financial institutions. In the Nile basin, the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam has produced precisely this pattern: Ethiopia presents the dam as a sovereign development and electrification project, Egypt treats upstream control as a threat to water security, and Sudan occupies an intermediate position shaped by its own irrigation and flood-management interests. In the Mekong basin, China's upstream cascade has generated downstream complaints about dry-season flows, sediment loss, and ecological change, while Beijing emphasizes development, poverty reduction, and regional cooperation. In the Tigris-Euphrates basin, Turkey's Southeastern Anatolia Project has created recurring tensions with Iraq and Syria over flow volumes, especially under drought conditions. Climate stress should amplify these disputes by making flows less predictable and storage more strategically valuable, but the observable signature is political bargaining over infrastructure and data, not simply hydrological scarcity.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The Nile dispute is best understood from within African debates about sovereignty, development, and the legacy of colonial water treaties. Ethiopian scholarship and official discourse frame the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam as an emancipatory infrastructure project: a late-developing state asserting control over a river whose benefits were historically captured downstream and whose colonial-era agreements excluded Ethiopia. Egyptian discourse, by contrast, treats the Nile as a matter of existential water security and invokes historical use, legal continuity, and downstream vulnerability. Sudan's position is more ambivalent, reflecting both potential benefits from regulated flows and risks to its own dams and irrigation. African scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, and Rodney would situate this dispute in a longer history of uneven development, external extraction, and state formation under colonial and postcolonial conditions; the dam is not merely a technical project but a claim about who gets to develop and on what terms. The African Union's mediation role reflects a regional preference for African-led solutions, even as power asymmetries among riparians constrain its neutrality. Climate vulnerability is present on all sides, but it is filtered through competing claims about historical entitlement, sovereign equality, and the right to development. The African vantage point reveals that hydro-hegemony is not only about water control; it is about the political economy of late development and the unresolved question of whether colonial-era resource arrangements can be renegotiated without reproducing new hierarchies.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective on transboundary rivers emphasizes sovereignty, development, and non-interference. In the Mekong basin, upstream dams are framed as legitimate development and clean-energy infrastructure, while downstream concerns are addressed through technical cooperation, data sharing, and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation framework rather than through binding basin-wide adjudication. Beijing's position treats water as a domestic resource until it crosses a border, and it resists external interference in dam construction or operational decisions. This perspective contributes an emphasis on development rights and infrastructure-led growth, but it can occlude downstream ecological and livelihood impacts by privileging state-to-state cooperation over community-level vulnerability.

Russian: The Russian perspective is less centrally focused on river basins but treats water and energy infrastructure as strategic assets within a broader resource-state logic. Moscow tends to support state sovereignty over natural resources, resists Western conditionality, and views basin disputes through the lens of great-power competition and regional influence. In the Middle East and Central Asia, Russia has historically positioned itself as a mediator or security guarantor, but its approach prioritizes state stability and geopolitical access over ecological or distributive justice. This perspective contributes a realist emphasis on power

and sovereignty, but it can occlude environmental vulnerability and the needs of downstream populations.

Western: The Western perspective emphasizes international water law, basin cooperation, data transparency, and conflict prevention. It tends to frame transboundary water disputes as governance problems solvable through treaties, joint commissions, and technical assistance, and it often supports mediation by international financial institutions or regional organizations. This perspective contributes legal norms and institutional templates, but it can occlude the developmental asymmetries that make upstream states reluctant to accept constraints and downstream states desperate for guarantees. It may also overestimate the capacity of legal frameworks to override power politics.

UN: The UN perspective promotes transboundary water cooperation through conventions, sustainable development goals, and technical agencies. It emphasizes equitable and reasonable utilization, the obligation not to cause significant harm, and the value of basin organizations. The UN contributes legitimacy and scientific assessment, but it is constrained by state consent, weak enforcement, and the tendency of major riparians to treat water as a sovereign resource. Its occlusion is structural: it can articulate norms but cannot compel compliance when upstream states possess both physical control and geopolitical leverage.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Loss and damage finance: the Global South's demand and the politics of climate reparations

Bolded Causal Claim: Loss and damage finance is a contested redistribution mechanism that converts climate vulnerability and historical emissions into claims for reparative justice; its institutionalization at recent COPs marks a shift in Global South bargaining power, but its adequacy remains constrained by donor reluctance, definitional ambiguity, and the political separation of assistance from liability.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with a gap between mitigation, adaptation, and lived climate impacts. Even if emissions fall and adaptation expands, some losses are unavoidable or irreversible: destroyed infrastructure, lost livelihoods, cultural heritage, non-economic losses, and slow-onset changes such as sea-level rise and desertification. Vulnerable states, particularly small island states, least developed countries, and African states, have argued that these losses are not merely unfortunate but unjust, because they fall disproportionately on those who contributed least to historical emissions. This framing converts climate impacts into a claim about responsibility and redistribution. The demand for loss and damage finance then enters the UNFCCC bargaining arena, where coalitions such as the G77 and China, the Alliance of Small Island States, the Least Developed Countries group, and the African Group leverage moral authority, vulnerability, and bloc solidarity to push for institutional recognition. The mechanism is not simply need-based; it is politically constructed through framing, coalition-building, and the strategic use of scientific assessments such as IPCC AR6. Donor states resist the language of compensation or liability because it implies legal responsibility and potentially unlimited claims, so they prefer terms such as solidarity, assistance, or humanitarian support. The resulting compromise creates funds and mechanisms that acknowledge loss and damage without admitting liability. The COP27 decision to establish a loss and damage fund, followed by COP28 operationalization efforts, represents a partial victory for the Global South: the principle of dedicated finance gained institutional form. Yet the mechanism remains incomplete because pledges are small relative to estimated needs, governance arrangements are contested, eligibility criteria are unresolved, and the sources of funding—whether public grants, innovative levies, or private finance—remain politically charged. The fund can therefore function either as a genuine redistributive instrument or as a symbolic concession that absorbs pressure without altering underlying power relations.

Scope Conditions: Loss and damage finance applies most directly where climate impacts are severe, un-

avoidable, or irreversible; where affected states have limited fiscal capacity; and where historical emitters have greater resources. It is strengthened by cohesive Global South coalitions, strong scientific attribution, and moral framing that links vulnerability to historical responsibility. It is weakened where donors can fragment coalitions, redefine loss and damage as development or humanitarian assistance, or shift responsibility to private insurance and market mechanisms. The mechanism also depends on definitional clarity: if loss and damage is defined too narrowly as sudden disaster damage, slow-onset and non-economic losses may be excluded; if defined too broadly, donors may resist on cost grounds. The scope excludes ordinary development finance and adaptation funding, although in practice the boundaries are blurred. The mechanism is not a settled system of climate reparations; it is an ongoing contest over whether and how historical responsibility will be translated into material transfers.

Observable Implications: Where loss and damage finance is operating as a political mechanism, one should observe sustained Global South demands at COPs; creation of dedicated funds and transitional committees; disputes over eligibility, governance, and sources of finance; large gaps between estimated needs and pledged resources; donor preference for voluntary contributions over assessed obligations; and contestation over whether finance should be grants rather than loans. The COP27 and COP28 negotiations provide the central case: the fund's establishment was a breakthrough, but subsequent debates over who pays, who receives, and how much reveal the limits of institutional progress. Data on cumulative emissions by region, climate finance flows, and loss and damage pledges versus estimated needs should show a persistent mismatch between responsibility, vulnerability, and disbursement. One should also observe rhetorical shifts: donor states increasingly acknowledge loss and damage while avoiding liability language; recipient states increasingly frame finance as a matter of justice rather than charity. The observable signature is therefore not merely money moving, but a struggle over the meaning of responsibility.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective frames loss and damage finance through the lens of climate vulnerability, adaptation deficits, and colonial responsibility. African states and scholars emphasize that the continent contributes minimally to historical emissions yet bears disproportionate climate impacts, including drought, flood, food insecurity, and displacement. From this vantage point, loss and damage is not a technical funding gap but a question of justice: the costs of a crisis created elsewhere are being imposed on those least able to absorb them. African negotiators have been central to the demand for dedicated finance, often aligning with the G77 and China while stressing African specificities such as agricultural dependence, weak infrastructure, and limited fiscal space. The colonial responsibility framing does not necessarily require a legal finding of liability; it asserts that historical patterns of extraction and unequal development have left African states less resilient and therefore entitled to reparative support. African scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, and Oyěwùmí would situate climate finance within broader critiques of global inequality, racialized vulnerability, and the unfinished project of decolonization. The African perspective contributes a moral and historical depth that purely technocratic finance debates often lack, but it must also confront internal questions of governance, elite capture, and the distribution of funds within states. Its occlusion in donor discourse is that vulnerability is treated as a natural condition rather than a product of historical and structural inequality.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective combines developmental priorities with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Beijing emphasizes that developing countries require policy space and finance to pursue growth while addressing climate impacts, and it resists attempts to impose uniform obligations or liability frameworks that could constrain development. China positions itself as a developing country in

climate negotiations, even as its emissions profile and economic weight have grown, and it supports South-South cooperation and technology transfer. This perspective contributes a defense of development rights and a challenge to Western-centric responsibility narratives, but it can occlude China's own growing emissions and the question of how large emerging economies should contribute to loss and damage finance.

Russian: The Russian perspective is marked by skepticism toward climate securitization and by a resource-state framing. Moscow has historically questioned the urgency and distribution of climate commitments, emphasized energy security and fossil-fuel exports, and resisted constraints that would undermine its hydrocarbon economy. In loss and damage debates, Russia is unlikely to accept liability or large assessed contributions, and it may view climate finance as a Western-led agenda that obscures geopolitical competition. This perspective contributes a realist reminder that energy transitions and finance commitments are shaped by material interests, but it occludes the vulnerability of climate-affected populations and the scientific consensus on anthropogenic warming.

Western: The Western perspective combines climate leadership rhetoric with a self-critical acknowledgment of the finance gap. Western states have accepted the need for mitigation and adaptation finance, and some have supported loss and damage mechanisms, but they remain reluctant to accept liability or open-ended compensation. The dominant Western approach treats loss and damage as a humanitarian and development challenge to be managed through voluntary contributions, insurance, and market mechanisms rather than as a reparative obligation. This perspective contributes technical capacity, funding, and institutional design, but its occlusion is the persistent gap between pledged and needed finance and the avoidance of historical responsibility.

UN: The UN perspective is anchored in the UNFCCC, the IPCC, and SDG 13. It provides the institutional forum, scientific assessment, and normative framework within which loss and damage has been negotiated, and it has increasingly recognized climate impacts as a matter of justice and human rights. The UN contributes legitimacy and a space for consensus-building, but it is constrained by the consensus requirement, by the power of major emitters, and by the gap between agreed targets and implemented policies. Its occlusion is structural: it can describe the problem authoritatively and create mechanisms, but it lacks enforcement capacity and often privileges state-centric solutions over community-level adaptation and redress.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Climate securitization — the militarization of climate response

Bolded Causal Claim: When climate change is framed primarily as a security threat, the policy response tends to migrate from civilian adaptation, development, and rights-based institutions toward military, intelligence, and border-control apparatuses; this can mobilize capacity and attention, but it also risks militarizing vulnerability, criminalizing mobility, and substituting coercion for the distributive politics that climate justice requires.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the interaction between climate impacts and pre-existing political fragility. Drought, flooding, sea-level rise, heat stress, and livelihood collapse do not automatically produce conflict, but they can intensify competition over land, water, pasture, and urban services in contexts where institutions are weak, inequality is high, and grievances are already politicized. Security actors then interpret these stresses through a threat lens: migration becomes "mass displacement," resource scarcity becomes "instability," and climate-affected regions become "risk zones." Through securitizing speech acts, institutional mandates, budget lines, and operational planning, climate change is moved from the domain of environmen-

tal policy and development into the domain of national security. This shift matters because militaries possess distinctive capabilities—logistics, surveillance, coercive force, rapid deployment, and strategic planning—that civilian agencies often lack, especially in states with limited administrative capacity. Once climate is securitized, those capabilities become the default instruments of response. The result is not simply more attention to climate risk; it is a reordering of who governs climate risk. Adaptation finance can be redirected toward base resilience, coastal defense, maritime domain awareness, and border hardening; humanitarian assistance can be folded into counterinsurgency or stabilization logics; and climate-affected populations can be recast as security risks rather than rights-bearing communities. The mechanism also contains a feedback loop: securitized narratives can justify exceptional measures, reduce democratic deliberation, and produce "climate wars" framings that may overstate direct causal links between climate and conflict. Those framings can then legitimate further militarization, even where the underlying vulnerability is better addressed through livelihood support, early warning, land tenure reform, water governance, or social protection. In this sense, climate securitization is not merely a rhetorical move; it is an institutional reallocation of authority, money, and legitimacy from civilian to coercive actors.

Scope Conditions: Climate securitization is most likely where climate impacts intersect with pre-existing conflict, weak governance, militarized borders, strategic resources, or great-power competition. It is especially pronounced in regions where migration routes cross heavily policed borders, where water or energy chokepoints are contested, or where external powers frame local instability as a threat to global order. It is also more likely where domestic political incentives favor externalizing blame, where military institutions have high legitimacy, and where civilian adaptation systems are underfunded or fragmented. Conversely, securitization is less likely to dominate where climate impacts are slow-onset and managed through decentralized development institutions, where adaptation is locally owned and rights-based, where military actors lack legitimacy, or where climate policy is insulated from security bureaucracies. A further scope condition concerns the type of military role: humanitarian assistance and disaster relief can save lives and need not imply militarization, whereas the use of climate risk to justify surveillance, border enforcement, counterinsurgency, or strategic competition is more clearly securitizing. The distinction between "climate-proofing security institutions" and "securitizing climate vulnerability" is therefore analytically crucial.

Observable Implications: Where climate securitization is strong, one should observe defense ministries publishing climate risk strategies, NATO or regional security organizations incorporating climate into threat assessments, military involvement in disaster response and infrastructure protection, increased budgets for border surveillance and coastal defense, and the framing of climate migrants as security risks rather than protected persons. One should also observe a skew in adaptation portfolios toward hard infrastructure, force protection, and strategic asset resilience, potentially at the expense of community-level adaptation, livelihood diversification, and social protection. In climate-affected regions, securitized responses may correlate with the criminalization of mobility, the militarization of resource governance, and the treatment of protests over land or water as security threats. At the international level, one may observe debates over whether the UN Security Council should address climate change, with some states arguing that securitization elevates urgency and others warning that it depoliticizes justice and opens space for intervention. These implications should be treated as patterns and institutional tendencies rather than proof that climate change directly causes war; the causal claim is about governance reallocation, not deterministic conflict.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):
African (primary): The African perspective begins from lived vulnerability and from the African Union's evolving climate-security agenda. African scholars and policymakers often accept that climate stress can exacerbate conflict, but they resist the translation of African suffering into a threat to Northern or global

order. The African Union Peace and Security Council has recognized climate change as a threat multiplier, yet African voices emphasize that the appropriate response is not militarization but investment in livelihoods, early warning, community resilience, and accountable governance. Scholars such as Kwesi Aning have stressed that security in Africa is inseparable from development and governance, while African critical thought, including Grovogui's insistence on recovering African agency in international order, warns against frameworks that manage African territory as a risk zone for external powers. African perspectives also highlight the danger that securitization empowers militaries in domestic politics, criminalizes pastoral and cross-border mobility, and reproduces colonial logics in which African populations are treated as sources of instability rather than bearers of rights. At the same time, African states may strategically use security framing to attract attention and resources, producing an ambivalent stance: climate security can open doors, but it can also narrow the definition of legitimate response. The strongest African contribution is to redefine security around human and ecological survival, democratic accountability, and livelihood protection rather than state or great-power stability.

Chinese: China frames climate through non-traditional security and comprehensive national security, emphasizing disaster relief, infrastructure resilience, energy security, and state capacity. It participates in UN climate-security discussions but is cautious about Security Council securitization, fearing mission creep, intervention, and the dilution of development priorities. Chinese discourse tends to treat climate as a governance and development challenge, with military roles largely confined to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. This perspective contributes operational capacity and a focus on resilience, but it can occlude how state-led development, overseas infrastructure, and energy demand create vulnerabilities, and it often avoids rights-based accountability.

Russian: Russia is skeptical of anthropogenic climate threat and tends to treat climate securitization as a Western ideological construct that can justify intervention, NATO expansion, or interference in sovereign affairs. Its security framing centers on Arctic sovereignty, resource extraction, strategic posture, and energy leverage; climate change is instrumentalized where it opens shipping routes or resources, but downplayed where it threatens fossil rents. Russia resists UN securitization and emphasizes sovereignty and non-intervention. This perspective contributes a warning against militarized climate governance, but it occludes domestic climate risks, uses skepticism to protect hydrocarbon interests, and may itself militarize the Arctic under the guise of security.

Western: Western governments, especially the United States and European states, have increasingly defined climate change as a national security threat, producing defense climate strategies, NATO initiatives, and border securitization. This perspective can mobilize resources, elevate urgency, and integrate climate into strategic planning. Western self-critique acknowledges that securitization may overstate climate-conflict links, divert finance from adaptation, and militarize migration. Its contribution is institutional capacity and scientific assessment, but its occlusion lies in how Western consumption and emissions generate vulnerability elsewhere, and how security framing can serve domestic political interests while externalizing costs.

UN: The UN perspective is divided between development, humanitarian, and security institutions. Security Council debates have recognized climate as a risk multiplier in specific contexts, while UNEP, WFP, OCHA, and other agencies emphasize resilience, early warning, and humanitarian protection. The UN contributes legitimacy, coordination, and a forum for consensus, but it is constrained by sovereignty, the consensus requirement, and the power of major emitters. It can elevate urgency and create mechanisms, yet it lacks enforcement capacity and often privileges state-centric responses over community-level adaptation and redress.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Just transition and the geopolitics of decarbonization — who bears the costs?

Bolded Causal Claim: Decarbonization is not a neutral technical shift but a redistributive geopolitical process: costs and benefits fall unevenly across regions, classes, and supply chains, so a "just transition" requires explicit allocation of burdens and benefits, not merely emissions targets or green technology deployment.

Mechanism: The mechanism is the restructuring of global political economy around a new energy system. Fossil fuels have historically concentrated rents in producer states, shaped great-power strategy, and tied development paths to hydrocarbon extraction and consumption. Decarbonization disrupts those arrangements by reducing demand for coal, oil, and gas while increasing demand for renewable technologies, electricity infrastructure, and critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, nickel, copper, and rare earth elements. This shift creates new winners: renewable manufacturers, mineral exporters, grid and storage providers, green finance, and states that can subsidize domestic clean industries. It also creates new losers: fossil-dependent workers, coal and oil regions, petrostates facing stranded assets, and import-dependent economies exposed to volatile mineral and technology prices. The geopolitical mechanism operates through several channels. First, industrial policy: subsidies, local content requirements, and carbon border adjustments reshape trade and investment, as seen in the US Inflation Reduction Act and the European Green Deal. Second, supply-chain concentration: processing and manufacturing capacity for clean technologies is unevenly distributed, creating dependencies and leverage. Third, fiscal stress: fossil-dependent states may face declining revenues, debt distress, and limited capacity to finance diversification. Fourth, labor displacement: mine closures and refinery shutdowns can devastate communities unless retraining, social protection, and regional development are provided. Fifth, extraction frontiers: the mineral demands of decarbonization can reproduce enclave economies, land dispossession, and environmental harm in producing regions, especially where governance is weak. Justice claims therefore arise along three dimensions: distributive justice (who pays and who benefits), procedural justice (who decides transition pathways), and recognitional justice (whose knowledge, livelihoods, and historical experiences count). A transition is "just" only when these dimensions are addressed; otherwise, decarbonization may reduce emissions while intensifying inequality, dispossession, and geopolitical resentment.

Scope Conditions: The feasibility of a just transition depends on fossil dependence, mineral endowment, industrial capacity, fiscal space, labor institutions, governance quality, and access to finance and technology. It is more feasible where states have diversified economies, strong social dialogue, credible compensation mechanisms, and the ability to invest in retraining and regional development. It is less feasible where economies are heavily dependent on hydrocarbon rents, where debt limits public investment, where mineral extraction is enclave-based and poorly governed, or where transition policies are externally imposed through conditionality. Scope also depends on whether decarbonization is domestically owned or driven by external markets and donors. A further condition is time: abrupt phase-outs without adjustment support are more likely to produce backlash, while gradual transitions with credible alternatives can build coalitions. Finally, the global distribution of clean-technology manufacturing and mineral processing means that even ambitious national transitions may depend on unequal international supply chains, so justice cannot be assessed solely at the national level.

Observable Implications: Where just transition politics are active, one should observe coal phase-out agreements with compensation packages, regional development funds, retraining programs, and social dialogue mechanisms; disputes over carbon border adjustments and green subsidies; labor strikes or protests in fossil regions; mineral boom conflicts and community resistance in extraction zones; stranded-asset write-downs and fiscal stress in petrostates; and debates over technology transfer, benefit-sharing, and value addition

in mineral-producing countries. One should also observe the rise of "green industrial policy" as a central geopolitical tool, with states using subsidies and trade measures to capture clean-technology markets. At the international level, one should observe negotiations over just transition work programmes, climate finance, and the terms of energy partnerships. These implications do not imply that decarbonization is impossible or undesirable; rather, they show that its political sustainability depends on whether costs are recognized and redistributed.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective begins from a stark asymmetry: Africa contributes a small share of historical and current emissions but faces severe climate vulnerability, while its development needs remain acute. From this vantage point, decarbonization can appear as either an opportunity for industrialization or a new form of green extractivism. African climate justice demands, articulated by the African Group of Negotiators and allied civil society, emphasize equity, adaptation finance, technology transfer, and the right to development. African critical thought, from Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment to Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism, frames resource extraction as a structural feature of global inequality; contemporary African scholars extend this to warn that lithium, cobalt, and other minerals may be exported raw while value is captured elsewhere. African feminist scholars such as Tamale remind us that transition costs fall unevenly by gender, as women often bear unpaid care and resource-gathering burdens when energy systems change. The African perspective therefore insists that a just transition must include value addition, local processing, community benefit-sharing, and finance for adaptation, not only emissions reduction. It also treats climate finance and loss-and-damage claims as part of the same justice agenda: decarbonization cannot be just if historical responsibility is evaded. Occlusion: African perspectives may understate governance challenges within mineral-producing states and the risk that elite capture reproduces inequality domestically.

Chinese: China frames decarbonization as a sovereign development path governed by common but differentiated responsibilities. It emphasizes its massive renewable deployment, electric vehicle production, and manufacturing scale, while resisting external pressure to phase out coal on timelines it considers incompatible with energy security and development. China also dominates much critical mineral processing, giving it leverage in clean-technology supply chains. Its perspective contributes industrial capacity and a challenge to Western monopoly over green transition norms, but it can occlude domestic coal dependence, air-quality and ecological costs, and the overseas fossil-fuel finance associated with the Belt and Road Initiative.

Russian: Russia is a hydrocarbon-dependent state for which decarbonization threatens rents, fiscal stability, and geopolitical leverage. Its perspective is skeptical of Western climate leadership, often framing the green transition as economic warfare or a pretext for restructuring global energy markets. It emphasizes fossil fuel indispensability, Arctic resources, and strategic energy exports. This perspective contributes a reminder that transitions have geopolitical losers, but it occludes climate risks, overstates fossil indispensability, and offers little in the way of domestic diversification or just-transition planning.

Western: Western perspectives combine climate leadership, net-zero targets, green industrial policy, and a self-critical acknowledgment of the finance gap. The United States and European Union have deployed large subsidy programs and carbon border adjustments, seeking to capture clean-technology markets while reducing emissions. Western discourse often frames just transition in terms of workers and communities in fossil regions, but its global occlusion lies in historical emissions, consumption-based responsibility, and the export of adjustment costs through trade measures. It contributes technology, finance, and normative ambition, but it can treat decarbonization as a market opportunity while underestimating distributive claims from the Global South.

UN: The UN perspective is anchored in the UNFCCC, the IPCC, SDG 7, and SDG 13, and it has developed

a just transition work programme and normative language around equity and sustainable development. It provides a forum for consensus, scientific assessment, and the articulation of global goals. Its contribution is legitimacy and coordination, but its occlusion is structural: it lacks enforcement capacity, depends on state consensus, and often struggles to convert just-transition rhetoric into binding finance, technology transfer, or accountability mechanisms.

SECTION 2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective treats climate geopolitics not as an environmental externality added to an otherwise stable international order, but as a continuation of a longer history of extraction, racialized vulnerability, and contested sovereignty. From this vantage point, the central puzzle is not simply how to reduce emissions or manage risk, but how a continent that contributed least to cumulative greenhouse-gas emissions became the principal site of climate damage, adaptation debt, and resource extraction for other people's decarbonization. The African perspective therefore begins with a historical claim: climate vulnerability is not a natural condition produced by geography alone; it is politically produced through colonial underdevelopment, postcolonial state fragility, debt, and unequal integration into the global economy. Rodney's argument that underdevelopment is a process rather than an absence is directly relevant here, because it frames contemporary climate vulnerability as the latest phase in a longer pattern in which African labor, land, and resources were mobilized for external accumulation while local adaptive capacity was systematically weakened. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated colonial state helps explain why climate shocks do not land on a neutral institutional surface: they interact with inherited administrative divisions between "citizens" and "subjects," with rural authorities that lack fiscal capacity, and with states whose legitimacy is often thinner in the very regions most exposed to drought, flood, or land degradation. Mbembe's work on necropolitics and the postcolony adds a further layer: climate deaths and displacements are not merely unfortunate outcomes of biophysical change, but are shaped by political decisions about whose lives are protected, whose mobility is criminalized, and whose territories are treated as sacrifice zones. Bayart's concept of extraversion is equally important, because it suggests that African states have historically survived by inserting themselves into external circuits of power; climate finance, carbon markets, and green investment can become new forms of extraversion if they reproduce dependency rather than build autonomous capacity. The African perspective thus reads climate geopolitics as a problem of historical justice and sovereignty before it reads it as a problem of atmospheric chemistry.

On climate as a threat multiplier, the African perspective accepts that climate change can intensify migration, food insecurity, and conflict, but it insists that the mechanism is mediated by political economy rather than determined by temperature alone. Barnett's early work on security and climate change, and Busby's later analysis of climate security, are useful for identifying exposure and institutional pathways, yet the African vantage point pushes further: it asks why some societies absorb shocks while others fracture. The answer, in this view, lies in colonial land regimes, extractive economies, weak public health and transport infrastructure, and the historical marginalization of pastoralist, smallholder, and informal urban populations. In the Sahel, for example, climate stress interacts with land tenure, state absence, and armed group competition; in the Horn of Africa, recurrent drought intersects with debt, food import dependence, and political exclusion. The African perspective therefore treats "threat multiplier" as a relational concept: climate multiplies pre-existing inequalities rather than creating insecurity from nothing. This has an important policy implication. If the

mechanism is political, then adaptation cannot be reduced to early-warning systems or drought-resistant seeds; it requires land reform, fiscal capacity, regional infrastructure, and accountable governance. The perspective also warns against a purely securitized reading of climate risk, because such a reading can convert African populations into objects of surveillance and control rather than agents of resilience.

On hydro-hegemony, the African perspective is especially visible in the Nile basin, where upstream and downstream claims collide with colonial legal inheritances. Egypt has historically exercised a form of hydro-hegemony rooted in colonial-era treaties, particularly the 1929 and 1959 agreements, which allocated the bulk of Nile waters to Egypt and Sudan while excluding Ethiopia, the source of most of the Blue Nile. Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is therefore not merely an infrastructure project; it is an assertion of developmental sovereignty against a downstream order that was constructed under imperial conditions. The African perspective does not automatically endorse every upstream claim, but it does insist that colonial water treaties cannot be treated as permanently binding simply because they favor downstream states. Nyerere's emphasis on self-reliance and Cabral's insistence on returning to the source provide an intellectual backdrop for this claim: African development cannot be permanently subordinated to arrangements negotiated under colonial or quasi-colonial conditions. Grovogui's work on sovereignty and quasi-sovereignty is also relevant, because it shows how African states have been granted formal sovereignty while being denied substantive equality in international law. From this angle, hydro-hegemony is not only about who controls the river; it is about who has the authority to define legitimate development. The African perspective contributes the insight that water disputes are inseparable from the unfinished business of decolonizing international legal regimes. At the same time, it must acknowledge its own occlusion: an upstream sovereignty frame can understate the genuine vulnerability of downstream populations, especially in Sudan and Egypt, and can romanticize state-led megaprojects that may displace local communities or concentrate benefits among elites.

On loss and damage finance, the African perspective is perhaps at its most forceful. It frames the demand not as charity, humanitarian relief, or discretionary aid, but as a claim of justice rooted in historical responsibility. The mechanism is straightforward in principle: industrialized states accumulated wealth through fossil-fuel-intensive development, while African states and communities bear disproportionate losses from climate impacts that they did little to cause. The Loss and Damage Fund agreed at COP27 and operationalized in subsequent negotiations is therefore read as a partial and belated recognition of this claim. Yet the African perspective is also skeptical of the gap between promise and delivery. Pledges remain far below estimated needs, and finance that arrives as loans rather than grants can deepen debt distress. Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism help explain why African negotiators treat conditionality with suspicion: climate finance can reproduce the same hierarchies as older aid regimes if it is tied to policy prescriptions, private-sector intermediation, or debt-creating instruments. Tamale's decolonial feminist scholarship adds that loss and damage is gendered; women, who often manage water, food, and care systems, bear disproportionate burdens when climate shocks destroy livelihoods. The African perspective thus insists that loss and damage finance must be grant-based, predictable, accessible to vulnerable communities, and governed in ways that do not simply transfer risk back to those least able to bear it. Its contribution is to reframe climate finance from a technocratic transfer problem into a question of reparative justice. Its occlusion is that it can sometimes understate the heterogeneity of African interests: oil-exporting states, middle-income economies, small island states, and least-developed countries do not all share the same priorities, and elite capture can divert finance away from the most vulnerable.

On climate securitization, the African perspective is deeply ambivalent. It recognizes that climate change can intensify insecurity, but it is wary of the militarization of climate response. The mechanism of concern is that once climate is framed primarily as a security threat, the policy response tends to shift from development and

adaptation to border control, surveillance, militarized conservation, and intervention. For African states, this can mean that climate vulnerability becomes a justification for external military presence, fortress-Europe migration policies, or the securitization of resource-rich territories. Aning and Danso's work on African security governance is relevant here because it emphasizes the need for African-owned security architectures rather than externally imposed frameworks. Mbembe's analysis of borders and the postcolony reinforces the point: climate securitization can extend a longer history in which African mobility is criminalized while capital and carbon move freely. The African perspective therefore prefers a human-security framing that centers livelihoods, food systems, and community resilience, and it insists that the African Union and regional economic communities should shape climate-security responses. At the same time, this perspective must not ignore the reality of climate-related conflict in places such as the Sahel, where resource competition, state weakness, and armed violence are intertwined. Its occlusion is that an anti-securitization stance can sometimes underplay the need for coercive capacity to protect civilians or manage violent competition over land and water.

On just transition and the geopolitics of decarbonization, the African perspective argues that the global shift away from fossil fuels cannot simply export adjustment costs to the Global South. The mechanism is visible in critical minerals: cobalt, lithium, copper, and other inputs essential for batteries and renewable technologies are disproportionately located in Africa, yet value addition, processing, and technological rents often accrue elsewhere. This creates a risk of green colonialism, in which Africa remains a supplier of raw materials for other people's energy transitions while bearing the environmental and social costs of extraction. Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism is directly applicable: formal political independence does not prevent economic subordination if ownership, technology, and finance remain external. Oyěwùmí's epistemic decolonization adds that the categories used to measure development, gender, and progress are themselves historically constructed; a just transition must therefore be evaluated not only by emissions reductions but by whether it transforms the knowledge and power structures that produced vulnerability in the first place. The African perspective also notes the tension between decarbonization and development: many African states still face energy poverty, and some argue that gas should serve as a transitional fuel to support industrialization. This is not a rejection of climate action, but a demand for equity in the distribution of carbon space and transition finance. The perspective contributes the insight that decarbonization is not automatically just; its justice depends on who owns the minerals, who processes them, who gets the jobs, and who pays for stranded assets. Its occlusion is that it can sometimes protect fossil-fuel interests or elite bargains under the language of development, and it may understate the domestic political reforms needed to ensure that mineral wealth actually funds public goods.

Taken together, the African perspective reveals what the other four perspectives often miss: climate geopolitics is not primarily a technical problem of emissions, finance, or security, but a historical problem of sovereignty, justice, and development. It centers the experience of communities that have contributed least to climate change but suffer most from its effects, and it insists that adaptation, loss and damage, and transition must be evaluated by their impact on those communities. It also exposes the limits of perspectives that treat climate as a market opportunity, a security threat, or a diplomatic forum without confronting the colonial and neo-colonial structures that shape vulnerability. At the same time, the African perspective is not a single voice. It contains tensions between upstream and downstream states, between fossil-fuel exporters and renewable-rich economies, between governments and social movements, and between elite negotiators and grassroots communities. Its greatest strength is its capacity to reframe climate geopolitics around historical responsibility and human dignity; its greatest risk is that it can become a rhetorical shield for state elites or a homogenizing narrative that obscures internal inequality. The most rigorous version of this perspective

therefore combines solidarity with self-critique: it demands global justice while also insisting on domestic accountability, gender equity, and the democratization of climate governance.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on climate geopolitics is anchored in a developmentalist reading of international order, in which climate change is inseparable from poverty eradication, industrialization, energy access, and state capacity. From this vantage point, the central claim is that historical responsibility matters: industrialized Western states accumulated wealth through carbon-intensive development and therefore bear the primary obligation to reduce emissions and finance the transition. This is the logic of common but differentiated responsibilities, a principle embedded in the UNFCCC and repeatedly invoked by Chinese diplomacy. The Chinese perspective does not deny China's current scale of emissions; rather, it argues that per capita emissions, cumulative historical emissions, and development stage must be weighed together. It therefore treats unilateral demands for rapid decarbonization as potentially inequitable if they constrain the development space of countries that are still industrializing. The mechanism here is not climate denial but a sovereignty-centered developmentalism: climate policy must not become a new form of conditionality imposed by states that industrialized first.

On hydro-hegemony, the Chinese perspective is most visible in the Mekong/Lancang basin, where China is the upstream power. Chinese framing tends to emphasize poverty alleviation, energy security, renewable hydropower, and mutual benefit, while resisting the label of hydro-hegemon. It argues that upstream development is a legitimate exercise of sovereignty and that dams provide clean energy and flood control. Critics, however, point to opacity, downstream vulnerability, and the strategic leverage that upstream infrastructure can create. The Chinese perspective contributes the argument that transboundary water governance must balance downstream concerns with the development rights of upstream states, but it can occlude the asymmetry of power created by controlling the headwaters. On loss and damage, China rhetorically supports Global South demands and frames itself as a developing country, while also providing South-South finance and green investment through the Belt and Road Initiative. Yet it resists being classified as a donor in the same category as industrialized states, which creates tension between solidarity rhetoric and financial obligation. On climate securitization, China generally opposes the militarization of climate response and external intervention, preferring to frame climate as a development and non-traditional security issue. Domestically, however, it has embraced ecological civilization as a state project, linking environmental governance to political legitimacy and social stability. On just transition, China's perspective is shaped by its dominance in solar manufacturing, batteries, electric vehicles, and critical mineral processing. It sees decarbonization as industrial policy and geopolitical opportunity, but this can generate new dependencies in the Global South and overcapacity in global markets. The Chinese perspective thus contributes scale, technology, and a powerful CBDR framing; its occlusion is that it can understate China's annual emissions, coal dependence, downstream water impacts, and the geopolitical leverage embedded in green supply chains.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on climate geopolitics is shaped by its identity as a resource state and by a deep skepticism toward Western-led decarbonization agendas. From this vantage point, climate change is often treated less as an existential planetary threat than as a political and economic instrument that can be used to constrain Russian fossil-fuel exports, justify protectionist measures such as carbon border adjustments, and restructure global energy markets in favor of Western green industries. The mechanism is straightforward: Russia's economy, fiscal stability, and geopolitical influence depend heavily on oil, gas, and coal exports, so a rapid global transition away from hydrocarbons threatens not only revenue but also state capacity and great-

power status. Russian discourse therefore frequently emphasizes energy security, technological sovereignty, and the right to development, while questioning the fairness and feasibility of Western net-zero timelines. It also points to Western hypocrisy: states that industrialized through fossil fuels now demand that others decarbonize quickly while failing to meet their own finance commitments.

On climate as a threat multiplier, the Russian perspective is more likely to highlight the opportunities created by warming, such as Arctic navigation, expanded agricultural potential, and resource access, than to emphasize vulnerability. This does not mean Russia ignores climate impacts; rather, it tends to frame them as manageable or regionally differentiated, and it often resists the securitization of climate in ways that could justify NATO or Western intervention. On hydro-hegemony, Russia is less central to the major basins discussed in this lesson, but its vantage point is relevant to Arctic and transboundary water politics, where it asserts sovereignty over Northern Sea Route access and resource extraction. On loss and damage, Russia is generally skeptical of reparations frameworks and is not a major contributor to climate finance; it may rhetorically align with Global South critiques of Western conditionality while offering little material support. On climate securitization, Russia opposes the use of climate as a justification for military intervention or alliance expansion, and it frames Western climate-security discourse as a pretext for geopolitical containment. On just transition, Russia promotes gas as a transitional fuel, nuclear energy, and Arctic development, while treating Western decarbonization as a threat to its economic model. The Russian perspective contributes a useful critique of Western hypocrisy and of the uneven distribution of transition costs, but its occlusion is severe: it can minimize climate risk, protect fossil-fuel dependence, and use anti-Western rhetoric to avoid domestic accountability. It also struggles to offer a credible adaptation or finance agenda for vulnerable states, which limits its constructive role in global climate governance.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on climate geopolitics combines climate leadership, scientific authority, and a growing self-critique regarding the finance gap. From this vantage point, the central problem is to align global emissions with temperature targets while maintaining economic competitiveness and security. Western states and institutions have been the principal architects of the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, and the IPCC assessment process, and they often present themselves as the leaders of global mitigation ambition. The mechanism of leadership is a mix of domestic decarbonization targets, green industrial policy, climate finance pledges, technology development, and normative pressure on other states. At the same time, the Western perspective increasingly acknowledges that its own performance has been uneven: finance commitments have fallen short, adaptation funding lags behind mitigation, and historical emissions remain disproportionately high. This self-critique is important, but it often remains bounded by a technocratic framing that treats climate change as a problem of targets, markets, and innovation rather than as a problem of historical justice.

On climate as a threat multiplier, the Western perspective has been central to securitizing climate risk. It frames climate change as a threat to national security, military readiness, migration management, and global stability. This can produce useful attention to risk assessment and preparedness, but it can also lead to the militarization of climate response and the treatment of climate migrants as security threats. On hydro-hegemony, Western diplomacy often emphasizes transboundary water cooperation, data sharing, and basin-wide agreements, while also protecting strategic alliances and commercial interests. In the Nile case, Western actors have generally sought to mediate rather than impose solutions, but their influence is constrained by sovereignty claims and by the legacy of colonial water arrangements. On loss and damage, the Western perspective has moved from resistance to reluctant acceptance, culminating in support for the Loss and Damage Fund. Yet it continues to worry about liability, moral hazard, and the fiscal burden of open-ended reparations.

The mechanism of Western hesitation is the fear that acknowledging historical responsibility could generate unlimited legal and financial claims. On just transition, Western states are increasingly adopting green industrial policies, carbon border adjustments, and domestic transition programs for coal communities. These measures can accelerate decarbonization, but they can also export adjustment costs to the Global South and create new forms of green protectionism. The Western perspective contributes scientific capacity, finance, and institutional leadership; its occlusion is that it can understate historical responsibility, overemphasize mitigation relative to adaptation, and treat climate justice as an afterthought to market-led transition.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on climate geopolitics is anchored in the UNFCCC, the IPCC, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the broader UN system. It treats climate change as a global collective-action problem requiring scientific assessment, normative consensus, and multilateral coordination. The UNFCCC provides the legal and diplomatic framework for negotiations; the IPCC supplies the scientific baseline; SDG 13 and related goals connect climate action to development; and the COP process provides a forum for incremental agreement. The UN perspective is therefore less a single national interest than an institutional attempt to reconcile competing claims under conditions of sovereignty and inequality. Its central contribution is legitimacy: it can articulate global goals, standardize measurement, and create spaces in which vulnerable states can demand finance, technology transfer, and loss and damage recognition.

On climate as a threat multiplier, the UN perspective draws heavily on IPCC assessments to frame climate risk as a threat to food security, health, displacement, and peace. It has also seen debates in the Security Council about whether climate should be treated as a security issue, revealing tension between development and securitization framings. On hydro-hegemony, the UN system promotes transboundary water cooperation through conventions and basin initiatives, but it lacks enforcement power and must navigate sovereignty claims. On loss and damage, the UNFCCC process has been the main venue for the Global South's demand, culminating in the Loss and Damage Fund. The UN perspective can elevate this demand and provide institutional form, but it cannot compel adequate funding. On climate securitization, the UN contains both development-oriented and security-oriented actors, producing an internal tension between human security and militarized responses. On just transition, the UN has developed a just transition work programme and normative language around equity, sustainable development, and decent work, but it struggles to convert rhetoric into binding finance, technology transfer, or accountability. The UN perspective contributes coordination, science, and normative framing; its occlusion is structural. It depends on state consensus, lacks enforcement capacity, and often reflects power asymmetries rather than overcoming them. It can name climate justice, but it cannot guarantee it.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African	Centers climate vulnerability, adaptation finance, loss and damage, and colonial responsibility; reframes climate finance as reparative justice rather than charity	Can underweight agency of non-Western emitters and domestic governance failures in African states	Climate justice as reparative; historical responsibility; differentiated obligations	IPCC AR6 WGII vulnerability assessments; COP27 Loss and Damage Fund decision; African Group of Negotiators positions	Western/Chinese: historical framing ignores contemporary emissions and development needs of emerging economies
Chinese	Developmental priorities; CBDR framing; South-South cooperation; technology transfer demands	Obscures China's own emissions trajectory and coal expansion; state-centric framing	CBDR; development rights; climate action must not constrain growth	China's NDCs; BASIC group positions; Belt and Road green finance initiatives	Western: China's emissions make it a major contributor, not merely a victim of historical injustice
Russian	Skepticism about climate alarmism; resource state framing; highlights de-carbonization costs for fossil fuel exporters	Understates climate risks; ignores vulnerability of own territory (permafrost, Arctic); instru-mentalizes climate for geopolitical leverage	Climate change is manageable; energy security and sovereignty; resistance to binding mitigation	Russia's climate strategy documents; Arctic policy; fossil fuel export dependence	African/UN: skepticism delays necessary action and harms vulnerable populations

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Climate leadership; finance gap self-critique; institutional innovation (UNFCCC, IPCC); market mechanisms	Historical emissions responsibility; finance shortfalls; greenwashing; conditionality; prioritizes mitigation over adaptation	Liberal internationalism; market-based solutions; rule-based order; climate as security threat	EU Green Deal; US Inflation Reduction Act; climate finance pledges; IPCC assessments	African: leadership rhetoric masks inadequate finance and historical responsibility
UN	Coordination; science (IPCC); normative framing (SDG 13); institutional architecture (UNFCCC, Paris Agreement)	Structural dependence on state consensus; lacks enforcement; reflects power asymmetries	Multilateralism; common but differentiated; sustainable development	Paris Agreement; Loss and Damage Fund; IPCC AR6; SDG 13	African: UN processes produce weak outcomes that favor powerful states

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2022-2023 COP27/COP28 negotiations and the Loss and Damage Fund

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the Loss and Damage Fund negotiations were shaped by specific negotiators and advocates: the Egyptian COP27 presidency under Sameh Shoukry, the UAE's Sultan Al Jaber as COP28 president, and the sustained advocacy of small island state representatives and African negotiators who had pressed the issue for decades. Individual climate activists and scientists, including IPCC authors, provided the epistemic foundation by documenting escalating impacts. At the state level, national positions diverged sharply: the G77+China bloc, led by Pakistan and supported by the African Group of Negotiators, demanded a dedicated fund; the European Union initially resisted a separate fund but shifted under pressure; the United States opposed liability language while accepting a fund without admission of legal responsibility; China positioned itself as a developing country while facing pressure to contribute. At the systemic level, the negotiations reflected the North-South divide in climate governance, the historical asymmetry of cumulative emissions, and the power dynamics of multilateralism in which wealthy states control finance flows. At the transnational level, civil society networks, scientific institutions, philanthropic actors, and private sector stakeholders shaped both the agenda and the implementation design, with the World Bank's role as interim host reflecting transnational financial governance structures.

Mechanism. The establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27 in November 2022 and its opera-

tionalization at COP28 in December 2023 followed a specific causal mechanism. First, escalating climate impacts—floods in Pakistan, drought in the Horn of Africa, cyclones in Mozambique—created material pressure that could not be addressed through existing mitigation or adaptation finance. Second, sustained advocacy by the G77+China, the African Group of Negotiators, and civil society organizations maintained the issue on the agenda across multiple COPs, preventing its dilution. Third, the shifting geopolitical context—US re-engagement under the Biden administration after the Trump withdrawal, China's growing assertiveness in climate diplomacy, and the EU's need to demonstrate climate leadership—created a window for compromise. Fourth, the Egyptian COP27 presidency leveraged its position to force the issue onto the agenda, making loss and damage a central negotiating track. Fifth, the compromise at COP27 established a fund "for responding to loss and damage" without conceding liability or compensation, a deliberate ambiguity that allowed agreement. Sixth, at COP28, the transitional committee's recommendations were adopted, with the World Bank designated as interim host for four years, and initial pledges totaling approximately $700 million were announced—far below estimated needs in the hundreds of billions. The mechanism thus combined material pressure, sustained advocacy, geopolitical opportunity, institutional entrepreneurship, and deliberate ambiguity to produce an outcome that was simultaneously historic and inadequate.

Perspective reconstruction. From the African perspective, the Loss and Damage Fund represents a partial and overdue recognition of climate injustice. African negotiators and scholars have long argued that the continent contributes minimally to cumulative emissions yet suffers disproportionate impacts, and that climate finance must be understood as reparative rather than charitable. The fund's establishment validates this framing, but its inadequacy—pledges of roughly $700 million against needs estimated in the hundreds of billions—confirms that recognition has not been matched by redistribution. The African perspective emphasizes that the fund's design, with the World Bank as interim host, risks replicating conditionalities and governance structures that have historically disadvantaged African states. It also stresses that loss and damage cannot be separated from adaptation and development finance, and that the fund must not become a substitute for mitigation ambition by wealthy emitters. From the Chinese perspective, the fund aligns with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, and China has positioned itself as a developing country with historical emissions far below those of industrialized nations. China supports the fund in principle while resisting pressure to contribute as a donor, arguing that its per capita emissions and development needs justify its classification. From the Russian perspective, the fund is viewed with skepticism as another mechanism for Western conditionality and as a distraction from energy security; Russia's position reflects its status as a fossil fuel exporter and its broader skepticism about climate alarmism. From the Western perspective, the fund represents climate leadership and a willingness to address historical responsibility, but with significant self-critique: the finance gap remains vast, and the fund's establishment without liability language reflects a compromise that protects wealthy states from legal exposure. From the UN perspective, the fund demonstrates the capacity of multilateral processes to produce institutional innovation, but also reveals structural limitations: dependence on voluntary pledges, lack of enforcement, and the gap between normative ambition and material commitment.

Adjudication. The African perspective best explains the case because it captures both the breakthrough and the inadequacy of the Loss and Damage Fund. It identifies the core mechanism—material vulnerability combined with sustained advocacy and geopolitical opportunity—and it explains why the outcome, while historic, remains structurally insufficient. The African framing of climate finance as reparative justice, rather than charity, accounts for the political dynamics that produced the fund and for the resistance to adequate funding. However, this perspective misses or underweights several elements: the genuine agency of non-Western emitters, particularly China's role in shaping the outcome; the internal diversity of African states'

interests and capacities; and the possibility that institutional design choices (such as World Bank hosting) may reflect pragmatic rather than purely extractive logics. The Western perspective captures the institutional innovation and self-critique but occludes the historical responsibility that makes the fund necessary. The Chinese perspective correctly identifies CBDR but obscures China's own emissions trajectory. The Russian perspective is largely orthogonal to the case. The UN perspective describes the process accurately but cannot explain the power asymmetries that shaped the outcome. The best explanation is thus a synthesis: the African perspective provides the normative and structural core, supplemented by Western institutional analysis and Chinese geopolitical positioning, with the UN framework as the arena in which these forces interacted.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. Identify the basin's upstream–downstream power asymmetry and the historical legal baseline (the 1929 and 1959 agreements) that Ethiopia rejects as a basis for allocating Nile waters.

2. Apply the hydro-hegemony framework to classify Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia, and explain why Sudan's position is not simply aligned with either Egypt or Ethiopia.

3. Explain how the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) alters Egypt's hydro-hegemony through resource capture, and identify the specific technical parameters (filling speed, drought releases, data sharing) that convert engineering facts into bargaining leverage.

4. Evaluate two competing explanations—(a) zero-sum water security and (b) cooperative benefit-sharing—and specify the evidence that would falsify each.

5. Assess whether securitization rhetoric is justified given climate variability in the Nile basin, and distinguish mobilization benefits from bargaining costs.

6. Propose a bounded policy recommendation and state its scope conditions: under what institutional and political conditions would it be feasible?

MODEL ANSWER: The Nile dispute is best understood not as a simple upstream–downstream quarrel but as a contest over the reconfiguration of hydro-hegemony in a basin whose legal and infrastructural order was built under colonial and post-colonial Egyptian dominance. Egypt's position rests on the 1929 and 1959 agreements, which allocated the bulk of Nile waters to Egypt and Sudan and which Ethiopia, as a non-signatory, regards as illegitimate inheritances of imperial preference. Ethiopia's construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam is therefore not merely a development project; it is a counter-hegemonic move that converts latent upstream geographic advantage into infrastructural and bargaining power. Under Zeitoun and Warner's framework, Egypt has long functioned as the basin hegemon through a combination of material power, ideational authority, and the institutionalization of its water claims; Ethiopia's dam challenges that order by creating a new fact on the ground that Egypt cannot easily reverse without risking regional escalation. Sudan occupies an intermediate position: it stands to gain regulated flows, flood control, and cheaper electricity, yet it also faces safety, sedimentation, and coordination risks if filling and operation are not jointly managed. This mixed incentive structure explains why Sudan's alignment has shifted across negotiation rounds and why a simple Egypt-versus-Ethiopia dyad misrepresents the politics. Historically,

Egypt's hegemony was reinforced by its diplomatic weight, its alliance with Sudan under the 1959 agreement, and its control over downstream infrastructure; Ethiopia's counter-hegemony depends on the fact that the GERD is already built and that military options are constrained by geography, cost, and international law. The Declaration of Principles signed in 2015 acknowledged equitable use and no significant harm, but it left operational details unresolved, creating a gap between normative commitment and enforceable rules. This gap is where hydro-hegemony is actually contested: not in abstract sovereignty claims, but in the technical parameters of filling speed, drought release, and information sharing.

The zero-sum water-security explanation captures Egypt's vulnerability because the Blue Nile contributes the majority of Egypt's Nile water, and any sustained reduction during drought years could threaten agriculture, urban supply, and the Aswan High Dam's electricity generation. Yet this explanation overstates the likely magnitude and intent of harm if the dam is operated with drought-mitigation rules and transparent data sharing. The cooperative benefit-sharing explanation is supported by the potential for the GERD to reduce evaporation losses relative to downstream reservoirs and to provide regional electricity, but it assumes trust and institutional capacity that the parties have not built. Evidence that would falsify the zero-sum view would be a multi-year record of filling and operation that does not reduce Egypt's usable water below agreed thresholds; evidence that would falsify the cooperative view would be repeated unilateral filling during drought, refusal to share real-time data, or dam-safety incidents. Climate variability intensifies both arguments: IPCC assessments emphasize that the Nile basin faces increasing hydrological uncertainty, which makes static allocation formulas less adequate and raises the value of adaptive, data-driven management. Securitization rhetoric, which frames the dam as an existential threat, can mobilize domestic support and international attention, but it also narrows the bargaining space by converting technical disputes into sovereignty contests. For Sudan, the dam's benefits are concrete but conditional; for Ethiopia, the dam is tied to national development and electricity export ambitions; for Egypt, the issue is framed as survival, which makes compromise politically costly. The African Union's role illustrates the difficulty of mediating among member states when one party sees the dispute as development and another as existential security. External mediation by the United States and the World Bank in 2019–2020 failed to secure a final text, in part because Ethiopia rejected binding third-party arbitration while Egypt insisted on enforceable guarantees. The UN Security Council's 2021 discussion underscored that the dispute is internationalized, but it did not impose a settlement, leaving the basin's governance dependent on voluntary negotiation. The most defensible recommendation is a binding, adaptive agreement on filling schedules, drought contingencies, and data exchange, backed by neutral monitoring and dispute resolution, rather than either unconditional Ethiopian sovereignty or Egyptian veto power. Such an arrangement is feasible only if all parties accept that water security is interdependent and that the basin's closure under climate stress requires cooperation rather than unilateral optimization.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism entered its transitional reporting phase in October 2023, requiring importers of steel, cement, aluminium, fertilizers, electricity, and hydrogen to report embedded emissions. Several African and other Global South exporters argue that the measure functions as a unilateral trade barrier that penalizes late industrializers, while the EU presents it as a climate-integrity tool to prevent carbon leakage and protect its own decarbonization investments. South Africa, Egypt, and other developing-country voices have questioned its compatibility with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and have warned that compliance costs could constrain export revenues and industrial upgrading. Analyze the dispute as

a problem of just transition and decarbonization geopolitics: identify the mechanism, reconstruct the competing perspectives, find a historical analogue, and specify what evidence would falsify your explanation. You are advising a trade ministry in an affected African state; your memo should explain whether the mechanism is primarily climate policy, protectionism, or a hybrid, and what bounded policy response is available.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

- **Mechanism:** What causal chain links CBAM's reporting and pricing rules to changes in trade flows, industrial location, emissions, and diplomatic alignment? Specify scope conditions and the level of analysis at which the mechanism operates.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct the EU, African, Chinese, Russian, and UN perspectives on CBAM without straw-manning; identify what each perspective contributes and what it occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare CBAM to one prior case of unilateral trade-environment linkage (for example, EU deforestation regulation, U.S. Superfund taxes, or carbon border debates in the 1990s) and state the limits of the analogy.
- **Falsifiers:** List observable evidence that would weaken or refute your central claim, including trade data, emissions data, diplomatic statements, and legal rulings.

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description (what CBAM does), explanation (why it produces these effects), prediction (what will happen under specified conditions), and prescription (what your government should do), and did you avoid conflating them?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Hinge question: At COP27, states agreed to establish a Loss and Damage Fund, but pledges and capitalization have lagged behind estimated needs. Which explanation best captures the central political obstacle?

A. The absence of a shared scientific consensus that climate damages are occurring.
B. The disagreement over whether loss and damage finance should be framed as compensation/reparations or as solidarity-based assistance, and over who pays.
C. The lack of any institutional venue for discussing climate finance.
D. The refusal of all developing countries to accept mitigation obligations.

Distractor diagnosis:
- **A is wrong** because IPCC AR6 and UNFCCC processes already establish that climate damages are occurring and attributable; the obstacle is political allocation, not scientific consensus.
- **B is correct** because the central contest is over framing (compensation/reparations versus solidarity-based assistance) and burden-sharing, which determines contributor obligations, recipient eligibility, and legal liability.
- **C is wrong** because venues such as the UNFCCC, the Green Climate Fund, and COP negotiation tracks already exist; the problem is mandate, scale, and contributor willingness, not institutional absence.
- **D is wrong** because it overgeneralizes: many developing countries have submitted NDCs and mitigation commitments, and the dispute centers on finance, historical responsibility, and capacity, not a blanket refusal to mitigate.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1: Cumulative CO□ Emissions by Region, 1850–2021 (approximate shares of global total)

Region	Share of cumulative CO□ (%)	Approx. tonnes (Gt)	Population share (%)	Per-capita cumulative (t)
United States	20.3	~420	4.3	~1,250
European Union (27)	17.3	~360	5.8	~790
China	12.7	~265	17.8	~190
Russia / former USSR	7.1	~148	4.8	~390
Japan	3.9	~81	1.6	~640
India	3.4	~71	17.7	~51
Middle East & North Africa	3.2	~67	6.0	~140
Latin America & Caribbean	4.0	~83	8.4	~125
Sub-Saharan Africa	2.8	~58	14.5	~51
Rest of world	25.3	~527	23.1	~288
Global total	**100**	**~2,080**	**100**	**~260**

Sources: Global Carbon Project / Our World in Data cumulative emissions estimates; population figures from UN DESA. Figures are approximate and rounded; exact totals vary by accounting convention (territorial vs. consumption-based, land-use change inclusion).

Table 2: Climate Finance Flows to Developing Countries, 2013–2022 (USD billions, annual)

Year | Total public + private finance (OECD-reported) | Public finance | Private finance (mobilised) | Share of $100B target met | |—|—|—|—|—| | 2013 | 52.2 | 37.9 | 14.3 | 52% | | 2015 | 61.8 | 44.6 | 17.2 | 62% | | 2017 | 71.2 | 56.7 | 14.5 | 71% | | 2019 | 79.6 | 62.9 | 16.7 | 80% | | 2020 | 83.3 | 68.3 | 15.0 | 83% | | 2021 | 89.6 | 73.1 | 16.5 | 90% | | 2022 | 115.9 | 91.6 | 24.3 | 116% (first year above target) |

Sources: OECD, Climate Finance Provided and Mobilised by Developed Countries in 2013–2022* (2024); UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance. Note: OECD methodology counts loans at face value; developing-country negotiators argue grant-equivalent figures are substantially lower.*

Table 3: Loss and Damage Fund — Pledges vs. Estimated Needs (USD)

Category	Amount	Source / basis
Pledges at COP28 (Dubai, Dec 2023)	~$700 million	UNFCCC / COP28 Presidency

Category	Amount	Source / basis
Estimated annual loss and damage needs by 2030	$400 billion – $1.8 trillion	V20 / Climate Vulnerable Forum estimates; IIED
Estimated annual needs (conservative, IPCC-aligned)	$100–300 billion	UNEP Adaptation Gap Report

Sources: UNFCCC Loss and Damage Fund documentation; V20 Group; UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2023; Oxfam Climate Finance Shadow Report.

Table 4: Nile Basin — Flow and Storage Data

Parameter	Value	Notes
Total Nile flow at Aswan (average annual)	~84 billion m³	Naturalised flow; varies with rainfall
Blue Nile contribution (at Khartoum)	~59% of total flow	Originates in Ethiopian Highlands
White Nile contribution	~28%	Originates in Lake Victoria / Equatorial Lakes
Atbara River contribution	~13%	Ethiopian/Sudanese origin
GERD (Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam) installed capacity	5,150 MW	Africa's largest hydroelectric project
GERD reservoir volume	~74 billion m³	Comparable to 1.5× annual Nile flow at Aswan
Egypt's annual water allocation (1959 Agreement)	55.5 billion m³	Bilateral Egypt–Sudan agreement; Ethiopia not party
Sudan's annual water allocation (1959 Agreement)	18.5 billion m³	
Egypt's population (2024 est.)	~112 million	97% of population lives on Nile floodplain/delta
Ethiopia's population (2024 est.)	~126 million	~60% lack grid electricity access

Sources: Nile Basin Initiative (NBI); International Water Management Institute (IWMI); World Bank; GERD project documentation; UN DESA population estimates.

Analysis Questions

1. Trend. Using Tables 1 and 2, describe the trajectory of cumulative emissions inequality and climate finance delivery between 2013 and 2022. What does the juxtaposition of these two trends reveal about the structural relationship between historical responsibility and present obligation?

2. Level of analysis. Table 4 presents the Nile dispute in terms of flows, reservoir volumes, and population figures. At which level of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational) does each data point operate, and which level is systematically underrepresented in the table? What would a transnational-level analysis of the same dispute require that the table cannot provide?

3. Perspective reconstruction (all five). For each of the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN), identify which table(s) and which specific figures would be foregrounded as decisive evidence, and which would be treated as misleading or irrelevant. Produce a one-sentence evidentiary claim for each perspective.

4. Interpretation. Table 3 shows that COP28 pledges to the Loss and Damage Fund (~$700 million) amount to less than 1% of the lower-bound annual need estimate ($100 billion). Does this gap constitute evidence of (a) a failure of political will, (b) a structural incapacity of the international system, or (c) a deliberate strategic choice by donor states? What evidence from Tables 1–2 would you need to adjudicate among these three interpretations?

5. Limitation. All four tables rely on data produced by institutions embedded in particular power structures (OECD, UN agencies, national governments). Identify one specific methodological or political limitation in each table that would lead a critical scholar to treat its headline figure with caution, and state what alternative measurement approach would address that limitation.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1: "The Threat Multiplier Cascade" — Climate as Systemic Amplifier

What to draw: A vertical cascade diagram on a single page. At the top, draw a large circle labeled "Climate Stress" containing three sub-labels: "Temperature rise," "Precipitation shift," and "Extreme events." From this circle, draw three downward arrows to a middle row of three rectangles: "Food insecurity," "Water scarcity," and "Livelihood collapse." From each rectangle, draw arrows converging on a bottom rectangle labeled "Conflict / Displacement / State fragility." Draw a feedback loop arrow from the bottom rectangle back up to the top circle, labeled "Conflict degrades adaptive capacity."

How to label it: Label each arrow with a mechanism: "crop yield reduction," "aquifer depletion," "pastoral route disruption," "resource competition," "governance erosion." Place a small legend in the bottom-left corner distinguishing "direct causal link" (solid arrow) from "feedback loop" (dashed arrow).

Perspective overlay to annotate: In the top-right corner, draw a small inset box labeled "African vantage: the cascade begins with colonial land tenure and extractive agriculture, not with temperature." Draw a dashed line from this box to the "Livelihood collapse" rectangle, indicating that the African perspective inserts a structural precondition into the cascade that the Western threat-multiplier framing omits. In the bottom-right corner, draw a second inset box labeled "UN vantage: IPCC AR6 confidence levels" with a small scale from "low" to "high" confidence, noting that the conflict link is rated "medium" confidence while the food-security link is rated "high."

Visual 2: "Hydro-Hegemony on the Nile" — Upstream/Downstream Power Geometry

What to draw: A horizontal cross-section of the Nile basin from south (left) to north (right). Draw the Blue Nile originating in the Ethiopian Highlands (left), flowing through Sudan (center), and reaching Egypt (right).

Mark the GERD as a large dam icon on the Blue Nile in Ethiopia. Mark the Aswan High Dam as a smaller dam icon in Egypt. Draw the White Nile entering from the south (Lake Victoria) joining at Khartoum. Use shading: darker blue for the Blue Nile (59% of flow), lighter blue for the White Nile (28%), lightest for the Atbara (13%). Draw arrows showing flow direction. Draw a dashed line representing the 1959 Agreement allocation boundary.

How to label it: Label each country with population and water allocation: "Ethiopia: 126M people, 0% allocated under 1959 Agreement"; "Sudan: 48M people, 18.5 bcm"; "Egypt: 112M people, 55.5 bcm." Label the GERD reservoir with "74 bcm storage capacity." Label the Aswan reservoir with "169 bcm capacity." Place a scale bar and north arrow.

Perspective overlay to annotate: Draw three small flag-icons or perspective tags along the river: near the GERD, tag "Ethiopian perspective: sovereign right to development, energy poverty, no colonial-era obligation"; near Khartoum, tag "Sudanese perspective: downstream beneficiary of GERD flood control, but anxious about filling timeline"; near Aswan, tag "Egyptian perspective: existential water security, 97% dependence, historical rights." In the top margin, draw a small box labeled "Russian/Chinese vantage: infrastructure financing and non-interference" with arrows pointing to the GERD icon, indicating external power involvement in dam construction.

Visual 3: "The Loss and Damage Gap" — Pledges vs. Needs as a Geopolitical Bar Chart

What to draw: A vertical bar chart with a logarithmic y-axis (USD billions). Draw four bars: (1) "Cumulative CO□ share — Global South (excluding China)" at ~10% (labeled as a horizontal reference line, not a bar); (2) "Climate finance delivered 2022" at $115.9B; (3) "Loss & Damage Fund pledges (COP28–29)" at ~$1.4B cumulative; (4) "Estimated annual L&D need by 2030" at $400B (lower bound) with an error bar extending to $1.8T. Color-code: bar 2 in blue (finance delivered), bar 3 in red (pledges), bar 4 in dark red (need). Draw a large gap bracket between bars 3 and 4 labeled "The reparations gap."

How to label it: Label each bar with its source (OECD, UNFCCC, V20). Add a small inset pie chart showing the composition of climate finance (adaptation vs. mitigation vs. cross-cutting) to illustrate that loss and damage is not separately tracked in standard flows. Add a footnote: "OECD counts loans at face value; grant-equivalent figures are lower."

Perspective overlay to annotate: Draw five small perspective tags around the chart: "African: the gap is a measure of colonial debt unpaid"; "Chinese: CBDR requires differentiated timelines, not just differentiated amounts"; "Russian: the gap reflects the unreliability of Western commitments"; "Western: the gap reflects domestic political constraints and the need for private-sector mobilisation"; "UN: the gap is a governance failure addressable through the Fund's Board and the NCQG process." Place these as a legend in the bottom margin, each with a distinct color.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue Column | Notes Column (with Source Log)

Cue (Question / Keyword)	Notes (Answer / Elaboration + Source)
What is a "threat multiplier"?	A condition that amplifies existing vulnerabilities rather than creating new ones independently. Barnett (2003) introduced the term in the context of environmental security; Busby (2018) operationalised it for climate-conflict research. The mechanism: climate stress → resource scarcity → competition → conflict, conditional on weak governance. Scope condition: threat multipliers require pre-existing institutional fragility; they do not generate conflict in robust states.
What is hydro-hegemony?	The control of water resources by an upstream or dominant riparian state to extract political or economic leverage over downstream states. Key cases: Nile (Ethiopia/Egypt), Mekong (China/downstream ASEAN), Tigris-Euphrates (Turkey/Syria/Iraq). Mechanism: dam construction alters flow timing and volume, creating asymmetric dependence.
What is "loss and damage"?	The harms from climate change that cannot be avoided through mitigation or adaptation. Demanded by Global South negotiators since the 1990s; formalised in the Warsaw International Mechanism (2013) and the Loss and Damage Fund (COP27, 2022). Distinct from adaptation finance: L&D addresses irreversible harm, not risk reduction.
What is climate securitization?	The framing of climate change as a security threat, leading to military involvement in climate response. Mechanism: threat framing → security-sector budget allocation → militarised adaptation (e.g., border fortification, resource guarding). Critique: securitization may crowd out civilian adaptation and human-security approaches.
What is "just transition"?	The principle that decarbonisation must not impose disproportionate costs on workers, communities, or countries least responsible for emissions. Mechanism: carbon-intensive economies face stranded assets; transition costs fall on fossil-fuel-dependent regions unless redistributive mechanisms are designed.

Cue (Question / Keyword)	Notes (Answer / Elaboration + Source)
What is CBDR?	"Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities" — the UNFCCC principle (Rio 1992, Art. 3.1) that all states share responsibility for climate action but obligations differ by historical contribution and capacity. Chinese and Indian negotiators invoke CBDR to resist equal mitigation obligations.
What is the GERD?	Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam: 5,150 MW capacity, 74 bcm reservoir, on the Blue Nile in Ethiopia. Africa's largest hydroelectric project. Disputed by Egypt (downstream water security) and Sudan (filling timeline, flood control). Negotiations stalled since 2021.
What is the Loss and Damage Fund?	Established at COP27 (Sharm el-Sheikh, 2022); operationalised at COP28 (Dubai, 2023). Governed by a Board with 26 members (14 developing, 12 developed). Pledges ~$700M at COP28; estimated annual need $100B–$1.8T by 2030.

Source Log: - IPCC AR6 (2021–2023), WGI/WGII/WGIII — physical science, impacts, mitigation. - Barnett, J. (2003), "Security and Climate Change," *Global Environmental Change* 13(1): 7–17. - Busby, J. (2018), "Warming World: Why Climate Change Matters More Than Anything Else," *Foreign Affairs* 97(4): 49–55. - UNFCCC, Warsaw International Mechanism (2013); COP27/COP28 Loss and Damage Fund decisions. - Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) technical reports; IWMI Nile flow data. - OECD, *Climate Finance Provided and Mobilised by Developed Countries in 2013–2022* (2024). - V20 Group / Climate Vulnerable Forum loss-and-damage need estimates. - Grovogui, S. (2006), *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*; Mamdani, M. (2020), *Neither Settler nor Native*.

Summary (3–5 sentences): Climate geopolitics operates through five interconnected mechanisms: climate as threat multiplier, hydro-hegemony, loss-and-damage finance demands, securitization, and just-transition politics. Each mechanism is interpreted differently across the five perspectives, with the African perspective foregrounding colonial responsibility and structural vulnerability, the Chinese perspective invoking CBDR and developmental sovereignty, the Russian perspective combining skepticism with resource-state interests, the Western perspective oscillating between leadership and self-critique, and the UN perspective providing institutional frameworks (UNFCCC, IPCC, SDGs) that mediate but do not resolve these conflicts. The data show a persistent gap between historical emissions responsibility, finance delivered, and loss-and-damage needs — a gap that is simultaneously a measure of political failure, structural incapacity, and strategic choice. The Nile dispute exemplifies how hydro-hegemony converts resource asymmetry into geopolitical leverage, with Ethiopia's GERD challenging Egypt's historical water rights. Understanding climate geopolitics requires holding all five perspectives in tension without collapsing them into a single narrative.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Climate change is not just a weather problem; it is a power problem. The countries that burned the most fossil fuels over the last 150 years are not the ones suffering the most from droughts, floods, and rising seas. When rivers cross borders, the country upstream can build a dam and control how much water flows downstream — that is what is happening on the Nile, where Ethiopia built a massive dam that Egypt fears will cut its water supply. Poor countries are asking rich countries to pay for the damage climate change is already causing, and rich countries have pledged a few hundred million dollars against needs estimated in the hundreds of billions. Meanwhile, some governments are treating climate change as a military threat, sending soldiers instead of aid workers, and the shift away from fossil fuels is creating winners and losers depending on who owns the oil and who owns the solar panels.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. My explanation above does not specify: (a) the mechanism by which climate stress becomes conflict (it is not automatic — it requires weak governance and pre-existing resource competition); (b) the distinction between adaptation finance and loss-and-damage finance (they address different problems and are often conflated); (c) the scope conditions under which hydro-hegemony operates (not all upstream states can leverage water; it requires infrastructure capacity and political will); (d) the difference between securitization as framing and securitization as practice (rhetoric vs. budgetary reality); (e) the specific African scholarly lineage (Grovogui, Mamdani, Rodney) that grounds the colonial-responsibility argument rather than treating it as a generic developing-country claim.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading the source material confirms: Barnett (2003) specifies that environmental scarcity becomes conflict only through intervening political and economic variables — the threat-multiplier framing is conditional, not deterministic. The IPCC AR6 WGII states with high confidence that climate impacts are already widespread but rates the climate-conflict link at medium confidence, confirming the gap identified in Step 2(a). The Loss and Damage Fund documentation confirms that L&D is distinct from adaptation and that the Fund's mandate excludes liability/adaptation overlap — confirming gap 2(b). Grovogui's *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy* and Mamdani's *Neither Settler nor Native* provide the African scholarly grounding for the colonial-responsibility framing, confirming gap 2(e).

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. Analogy: climate geopolitics is like a debt-collection dispute in which the debtor (the Global North) wrote the contract (the industrial economy), the creditor (the Global South) is demanding payment for damages already incurred, and a third party (the UN) is mediating without enforcement power. **Limits of this analogy:** (i) climate harm is not a single debt but a continuous, accumulating flow; (ii) the "debtor" is not a single actor but a heterogeneous group of states with divergent interests; (iii) the "creditor" is also heterogeneous and includes states (China) that are simultaneously creditors and debtors; (iv) the analogy implies a clear liability framework that international law does not provide — the Loss and Damage Fund explicitly excludes liability and compensation language; (v) the analogy cannot capture the hydro-hegemony dimension, which is about resource control rather than financial transfer.

Step 5 — Rewrite. Climate geopolitics is the study of how climate change redistributes power, vulnerability, and obligation across the international system. It operates through five mechanisms: (1) climate as a threat multiplier that amplifies pre-existing fragilities in food, water, and livelihood systems, with conflict as a conditional rather than automatic outcome; (2) hydro-hegemony, in which upstream states leverage dam infrastructure to extract political concessions from downstream dependents, as in the Nile dispute between Ethiopia and Egypt; (3) loss-and-damage finance, in which Global South states demand reparations for irreversible climate harm, confronting a gap between pledged funds (~$700M at COP28) and estimated needs ($100B–$1.8T annually by 2030); (4) climate securitization, in which threat framing channels resources

toward military responses and away from civilian adaptation; and (5) just-transition politics, in which decarbonization costs fall unevenly on fossil-fuel-dependent economies and communities. These mechanisms are interpreted through five perspectives: the African perspective, grounded in the colonial-responsibility scholarship of Grovogui and Mamdani, foregrounds structural vulnerability and demands reparations; the Chinese perspective invokes CBDR and developmental sovereignty; the Russian perspective combines climate skepticism with resource-state interests; the Western perspective oscillates between climate leadership and self-critique of the finance gap; and the UN perspective provides institutional mediation through the UNFCCC, IPCC, and SDG 13 without resolving the underlying power asymmetries. The data reveal a persistent triple gap — between historical emissions and present vulnerability, between finance delivered and finance needed, and between pledged loss-and-damage funds and estimated damages — that is simultaneously a measure of political failure, structural incapacity, and strategic choice by donor states.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L51	Definition	What is “climate as threat multiplier”?	Climate change amplifies pre-existing vulnerabilities—food insecurity, water stress, livelihood loss—rather than directly causing conflict; risk multiplies in fragile contexts.	African: centers agrarian vulnerability; Western: security framing.
L51	Mechanism	How does climate become a conflict multiplier?	Through resource scarcity, livelihood collapse, migration pressure, and weakened state capacity in already fragile regions, interacting with governance failures.	African: colonial legacies shape fragility; UN: SDG 13 lens.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L51	Definition	What is hydro-hegemony?	The structural power of an upstream riparian state over shared water resources via control of flow, data, and infrastructure.	African: Nile dispute exemplifies; Chinese: Mekong dams.
L51	Application	What is the Nile dam dispute?	Ethiopia's GERD versus Egypt/Sudan downstream water-security concerns; upstream development collides with downstream historical entitlements.	African: primary case; Western: mediation attempts.
L51	Definition	What is loss and damage finance?	Compensation/reparations for climate impacts beyond adaptation limits, demanded by the Global South as a matter of climate justice.	African: colonial responsibility framing; UN: UNFCCC process.
L51	Debate	What is "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR)?	All states share responsibility for climate action, but historical emitters bear greater mitigation and finance burdens.	Chinese: core diplomatic frame; Western: self-critique on delivery.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L51	Source	What does IPCC AR6 contribute?	Synthesizes climate science; WGII on impacts/adaptation, WGIII on mitigation; stresses regional vulnerability and limits to adaptation.	UN: science-policy interface; African: vulnerability evidence.
L51	Mechanism	What is climate securitization?	Framing climate as a security threat that channels response through military and border-control institutions rather than civilian adaptation.	Western: security discourse; African: militarization risk.
L51	Comparison	Securitization vs. human security?	Securitization prioritizes state/military stability; human security prioritizes people's livelihoods, rights, and adaptive capacity.	African: human-security preference; Russian: state-centric.
L51	Definition	What is a just transition?	Decarbonization that protects workers and communities and distributes costs fairly across North and South.	African: cost-bearing equity; Chinese: developmental space.
L51	Occlusion	What does Western climate leadership occlude?	Historical responsibility and the finance gap; self-critique acknowledges pledged finance often unmet.	Western: self-critique; African: demands accountability.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L51	Reconstruction	Chinese perspective on climate geopolitics?	Developmental priorities plus CBDR; resists binding mitigation constraining growth; emphasizes South-South cooperation and technology transfer.	Chinese: developmental sovereignty; Western: rivalry lens.
L51	Reconstruction	Russian perspective on climate geopolitics?	Skepticism of anthropogenic urgency; resource-state interests; frames climate governance as Western regulatory capture.	Russian: energy-state framing; Western: obstruction narrative.
L51	Adjudication	How to adjudicate loss-and-damage claims?	Weigh historical emissions, demonstrated vulnerability, and unmet finance against attribution-science limits and political will.	African: justice claim; UN: fund architecture.
L51	Visual	What does cumulative CO2 by region show?	Historical responsibility concentrated in the Global North, informing reparations and finance debates.	African: evidence base; Western: self-critique.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Concept	Confidence (0–100)	Basis for score
Threat-multiplier mechanism (climate → conflict)		
Hydro-hegemony and Nile dynamics		
Loss-and-damage finance politics		
Climate securitization vs. human security		
Just transition and cost distribution		
Reconstruction of all five perspectives		
Data interpretation (CO2, finance flows, Nile data)		
Adjudication of competing claims		

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives was hardest to steel-man from within, and what specifically resisted your reconstruction?
2. Where did your initial causal claim about climate and conflict fail when tested against counter-evidence or scope conditions?
3. What single piece of evidence would most change your adjudication of the Nile dispute or the loss-and-damage fund?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Climate change directly causes war.	It multiplies risk in fragile contexts; conflict requires governance and livelihood failures as intermediaries.	Busby (2018); IPCC AR6 WGII.
Upstream states always dominate shared rivers.	Hydro-hegemony is contested by downstream coalitions, international water law, and counter-hegemonic alliances.	Nile dispute (Egypt/Sudan/Ethiopia).
The Loss and Damage Fund equals full climate reparations.	The fund is limited, largely voluntary in pledges, and does not cover full estimated needs.	UNFCCC/Loss and Damage Fund documentation.
Climate securitization improves response.	It can militarize adaptation, displace civilian governance, and prioritize borders over people.	Barnett (2003); securitization literature.
Decarbonization costs are shared equally.	The Global South bears disproportionate costs; just transition demands explicit equity mechanisms.	IPCC AR6 WGIII; UNFCCC.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Threat multiplier; hydro-hegemony; loss and damage; securitization; just transition	Scarcity → livelihood loss → migration → conflict; upstream flow control; finance-gap politics; militarization of adaptation; cost shifting in decarbonization	Barnett (2003); Busby (2018); IPCC AR6; UNFCCC; CBDR principle	Nile/GERD; COP27/COP28 L&D Fund; cumulative CO2 by region; climate finance flows; Nile flow data	Security vs. human security; reparations vs. aid; CBDR vs. universal obligations	No conflict in high-vulnerability/low-governance cases; downstream veto power; full fund delivery; equal cost sharing	L19 resources; L17 world-systems; L49 Global South; L53 critical minerals; L57 biosecurity; L61 grand strategy

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1):** Re-read Key Idea 1 and flashcards 1–3; define "threat multiplier" in one sentence without jargon.
- **R2 (Day 3):** Reconstruct the Nile dispute from memory (actors, interests, upstream/downstream claims); check against notes.
- **R3 (Week 1):** Write a 200-word memo on the Loss and Damage Fund's political economy; compare with worked example.
- **R4 (Week 2):** Steel-man the Russian and Chinese perspectives in a short debate; identify one occlusion in each.
- **R5 (Month 1):** Timed practice question adjudicating securitization vs. human security using all five perspectives.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define "climate as threat multiplier" and specify its mechanism.
☐ I can explain hydro-hegemony with the Nile case.
☐ I can distinguish upstream from downstream claims in the GERD dispute.
☐ I can explain loss-and-damage finance and its political economy.
☐ I can state the CBDR principle and its contestations.
☐ I can distinguish climate securitization from human security.
☐ I can explain just transition and cost distribution.
☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives from within.
☐ I can identify what the African perspective reveals that others miss.
☐ I can interpret cumulative CO2 and climate finance data.
☐ I can adjudicate competing claims with evidence.
☐ I can state falsifiers for each key idea.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit honestly.

☐ I have logged at least one misconception in the error-log.
☐ I can link this lesson to L19, L17, L49, L53, L57, L61.
☐ I can answer the hinge question correctly.
☐ I have scheduled R1–R5 reviews.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Climate science and impacts - IPCC, *Sixth Assessment Report (AR6)*, Working Groups I–III (2021–2023). - Barnett, J. (2003), "Security and Climate Change," *Global Environmental Change*.

Conflict and security - Busby, J. (2018), "Warming World: Why Climate Change Matters More Than Anything Else," *Foreign Affairs* (and related work on climate and security).

Water and hydro-hegemony - UNFCCC reports on water and climate adaptation; Nile Basin Initiative documentation.

Loss and damage and finance - UNFCCC, Loss and Damage Fund documentation and COP27/COP28 decisions.

Perspectives and global justice - African scholarship on climate vulnerability and colonial responsibility (e.g., Grovogui, Mbembe, Rodney, Nkrumah) as framing for reparations debates.

End of Lesson 51. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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53. Semiconductor Chokepoint Geopolitics

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 52 — Semiconductor Chokepoint Geopolitics
Module	Module 9: Techno-Geopolitics, AI, and Emerging Domains
Prerequisites	L18 (weaponized interdependence), L47 (US–China strategic competition), L19 (critical minerals)
Interleaved links	Forward to L53 (critical minerals), L54 (AI governance), L55 (quantum), L56 (innovation systems)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Dense analytical prose, data tables, worked example, problem pair, dual-coded visuals, flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is deceptively simple: how did a single manufactured component — the advanced semiconductor — become the most consequential chokepoint in the global economy, and why do states now treat fabrication capacity as a matter of national security rather than commercial efficiency? Semiconductors are not rare in the geological sense; silicon is abundant. What is scarce is the *capacity to manufacture* chips at the leading edge, and that scarcity is concentrated in a handful of firms and a handful of geographies. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) produces roughly ninety percent of the world's most advanced logic chips. ASML of the Netherlands is the sole supplier of extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography systems. Applied Materials, Lam Research, and Tokyo Electron dominate critical equipment segments. This concentration means that a disruption at any one node — a blockade, an earthquake, an export-control ruling — propagates through every downstream industry, from smartphones to missile guidance. The lesson asks when control over such a node constitutes durable geopolitical leverage, and when it instead accelerates the diversification that erodes the very power it confers.

This puzzle sits at the intersection of three threads already developed in the curriculum. From L18 on weaponized interdependence, the student inherits the Farrell and Newman framework: states can weaponize network structures by controlling *chokepoints* (nodes through which others must pass) and *panopticons* (nodes that let them observe and discipline). From L47 on US–China competition, the student inherits the strategic context: a rising power whose technological ascent threatens a hegemon's military and economic edge, and a hegemon willing to restrict technology flows to slow that ascent. From L19 on critical minerals, the student inherits the upstream logic: that the "green" and "digital" transitions rest on physical inputs whose supply is geographically concentrated and politically contested. Semiconductors are the downstream mirror image — not a raw material but a *processed* capability, and one whose production requires not just minerals but an ecosystem of tools, chemicals, talent, and capital accumulated over decades. The lesson tests whether the chokepoint logic developed for pipelines and financial messaging (SWIFT) transfers to a manufactured good whose production can, in principle, be replicated given enough time and money.

The stakes are not abstract. In October 2022 the United States imposed sweeping export controls restricting China's access to advanced chips, chip-making equipment, and US-person support for Chinese fabrication. In August 2023 China retaliated with export controls on gallium and germanium — inputs into compound semiconductors and fiber optics. The CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 committed roughly fifty-two billion dollars to domestic semiconductor manufacturing and research. TSMC broke ground on a fab in Arizona. The European Union passed its own Chips Act. Japan and the Netherlands aligned with US restrictions on lithography exports. These moves collectively signal a regime change: from the post-Cold War assumption that semiconductor production should follow comparative advantage and cost minimization, to a new assumption that fabrication geography is a security variable. Whether this shift is wise, sustainable, or self-defeating is precisely the evaluative question the lesson trains the student to adjudicate.

The African vantage point reframes the entire puzzle rather than appearing as a regional illustration. Africa is almost entirely absent from the semiconductor supply chain — not as a consumer only, but as a non-participant in design, fabrication, equipment, or even most packaging. This absence is not a natural fact; it is the product of decades of industrial policy choices, structural adjustment, and the concentration of capital-intensive manufacturing in East Asia, Europe, and North America. From an African perspective, the "chokepoint" debate among great powers is a debate about who controls a technology that Africa does not produce and largely does not design, yet on which its digital economies, financial systems, and (increasingly) agricultural and health infrastructure depend. The digital divide is not merely a gap in connectivity; it

is a gap in *productive capacity*, and the semiconductor geopolitics of the 2020s risks widening it by diverting investment and attention toward "friend-shoring" among already-industrialized partners. African scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, and Rodney have long argued that technological dependence is a form of structural subordination; the semiconductor case gives that argument contemporary, concrete form. The lesson therefore asks not only "who controls the chokepoint?" but "who is excluded from the chain entirely, and what does that exclusion cost?"

Methodologically, the lesson applies the four levels of analysis established in Lesson 1 — individual, state, systemic, and transnational — to a single case, and requires the student to reconstruct five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on the same events. It also demands that the student distinguish description (what the supply chain looks like), explanation (why concentration emerged), prediction (whether controls will slow China), and prescription (what policy should follow). These distinctions are easy to blur in techno-geopolitical discourse, where analysts routinely slide from "China is catching up" to "therefore we must restrict" without examining the causal mechanism or the counterfactual. The lesson's worked example on the 2022–2023 US controls and its problem pair on China's 2023 gallium and germanium controls are designed to force that discipline: each requires the student to state a mechanism, identify scope conditions, and specify what evidence would falsify the claim.

By the end of the lesson the student should be able to: map the semiconductor supply chain by stage and identify the dominant firm and geography at each; apply chokepoint analysis to ASML, TSMC, and Applied Materials with explicit scope conditions; evaluate the US export-control architecture (Entity List, CHIPS Act, "small yard, high fence") against its stated objectives and its documented loopholes; reconstruct China's self-sufficiency strategy and assess its progress and constraints; and adjudicate between competing perspectives on whether economic security framing improves or worsens global welfare. The student should also be able to carry these tools forward to L53 (minerals), L54 (AI), L55 (quantum), and L56 (innovation systems), where the same chokepoint logic recurs with different materials and different political economies.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer these from memory before reading the lesson core. Each question targets a concept from an earlier lesson that this lesson builds on.

1. **(L18 — Weaponized Interdependence)** Define *chokepoint* and *panopticon* in the Farrell and Newman framework, and give one non-semiconductor example of each from the curriculum.
2. **(L18)** Under what conditions does weaponized interdependence *fail* — i.e., when does the target state escape or reverse the leverage?
3. **(L47 — US–China)** What is the "small yard, high fence" doctrine, and which US administration articulated it? What is the yard, and what is the fence?
4. **(L47)** How does the US–China technology competition differ from the US–Soviet competition in terms of supply-chain integration and mutual dependence?
5. **(L19 — Critical Minerals)** Name three critical minerals whose supply is geographically concentrated, and identify the dominant producer for each.
6. **(L19)** What is the difference between *resource nationalism* and *friend-shoring*, and which states have pursued each in the minerals domain?

1.2 Orientation Questions

These frame the lesson's central puzzle. Do not answer them yet; hold them in mind as you read.

1. If TSMC's advanced fabrication were disrupted for six months, which industries would halt first, and does that dependency give Taiwan *political* leverage over the United States or only *economic* leverage?
2. The US controls exports of EUV lithography to China but not of older deep-ultraviolet (DUV) equipment. Is this a coherent "small yard," or does the yard expand over time as controls are tightened? What evidence would distinguish the two?
3. China's gallium and germanium controls of 2023 were widely read as retaliation. Did they impose costs on the US and its allies, or did they mainly accelerate substitution and stockpiling? What metric would settle this?
4. From an African standpoint, is the semiconductor chokepoint debate a distraction from more urgent development priorities, or is control over digital infrastructure now a precondition for any development strategy?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Provisional definitions — refine these as you encounter the terms in the lesson core.

Term	Provisional Definition
Chokepoint	A node in a network through which others must pass, giving the controller potential leverage over users.
Node (process node)	A semiconductor manufacturing generation, measured in nanometers (e.g., 3 nm, 5 nm), indicating transistor density; smaller is more advanced.
EDA (Electronic Design Automation)	Software tools used to design integrated circuits; dominated by Synopsys, Cadence, and Siemens EDA.
Lithography	The process of patterning circuits onto silicon wafers using light; EUV lithography is the most advanced and is monopolized by ASML.
Fabrication (fab)	A facility that manufactures semiconductor wafers; leading-edge fabs cost $15–20 billion and take years to build.
Small yard, high fence	The US doctrine of narrowly restricting the most sensitive technologies while keeping broader trade open.
Indigenous innovation	China's policy goal of developing domestic technological capability to reduce dependence on foreign suppliers.
Import substitution	A development strategy of replacing imported goods with domestic production; in the Russian case, accelerated by sanctions.

Term	Provisional Definition
Friend-shoring	Relocating supply chains to politically aligned or allied countries to reduce geopolitical risk.
Digital divide	The gap between those with and without access to digital technologies and the productive capacity to use them; in this lesson, extended to semiconductor production capacity.
Weaponized interdependence	The use of network structures and chokepoints as instruments of coercion, per Farrell and Newman.

End of requested chunk. Sections 2 onward follow in subsequent chunks.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

After mastering this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Map and classify** the semiconductor supply chain into its principal stages—electronic design automation (EDA), lithography, wafer fabrication, and packaging—and identify the dominant firms, technologies, and geographies at each stage, drawing on industry data and the canonical sources (Miller, 2022; Miller and Varas, 2021; SIA State of the Industry reports). (Bloom: Understand/Analyze)
2. **Explain the mechanism** by which extreme geographic and firm-level concentration in a sequentially dependent production network generates structural chokepoints, specifying the roles of co-specified inputs, non-substitutability, and adjustment time horizons, and connecting this mechanism to the theory of weaponized interdependence. (Bloom: Explain/Analyze)
3. **Evaluate the scope conditions** under which a chokepoint converts into usable coercive leverage—including durable barriers to entry, stockpiling feasibility, credibility of denial, and the absence of substitute pathways—and identify the conditions under which chokepoint power erodes. (Bloom: Evaluate)
4. **Reconstruct and compare** how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives frame the semiconductor supply chain's implications for development, security, sovereignty, and global order, identifying what each perspective contributes and what it occludes. (Bloom: Analyze/Compare)
5. **Apply** the chokepoint framework to a novel disruption scenario—for example, a sudden loss of access to EUV lithography or advanced packaging capacity—and derive falsifiable predictions about state and firm behavior, including relocation, stockpiling, and indigenous innovation responses. (Bloom: Apply)

These objectives are assessed through the worked example, problem pair, independent memo, and hinge question in later sections of this lesson, and they build directly on the weaponized interdependence framework developed in Lesson 18 and the US-China strategic competition framework developed in Lesson 47.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — The semiconductor supply chain: EDA, lithography, fabrication, and packaging

Bolded Causal Claim: The semiconductor supply chain is not a competitive market with interchangeable suppliers but a sequentially dependent production network in which each stage's output must meet tolerances that only the next stage's specific inputs can satisfy; consequently, control over a single bottleneck node confers structural power over all downstream stages, and this power persists for as long as substitution remains slower than the political time horizon of the actors involved.

Mechanism: The production of a leading-edge semiconductor proceeds through a chain of stages whose outputs are not generic commodities but co-specified inputs. Electronic design automation (EDA) software—dominated by Synopsys, Cadence, and Siemens EDA—translates circuit intent into manufacturable layouts validated against the design rules of a specific fabrication process. Those layouts are patterned onto silicon using lithography systems; at the leading edge, extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography is supplied exclusively by ASML of the Netherlands, with deep ultraviolet (DUV) systems also concentrated among ASML, Canon, and Nikon. The patterned wafers are processed in fabrication facilities (fabs) whose equipment—deposition, etch, ion implantation, metrology—is dominated by Applied Materials, Lam Research, KLA (United States), and Tokyo Electron (Japan). The resulting dies are then packaged and tested, increasingly through advanced techniques such as 2.5D/3D integration and chiplet assembly, where capacity is concentrated at TSMC's advanced packaging lines and at outsourced semiconductor assembly and test (OSAT) providers such as ASE, Amkor, and JCET. Each stage's output must satisfy the next stage's input specifications: EDA tools must support the target node's design rules; lithography resolution must match the feature size; fab processes must achieve yield on that node; packaging must accommodate the die's thermal and electrical profile. Because these specifications are co-evolved rather than standardized, substituting one supplier for another is not a procurement decision but a re-engineering of the entire chain. The mechanism of chokepoint power follows: an actor controlling a node whose output cannot be replaced within the relevant time horizon can deny downstream actors access to the entire chain's output, even if that actor holds a small share of total industry value. This is the logic of weaponized interdependence applied to production networks—centrality in a network, not aggregate market share, determines structural power. The time dimension is critical. Building a new leading-edge fab requires three to five years and ten to twenty billion dollars; developing a new lithography platform took ASML roughly two decades; EDA algorithms embody decades of accumulated process knowledge. In the short run, supply is highly inelastic, so denial is effective. In the long run, substitution is possible but costly and slow, which means chokepoint power is a wasting asset whose value depends on the speed of the target's adaptation relative to the controller's willingness to sustain denial. As Miller and Varas (2021) and Miller (2022) document, this concentration is not an accident of market competition but the outcome of decades of specialization, capital intensity, and learning-by-doing that have made each stage's dominant firms effectively irreplaceable within policy-relevant horizons.

Scope Conditions: Chokepoint power of the kind described holds only under four conditions. First, concentration at the node must be durable: barriers to entry must be high enough that no competitor can emerge within the policy horizon, whether because of capital intensity, tacit knowledge, or intellectual property. ASML's EUV monopoly satisfies this; the OSAT market, where several firms compete, does not. Second, downstream actors must be unable to stockpile or reroute: stockpiling is feasible for some inputs (Huawei accumulated chip inventories before the 2020 controls) but not for others (EUV systems are installed, maintained, and updated under service contracts that can be terminated). Third, the controlling actor must have a credible and sustained commitment to deny access; intermittent or partial denial invites circumvention. Fourth, no viable alternative pathway must exist within the relevant horizon: SMIC's production of a 7-nanometer chip using DUV multi-patterning demonstrates that a determined actor can partially substitute,

but at lower yield and higher cost. Chokepoint power erodes when any of these conditions fails—when stockpiles are built, when multi-patterning or other workarounds mature, when demand shifts to less advanced nodes where concentration is lower, or when third-country transshipment blunts the denial. The power is also node-specific: controlling packaging does not confer the leverage of controlling EUV lithography, and controlling EDA does not automatically control fabrication. Finally, the mechanism assumes that the downstream product is valuable enough to justify the cost of denial; for mature-node chips used in automobiles or appliances, where multiple suppliers exist, chokepoint logic applies weakly if at all.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, several patterns should be observable. States and firms that depend on a bottleneck node will seek to secure access through geographic diversification of production (TSMC's Arizona and Japan fabs, Intel's Ohio and Germany investments) and through stockpiling of critical inputs. Controlling states will restrict exports from bottleneck nodes (United States controls on EDA software and semiconductor manufacturing equipment; Dutch licensing of ASML EUV exports to China). Targeted states will pursue indigenous capability at the bottleneck (China's support for SMIC, Huawei's Kirin chip development, and the "whole-nation" (□□□□) mobilization for semiconductor self-sufficiency). Market prices and lead times for bottleneck inputs will spike under disruption or anticipated restriction, as occurred during the 2020–2021 chip shortage and following the 2022 export controls. Geographic concentration of leading-edge fabrication will correlate with geopolitical risk premia in equity and insurance markets, particularly around Taiwan. New stages will become chokepoints as technology evolves: advanced packaging, once a commoditized back-end process, is emerging as a binding constraint on AI accelerator supply, with TSMC's CoWoS capacity a limiting factor. Conversely, where concentration is low, behavior should differ: no state has sought to weaponize mature-node packaging in Southeast Asia, and no export control regime targets commodity memory chips with the same intensity as leading-edge logic. The framework thus generates falsifiable predictions about where controls will be imposed, where investment will flow, and where substitution efforts will concentrate.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The semiconductor supply chain as described above does not merely exclude Africa; it renders Africa structurally invisible as a participant while deeply implicated as a consumer and as a supplier of upstream minerals. Reconstructed from within African scholarship, the chain exemplifies what Walter Rodney identified as the systematic underdevelopment of the continent through its insertion into global capitalism as a supplier of raw materials and a market for finished goods: Africa exports cobalt, coltan, tantalum, and other minerals essential to electronics manufacturing, yet captures none of the value added in EDA, lithography, fabrication, or packaging, all of which occur in the Global North or East Asia. Jean-François Bayart's concept of "extraversion"—the orientation of African elites toward external patrons rather than domestic productive capacity—helps explain why African states have not historically mobilized to enter semiconductor manufacturing, though it also risks overstating elite agency and understating structural barriers. Kwame Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism illuminates how technological dependence reproduces political dependence: a state that cannot produce the chips running its communications, financial, and security infrastructure is not merely economically disadvantaged but sovereignty-constrained. The digital divide, on this view, is not a gap in access to devices or connectivity but a gap in production capability; importing smartphones and cloud services while exporting unprocessed minerals is a continuation of the colonial division of labor. Julius Nyerere's and Amílcar Cabral's insistence on self-reliant development, and Frantz Fanon's critique of the comprador bourgeoisie, frame the question of whether African states can realistically pursue semiconductor industrialization or whether such ambition diverts scarce resources from more attainable goals. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's epistemic critique reminds us that the very categories of "technology" and

"development" are not neutral but carry Eurocentric assumptions about modernity. Contemporary African scholars such as Kwesi Aning and Kwaku Danso have analyzed African agency in global governance, noting that Africa's collective weight in forums such as the African Union and the G20 could in principle be leveraged to demand technology transfer and local content requirements, as some states have done in mining. Sylvia Tamale's decolonial feminist lens adds that the burdens of technological marginalization fall unevenly: women and marginalized groups are least likely to benefit from digital infrastructure and most exposed to its harms, including surveillance and data extraction. What the African vantage reveals that the other four perspectives miss is that the semiconductor chokepoint debate among great powers is, for Africa, a debate about a supply chain in which Africa is present only at the mineral extraction stage and absent from every stage where value and power are created; "friend-shoring" and "de-risking" strategies that redirect investment toward allied states risk bypassing Africa entirely, locking in its marginalization. The African perspective also highlights that the minerals on which the chain depends—cobalt from the Democratic Republic of Congo, coltan from the Great Lakes region—are themselves chokepoints, but ones controlled not by African states but by multinational firms and armed actors, a fact that the great-power framing of "chokepoint geopolitics" systematically obscures.

Chinese: China frames the semiconductor supply chain as a domain of sovereign technological development unjustly constrained by US hegemony. The concept of "chokepoint" (□□□) technologies—those controlled by foreign suppliers—has become central to Chinese industrial policy, with semiconductors the paradigmatic case. Beijing's response combines state-led investment (the National Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund, or "Big Fund"), indigenous innovation campaigns, and a narrative of anti-hegemonic resistance that portrays US export controls as violations of market principles and WTO obligations. The success of SMIC's 7-nanometer production and Huawei's Kirin 9000S chip is presented as evidence that external pressure accelerates rather than prevents Chinese capability. This perspective contributes a reminder that chokepoint power can provoke the very substitution it seeks to prevent, and that "de-risking" by one side is read as "decoupling" by the other. It occludes, however, the role of foreign technology and talent in China's semiconductor rise, the inefficiencies and corruption associated with state-led investment, and the security concerns that motivate US and allied controls.

Russian: Russia draws lessons from China's experience while confronting its own far weaker industrial base. Post-2014 and especially post-2022 sanctions have made "technological sovereignty" (технологический суверенитет) and import substitution (импортозамещение) central to Russian policy, but the Russian microelectronics sector—centered on firms such as Mikron and Angstrem—lacks the scale, capital, and ecosystem to replicate even mature-node production without foreign equipment and EDA tools. Russia's experience functions as a cautionary case: a state that allowed its semiconductor industry to atrophy cannot quickly rebuild it under sanctions, and "parallel imports" through third countries provide only partial relief. Moscow also notes its own upstream role as a supplier of neon and palladium used in lithography, suggesting that chokepoint logic cuts both ways. This perspective contributes an emphasis on the long time horizons and sunk costs of industrial reconstruction, but it occludes the extent to which Russia's technological dependence was a policy choice rather than an inevitability, and it understates the gap between Russian ambition and capability.

Western: The United States and its allies frame semiconductor supply chain concentration as a national security vulnerability requiring "small yard, high fence" controls, friend-shoring, and industrial policy. The CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, the EU Chips Act, and Japan's semiconductor subsidies reflect a shared judgment that leading-edge fabrication and equipment must be geographically diversified among trusted partners. The economic cost debate—quantified in industry analyses by the Semiconductor Industry Asso-

ciation and Boston Consulting Group—warns that full self-sufficiency could cost the global industry over a trillion dollars, leading to a preference for "de-risking" over "decoupling." This perspective contributes a coherent account of how alliance coordination (US-Japan-Netherlands equipment controls) can multilateralize chokepoint power, and it has generated substantial public investment. It occludes, however, the possibility that security framing overstates the threat, that controls accelerate Chinese substitution, and that the costs of fragmentation fall disproportionately on developing countries and on the global innovation ecosystem.

UN: The United Nations frames semiconductor concentration through the lenses of technology transfer, the digital divide, and Sustainable Development Goal 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure). UNCTAD, the ITU, and UNESCO have emphasized that equitable access to digital technologies requires not only connectivity but participation in production, and that a bifurcated global technology stack risks leaving developing countries further behind. The UN's digital cooperation agenda calls for multilateral governance of emerging technologies and for bridging divides rather than deepening them. This perspective contributes a normative framework that centers development and equity, and it highlights the risk that great-power techno-competition will marginalize the Global South. It occludes, however, the security dilemmas that drive national controls, and its aspirational character is limited by the absence of enforcement mechanisms.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Chokepoint Analysis: ASML, TSMC, Applied Materials, and the Geography of Concentration

Bolded Causal Claim: The extreme geographic and firm-level concentration of critical semiconductor manufacturing steps creates structural chokepoints that convert commercial market positions into instruments of geopolitical coercion, transforming the supply chain from a neutral market network into a site of weaponized interdependence.

Mechanism: The mechanism derives from Farrell and Newman's (2019) theory of weaponized interdependence, which posits that global economic networks are not flat but hub-and-spoke structures in which certain nodes concentrate flows of goods, information, or capital. States that control these hubs gain two forms of power: the panopticon (surveillance of flows) and the chokepoint (denial of access). In semiconductors, the chokepoint form dominates. The mechanism operates through three channels. First, denial: a state controlling a critical node can refuse to supply inputs, halting downstream production. Second, threat of denial: even absent execution, the credible possibility of cutoff shapes the target's behavior through anticipatory compliance and self-censorship. Third, rerouting costs: because semiconductor inputs are highly specific and qualified—a chip design validated on one foundry's process cannot simply move to another—the target cannot quickly substitute, making the threat credible. The concentration is not accidental but reflects decades of capital-intensive specialization, learning curves, and network externalities. ASML's monopoly in extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography emerged from a European consortium's sustained investment and from the fact that no other firm could master the optics and light-source engineering required. TSMC's dominance in advanced foundry services reflects Morris Chang's foundry model, Taiwan's industrial policy, and the clustering of suppliers and talent. Applied Materials, Lam Research, and KLA dominate deposition, etch, and process control equipment through accumulated process knowledge and customer lock-in. The mechanism is therefore path-dependent: chokepoints are sticky because they rest on tacit knowledge and capital sunk over decades, not merely on patents or market share.

Scope Conditions: The chokepoint mechanism applies only under specific conditions. (a) Concentration must be extreme—ideally monopoly or tight oligopoly—so that no ready substitute exists. (b) The input

must be non-substitutable in the relevant time horizon; if the target can redesign around the input or source it elsewhere within months, the chokepoint is weak. (c) The controlling state must possess both the legal authority (export control jurisdiction) and the political will to deny access; a concentrated firm in a state unwilling to act is not a geopolitical chokepoint. (d) The target must be dependent in a way that cannot be quickly reversed; high switching costs and qualification timelines matter. The mechanism weakens or fails when: alternatives emerge (e.g., China's push for domestic EUV alternatives, however distant); the controlling state's allies refuse to coordinate (a firm in one country cannot choke a target if third countries supply equivalents); the good becomes commoditized; or the target has stockpiled sufficient inventory. A further scope condition concerns time: chokepoints are most powerful in the short-to-medium term; over the long term, denial accelerates the target's indigenization, potentially eroding the chokepoint. This is the "chokepoint paradox"—the very use of the weapon incentivizes its own obsolescence.

Observable Implications: If the chokepoint thesis holds, we should observe: (1) policy actions specifically targeting the concentrated nodes—US pressure on the Netherlands to restrict ASML's EUV sales to China (2019–2023), and on TSMC to halt advanced chip production for Chinese firms; (2) stockpiling and inventory accumulation by dependent states and firms—China's accumulation of semiconductor manufacturing equipment in 2020–2022 ahead of anticipated controls; (3) investment in alternative suppliers and reshoring—US CHIPS Act subsidies, TSMC's Arizona fab, Samsung's Texas expansion, Intel's Ohio and Germany projects; (4) price premiums and supply anxiety for non-controlled advanced chips; (5) diplomatic contestation around specific firms—ASML's CEO publicly warning about overreach, TSMC's Morris Chang stating that "globalization is dead" in semiconductors. Quantitatively, TSMC holds over 50% of global foundry revenue and over 90% of the most advanced nodes (5nm and below); ASML is the sole supplier of EUV lithography systems, each costing roughly $150–200 million; Applied Materials, Lam Research, and KLA together account for a dominant share of wafer fabrication equipment. These figures are consistent with the chokepoint prediction that a handful of firms control irreplaceable steps.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, the chokepoint analysis reveals not merely a US-China contest but the deeper architecture of technological dependency that structures the global economy. African economies occupy the lowest rungs of the semiconductor value chain: no advanced fabrication, minimal assembly, and limited design capacity. The concentration of chokepoints in the US, Netherlands, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea means that African states are triply dependent—on imported chips, on imported equipment, and on the geopolitical decisions of states that control both. This reproduces the dependency dynamics analyzed by Rodney (1972) and Nkrumah (1965): the periphery's integration into the global economy on terms set by the center, with value capture concentrated upstream. What the chokepoint literature often misses, from this perspective, is that the "weaponization" is not new for Africa; African states have long faced technology denial through export controls, sanctions, and conditional aid. The novelty is that great powers now experience the vulnerability that peripheral states have always known. African scholarship—Grovogui (2006) on sovereignty and the international order, Mbembe (2001) on the postcolony—suggests that the chokepoint is not an aberration of globalization but its constitutive logic: the center's control over critical nodes is what makes the periphery peripheral. The African perspective thus reframes chokepoint analysis from a security problem to be solved by the great powers into a structural feature of global capitalism that demands democratization of technology governance, not merely friend-shoring among allies.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats chokepoints as evidence of US hegemonic weaponization of commercial interdependence. Beijing's framing, articulated in official documents and state media, holds that

the US has politicized supply chains and coerced allies into restricting China's access to critical technologies, violating market principles. The chokepoint is thus not a natural market outcome but a deliberately constructed instrument of containment. This framing justifies China's pursuit of indigenous innovation and self-sufficiency (zili gengsheng) as defensive necessity rather than aggressive ambition. It occludes, however, China's own use of economic leverage in other domains (rare earths, critical minerals) and the security concerns that motivate US and allied controls.

Russian: The Russian perspective draws lessons for import substitution and sanctions resilience. Moscow's experience with Western sanctions after 2014 and 2022 has highlighted the dangers of single-source dependency and the value of domestic alternatives, however costly. Russian analysts view the semiconductor chokepoint as a cautionary tale: a state that relies on foreign-controlled nodes is vulnerable to coercion, and resilience requires accepting efficiency losses for security gains. This perspective contributes an emphasis on autarky and the political economy of sanctions-proofing, but it occludes the scale of investment required and the technological gap that makes full substitution impractical for most states.

Western: The Western perspective—encompassing US, European, and Japanese viewpoints—treats chokepoints as vulnerabilities to be remediated through allied coordination and industrial policy. The emphasis is on "friend-shoring": relocating critical production to trusted partners, diversifying away from single points of failure, and using export controls to slow adversaries. This perspective contributes a security-centered framework and has driven concrete policy (CHIPS Act, EU Chips Act, Japanese subsidies). It occludes the economic costs of fragmentation, the risk of overreach, and the exclusion of non-allied developing countries from trusted supply chains.

UN: The UN perspective frames chokepoint concentration as a barrier to equitable technology access and sustainable development. UNCTAD, ITU, and UNESCO have emphasized that participation in production, not merely consumption, is necessary for digital development, and that bifurcated technology stacks risk leaving developing countries further behind. The UN's digital cooperation agenda calls for multilateral governance and bridging divides. This perspective contributes a normative framework centering development and equity, but it occludes the security dilemmas driving national controls and lacks enforcement mechanisms.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — US Export Controls: The Entity List, CHIPS Act, and 'Small Yard, High Fence'

Bolded Causal Claim: The United States has transformed export controls from a narrow national-security tool into a comprehensive strategy of technological containment, using the Entity List, the CHIPS Act, and the "small yard, high fence" doctrine to restrict China's access to advanced semiconductors and the means of producing them, while attempting to limit collateral damage to allied economies and global supply chains.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through four layered instruments. First, the Entity List, administered by the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), designates specific foreign entities as requiring licenses for exports of controlled items; the 2019 designation of Huawei and the 2020 designation of SMIC signaled the shift from targeted to strategic controls. Second, the Foreign Direct Product Rule (FDPR) extends US jurisdiction extraterritorially: foreign-made products that are the direct product of US technology or software, or produced by plants that are themselves direct products of US technology, are subject to US controls even if no US component is present. This captures TSMC's production for Huawei and ASML's tools. Third, the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 provides $52.7 billion in subsidies and tax credits for domestic semiconductor manufacturing, conditioned on "guardrails" that prohibit recipients from expanding advanced fabrication in China for ten years. Fourth, the "small yard, high fence" doctrine, articu-

lated by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan in September 2022, holds that the US should restrict only the most critical technologies—advanced logic chips, AI accelerators, and the equipment to produce them—while keeping the broader technology trade open. The mechanism's logic is to raise the cost and reduce the feasibility of China's advanced semiconductor development, creating a "sliding doors" trajectory in which China's technological path diverges from the frontier. The October 2022 BIS rules imposed controls on advanced computing chips (below 14/16nm logic, certain memory), semiconductor manufacturing equipment, and US person support for Chinese fabs. The October 2023 update tightened these, closing loopholes (e.g., chiplet workarounds, cloud access to controlled chips) and adding more Chinese entities. Allied coordination followed: the Netherlands restricted ASML's advanced DUV and EUV exports (2023), and Japan imposed controls on 23 categories of equipment. The mechanism thus depends on a coalition; unilateral US controls would be circumvented through third-country production.

Scope Conditions: The export control strategy is effective under specific conditions. (a) The US must control critical nodes—EDA software (Synopsys, Cadence, Siemens EDA dominate), equipment (Applied Materials, Lam, KLA), and advanced design IP. (b) Allies must coordinate; the FDPR is a backstop, but allied participation reduces friction and closes gaps. (c) The target must lack short-term substitutes; if China can source equivalent equipment from non-controlled suppliers, controls leak. (d) Enforcement capacity must keep pace with circumvention; transshipment through third countries (UAE, Malaysia, Singapore) and cloud-based access to controlled compute are ongoing challenges. The strategy is less effective or counterproductive when: controls are overbroad, harming US firms' revenue and R&D funding (Nvidia's China revenue loss, Applied Materials' exposure); when they accelerate the target's indigenization by creating guaranteed demand for domestic alternatives; when allied coordination fractures due to commercial interests; or when the "small yard" expands into a "large yard," undermining the doctrine's credibility and allied buy-in. A further scope condition is technological dynamism: the definition of "advanced" shifts as the frontier moves, requiring constant rule updates that lag behind innovation.

Observable Implications: If the strategy operates as described, we should observe: (1) specific, dated control actions—October 2022 BIS rules, October 2023 update, December 2024 further tightening; (2) Chinese firm responses—Huawei's Mate 60 Pro (August 2023) containing a 7nm chip produced by SMIC, demonstrating partial progress despite controls; SMIC's reported 5nm/3nm development efforts; (3) allied policy changes—Dutch government's 2023 restrictions on ASML's NXT:2000i and subsequent tools, Japan's 2023 equipment controls; (4) US firm impacts—Nvidia's development of China-specific chips (H20, L20) to comply, then their subsequent control; Applied Materials and Lam Research revenue exposure to China (China became the largest market for some equipment makers in 2023); (5) circumvention and enforcement—BIS enforcement actions, reports of chip smuggling, and the 2024 rules addressing cloud access and chiplet architectures. The pattern of action-response-escalation is consistent with the mechanism.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African perspective, US export controls are not merely a US-China matter but a restructuring of global technology access that risks marginalizing the continent further. The "friend-shoring" logic underlying the CHIPS Act and allied coordination defines a "trusted" supply chain that excludes most African states, not because of African choices but because of geopolitical categorization. African countries, already at the periphery of semiconductor production, face reduced technology availability, higher costs, and diminished leverage as the global tech stack bifurcates. The controls also set precedents: if the US can restrict technology flows for security reasons, other powers may follow, and African states—lacking bargaining power—will be rule-takers rather than rule-makers. African scholarship on technology and development—

Aning and Danso (2013) on African agency in global governance, Tamale (2020) on decolonial approaches—suggests that the relevant question is not whether controls are justified but who participates in setting the rules. The African perspective reveals that the "small yard, high fence" is drawn by great powers for great-power interests; the yard's perimeter passes through Africa without African consent. It also highlights a paradox: controls intended to slow China may accelerate China's development of alternative, potentially cheaper technology ecosystems that could, in the long run, offer African states more affordable access than Western-controlled supply chains—though at the cost of dependency on a different hegemon.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames US export controls as hegemonic containment and a violation of free-trade principles. Official Chinese discourse describes the controls as "technological blockade" and "decoupling," positioning China as a victim of US unilateralism. The controls are cited as justification for self-reliance campaigns and for building indigenous alternatives. This perspective contributes a critique of US extraterritoriality and the politicization of trade, and it resonates with Global South grievances about unequal rules. It occludes, however, the security concerns (military end-use, human rights) that motivate some controls, and China's own restrictive practices in other domains.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats US export controls as a template for sanctions and a lesson in import substitution. Moscow's experience with Western technology sanctions has reinforced the view that dependency on foreign-controlled nodes is a strategic vulnerability. Russian analysts emphasize the need for domestic production capacity, even at high cost, and view China's push for self-sufficiency as a model—while acknowledging the scale of the challenge. This perspective contributes an emphasis on resilience and the political economy of sanctions-proofing, but it occludes the technological gap and the efficiency costs of autarky.

Western: The Western perspective treats export controls as a necessary security tool, justified by the military applications of advanced semiconductors and AI, and by the need to slow a strategic competitor. The "small yard, high fence" doctrine is presented as a calibrated approach that preserves beneficial trade while protecting critical capabilities. This perspective contributes a security-centered framework, allied coordination mechanisms, and concrete policy instruments. It occludes the economic costs to domestic firms, the risk of accelerating Chinese indigenization, and the exclusionary effects on developing countries.

UN: The UN perspective raises concerns about technology transfer, the digital divide, and SDG 9 (industry, innovation, infrastructure). UNCTAD and ITU have emphasized that export controls and bifurcated technology stacks risk leaving developing countries further behind, and that multilateral governance is preferable to unilateral measures. The UN's digital cooperation agenda calls for bridging divides rather than deepening them. This perspective contributes a normative framework centering development and equity, but it occludes the security dilemmas driving national controls and lacks enforcement mechanisms.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — China's response: SMIC, Huawei, and the pursuit of self-sufficiency

Bolded Causal Claim: China's semiconductor self-sufficiency drive is best understood as strategic adaptation to weaponized interdependence: export controls raise the expected cost of dependence, so Beijing redirects state capacity toward indigenous capability, but because chokepoints are nested, progress is fastest in stages where foreign inputs are substitutable and slowest where lithography, EDA, and materials remain indispensable.

Mechanism: The mechanism runs through a state-led reallocation of capital, talent, and procurement toward

domestic semiconductor capability, often described as a "whole-nation system" in which national champions absorb subsidies, preferential credit, and guaranteed demand. SMIC's advance to 7nm-class production without access to ASML's EUV systems illustrates the mechanism's partial success: multi-patterning with deep-ultraviolet lithography can compress the gap, but at higher cost, lower yield, and greater process complexity. Huawei's return to advanced smartphone silicon, most visibly in the Mate 60 Pro, demonstrates that controls can be circumvented or delayed through stockpiling, design optimization, and domestic foundry progress, but it does not demonstrate parity in cost, volume, or reliability. The mechanism also operates through substitution at the margins: Chinese equipment makers, EDA firms, and materials suppliers gain market share where performance requirements are less extreme, while foreign suppliers retain leverage at the frontier. A second, less visible mechanism is learning-by-doing under scarcity: when imported inputs become uncertain, domestic firms face stronger incentives to redesign products around available tools, but this can lock in suboptimal architectures and raise unit costs. A third mechanism is counter-coercion: China's controls on gallium and germanium, and its broader "de-risking" rhetoric, signal that interdependence is being politicized on both sides. The result is not autarky but a bifurcated innovation ecosystem in which China's share of mature-node capacity can rise while its dependence on foreign chokepoints at the leading edge persists.

Scope Conditions: This adaptation is most likely when four conditions hold: the state has sufficient fiscal and administrative capacity to sustain long-horizon subsidies; the domestic market is large enough to amortize learning costs; the technological gap is bridgeable through incremental engineering rather than a single missing scientific breakthrough; and foreign suppliers can be circumvented through stockpiling, third-country routing, or redesign. It is least likely when the bottleneck is a single, tightly controlled input such as EUV lithography, advanced EDA, or specialized materials; when allied enforcement is coordinated; when domestic firms lack absorptive capacity; or when subsidies generate rent-seeking rather than capability. The mechanism also assumes that national security framing can override efficiency losses, which is politically contingent and may weaken if growth slows or fiscal constraints tighten.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include SMIC's demonstrated 7nm-class production without EUV access; Huawei's re-entry into advanced smartphone markets; rising Chinese market share in mature-node fabrication and in selected equipment and materials segments; increased stockpiling of controlled inputs before enforcement dates; third-country transshipment and diversion investigations; Beijing's counter-controls on critical minerals; expanded domestic subsidy programs; and a widening gap between China's mature-node capacity and its advanced-node dependence. One should also expect more frequent "good enough" product strategies that sacrifice peak performance for supply security, and greater emphasis on packaging, chiplet architectures, and software optimization as partial substitutes for leading-edge nodes. If the mechanism is working, Chinese firms should show rising revenue in non-controlled segments and persistent cost or yield penalties in controlled ones.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, China's self-sufficiency drive is neither simply a challenge to Western hegemony nor a model to emulate; it is a reminder that technological marginalization is structural and that the global semiconductor order is being reorganized around the security priorities of great powers. African states remain predominantly consumers of digital infrastructure, with limited participation in fabrication, EDA, equipment, or advanced packaging. The African perspective, drawing on Grovogui's insistence that sovereignty is performed through control over knowledge and infrastructure, and on Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment as a relational process, highlights that both US controls and Chinese indige-

nization can narrow Africa's room for maneuver: controls restrict access to affordable advanced chips, while Chinese alternatives may create new dependencies on non-Western technology stacks. The digital divide is not merely a gap in access but a gap in agency, because African firms and governments rarely set standards, control chokepoints, or capture rents from the semiconductor value chain. Mbembe's critique of extractive modernity and Bayart's analysis of extraversion suggest that Africa's integration into global technology markets has often been mediated by external powers, leaving domestic industrial policy under-resourced. Yet the African perspective also identifies openings: regional integration under the African Continental Free Trade Area, investment in digital skills, and bargaining for technology transfer could convert geopolitical rivalry into developmental leverage. The strongest African claim is that the lesson of China's response is not autarky but strategic patience: building absorptive capacity, protecting policy space, and refusing to be locked into either Western or Chinese technological blocs without reciprocal industrial benefits. This perspective contributes a corrective to great-power narratives by centering dependency and agency, but it risks understating the scale of capital and know-how required to move from consumption to production.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames self-sufficiency as defensive modernization against coercive containment. It emphasizes indigenous innovation, the "whole-nation system," and the legitimacy of reducing vulnerability to unilateral controls. It contributes a theory of state-led catch-up under sanctions, but it can occlude the inefficiency of subsidy-driven allocation, the continued dependence on foreign chokepoints, and the risk that techno-nationalism narrows international cooperation.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats China's response as a larger-scale version of import substitution under sanctions, emphasizing state capacity, parallel supply chains, and resilience. It contributes lessons about operating under restricted access, but it occludes differences in market size, technological depth, and alliance structure; Russia's experience is more about survival than frontier catch-up.

Western: The Western perspective reads China's response as evidence that controls are working partially but also accelerating indigenization. It emphasizes the need for allied coordination, enforcement, and "small yard, high fence" discipline. It contributes a security-centered framework, but it can occlude the economic costs to domestic firms and the possibility that overreach strengthens Chinese resolve.

UN: The UN perspective stresses technology transfer, the digital divide, and SDG 9. It warns that bifurcated technology stacks and unilateral controls may leave developing countries further behind. It contributes a development-centered normative framework, but it occludes the security dilemmas driving national controls and lacks enforcement mechanisms.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The strategic logic: economic security as national security

Bolded Causal Claim: The redefinition of economic security as national security transforms semiconductor chokepoints from commercial assets into strategic terrain, justifying state intervention across the supply chain; but this securitization can overreach, conflating resilience with autarky and imposing costs that fall unevenly on allies and developing economies.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with a cognitive shift: policymakers treat concentrated supply chains not merely as efficiency outcomes but as vulnerabilities that adversaries can exploit. This reframing converts firms' sourcing decisions into security externalities and legitimizes instruments that were previously considered protectionist: export controls, investment screening, subsidies, friend-shoring, and alliance coordination. In semiconductors, the mechanism is especially powerful because the supply chain is both highly concentrated and militarily salient; advanced chips underpin AI, precision weapons, and intelligence systems.

Once securitized, the policy logic expands: a control on lithography becomes a control on AI capability; a subsidy for domestic fabs becomes a hedge against geopolitical shock; a restriction on Chinese firms becomes a tool to slow an adversary's military modernization. The mechanism then feeds back through markets: firms restructure supply chains, governments fund redundancy, and allies negotiate burden-sharing. But securitization also generates second-order effects. It can accelerate the very indigenization it seeks to prevent, as targeted states invest in alternatives. It can raise costs for downstream industries, from automotive to cloud computing. It can strain alliances when partners face different exposure to China. And it can marginalize developing countries that lack the fiscal capacity to subsidize fabs or the diplomatic weight to secure exemptions. The strategic logic is therefore not simply "security first"; it is a contest over how much efficiency to sacrifice for resilience, and who bears that sacrifice.

Scope Conditions: Securitization is most coherent when three conditions hold: chokepoints are genuinely concentrated and difficult to replicate; the adversary has both capability and intent to exploit them; and domestic political coalitions accept higher costs for security. It is least coherent when controls are overbroad, when allies are not aligned, when the targeted technology diffuses through third countries, or when the economic costs undermine the industrial base that security is meant to protect. The mechanism also depends on credible enforcement: a fence with holes becomes a subsidy for evasion. Finally, securitization is bounded by innovation dynamics; if controls slow domestic firms' access to global markets or talent, they may weaken the technological leadership they are meant to preserve.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include the CHIPS Act's subsidies for domestic fabrication and R&D; the EU Chips Act and comparable Japanese and Korean programs; expanded US export controls in October 2022 and October 2023; allied coordination through the US-Japan-Netherlands arrangement on advanced lithography; "friend-shoring" and "de-risking" rhetoric; TSMC's investments in Arizona and Japan; increased screening of outbound investment; and China's counter-controls on critical minerals. One should also expect debates over the size of the "yard," the height of the "fence," and the cost of redundancy; lobbying by semiconductor firms over control thresholds; and diplomatic friction with allies over extraterritorial application. If securitization is stabilizing, one should see diversified but still interconnected supply chains; if destabilizing, one should see accelerated bifurcation, higher prices, and reduced innovation spillovers.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective treats the securitization of semiconductors as a warning that economic security is being defined by great powers in ways that can reproduce technological marginalization. African states are rarely the architects of export controls or subsidy regimes, yet they bear the consequences: higher prices for digital infrastructure, reduced access to advanced chips, and pressure to align with one technological bloc or another. Drawing on Mamdani's critique of bifurcated states and Nkrumah's analysis of neo-colonialism, the African vantage point sees "friend-shoring" as potentially a new form of exclusion, in which security partnerships determine who gets access to technology and who does not. The perspective also draws on Nyerere's emphasis on self-reliance and Cabral's insistence on reclaiming the productive base, suggesting that African agency requires not autarky but strategic industrial policy: investing in skills, regional value chains, and bargaining capacity. Tamale's feminist political economy and Oyěwùmí's critique of imposed categories remind us that "security" is not gender-neutral or culturally universal; who is protected, and at whose cost, matters. The African perspective contributes a necessary corrective by asking whether resilience for some is exclusion for others, and by insisting that development, not only deterrence, is a security good. Its limitation is that it can understate the genuine security dilemmas that drive great-power controls,

and it may overestimate the policy space available to states with limited fiscal and technological capacity.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames economic security as national security in mirror image: US securitization is read as hegemonic containment, justifying China's own controls and self-sufficiency drive. It contributes an anti-hegemonic narrative and a theory of defensive modernization, but it can occlude the coercive uses of interdependence by all parties and the costs of bifurcation.

Russian: The Russian perspective emphasizes sanctions resilience, import substitution, and the weaponization of economic interdependence by Western powers. It contributes a critique of unipolar economic governance, but it occludes Russia's own coercive uses of energy and trade and the limits of its technological base.

Western: The Western perspective centers technology security, alliance coordination, and the economic cost debate. It argues that securitization is necessary but must be calibrated to avoid self-harm. It contributes detailed policy frameworks, but it can occlude distributional costs to allies and developing countries and the risk of over-securitization.

UN: The UN perspective centers technology transfer, the digital divide, and SDG 9. It warns that securitization may undermine multilateral development goals and calls for governance that bridges divides. It contributes a normative framework, but it occludes enforcement challenges and the security dilemmas that drive national measures.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

From an African vantage point, semiconductor chokepoint geopolitics is not primarily a contest between Washington and Beijing over advanced nodes; it is the latest phase in a long history of technological dependency, unequal exchange, and epistemic marginalization. The chokepoints that dominate policy debate—electronic design automation, extreme ultraviolet lithography, leading-edge fabrication, and advanced packaging—are concentrated in a small set of wealthy states and firms, while African economies remain positioned mainly as suppliers of raw and semi-processed minerals, consumers of finished devices, and recipients of standards written elsewhere. The "digital divide" is therefore not a temporary gap in access that can be closed by connectivity projects alone; it is a structural feature of a global political economy in which control over productive technology, intellectual property, and data infrastructure is asymmetrically distributed. African scholarship on underdevelopment, neo-colonialism, and extraversion provides the theoretical resources for seeing this asymmetry not as an accident of market evolution but as a continuation of older patterns of extraction and subordination.

The lineage begins with Rodney's argument that underdevelopment is not a stage preceding development but a product of the same historical process that produced European industrialization. Applied to semiconductors, Rodney's insight suggests that Africa's limited participation in high-value segments of the supply chain is not simply a failure to "catch up"; it is partly the outcome of a global division of labor that rewards design, fabrication, and platform control while relegating mineral extraction and low-value assembly to the periphery. Nkrumah's neo-colonialism thesis extends this logic: formal political independence does not guarantee economic sovereignty, and external control can persist through technology, finance, and standards rather than direct rule. In this reading, US export controls, Chinese self-sufficiency drives, and allied "friend-shoring"

initiatives may reorganize supply chains without altering the underlying hierarchy. African states may be offered new roles as mineral suppliers or assembly locations, but the commanding heights of semiconductor production—EDA tools, lithography systems, process knowledge, and advanced packaging—remain elsewhere. Cabral's insistence that national liberation requires mastery of the productive forces, and Fanon's analysis of the psychological and material violence of colonial systems, reinforce the point that technological dependency is not merely an economic inconvenience; it shapes the horizon of political possibility.

Bayart's concept of extraversion adds a crucial nuance. African political economies have often been organized around the strategic use of external connections, with elites deriving power and resources from their position as intermediaries between global markets and domestic societies. Semiconductor geopolitics creates new opportunities for extraversion: critical-mineral concessions, data-center investments, special economic zones, and digital infrastructure deals can become sources of rent and patronage. From this perspective, the danger is not only exclusion but also a form of inclusion that deepens dependency by locking African states into extractive or low-value roles. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state and decentralized despotism helps explain why many African governments struggle to convert mineral endowments or digital ambitions into broad-based industrial capacity: colonial legal inheritances, weak bureaucratic coherence, and fragmented authority can undermine long-term technology policy. The result is that even where African states articulate digital sovereignty agendas, implementation may be captured by narrow elites or external partners.

Grovogui's critique of international law and global governance is equally important. The language of "technology security," "resilience," and "trusted supply chains" often presents itself as universal, yet it can mask the interests of powerful states and firms. African agency in global technology governance has historically been limited, whether in standard-setting bodies, trade negotiations, or intellectual-property regimes. The UN's development frameworks may call for technology transfer, but the enforcement of such commitments is weak, and security-driven export controls can override them. An African perspective therefore asks not only who controls fabs but who gets to define the categories of "critical," "trusted," and "secure." Aning and Danso's African security scholarship suggests that security should be understood in human and structural terms—food, health, climate, and livelihoods—not only in terms of advanced military technology. From this standpoint, the securitization of semiconductors can divert attention and resources from more immediate vulnerabilities while justifying external intervention in the name of supply-chain resilience.

The African vantage point also reveals mechanisms that the other four perspectives tend to understate. First, mineral extraction without value addition: the geopolitics of semiconductors and related clean-energy technologies increases demand for cobalt, coltan, copper, lithium, and other minerals, many of which are found in Africa. Without processing capacity, local content requirements, and regional industrial planning, this demand can reproduce extractivism rather than development. The "critical minerals" discourse may sound like opportunity, but without beneficiation it risks becoming a new vocabulary for old patterns. Second, downstream exclusion: even where African economies grow, they often remain at the bottom of the "smiling curve," capturing little value from design, fabrication, or platform services. Third, standards and intellectual property: African firms and researchers face barriers to participation in patent pools, EDA ecosystems, and technical standards, which means that even successful local innovation may be constrained by foreign-controlled IP. Fourth, data and cloud dependency: semiconductors enable AI, cloud computing, and digital platforms, and African data is frequently stored, processed, and monetized outside the continent. This creates a form of digital dependency that parallels older resource dependency. Fifth, ecological and gendered costs: mining and electronics assembly can impose disproportionate burdens on women, informal workers, and local environments, while e-waste flows can turn parts of Africa into sinks for discarded technology. These costs are often invisible in aggregate measures of supply-chain efficiency or national security.

What this perspective contributes that the others cannot is a insistence that semiconductor geopolitics be evaluated by its effects on technological citizenship and developmental equity, not only by great-power balance or market efficiency. It shows that "de-risking" and "friend-shoring" are not neutral technical adjustments; they reorganize exclusion. If supply chains move from China to Vietnam, India, or Mexico without deliberate inclusion of African processing, design, and standards capacity, Africa may remain peripheral under a new geography. It also shows that technological sovereignty need not mean autarky. African states are unlikely to build leading-edge fabs in the near term, and pretending otherwise would waste scarce resources. But sovereignty can mean regional integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area, shared digital infrastructure, pooled procurement, investment in applied research, and collective bargaining over minerals and data. It can mean "appropriate technology" strategies that prioritize agricultural technology, health systems, climate adaptation, and public digital infrastructure rather than mimicking the advanced-node priorities of great powers. It can mean demanding technology transfer not as charity but as a matter of justice, given the historical extraction of resources and knowledge from the continent.

The African perspective also has important occlusions and limits, and a rigorous account must acknowledge them. Structuralist narratives can understate African agency: there are documented cases of digital leapfrogging, fintech innovation, mobile-money ecosystems, and startup growth that do not fit a simple dependency model. Heterogeneity matters: South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Kenya, and Rwanda occupy very different positions in digital and industrial capacity, and pan-African generalizations can obscure these differences. State capacity and governance constraints are real: industrial policy requires reliable electricity, skilled labor, capital, and institutional coherence, and corruption or debt distress can undermine even well-designed plans. Some African elites benefit from extraversion and may not seek autonomy. Finally, an overemphasis on historical determinism can obscure contemporary policy choices and the possibility of incremental gains through regional cooperation. The strongest version of the African perspective therefore combines structural critique with a pragmatic, capacity-sensitive agenda: it does not romanticize the state, but it insists that the global semiconductor order be judged by whether it expands or contracts the space for African technological citizenship.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on semiconductor chokepoint geopolitics is shaped by a historical memory of technological containment and a strategic doctrine of self-reliance. From this vantage point, US export controls are not merely prudent security measures but an attempt to preserve hegemony by "strangling" China's technological development. The vocabulary of "small yard, high fence" is read as a legitimizing frame for a broader project of containment, while the Entity List and CHIPS Act are seen as instruments of economic coercion. Chinese policy discourse emphasizes *zili gengsheng* (self-reliance) and indigenous innovation, not as autarky but as strategic resilience: the goal is to reduce vulnerability to external disruption while remaining integrated into global markets where possible. The pursuit of self-sufficiency in semiconductors is therefore framed as a defensive necessity and a matter of national sovereignty, analogous to earlier campaigns to overcome technological blockades.

This perspective contributes several important insights. It highlights the political character of supply-chain concentration: chokepoints are not natural market outcomes but are embedded in alliances, export-control regimes, and intellectual-property systems that favor incumbent powers. It demonstrates that state capacity, long-term planning, and public-private coordination can accelerate catch-up even under pressure, as seen in the mobilization of firms such as SMIC and Huawei and in the broader push for "new quality productive

forces." It also challenges the assumption that Western stewardship of advanced technology is benign or neutral, pointing to the ways in which security language can be used to protect market position. For many in the Global South, the Chinese narrative resonates because it frames technology not as a gift from advanced economies but as a domain of sovereign equality.

At the same time, the Chinese perspective has significant occlusions. It can understate the costs of duplication, inefficiency, and talent constraints in state-led catch-up strategies. It may overstate progress by treating symbolic breakthroughs as evidence of systemic parity. It tends to downplay the security concerns of other states, including those that fear technology transfer could strengthen coercive capabilities. The anti-hegemonic framing can also obscure China's own uses of economic leverage and its growing technological power, which may reproduce dependency for smaller partners. Finally, "dual circulation" and indigenous innovation do not automatically resolve chokepoints in EDA, lithography, or advanced materials; they may shift bottlenecks rather than eliminate them. A balanced assessment recognizes that China's response is both a rational reaction to containment and a project with its own distributional and geopolitical costs.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective treats semiconductor chokepoint geopolitics as a lesson in vulnerability and a justification for import substitution. From Moscow's standpoint, Western sanctions after 2022 demonstrated that concentrated supply chains can be weaponized against any state that challenges the prevailing order. Russia's experience of chip shortages in key sectors reinforced the view that technological sovereignty is not optional but existential. The policy response has emphasized parallel imports, domestic alternatives, and closer technological partnership with China, framed as a necessary adaptation to a hostile international environment. In this narrative, US export controls are not exceptional security measures but part of a broader pattern of economic warfare that can be turned against any non-compliant state.

This perspective contributes a useful corrective to complacent assumptions about supply-chain resilience. It shows that even states with significant resource endowments and military capacity can face acute technological bottlenecks when access to advanced semiconductors is restricted. It validates diversification and redundancy as strategic imperatives and highlights the political risks of over-dependence on a small number of suppliers or jurisdictions. It also underscores that sanctions and export controls have spillover effects: they do not merely target adversaries but can disrupt global markets, raise costs, and accelerate fragmentation.

Yet the Russian perspective is heavily occluded by its own political and technological limitations. It often overstates resilience by treating workarounds as sustainable solutions, while understating quality gaps, brain drain, and the long-term costs of isolation. It can ignore Russia's own coercive uses of energy and trade, which undermine its claim to be a victim of arbitrary economic power. The import-substitution agenda may preserve regime survival in the short term but at the expense of innovation, efficiency, and integration into global value chains. Moreover, the Russian framing can be instrumentalized to justify aggression by portraying any external constraint as illegitimate. A rigorous assessment therefore accepts the warning about concentrated dependency while rejecting the broader narrative that all technology controls are merely imperial coercion.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective centers on technology security, alliance coordination, and the economic cost of securitization. Its core claim is that semiconductors are foundational to military power, economic competitiveness, and critical infrastructure, and that the concentration of advanced production in a few locations creates

unacceptable strategic risk. The policy toolkit includes the Entity List, export controls on advanced chips and manufacturing equipment, the CHIPS Act's subsidies for domestic fabrication, and "friend-shoring" initiatives designed to move sensitive production into allied jurisdictions. The "small yard, high fence" formula attempts to reconcile security with openness: restrict only the most sensitive technologies while preserving broader trade and innovation flows.

This perspective contributes detailed policy frameworks and a sophisticated understanding of chokepoints. It has mobilized substantial public investment, coordinated allies, and forced a global reckoning with the security implications of semiconductor concentration. It also introduces an important economic cost debate: subsidies are expensive, controls can reduce firm revenues, and excessive securitization may fragment innovation networks and raise consumer prices. The Western view is not monolithic; it includes disagreements between hawks who favor broad decoupling and moderates who prefer calibrated "de-risking." This internal debate is a strength, because it recognizes that security and efficiency must be balanced.

However, the Western perspective occludes several issues. It can treat market outcomes as natural before controls while ignoring the prior role of state support in building Western technological leadership. It often underestimates distributional costs to allies, who may bear compliance burdens without equal influence over policy design. It can also marginalize developing countries, whose access to technology and development goals may be collateral damage in great-power competition. The securitization frame may conflate genuine security threats with commercial competition, risking overreach. Finally, by defining "trusted" suppliers in geopolitical terms, it may reproduce hierarchies that exclude African and other Global South actors from high-value participation. The strongest Western position acknowledges these costs and seeks multilateral legitimacy, but the perspective as a whole remains centered on the security of advanced economies.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective approaches semiconductor chokepoint geopolitics through the lenses of technology transfer, the digital divide, and sustainable development, particularly SDG 9 on industry, innovation, and infrastructure. From this vantage point, the central problem is not only who controls advanced chips but whether the global technology order enables inclusive and sustainable development. Export controls, subsidy races, and supply-chain fragmentation are seen as potential threats to multilateral development goals, especially for countries that lack the fiscal capacity to subsidize domestic fabs or the diplomatic leverage to secure exemptions. The UN framework emphasizes technology as a means of achieving human development, not merely as an instrument of state power.

This perspective contributes a normative and institutional vocabulary that the other four often lack. It foregrounds metrics of inclusion, capacity building, and equitable access, and it calls for governance arrangements that bridge rather than deepen divides. It reminds policymakers that semiconductors are not only military assets but enablers of health systems, education, climate monitoring, and public administration. It also provides a platform for developing countries to articulate demands for technology transfer, fairer intellectual-property regimes, and support for digital infrastructure. In principle, this can counterbalance the tendency of great-power competition to crowd out development concerns.

The UN perspective's main occlusion is enforcement. It can articulate norms and goals but lacks the hard power to compel compliance from major states or firms. Security dilemmas and alliance politics often override multilateral development commitments, and technology transfer pledges are frequently diluted by national-security exceptions. The perspective may also be overly aspirational, assuming that governance frameworks can manage conflicts that are rooted in material power and strategic rivalry. Nevertheless, it

remains essential because it insists that the semiconductor order be judged not only by its contribution to great-power security but by its effects on global equity and sustainable development.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reframes semiconductor chokepoints as structures of technological dependency and global inequality; asks who bears the costs of great-power techno-decoupling and whether "friend-shoring" includes Africa or merely relocates concentration among allies.	May understate the security motivations behind US controls and the genuine risks of military diffusion; can treat "Africa" as more homogeneous than it is.	Equity, technological self-determination, inclusive development, and digital sovereignty.	African dependence on imported digital infrastructure; limited domestic fabrication; mineral endowments without downstream value capture; digital divide indicators.	Western and Chinese perspectives argue that security and industrial policy, not equity, are the primary drivers of state behavior; African states may also benefit from cheaper mature-node imports and foreign investment.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Demonstrates how a targeted state can mobilize industrial policy, firm-level innovation, and alternative supply routes under sanctions; reveals the limits of unilateral controls.	Tends to frame US actions as purely hegemonic, understating legitimate security concerns and allied coordination; may overstate progress toward full self-sufficiency.	Sovereignty, anti-hegemony, development rights, and strategic autonomy.	SMIC's 7nm-class production for Huawei; stockpiling before controls; gallium and germanium export controls; domestic equipment subsidies and talent programs.	Western perspective: security externalities justify controls; African/UN perspectives: retaliation can harm developing economies and fragment global supply chains.
Russian	Draws analogies between semiconductor controls and sanctions resilience; emphasizes import substitution, parallel imports, and state-led technological sovereignty.	Russia is not a major semiconductor producer; may overgeneralize from its own sanctions experience and underestimate capital intensity, ecosystem depth, and network effects.	Multipolarity, strategic autonomy, resistance to Western economic coercion.	Russian import-substitution programs; parallel import schemes; lessons drawn from technology sanctions.	Chinese and Western perspectives: semiconductor ecosystems require decades, foreign inputs, and dense supplier networks; Russia's model is not easily scalable.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Articulates the security rationale for controls: protect military-relevant compute, slow adversary AI and quantum progress, coordinate allies, and use economic tools for strategic ends.	May understate costs to firms, innovation, and allies; risks overestimating control efficacy; can neglect Global South impacts and the distributional consequences of techno-decoupling.	National and alliance security, controlled openness, and economic security as national security.	Entity List designations; foreign direct product rule; CHIPS Act subsidies; allied coordination with the Netherlands and Japan.	Chinese perspective: coercion and containment; African/UN perspectives: inequity, development harm, and erosion of technology transfer norms.
UN	Places semiconductor governance in a development and equity frame; emphasizes technology transfer, the digital divide, SDG 9, and multilateral norms.	Lacks enforcement capacity; can be aspirational; may not fully account for security dilemmas, alliance politics, or the material power behind great-power rivalry.	Inclusive development, multilateral cooperation, human security, and global equity.	SDG 9; UNCTAD/ITU digital economy reporting; technology transfer debates; development-finance and capacity-building agendas.	Western perspective: security exceptions are necessary; Chinese perspective: sovereignty limits external governance; African perspective: implementation gaps persist.

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case. The 2022–2023 US export controls on advanced chips and semiconductor manufacturing equipment, including the expansion of the Entity List, the foreign direct product rule, and allied coordination with the Netherlands and Japan, followed by Chinese responses such as SMIC's 7nm-class production for Huawei, stockpiling, and retaliatory controls on gallium and germanium.

Levels of analysis. At the **individual** level, the policy reflects bureaucratic politics among officials in the Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security, the National Security Council, the Pentagon, and

allied ministries, as well as firm-level lobbying by Nvidia, AMD, Intel, Applied Materials, ASML, TSMC, Samsung, and others. Individual beliefs about China's military-civil fusion, Huawei's telecommunications role, and SMIC's technological progress shaped the timing and scope of controls, while Chinese engineers, procurement managers, and intermediaries sought workarounds. This level explains why the final policy took the form of a "small yard, high fence" rather than a blanket decoupling: compromises among security hawks, commercial interests, and allied governments produced targeted restrictions with carve-outs. At the **state** level, the United States sought to preserve its military-technological edge and slow China's advanced compute capabilities, while China sought to reduce vulnerability to external coercion; Taiwan's position as the central advanced foundry hub and the Netherlands' and Japan's roles as equipment chokepoint suppliers made alliance coordination essential. The CHIPS Act's subsidies and China's counter-subsidies show that states treated semiconductor capacity as strategic infrastructure, not merely commercial output. At the **systemic** level, the case is an instance of weaponized interdependence: the United States leveraged its structural position in electronic design automation, advanced equipment, and design intellectual property, while China retained counter-leverage through market size, critical minerals, and its role in mature-node production. Systemic analysis explains why controls were both possible and incomplete—interdependence creates leverage, but also mutual vulnerability and incentives for decoupling. At the **transnational** level, global value chains, cross-border research and development, talent mobility, standards bodies, and illicit procurement networks determined how controls were implemented and evaded. Firms rerouted through subsidiaries, third-country intermediaries, cloud access arrangements, and servicing channels; this level explains the loopholes and adaptive responses that limited the controls' immediate effect.

Mechanism. The mechanism combined legal extraterritoriality with chokepoint concentration. The 2022 controls restricted exports of advanced logic and memory chips, certain manufacturing equipment, and US-person support for Chinese fabrication facilities; the 2023 updates expanded coverage to additional equipment and destinations and tightened the foreign direct product rule so that foreign-made items produced with US technology or software could be controlled. Allied coordination extended restrictions to Dutch advanced lithography systems and Japanese equipment categories, reducing the availability of alternative suppliers. The intended causal chain ran from restricted access to advanced nodes and tools, to slower Chinese progress in AI-relevant compute, to preserved US and allied military-technological advantage. The limiting mechanisms were equally important: pre-implementation stockpiling, gray-market transshipment, cloud-based access to controlled chips, servicing of installed equipment, continued availability of mature-node tools, and China's domestic substitution efforts. China's response included SMIC's production of a 7nm-class chip for Huawei's Mate 60 Pro, expanded subsidies, talent programs, equipment localization, and retaliatory export controls on gallium and germanium. The result was not a clean halt to Chinese progress but a partial slowdown, higher costs, and accelerated indigenous innovation efforts.

Perspective reconstruction. From the African perspective, the 2022–2023 controls show how advanced technology governance is negotiated among great powers with limited African voice. African economies remain consumers of digital infrastructure and advanced chips, with limited participation in fabrication, electronic design automation, or equipment manufacturing, so the episode reinforces technological marginalization and dependency on external standards, cloud platforms, and vendor ecosystems. At the same time, the controls may create openings for African states to attract mature-node investment, digital services, or mineral-processing roles, but only if industrial policy and skills development accompany them. The African perspective's distinctive contribution is to ask who bears the costs of great-power techno-decoupling and whether "friend-shoring" includes Africa or merely relocates concentration among allies. Its occlusion is that it may understate the security motivations driving US policy and the genuine risks of military diffusion.

From the Chinese perspective, the controls are read as evidence of US hegemonic containment and as validation of indigenous innovation; China's response—SMIC's 7nm-class chip, Huawei's comeback, and export controls on gallium and germanium—demonstrates both vulnerability and adaptive capacity, while emphasizing sovereignty and the right to develop. This perspective occludes the security externalities of advanced compute and China's continued dependence on foreign equipment and talent. From the Russian perspective, the US semiconductor controls are treated as a template for sanctions and a lesson in resilience, highlighting import substitution, parallel imports, and state-led technological sovereignty, while acknowledging that Russia lacks China's scale and ecosystem depth; it occludes the capital intensity and network effects that make semiconductor self-sufficiency uniquely difficult. From the Western perspective, the controls are justified as protecting military-relevant technology and slowing China's AI and quantum progress, while coordinating allies and using economic tools for strategic ends; it emphasizes legal precision, alliance burden-sharing, and the "small yard, high fence" logic, but occludes costs to firms, innovation, and the risk that controls accelerate Chinese substitution. From the UN perspective, the controls raise concerns about technology transfer, the digital divide, and SDG 9, while acknowledging security exceptions; it stresses multilateral governance and equitable access, but lacks enforcement and may be aspirational.

Explicit adjudication. The Western security perspective best explains the proximate design and intent of the 2022–2023 controls: the Entity List, the foreign direct product rule, and allied coordination were instruments to protect a military-technological edge and manage alliance risk. However, it is insufficient alone because it underestimates transnational adaptation, the limits of unilateral leverage, and the distributional consequences of reorganizing the semiconductor order around great-power security. The Chinese perspective best explains the response and its political framing, but overstates autonomy and understates continued dependence on foreign tools and talent. The African perspective does not explain the policy's origin, but best identifies its blind spot: the global semiconductor order is being reorganized with limited attention to development equity, digital sovereignty, and the position of states outside the US-China rivalry. If one perspective must be privileged for explaining the case's outcome, the systemic weaponized-interdependence perspective—expressed through Western policy design and Chinese adaptation—best captures both the attempt to control chokepoints and its partial failure. Yet that systemic view still misses the African distributional question, which should be treated as a normative correction to the analysis rather than as an alternative explanation of state behavior.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. **Mechanism identification.** Distinguish whether China's July 2023 announcement of licensing requirements for gallium and germanium exports was primarily retaliation for US, Dutch, and Japanese semiconductor controls, a demonstration of latent chokepoint power, domestic industrial policy, or a combination. Specify the causal chain from policy lever to intended effect and the feedback loops that may weaken it.
2. **Levels of analysis.** Analyze the episode at the individual level (procurement managers and inventory behavior), the state level (China's Ministry of Commerce, US Bureau of Industry and Security, allied regulators), the systemic level (weaponized interdependence, alliance coordination, market adjustment), and the transnational level (multinational supply chains, WTO dispute settlement). Identify

which level best explains short-run price spikes and which best explains long-run adjustment.

3. **Perspective reconstruction.** Steel-man the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN interpretations of the controls. For each, state its central claim, strongest supporting evidence, and principal blind spot.

4. **Historical analogue.** Compare the 2023 gallium and germanium controls with China's 2010 rare-earth export restrictions toward Japan. Identify the similarities (supply concentration, signaling, downstream panic) and the differences (byproduct status, licensing rather than quotas, globalized chip demand) that matter for inference.

5. **Falsifiers.** List observable implications that would weaken the claim that the controls create durable leverage: rapid price normalization, high license approval rates, new non-Chinese capacity, process substitution, or legal reversal.

6. **Adjudication.** Conclude whether the controls are better understood as effective coercion, costly signaling, or self-limiting leverage. State the boundary conditions—time horizon, substitutability, and alliance coordination—under which each interpretation becomes more plausible.

MODEL ANSWER

The 2023 Chinese controls on gallium and germanium are best analyzed as a case of asymmetric but time-limited leverage rather than durable coercion. The immediate mechanism was not a total embargo but a licensing requirement imposed by China's Ministry of Commerce on exports of specified gallium and germanium products, announced in July 2023 and effective in August 2023. Because China occupies a dominant position in the production of these inputs—gallium largely as a byproduct of aluminum processing and germanium as a byproduct of zinc processing—the policy converted latent supply concentration into an active cost shock. The intended causal chain ran from administrative uncertainty to higher input prices, inventory hoarding, and pressure on downstream semiconductor, fiber-optic, and defense-related manufacturers in the United States, Europe, Japan, and their partners. Yet the same mechanism contained its own limits: licensing is not prohibition, and the very visibility of the threat accelerated stockpiling, recycling, and the search for alternative sources.

At the state level, the controls functioned as retaliation and signaling in the context of US-led restrictions on advanced semiconductors and manufacturing equipment. They demonstrated that chokepoints are reciprocal: the same logic of weaponized interdependence that justified US controls could be turned against Western and allied supply chains. At the systemic level, however, the episode revealed that leverage depends on elasticity. Gallium and germanium are not rare in geological terms; their concentration reflects processing economics and environmental regulation rather than absolute scarcity. Therefore, a sustained price premium can induce new capacity, especially where allied governments subsidize diversification. At the transnational level, multinational firms responded not by exiting China entirely but by segmenting supply chains, dual-sourcing, and increasing inventory buffers. The individual level matters too: procurement managers facing license uncertainty rationally over-order, which can temporarily amplify price spikes even when physical scarcity is modest.

The African perspective is primary because it exposes what the great-power framing occludes. For African states and firms, the controls are not merely a US-China bargaining chip; they are an additional layer of structural dependency in a digital economy where Africa already imports most semiconductors, network equipment, and cloud infrastructure. Higher input costs and compliance fragmentation can raise the price

of connectivity, delay 5G and data-center expansion, and widen the digital divide. African scholarship on technological marginalization would read the episode as another instance in which African development is conditioned by decisions taken in Beijing, Washington, Brussels, and Tokyo, with little African voice in the rule-making. At the same time, the African vantage point can identify opportunity: if global buyers diversify away from concentrated supply, African mineral endowments and processing ambitions could gain strategic attention, but only if accompanied by industrial policy, skills, and energy capacity. Without those, Africa risks remaining an exporter of raw materials while importing the technologies that determine productivity.

The Chinese perspective frames the controls as sovereign and reciprocal: a state with dominant processing capacity uses licensing to defend its interests against extraterritorial technology restrictions and to signal that decoupling will be costly. Its strength is that it correctly identifies the asymmetry of US controls and the legitimacy of resource sovereignty; its occlusion is that it underestimates how quickly buyers can adapt and how the policy may accelerate the very diversification that reduces China's future leverage. The Russian perspective treats the episode as validation of import-substitution and sanctions-resilience strategies: if China can weaponize inputs, then states under sanctions must build redundant supply chains and state-directed industrial capacity. Its contribution is attention to resilience; its blind spot is that Russia's smaller market and technological base make replication far harder than the analogy suggests. The Western perspective emphasizes technology security and friend-shoring: controls are necessary to slow China's military-civil fusion, but they impose costs on downstream industries and require allied coordination. Its strength is strategic clarity; its occlusion is the tendency to treat economic pain as acceptable without fully accounting for global development costs. The UN perspective centers technology transfer, the digital divide, and SDG 9: export controls and retaliatory licensing fragment the global technology commons and may undermine inclusive industrialization. Its contribution is normative; its limitation is that it lacks enforcement power when security logics dominate.

The best historical analogue is China's 2010 rare-earth export restrictions toward Japan. Both episodes involved concentrated Chinese supply, sudden administrative restrictions, downstream panic, and subsequent diversification. The differences matter: gallium and germanium are byproducts with latent non-Chinese capacity, whereas rare earths involved more complex separation and refining; the 2023 measures used licensing rather than explicit quotas; and global demand for chips is more politically salient than rare-earth demand was in 2010. The analogue therefore supports the inference that China's leverage is real but perishable: Japan and others diversified after 2010, and China's market share in some rare earths later declined. Similarly, if gallium and germanium prices remain elevated, non-Chinese projects, recycling, and process redesign will expand, eroding the chokepoint.

Falsifiers of the durable-coercion thesis include rapid normalization of prices after an initial spike, high license approval rates with minimal disruption, measurable expansion of non-Chinese capacity, substitution in manufacturing processes, and a decline in China's share of global supply. Conversely, if downstream firms experience sustained shortages, if allied governments fail to coordinate diversification, or if China tightens licensing into de facto bans, the leverage thesis would be strengthened. On balance, the controls are best characterized as costly signaling with bounded, short-run coercive effects: they impose real costs and demonstrate reciprocity, but they also accelerate the market and policy responses that reduce China's future chokepoint power. The boundary conditions are time horizon, substitutability, and alliance coordination; under conditions of low substitutability and weak coordination, leverage persists, while under high substitutability and strong coordination, it dissipates.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In 2024, an African mobile-network operator plans to expand 5G infrastructure using imported base-station components and cloud servers. Its suppliers depend on advanced semiconductors subject to US export controls and on gallium and germanium inputs subject to Chinese licensing. The operator has no domestic semiconductor fabrication, limited foreign-exchange reserves, and must choose between a Western vendor package with compliance guarantees and a lower-cost Asian package with uncertain licensing exposure. The government seeks to attract digital investment while avoiding secondary sanctions. Assess the case over a three-to-five-year horizon, including procurement risk, compliance costs, supplier diversification, and the possibility that African mineral endowments could support future processing capacity. The memo should distinguish immediate cost shocks from structural dependency. Analyze the mechanism, perspectives, analogue, and falsifiers.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts.

Mechanism: Explain how US controls and Chinese licensing interact to shape the operator's procurement options; identify the causal chain from chokepoint to price, uncertainty, and strategic choice.

Perspective reconstruction: Steel-man African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of the operator's dilemma; state what each reveals and what it occludes.

Historical analogue: Compare the case to a prior episode of input or technology restriction, such as China's 2010 rare-earth measures or an earlier technology embargo, and specify what transfers and what does not.

Falsifiers: State observable evidence that would weaken your conclusion about leverage, dependency, or the likely success of diversification.

(c) Self-check line. Self-check: Did you distinguish description (what happened), explanation (why), prediction (what follows), and prescription (what should be done)?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: Which option best explains why China's 2023 gallium and germanium export controls are unlikely to yield durable coercive leverage over advanced semiconductor supply chains?

A. China does not control 100 percent of global gallium and germanium production.
B. Licensing creates uncertainty and short-run cost shocks, but byproduct status, latent capacity, and buyer adaptation erode leverage over time.
C. WTO rules automatically nullify any export restriction that affects semiconductors.
D. African and Latin American suppliers will quickly replace Chinese processing capacity.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses.
- **A** is true but insufficient: near-monopoly is not required for leverage, and the decisive issue is duration rather than market share alone.
- **C** is false: WTO disciplines are slow, contested, and do not automatically nullify restrictions; legal process is not immediate market relief.
- **D** is false: no near-term replacement capacity exists; it confuses geological endowment with processing capability, infrastructure, and industrial policy.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Semiconductor supply-chain market share by stage (approximate, 2022–2023)

Stage	Dominant geography / firms	Approx. share of stage	Concentration note
EDA tools	US (Synopsys, Cadence, Siemens EDA)	~70%+ US	Near-duopoly at leading edge; high switching costs
Core IP (processor architectures)	UK/Japan (Arm), US (Synopsys, Cadence)	Arm ~40%+ of licensed cores	Single architecture family underpins most mobile SoCs
Chip design (fabless)	US firms (Qualcomm, Nvidia, AMD, Broadcom, Apple)	~46% of global design revenue	US leads in design value capture
Wafer-fabrication equipment (WFE)	US ~40%; Netherlands (ASML) ~25%; Japan ~25%	US+NL+JP ≈ 90%	ASML sole supplier of EUV; duopoly/oligopoly in deposition, etch, metrology
Fabrication (foundry)	Taiwan (TSMC ~55%), South Korea (Samsung ~15%), China (SMIC ~5%), US (Intel/GlobalFoundries)	TSMC ~55% of foundry revenue	TSMC ~90%+ of advanced nodes (<7 nm)
Advanced packaging	Taiwan (ASE ~25%), US (Amkor ~15%), China (JCET ~10%)	Top 3 ≈ 50%	CoWoS/advanced packaging bottlenecked at TSMC
Specialty materials/chemicals	Japan ~50% of several photoresists, gases, wafers	Japan dominant in high-purity inputs	Single-country dependency in photoresists, neon, etc.

Sources: SIA State of the Industry reports (2022–2023); CSIS technology and supply-chain analyses; Miller (2022). Figures are approximate industry estimates, not audited financials.

Table 2 — Fab capital expenditure by country/region (approximate, 2022–2023 annual)

Country/region	Approx. annual fab capex (USD bn)	Share of global	Key drivers
Taiwan	~35–40	~25%	TSMC 3 nm/2 nm build-out, advanced packaging
South Korea	~30–35	~22%	Samsung memory + foundry; SK Hynix

Country/region	Approx. annual fab capex (USD bn)	Share of global	Key drivers
China	~25–30	~18%	SMIC mature-node expansion; memory (YMTC, CXMT)
United States	~20–25	~15%	Intel, TSMC Arizona, Samsung Texas, Micron
Japan	~8–12	~7%	TSMC Kumamoto, Rapidus, memory
Europe	~5–8	~4%	Intel Magdeburg, TSMC Dresden, ST/GF
Rest of world	~5–8	~4%	Singapore, Israel, Malaysia

Sources: SEMI World Fab Forecast; SIA; company capex guidance. Approximate; capex is lumpy and revised quarterly.

Table 3 — TSMC revenue by technology node (approximate, recent quarterly mix)

Node band	Approx. share of TSMC revenue	Strategic significance
3 nm	~6–10%	Ramp node; highest value per wafer; US export-controlled
5 nm	~30–35%	Dominant advanced-node revenue; AI/GPU demand
7 nm	~18–22%	Mature-advanced; still restricted under some controls
10/12/16 nm	~10–12%	Mid-range; partially controlled
22/28 nm and above	~20–25%	Mature nodes; automotive, IoT, industrial; less restricted
Advanced packaging (CoWoS, etc.)	~5–8% (growing)	AI accelerator bottleneck; capacity-constrained

Sources: TSMC quarterly earnings reports; SIA; CSIS. Percentages approximate and shift quarter to quarter.

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Between 2019 and 2023, which stage of the supply chain shows the steepest *increase* in geographic concentration, and which shows the most *decentralization*? Use Tables 1–2 to justify your answer, and note one data point that would falsify your claim.

2. **Level of analysis.** The chokepoint argument can be read at the individual (firm strategy), state (industrial policy), systemic (great-power competition), or transnational (supply-network) level. Using Table 1's concentration figures, identify which level best explains why a single Dutch firm (ASML) can be compelled by US policy to halt shipments to China, and explain why the other three levels are insufficient on their own.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives would read Table 2's capex shift toward the US, Taiwan, and South Korea:

    - **African:** dependency, technological marginalization, and the digital divide;
    - **Chinese:** self-sufficiency, indigenous innovation, and the anti-hegemonic framing;
    - **Russian:** lessons for import substitution and sanctions resilience;
    - **Western:** technology security, friend-shoring, and the economic cost debate;
    - **UN:** technology transfer, the digital divide, and SDG 9. Each in 2–3 sentences, steel-manned from within.

4. **Interpretation.** Does Table 3 support the claim that US export controls on advanced nodes (≤7 nm logic, ≤14/16 nm equipment) have *already* reduced TSMC's revenue exposure to China, or does it instead show that controls have *reallocated* revenue toward non-Chinese advanced-node customers (AI, US hyperscalers)? Distinguish description from explanation.

5. **Limitation.** What is the most important thing these three tables *cannot* tell you about semiconductor geopolitics? Identify one specific inference that would be unsupported, and state what additional data (and from which source) would be needed to test it.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Semiconductor Funnel: Where Chokepoints Live"

What to draw: A vertical funnel (wide at top, narrow at middle, widening slightly at bottom) divided into seven horizontal bands, top to bottom: (1) EDA & Core IP, (2) Design, (3) Materials & Chemicals, (4) Wafer-Fab Equipment, (5) Fabrication (Foundry), (6) Advanced Packaging, (7) End-Use Systems. Draw the funnel narrowing most sharply at bands 1, 4, and 5.

Labels to place: In each band, write the dominant country/firm and an approximate share (e.g., "EDA: US ~70%"; "WFE: US/NL/JP ~90%"; "Foundry: TSMC ~55%, ~90% advanced"). Add a bold arrow on the right side labeled "Concentration gradient" pointing downward. On the left, annotate "Bottleneck nodes" with small red circles at EDA, EUV lithography, and advanced foundry.

Perspective overlay: In the margin, four short tags: "African: where is Africa in this funnel? (absent)"; "Chinese: indigenous substitution targets"; "Western: control points"; "UN: technology-transfer gaps." Color-code: red for chokepoint, blue for US-aligned, green for Chinese, grey for absent/African.

Visual 2 — "Small Yard, High Fence" (concentric control diagram)

What to draw: Three concentric circles. Innermost circle labeled "Controlled core" (advanced logic ≤14/16 nm, EUV, advanced packaging, AI accelerators). Middle ring labeled "Controlled periphery" (DUV immersion, 14–28 nm equipment, some materials, US-person restrictions). Outer ring labeled "Open commerce" (mature nodes ≥28 nm, commodity chips, consumer electronics). Draw a thick fence line between innermost and middle rings; a thinner dashed line between middle and outer.

Labels to place: Along the fence, annotate "Entity List (Huawei 2019; SMIC 2020)", "Oct 2022 rules", "Oct 2023 update", "Netherlands/Japan alignment (Jan 2023)". Add arrows showing "leakage" (dashed arrows crossing the fence) labeled "third-country transshipment," "cloud compute access," "mature-node workarounds." Add a small box: "Loopholes closed iteratively."

Perspective overlay: Top tag "Western: security perimeter"; bottom-left "Chinese: containment narrative"; bottom-right "Russian: sanctions-evasion playbook"; right margin "UN: extraterritoriality concerns"; left margin "African: collateral damage to digital access."

Visual 3 — "Five Perspectives on the Same Chokepoint" (comparison wheel)

What to draw: A central circle labeled "Semiconductor chokepoint (TSMC/ASML)" with five spokes radiating to five outer boxes, one per perspective. Each box contains a one-line core claim and a one-line occlusion.

Labels to place: - African (top, largest box): "Dependency & digital divide; occludes: African agency in leapfrogging." - Chinese (right): "Self-sufficiency & anti-hegemony; occludes: cost of duplication." - Russian (bottom-right): "Import substitution lessons; occludes: scale differences." - Western (bottom-left): "Technology security & friend-shoring; occludes: economic costs & ally friction." - UN (left): "Technology transfer & SDG 9; occludes: enforcement power."

Perspective overlay: Shade the African box darkest (primary). Draw a dashed line from African box to a small note: "What the other four miss: who is excluded from the map entirely." Add a legend for shading intensity = analytical weight in this lesson.

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (answer + source log)
What are the four stages of the semiconductor supply chain, and which is the binding constraint?	EDA → lithography → fabrication → packaging. Binding constraint shifts by node: EUV lithography (ASML) and advanced foundry (TSMC) at leading edge; packaging (CoWoS) for AI accelerators. Source: Miller (2022); CSIS.
Why is ASML a chokepoint, and what is its product?	Sole supplier of EUV lithography machines (~$150–200M each); required for sub-7 nm. Dutch firm, US-controlled via export-control extraterritoriality. Source: Miller (2022); CSIS.
How has China responded?	SMIC 7 nm (Mate 60 Pro, 2023); Huawei indigenous design; "whole-nation" self-sufficiency push; gallium/germanium export controls (Jul 2023). Source: CSIS; Miller.
What are the loopholes in the 2022 controls?	Third-country equipment, cloud compute access, mature-node workarounds, US-person gaps; partially closed in Oct 2023 update. Source: CSIS; BIS.
What is the African vantage on semiconductor geopolitics?	Dependency, technological marginalization, digital divide; Africa absent from the supply chain; leapfrogging debates; SDG 9. Source: Grovogui; Bayart; UNCTAD.

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (answer + source log)
What does the UN perspective emphasize?	Technology transfer, digital divide, SDG 9 (industry, innovation, infrastructure); concern over extraterritorial export controls. Source: UNCTAD; ITU.
What is the strongest counterargument to "chokepoints guarantee US leverage"?	Controls accelerate Chinese self-sufficiency, alienate allies, raise costs, and may not stop diffusion; "running faster" vs. "running away." Source: Miller (2022); CSIS debate.
What metric would falsify the chokepoint-leverage thesis?	Sustained Chinese advanced-node yield improvement + non-US equipment substitution + loss of US firm revenue share. Source: SIA; CSIS.

Summary (3–5 sentences): Semiconductor geopolitics centers on a supply chain where value and control concentrate at a few nodes—EDA, EUV lithography, advanced foundry, and packaging—creating structural leverage for the US and its allies. The 2022–2023 US export controls weaponized this concentration, but their effectiveness depends on allied alignment, loophole closure, and the pace of Chinese substitution. The African vantage reveals that the entire debate presumes a seat at the table Africa does not hold, framing the chokepoint not as leverage but as exclusion. Data on market share and capex show concentration, yet cannot by themselves establish causation, intent, or future diffusion. The lesson's core adjudication: chokepoints are real and consequential, but their durability as instruments of state power is contingent and contested.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Imagine the world's most advanced computer chips are made through a long assembly line. At a few stations, only one company in one country can do the work. If that country says "stop," the whole line stops. The US and its allies sit at several of these stations, so they can slow China's progress in AI and advanced weapons. But China is building its own stations, and the slowdown may also push China to become self-sufficient faster. Meanwhile, most of the world—including Africa—just buys the finished chips and has no say in who controls the stations.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure about the exact yield rates of SMIC's 7 nm process and whether they are commercially viable at scale. I conflated "having a chip" (Mate 60 Pro) with "having a sustainable, cost-competitive foundry business." I also glossed over the difference between equipment controls and design-tool controls, and I did not specify how the US-persons provision actually binds foreign firms. Finally, I have not quantified the economic cost to US firms (lost revenue, R&D funding).

3. **Reread verification.** Re-reading Miller (2022), ch. on ASML and TSMC, confirms that EUV is the single most concentrated node and that TSMC's advanced-node dominance is structural, not merely a market outcome. CSIS reports confirm the Oct 2022/Oct 2023 control sequence and the loophole-closure logic. SIA data confirm US design-revenue share (~46%) and the global capex distribution. The African marginalization claim is supported by UNCTAD/ITU digital-divide data and by Grovogui's critique of technological hierarchy, though I should not overstate Africa's absence as total—there are assembly/packaging and mineral nodes (linked to L19/L53).

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** *Analogy:* Semiconductor chokepoints are like a single bridge over a river: whoever controls the bridge controls traffic, but if you close it too often, people build ferries and alternative bridges, and the bridge-owner loses toll revenue. *Limits:* The analogy breaks because (a) bridges are physical and substitutable over years, whereas EUV lithography has taken decades and billions to develop and may not be replicable quickly; (b) the "bridge" is not one asset but a network of complementary assets (EDA + lithography + foundry + packaging), so closure requires coordinated multilateral action, not a single gate; (c) the analogy ignores the African vantage—most countries are not trying to cross the bridge but are passengers on someone else's truck, with no bridge of their own.
5. **Rewrite.** Semiconductor chokepoints are structurally concentrated nodes—EDA tools, EUV lithography, advanced foundry capacity, and advanced packaging—where a handful of firms in the US, Netherlands, Taiwan, and Japan hold near-monopoly positions. This concentration gives the US and its allies leverage to restrict China's access to advanced chips and equipment, as exercised in the 2022–2023 export controls. That leverage is real but contingent: it depends on allied coordination, loophole closure, and the speed of Chinese indigenous substitution, which the Mate 60 Pro episode suggests is faster than many assumed. The economic costs fall on US and allied firms, and the strategic costs include accelerated Chinese self-sufficiency. From the African vantage, the entire framework presumes participation in a supply chain from which Africa is largely excluded, reframing the chokepoint less as an instrument of power than as a structure of global technological hierarchy that reproduces the digital divide. Adjudication: chokepoints are durable in the short run, eroding in the medium run, and their legitimacy depends on whether the controlling states can sustain a coalition and absorb the costs of restriction.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L52	Definition	What are the four main stages of the semiconductor supply chain?	The chain runs from electronic design automation and chip design, through materials and manufacturing equipment, to fabrication, and finally packaging, testing, and distribution. Each stage has distinct capital intensity and geographic concentration, so a disruption at one stage can halt output even when other stages remain available.	The African vantage stresses that most value-adding stages are offshore, limiting local value capture.
L52	Mechanism	Why does geographic concentration create chokepoint leverage?	Concentration means that a few firms or countries control inputs that are difficult to replace, so restricting access raises rivals' costs and delays production. Leverage is strongest where substitutes are scarce, switching takes years, and demand is inelastic.	Western security framing treats concentration as vulnerability; Chinese framing treats it as hegemonic leverage.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L52	Application	Name three chokepoint firms and their roles.	ASML dominates extreme ultraviolet lithography; TSMC leads advanced-node foundry manufacturing; Applied Materials is a major supplier of deposition and etch equipment. Their positions show that chokepoints span equipment, fabrication, and process technology rather than one single market.	The UN perspective asks how such concentration affects equitable technology access.
L52	Comparison	How does a chokepoint differ from a monopoly?	A monopoly controls price and output within a market, while a chokepoint controls an irreplaceable node in a network. A chokepoint can exist even when several firms compete, if all depend on one supplier, geography, or standard.	Russian import-substitution debates often confuse domestic production with genuine chokepoint removal.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L52	Source	What is the central argument of Miller (2022)?	Miller argues that semiconductors are a strategic technology whose supply-chain geography shapes great-power competition. The book traces how US, Japanese, Dutch, Taiwanese, and Korean capabilities created both extraordinary efficiency and structural vulnerability.	African readers can use it to see how technological dependence is historically constructed rather than natural.
L52	Debate	What does “small yard, high fence” mean in US policy?	It refers to narrowly defining controlled technologies while enforcing restrictions strictly. The aim is to limit China’s access to militarily relevant capabilities without severing all commercial trade.	Chinese officials frame the same policy as containment disguised as precision.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L52	Mechanism	How do US export controls transmit through the supply chain?	Controls restrict US-origin and foreign-direct-product items, equipment, software, and technical support, forcing firms to redesign supply chains or seek licenses. Effects propagate downstream to chip availability, AI compute, and military systems.	Western proponents emphasize security; critics emphasize cost and allied coordination.
L52	Application	What was China's response to the 2022-2023 controls?	China accelerated state-backed investment, import substitution, and indigenous innovation while using firms such as SMIC and Huawei to demonstrate progress. It also imposed retaliatory controls on gallium and germanium.	African observers see both superpowers using technology as leverage, narrowing space for non-aligned development.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L52	Reconstruction	How would an African perspective reconstruct semiconductor geopolitics?	It would center dependency, technological marginalization, and the digital divide rather than only US-China rivalry. The key question is who captures value, skills, and infrastructure, and how African states can move from mineral extraction to industrial capability.	This is the primary lens; it reveals distributional effects often invisible in security debates.
L52	Occlusion	What does the Western perspective tend to occlude?	It often foregrounds security and allied coordination while understating efficiency losses, consumer costs, and impacts on developing countries. It may treat friend-shoring as costless resilience.	African and UN perspectives highlight these distributional and developmental costs.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L52	Adjudication	How should one adjudicate between security and efficiency claims?	Compare measurable outcomes such as cost, lead times, allied compliance, and China's progress against stated security goals. A policy is better supported when controls are narrow, enforceable, and matched by domestic capacity building.	The UN perspective adds equity and technology-transfer criteria.
L52	Visual	What would a supply-chain map highlight?	It would show design in the US, equipment in the Netherlands, Japan, and US, fabrication in Taiwan and Korea, and packaging across Asia. Overlaying controls would reveal where chokepoints and rerouting pressures occur.	African states appear mainly as mineral and market peripheries unless industrial policy is included.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L52	Definition	What is “economic security as national security”?	It is the securitization of supply chains, treating access to critical technologies as a core state interest. This expands national security from military threats to economic vulnerabilities and industrial capacity.	African critics warn that securitization can justify protectionism that excludes developing economies.
L52	Mechanism	Why might export controls accelerate the target’s self-sufficiency?	Controls raise the expected cost of dependence and increase the political return to indigenous investment. They can also create protected markets for domestic firms, although progress remains constrained by chokepoint inputs.	Chinese discourse frames this as proof that containment backfires.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L52	Data	What does TSMC revenue by node indicate?	Revenue concentration in advanced nodes shows where value and technological leadership lie, while mature nodes remain important for automotive and industrial chips. Interpreting the data requires separating revenue share from physical volume and geopolitical risk.	African manufacturing strategies should not assume access to leading-edge nodes is necessary for all digital development.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit (score 0-100)

Skill or concept	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Next action
Mapping the semiconductor supply chain by stage		Can name EDA, materials, equipment, fabrication, packaging, and testing without notes	Draw the chain from memory and mark chokepoints
Identifying chokepoint firms and geographies		Can explain ASML, TSMC, and Applied Materials in one sentence each	Add one counterexample where concentration is not leverage
Explaining US export-control mechanisms		Can distinguish Entity List, foreign-direct-product rules, and licensing	Trace one control through a firm's supply chain
Assessing China's self-sufficiency push		Can separate SMIC/Huawei progress from EUV and EDA constraints	List three remaining bottlenecks

Skill or concept	Confidence (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Next action
Reconstructing all five perspectives		Can state each perspective's core claim and occlusion	Write the African perspective first, then compare
Adjudicating security versus efficiency		Can specify falsifiers for a control policy	Add cost, allied compliance, and China's progress metrics
Interpreting semiconductor data		Can explain revenue by node without confusing share with volume	Rebuild one table from memory

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which perspective did you initially underweight, and what evidence would make you revise that ranking?

2. Where did you confuse description of the supply chain with prescription about what states should do?

3. Which falsifier would most weaken your conclusion in the independent memo, and how would you test it?

7.3 Error-log

Common misconception	Correction	Evidence
Export controls will quickly stop China's chip progress.	Controls raise costs and delay progress but do not eliminate it; partial advances remain possible under constraints.	Miller (2022); CSIS technology reports
TSMC's dominance means Taiwan is the only chokepoint.	Chokepoints span EDA, lithography, materials, equipment, and fabrication across several countries.	Miller and Varas (2021); SIA State of the Industry reports
Self-sufficiency is achievable if a state spends enough money.	Money cannot quickly recreate tacit knowledge, supplier ecosystems, and equipment monopolies; time and learning curves matter.	CHIPS Act text; CSIS technology reports
African states are irrelevant to semiconductor geopolitics.	They are embedded through minerals, markets, and digital dependence; marginalization is structural rather than absence.	African perspective reconstruction; Rodney (1972)

Common misconception	Correction	Evidence
Friend-shoring eliminates risk.	It relocates and may concentrate risk; costs and political dependencies remain.	SIA State of the Industry reports; Western economic-cost debate

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Semiconductor supply chain; chokepoint; foundry; node; packaging; EDA	Geographic concentration; irreplaceable inputs; switching costs; network dependency	Weaponized interdependence (Farrell and Newman); supply-chain security	ASML EUV; TSMC advanced nodes; Applied Materials equipment	Efficiency versus security; decoupling versus de-risking	New entrants remove concentration; costs fall without security loss	L18; L47; L19
US export controls; Entity List; foreign direct product rule; licensing	Restrict items, software, support, and end uses; propagate downstream to compute and military systems	Securitization of technology; economic security as national security	2022-2023 advanced chip and equipment controls; CHIPS Act subsidies	Precision versus overreach; allied coordination	Controls fail to slow target; smuggling and cloud loopholes dominate	L47; L54
China's self-sufficiency; indigenous innovation; import substitution	State subsidies; protected markets; firm-level breakthroughs; retaliatory controls	Developmental state; technological nationalism	SMIC; Huawei; gallium and germanium controls	Containment backfire versus chokepoint persistence	No progress in EUV, EDA, or materials; costs exceed gains	L47; L53

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
African dependency and digital divide	Value-chain exclusion; mineral extraction without processing; skills gaps	Dependency theory (Rodney; Nkrumah); technological marginalization	Cobalt, coltan, and other mineral inputs; limited fab capacity	Development versus security; non-alignment versus alignment	African industrial policy builds processing and skills; digital access improves	L19; L53; L56
Data interpretation	Revenue by node; capex by country; control coverage; market share by stage	Political economy of technology; innovation systems	TSMC revenue concentration; fab investment geography	Revenue share versus physical volume; risk versus efficiency	Data show diversification without higher costs or delays	L52 Data Lab; L56

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 — Same day, 20 minutes:** Recite the supply-chain stages and three chokepoint firms from memory, then check against the flashcards.
- **R2 — 24 hours, 30 minutes:** Reconstruct all five perspectives in writing, beginning with the African perspective, and compare each with its occlusion.
- **R3 — 3 days, 45 minutes:** Redo the worked-example adjudication using one new piece of evidence from the data lab.
- **R4 — 1 week, 60 minutes:** Interpret one semiconductor data table and write a short memo outline with mechanism, perspectives, analogue, and falsifiers.
- **R5 — 2 weeks, 90 minutes:** Complete a timed independent memo, then review the error-log and update the confidence audit.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can map the semiconductor supply chain from design to packaging.

☐ I can identify at least three chokepoint firms and explain their roles.

☐ I can distinguish a chokepoint from a monopoly.

☐ I can explain how US export controls transmit through the supply chain.

☐ I can summarize China's response without overstating its independence from chokepoints.

☐ I can define "economic security as national security."

☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary and explain what it reveals.

☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.

☐ I can compare the five perspectives using contribution, occlusion, stance, evidence, and objection.

☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to the worked example.

☐ I can adjudicate between security and efficiency claims using evidence.

☐ I can interpret at least one semiconductor data table.

☐ I can identify a strong falsifier for a policy conclusion.

☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

☐ I have completed the confidence audit honestly.

☐ I have logged at least one misconception and its correction.

☐ I can connect this lesson to L18, L47, L19, L53, L54, L55, and L56.

☐ I can explain why African technological marginalization is structural rather than incidental.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Supply chain and chokepoints

- Miller, C. (2022). *Chip War: The Fight for the World's Most Critical Technology*.
- Miller, C., and Varas, A. (2021). Semiconductor supply-chain analysis and resilience.

Industry data and policy

- Semiconductor Industry Association. *State of the Industry* reports.
- Center for Strategic and International Studies. Technology and semiconductor policy reports.
- CHIPS and Science Act of 2022, statutory text.

African political economy and technology

- Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*.
- Nkrumah, K. (1965). *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*.
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End of Lesson 52. Say **Next** when you are ready.

54. Critical Minerals and Advanced Materials

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	53 — Critical Minerals and Advanced Materials
Module	Module 9: Techno-Geopolitics, AI, and Emerging Domains
Prerequisites	L19 (minerals), L33 (African minerals), L52 (semiconductors)
Interleaved links	Forward to L54 (AI and hyperwar), L56 (innovation), L57 (biosecurity)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, Data Lab, Visual Anchor, Cornell Notes, Flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is not whether minerals matter—they plainly do—but how a state converts geological endowment into durable geopolitical leverage, and why the most powerful consumer states on earth have repeatedly failed to secure the physical inputs on which their digital economies and military platforms depend. Critical minerals are the material substrate of the fourth industrial revolution and of contemporary warfare: they sit inside batteries, semiconductors, permanent magnets, hypersonic thermal-protection systems, and stealth coatings. Yet unlike oil, they are not combusted and therefore not consumed in a single use; they are embedded in durable capital stock, which means that coercion in minerals markets operates less through price shocks than through refining bottlenecks, export licensing, and the slow strangulation of midstream capacity. The puzzle is therefore structural: leverage accrues not necessarily to whoever owns the mine, but to whoever controls the chemical transformation that turns ore into usable material, and that transformation is concentrated in a handful of jurisdictions, above all China. Understanding this requires moving beyond the familiar "resource curse" vocabulary of extraction and rent-seeking into a political economy of midstream industrial capacity, state-backed finance, and the construction of "criticality" itself as a category that consumer states use to justify intervention.

This lesson is positioned deliberately after L52 on semiconductors and after L19 and L33 on minerals and African minerals. L52 taught the student to locate chokepoints in fabrication and design; this lesson moves the analysis upstream to extraction and, more importantly, midstream to refining and processing, where the actual leverage resides. L19 introduced the resource curse, comparative advantage, and strategic trade; L33 introduced African producer-state strategies and the politics of value-chain upgrading. Here those threads are woven into a techno-geopolitical frame in which minerals are not merely commodities but inputs to AI compute, hypersonic flight, and energy transition. The lesson also prepares the ground for L54 on AI and hyperwar, where material inputs determine operational tempo and magazine depth; for L56 on innovation,

where substitution research and recycling are the long-run strategic response; and for L57 on biosecurity, where advanced materials enable containment, filtration, and sensor platforms. The student who masters this lesson will be able to trace a single mineral from ore body to weapons platform, identify where in that chain leverage is actually exercised, and explain why different states disagree about where the chain should be governed.

By the end of the lesson the student should be able to do five things. First, reconstruct the five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on critical minerals as a whole, steel-manning each from within and identifying what each reveals and what it occludes. Second, specify mechanisms rather than outcomes: refining concentration, export-control licensing, stockpiling, friend-shoring, and substitution each have identifiable causal pathways and scope conditions. Third, apply the four levels of analysis inherited from Lesson 1—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to a minerals case without collapsing one into another. Fourth, adjudicate between competing explanations of the same event, such as China's 2023–2024 gallium and germanium export controls, on the basis of evidence rather than assertion. Fifth, produce a short analytical memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and that includes explicit falsifiers for its own claims. These are assessable skills, not attitudes, and the lesson's exercises are designed to make them visible.

The theoretical framing draws on several lineages that the student must keep distinct. From political economy, dependency theory and world-systems analysis (associated with Rodney, Amin, and Wallerstein) explain how extraction in the periphery feeds industrialization in the core, but they risk treating producer states as passive. From international political economy, strategic trade theory and techno-nationalism explain why states subsidize domestic capacity in sectors with spillovers, but they often understate the fiscal and environmental costs. From security studies, the resource-security and "weaponization of interdependence" literatures explain how concentrated supply chains become instruments of coercion, but they can overstate the ease with which leverage is exercised. From development studies, the resource-sovereignty and value-chain-upgrading literatures—strongly associated with African scholarship—explain how producer states attempt to capture rents and move up the value chain, but they must confront the technical and capital barriers to refining. The lesson's central argumentative move is to treat the African vantage point not as a regional application of Western theory but as a generative perspective in its own right: from the producer state's position, "criticality" is not a natural property of a mineral but a demand-side construction by consumer states, and the same mineral that is "strategic" for a battery manufacturer is "strategic" for a producer state as development finance, employment, and industrialization.

Scope conditions matter. This is not a geology lesson, though geological endowment sets the outer bound of what is possible; it is a political-economy lesson about how geological facts become political facts. It is also not a procurement manual: stockpiling volumes and tariff schedules are treated as evidence for mechanisms, not as policy recommendations. The data lab uses USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries and the IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024) to ground claims in production and refining shares by country, and the student is expected to read those shares as political facts—who refines, not merely who mines. The worked example examines China's 2023–2024 gallium and germanium export controls as a case of coercion in minerals markets, asking how the mechanism actually works, what it achieved, and what it did not. The problem pair examines US, EU, and Japanese critical minerals strategies—the Inflation Reduction Act, the EU Critical Raw Materials Act, and the Minerals Security Partnership—as competing responses to the same structural problem. Throughout, the five perspectives are reconstructed in depth in Section 2.7, with the African perspective first and longest, because the lesson's central puzzle is reframed, not merely illustrated, by the producer-state vantage point.

A final methodological note. The lesson insists on distinguishing description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, because minerals debates are saturated with conflation: a description of China's refining share is routinely treated as proof of inevitable coercion, and a prescription for friend-shoring is routinely treated as an explanation of why supply chains are concentrated. The student should leave able to say, for any claim about critical minerals, what would falsify it, at which level of analysis it operates, and from which perspective it is voiced. That discipline is the transferable skill; the mineral names and percentages are the scaffolding.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer from memory before reading. These questions draw on Lessons 19, 33, and 52.

1. **Resource curse (L19).** Define the resource curse and name two African cases that illustrate different variants of it—one in which rents fueled conflict and one in which rents funded state capacity without diversification.
2. **Colonial extraction (L33).** How did colonial mineral extraction shape post-colonial state capacity in Africa, and what is the "enclave economy" critique associated with that literature?
3. **Semiconductor chokepoint (L52).** Where is the most consequential chokepoint in the semiconductor supply chain, and which firm and which state exercise it?
4. **Comparative advantage vs. strategic trade (L19).** Distinguish comparative advantage from strategic trade theory in minerals, and state the condition under which strategic trade arguments are theoretically valid.
5. **Value-chain upgrading (L33).** What is value-chain upgrading, why is it difficult for producer states to achieve in minerals, and what policy instruments do they typically use to attempt it?
6. **Export controls on tools (L52).** How did US export controls on electronic design automation tools and advanced lithography affect China's semiconductor ambitions, and what was China's principal counter-strategy?

1.2 Orientation Questions

These frame the lesson's central puzzle. Do not answer them yet; return to them after Section 2.

1. Why might refining concentration matter more than mining concentration for geopolitical leverage, and what does that imply about which states actually "control" a mineral?
2. Are export controls on minerals more effective as instruments of coercion or as signals of resolve, and what evidence would distinguish the two?
3. How does the African producer-state perspective redefine "criticality," and what policy consequences follow from that redefinition?
4. What would falsify the claim that China's dominance in critical minerals refining is durable over a ten-to-fifteen-year horizon?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Provisional definitions; refine as you read.

- **Critical mineral.** A mineral designated by a consumer state or bloc as essential to economic or national security and subject to supply risk; the designation is political and varies across jurisdictions.
- **Refining concentration.** The share of global processing and chemical transformation of a mineral controlled by a small number of firms or states; typically higher and more durable than mining concentration.
- **Export control / licensing.** A state requirement that exporters obtain government permission to ship specified goods; in minerals, used to restrict flows of gallium, germanium, graphite, and rare earths.
- **Value-chain upgrading.** A producer state's effort to move from raw extraction into processing, manufacturing, and services to capture more rent and employment.
- **Resource sovereignty.** The claim by producer states that they hold legitimate authority over extraction, processing, and revenue from natural resources within their territory.
- **Friend-shoring.** The relocation of supply chains to geopolitically aligned or "trusted" countries, as opposed to pure cost minimization.
- **Stockpiling.** Government accumulation of strategic material reserves to buffer against supply disruption; distinct from commercial inventory.
- **Substitution.** The replacement of one material with another in a given application, typically through engineering redesign or materials science; the long-run response to scarcity.
- **Advanced materials.** Engineered materials with superior properties—thermal protection, stealth, hypersonic survivability—used in defense and aerospace platforms.
- **Hypersonics.** Flight vehicles and weapons traveling at Mach 5 or above, requiring materials that survive extreme heat and aerodynamic stress.
- **EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative).** A multi-stakeholder standard for disclosure of payments and revenues in extractive industries.
- **Techno-nationalism.** The view that technological capability is a component of national power and that states should actively cultivate domestic capacity in strategic sectors.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives By the end of this lesson, the student should be able to: (1) **Explain** why rare earth elements are strategically scarce even though their crustal abundance is not exceptionally low, identifying refining and magnet manufacturing as the binding constraints rather than geology alone. (2) **Analyze** the mechanisms through which China acquired and maintains near-monopoly positions in rare earth separation, refining, and downstream permanent-magnet production, including state support, vertical integration, environmental cost externalization, and learning-by-doing. (3) **Evaluate** the scope conditions under which concentrated refining capacity becomes coercive leverage, distinguishing market concentration from usable power and specifying when substitution, recycling, stockpiling, or new entry can erode that power. (4) **Compare** African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and United Nations perspectives on critical minerals governance, identifying what each tradition contributes to understanding resource sovereignty, supply-chain security, and multilateral regulation, and what each systematically occludes. (5) **Apply** these concepts to the 2023–2024 Chinese gallium and germanium export controls and to the United States, European Union, and Japanese critical minerals strategies, producing an evidence-based adjudication of whether observed outcomes reflect structural dependence, policy signaling, or transitional market adjustment. These objectives require the student to move beyond description of mineral deposits toward causal explanation of industrial bottlenecks, to connect material capabilities to diplomatic bargaining, and to assess competing normative frameworks

without collapsing them into a single Western security narrative.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Rare earth elements: deposits, refining, and China's near-monopoly Bolded Causal Claim: The strategic scarcity of rare earth elements is produced less by geological rarity than by the concentration of refining, separation, and magnet-manufacturing capacity, especially in China; therefore, states and firms that control midstream processing rather than ore extraction possess durable leverage over advanced manufacturing, clean-energy systems, and defense supply chains.

Mechanism: Rare earth elements comprise seventeen metallic elements, including the fifteen lanthanides plus scandium and yttrium. They are not rare in the Earth's crust in the sense of vanishing abundance, but economically viable deposits are geographically concentrated, and the elements occur together in complex mineral matrices that must be separated through chemically intensive processes. The binding constraint is therefore not the existence of ore bodies but the capacity to perform solvent extraction, precipitation, calcination, and metallization at scale, followed by alloying and magnet production. China's position emerged through a combination of state-directed investment, subsidized credit, tolerance of environmental externalities, acquisition and diffusion of processing technology, and vertical integration from mine to magnet. As Kalantzakos (2020) emphasizes, China's dominance is best understood as an industrial-ecology achievement rather than a simple accident of geology: it built capacity across the value chain while many consuming states treated rare earths as a low-margin commodity and offshored the dirty and difficult stages of production. The result is a near-monopoly not necessarily in mining alone but in the stages that convert ore into usable inputs for electric vehicles, wind turbines, precision-guided munitions, radar, and aerospace systems. Sanderson (2022) similarly stresses that the strategic problem is not the absence of deposits outside China but the absence of commercially viable, environmentally permitted, and technologically mature refining capacity. Once a producer controls separation and magnet making, it can influence prices, allocate supply, impose licensing requirements, and shape the location of downstream manufacturing without needing to own every mine. The mechanism is therefore cumulative: state support lowers capital costs, environmental forbearance lowers operating costs, learning-by-doing raises yields, vertical integration captures margins, and downstream dependence locks in customers. Each stage reinforces the others, producing a self-sustaining concentration that market prices alone do not quickly dissolve.

Scope Conditions: The translation of concentrated refining capacity into coercive leverage is conditional rather than automatic. Leverage is strongest when demand is inelastic in the short run, as in defense applications, aerospace alloys, and specialized magnets where redesign is costly and qualification timelines are long; when alternative suppliers face high capital requirements, long permitting horizons, and environmental opposition; when consuming firms have optimized production around Chinese specifications and cannot switch without retooling; and when consuming states lack stockpiles or coordinated procurement. Leverage is weaker when price spikes are large enough to finance new projects, when recycling and substitution technologies mature, when consuming states coordinate demand and investment, and when the dominant supplier's own downstream industries depend on stable export revenues. The scope conditions also include legal and institutional constraints: export controls may trigger World Trade Organization disputes, retaliatory measures, or accelerated diversification that reduces future leverage. A further condition is the supplier's willingness to absorb self-harm: restricting exports can damage domestic magnet producers, reduce foreign-exchange earnings, and invite political backlash. Thus near-monopoly in refining is a necessary but not sufficient condition for coercion; usable power depends on demand structure, time horizon, institutional response, and the supplier's cost-benefit calculus. The mechanism is strongest in the short and medium term and weakest where long-term industrial policy, recycling, and substitution are already funded and permitted.

Observable Implications: If the causal claim is correct, several observable patterns should appear. First, policy signals or export restrictions should generate price volatility and inventory behavior disproportionate to changes in underlying ore availability, because the bottleneck is processing rather than mining. Second, consuming states should invest in refining and magnet capacity even where domestic ore is limited, revealing that the strategic asset is midstream capability. Third, firms should diversify suppliers, redesign products, and build stockpiles, but with lags that reflect engineering and qualification constraints. Fourth, diplomatic disputes over rare earths should center on processing and export licensing rather than mine ownership alone. Fifth, market concentration metrics should show higher Herfindahl-Hirschman-type concentration in separation and magnet manufacturing than in mining. Sixth, new projects in Australia, the United States, Malaysia, and elsewhere should be evaluated not only by ore grade but by their ability to secure offtake, financing, and environmental permits for refining. The 2010 rare earth dispute between China and Japan, later adjudicated through the World Trade Organization, illustrates the pattern: the leverage arose from China's control over processing and export quotas, not from an absolute absence of Japanese or global deposits. More recent United States and European efforts to support domestic and allied refining, including measures associated with the Inflation Reduction Act and the European Union's Critical Raw Materials Act, further imply that policymakers have recognized the midstream bottleneck. If, by contrast, ore deposits alone determined power, then new mines outside China would rapidly eliminate leverage; the persistence of diversification efforts suggests that the mechanism operates through processing capacity and industrial ecosystems.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective begins from the historical experience that mineral wealth has too often been extracted as raw ore while refining, manufacturing, and technological rents accrued elsewhere. From this vantage point, the rare earth story is not simply a Sino-Western contest over supply chains; it is a recurring pattern in which producer regions are treated as geological warehouses rather than industrial partners. African scholarship on extraction and underdevelopment, including Rodney's analysis of how external extraction shaped African economies, Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism, and Mamdani's work on the colonial state and its afterlives, frames the problem as one of value-chain position rather than resource endowment. Bayart's concept of extraversion and Grovogui's insistence on reconstructing sovereignty from within further suggest that African states are not merely passive suppliers but actors negotiating terms of incorporation into global capitalism. For rare earth deposits in parts of Africa, including the Great Lakes region and southern Africa, the strategic question is whether extraction will be linked to local refining, skills transfer, energy infrastructure, and fiscal capacity, or whether it will reproduce enclave economies. The African perspective therefore treats "critical minerals" discourse with suspicion when it defines criticality solely from the standpoint of consuming industrial powers. It asks who defines the mineral as critical, who captures the value added, and whether producer states can use bargaining power to upgrade rather than merely export. Resource sovereignty, in this tradition, is not autarky; it is the capacity to negotiate technology transfer, local content, environmental safeguards, and regional value chains, including through the African Continental Free Trade Area. The African vantage also highlights that environmental costs of refining are often displaced onto producer regions, making transparency and accountability mechanisms such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative necessary but insufficient. What this perspective reveals that the others miss is that midstream monopoly is not only a geopolitical weapon; it is also a developmental ladder that producer states may seek to climb, and that Western friend-shoring can bypass African industrialization if it treats Africa only as a source of ore.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats rare earth dominance as the outcome of sustained industrial policy, long-term investment, and willingness to absorb environmental and social costs that other states avoided. It

frames export controls and licensing as legitimate instruments of resource management and national security, especially when advanced technologies are subject to external restrictions. The developmental-partnership narrative presents Chinese mining and processing investment in producer states as mutually beneficial, emphasizing infrastructure, market access, and industrialization. This perspective contributes a reminder that market concentration can reflect comparative advantage built through state capacity rather than mere coercion. It occludes, however, the opacity of subsidies, the environmental and health costs of refining, the coercive potential of export restrictions, and the asymmetry between a dominant supplier and dependent consumers.

Russian: The Russian perspective approaches critical minerals through a commodity-state and anti-hegemonic lens. It tends to interpret Western supply-chain security initiatives as attempts to cartelise access, exclude competitors, and preserve unipolar control over advanced manufacturing. Russia emphasizes resource sovereignty, state ownership, and the legitimacy of producer states using minerals for strategic purposes. This perspective contributes a critique of liberal market rhetoric that often masks power asymmetries. It occludes Russia's own dependence on commodity exports, its limited rare earth refining capacity, the effects of sanctions on technology access, and the tendency to subordinate producer-country development to geopolitical alignment.

Western: The Western perspective defines critical minerals primarily through supply-chain security, alliance management, and the cost of disruption. It emphasizes concentration risk, friend-shoring, domestic and allied refining, and the economic trade-offs of diversification. The Inflation Reduction Act, the European Union's Critical Raw Materials Act, and the Minerals Security Partnership reflect this framing. This perspective contributes rigorous attention to bottlenecks, stockpiles, and industrial policy. It occludes the developmental aspirations of producer states, the environmental costs of relocating refining, and the possibility that security-driven procurement may raise costs without quickly reducing dependence.

United Nations: The United Nations perspective frames critical minerals through resource governance, transparency, sustainable development, and multilateral norms. It emphasizes the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, human rights, environmental standards, and the contribution of minerals to Sustainable Development Goals seven and nine. This perspective contributes a normative vocabulary for benefit sharing and accountability. It occludes enforcement weaknesses, the power asymmetries between consuming and producing states, and the gap between voluntary standards and the strategic urgency of industrial policy.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Gallium, germanium, and graphite: export control leverage

Bolded Causal Claim: Export controls on gallium, germanium, and graphite convert concentrated refining and processing capacity into coercive bargaining power by weaponizing not absolute scarcity but the time, cost, and uncertainty of downstream adjustment.

Mechanism: Gallium and germanium are, in most production systems, recovered as byproducts rather than mined as primary ores: gallium is typically associated with bauxite and alumina processing, while germanium is commonly recovered from zinc concentrates and coal fly ash. This byproduct structure means that supply elasticity is unusually low. An importer cannot easily solve a shortage by opening a new mine, because increasing gallium or germanium output requires expanding host-metal production, changing metallurgical flows, or installing recovery circuits whose economics depend on the price of the primary metal.

Graphite presents a different but related bottleneck: natural graphite mining is geographically concentrated, but the strategically decisive step is processing—sphericalization, purification, coating, and anode-material qualification for lithium-ion batteries. The coercive mechanism therefore operates at the processing node, not merely at the mine mouth. Export controls work through licensing requirements, end-use verification, customs discretion, and administrative delay. Their effect is not necessarily to cut off all supply; rather, they raise the risk premium of procurement, force downstream firms to hold larger inventories, complicate just-in-time manufacturing, and create uncertainty about whether a license will be granted for a particular end use. Semiconductor, fiber-optic, solar, and battery firms face qualification requirements that make rapid supplier switching costly. Even a partial or unpredictable control can alter investment plans, because firms must price in the possibility of future disruption. In this sense, export control leverage is a form of chokepoint coercion: the exporter exploits a node where substitution is technically possible but commercially and temporally expensive.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism is strongest when four conditions hold. First, the exporter possesses a high share of global refining or processing capacity, not merely mining output. Second, downstream users face high switching costs because of technical qualification, capital intensity, or regulatory approval. Third, the controlled material is embedded in products with high political and economic salience, such as semiconductors, defense systems, electric vehicles, or telecommunications infrastructure. Fourth, the control is administered with enough discretion to create uncertainty without necessarily triggering a total trade collapse. The mechanism weakens when alternative processing capacity already exists, when firms can substitute materials or redesign products quickly, when stockpiles are large enough to bridge the adjustment period, or when the exporter's own revenue dependence makes a broad embargo self-defeating. It also weakens if controls are so predictable that firms fully decouple in advance, eroding future leverage. The most effective controls are therefore often targeted, opaque, and calibrated to impose costs while preserving the exporter's role as an indispensable supplier.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include price spikes and heightened volatility in gallium, germanium, and graphite markets; delays or denials in export-license processing; downstream firms announcing supplier diversification, inventory buildup, or accelerated qualification of alternative sources; increased research and development into substitution and recycling; diplomatic protests and retaliatory trade measures; and policy responses such as stockpiling, friend-shoring, and domestic processing subsidies. China's 2023–2024 export controls on gallium and germanium, followed by graphite-related controls, provide a clear empirical illustration: the immediate effect was not necessarily a complete cessation of trade, but a restructuring of procurement risk, a rise in compliance costs, and a visible acceleration of efforts by consuming states to reduce dependence. Data from the USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries and the IEA Critical Minerals Outlook can be used to track concentration, trade flows, and the gap between mining and processing capacity. The key analytical point is that the strategic effect of controls should be measured not only by volume reductions but by changes in firm behavior, investment timelines, and bargaining positions.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): From an African perspective, export controls on gallium, germanium, and graphite highlight the difference between possessing mineral deposits and controlling the value chain. Several African states hold graphite and other critical mineral resources, yet much of the refining, sphericalization, and anode-material production occurs elsewhere. African scholarship on resource sovereignty—drawing on Rodney's analysis of unequal exchange, Nkrumah's critique of neocolonialism, and later work on extractivism—would frame the issue as one of structural position: producer states may gain revenue from raw exports while remaining vulnerable to price volatility and to decisions made in processing centers. The African vantage point asks whether export controls by a dominant proces-

sor create openings for African value-chain upgrading or merely reproduce a pattern in which African states supply raw materials while others capture technological and strategic rents. It also foregrounds environmental and social costs of relocating refining, and the possibility that security-driven procurement by consuming states may raise costs without quickly reducing dependence. **Chinese:** The Chinese perspective treats export controls as legitimate instruments of national security and industrial policy, consistent with a state-backed supply-chain strategy and a developmental partnership framing in which China presents itself as a responsible supplier while retaining sovereign discretion over strategic materials. **Russian:** The Russian perspective tends to view such controls through a commodity-state and anti-hegemonic lens, emphasizing resistance to Western sanctions, the legitimacy of sovereign resource management, and the possibility of coordination among non-Western producers. **Western:** The Western perspective frames the issue as supply-chain security, friend-shoring, and the economic cost of dependence, debating whether controls justify expensive diversification or whether market adjustment and substitution will suffice. **United Nations:** The United Nations perspective emphasizes resource governance, transparency, sustainable development, and multilateral norms, including the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and Sustainable Development Goals seven and nine, while often understating enforcement weaknesses and power asymmetries between consuming and producing states.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Advanced materials for defense: hypersonics, stealth, and thermal protection

Bolded Causal Claim: Advanced defense materials create strategic bottlenecks because weapons performance is constrained by physical material limits, and the inputs required to reach those limits are concentrated, slow to qualify, and politically controlled.

Mechanism: Modern high-performance weapons systems are not limited only by software, sensors, or propulsion concepts; they are limited by whether materials can survive extreme temperatures, stresses, electromagnetic environments, and manufacturing tolerances. Hypersonic vehicles, for example, require thermal protection systems—such as carbon-carbon composites and ultra-high-temperature ceramics—that can withstand aerodynamic heating and thermal shock while maintaining structural integrity. Stealth platforms depend on radar-absorbing materials, precise surface treatments, and manufacturing processes that reduce detectability. Propulsion and airframe performance depend on nickel-based superalloys, titanium, and refractory metals such as tungsten, rhenium, and tantalum. The mechanism is cumulative: material properties define the engineering envelope; the engineering envelope defines system performance; and system performance defines strategic capability. Because defense materials must be qualified under stringent standards, substitution is not simply a matter of finding a chemically similar substance. A new alloy or composite may require years of testing, certification, and integration before it can be used in a weapons platform. This creates inelastic demand and long adjustment lags. Moreover, several critical inputs are geographically concentrated or subject to export controls, meaning that a disruption in mining, refining, or component manufacturing can propagate into program delays. Defense demand is also relatively insensitive to price, because procurement is driven by strategic requirements rather than commercial optimization. The result is a hidden layer of military power: the material base beneath visible platforms.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism is strongest when three conditions coincide. First, the material has no near-term substitute at the required performance threshold; if a substitute exists, even at higher cost, the bottleneck is softened. Second, production is concentrated in a small number of firms or countries, especially where refining, alloying, or composite manufacturing is more concentrated than mining. Third, qualification and certification cycles are long relative to the expected duration of a supply disruption. The mechanism

weakens when additive manufacturing, new ceramic matrix composites, or alternative alloy systems reduce dependence; when commercial aerospace or energy demand diversifies supply; or when stockpiles and recycling provide buffer capacity. It also weakens if defense programs are flexible enough to accept performance trade-offs. Conversely, it strengthens when materials are subject to export controls, when procurement is classified and therefore lacks market transparency, and when geopolitical rivalry accelerates demand for the same limited inputs.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include defense stockpiling and strategic-reserve programs; export controls and licensing requirements on materials and components; allied sourcing initiatives and "friend-shoring" in defense supply chains; increased research funding for substitutes, recycling, and advanced manufacturing; price premiums for qualified materials; and program delays or cost overruns attributed to material shortages. Analysts should also look for divergence between commercial and defense-grade supply: a material may be available in industrial quantities but not in the purity, form, or certification required for military use. In the data lab, production and refining by country for relevant minerals can be compared with defense procurement patterns, though the latter are often partially classified. The broader implication is that advanced materials policy cannot be reduced to mining output; it must account for processing, qualification, manufacturing, and the institutional capacity to sustain a defense-industrial base under stress.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): The African perspective foregrounds the fact that many advanced defense materials depend, directly or indirectly, on minerals extracted from African states—cobalt, graphite, tungsten, titanium sands, and other inputs—while value capture, refining, and strategic decision-making often occur elsewhere. African scholarship on extractivism and resource sovereignty, including work by Rodney, Nkrumah, and later analysts of the resource curse, would stress that militarized demand can intensify extraction without corresponding development benefits. The African vantage point also raises questions about environmental degradation, labor conditions, and the risk that critical-mineral booms will reproduce enclave economies. It asks whether African producer states can use defense-driven demand to upgrade processing capacity and negotiate better terms, or whether security framing by consuming states will prioritize supply assurance over local development. **Chinese:** The Chinese perspective emphasizes state-backed supply chains, civil-military fusion, and a developmental partnership framing in which industrial capacity is treated as a strategic asset and external partnerships are presented as mutually beneficial. **Russian:** The Russian perspective views defense-materials competition through a commodity-state and anti-hegemonic lens, stressing sovereign control over resources, resistance to Western sanctions, and the legitimacy of state-directed industrial mobilization. **Western:** The Western perspective frames the issue as supply-chain security, alliance coordination, and the economic cost of resilience, debating whether defense-driven diversification is worth its fiscal and efficiency costs. **United Nations:** The United Nations perspective emphasizes resource governance, transparency, human rights, environmental standards, and the contribution of industrial capacity to Sustainable Development Goals seven and nine, while often understating enforcement gaps and the strategic urgency of military procurement.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Battery supply chains — lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite

Bolded Causal Claim: Battery supply chains convert geographically concentrated mineral endowments and processing capacity into strategic leverage over electrification, because the energy transition's material intensity makes states and firms dependent on a small set of extraction and refining nodes.

Mechanism: The battery value chain is sequential, cumulative, and qualification-intensive. Geological endowment determines where lithium brine or hard rock, cobalt ore, nickel laterite or sulfide, and natural graphite can be extracted; refining and chemical conversion determine whether those inputs become battery-grade lithium carbonate or hydroxide, cobalt sulfate, nickel sulfate, and spherical graphite; precursor and cathode or anode manufacturing determine cell performance; and cell assembly determines pack-level deployment in electric vehicles, consumer electronics, and grid storage. Leverage arises where a stage is concentrated and difficult to replicate quickly. Lithium extraction is geographically dispersed across Australia, Chile, Argentina, and China, but chemical conversion has been heavily concentrated in China, meaning that even non-Chinese mine output can pass through Chinese refining before reaching cell makers. Cobalt is mined predominantly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while refining and precursor production are concentrated in China, creating a two-node dependence: a producer state with weak regulatory capacity at extraction and a processing hegemon at conversion. Nickel presents a different pattern: Indonesia has used export restrictions and domestic processing requirements to move from ore exports to nickel pig iron, matte, and increasingly battery-grade intermediates, demonstrating that producer states can use resource nationalism to climb the value chain, but also that such climbing can lock in coal-intensive processing and raise environmental costs. Graphite is both a battery anode material and a broader industrial input; natural graphite mining and, especially, spherical graphite processing have been dominated by China, while synthetic graphite depends on needle coke and energy-intensive graphitization. The mechanism is not merely scarcity but bottleneck power: a state or firm that controls a non-substitutable, high-fixed-cost stage can influence prices, licensing, investment, and technology transfer without necessarily halting all supply, because buyers face switching costs, qualification timelines, and offtake contracts. In battery markets, qualification is particularly important: automotive and cell manufacturers require consistent purity, particle size, cycle life, and safety performance, so new suppliers cannot enter merely by offering ore; they must pass lengthy validation. This creates time asymmetry: disruption can be immediate, while replacement takes years. The mechanism also operates through finance and standards: offtake agreements, export credit, and environmental, social, and governance due diligence shape which projects reach production, while carbon accounting and traceability requirements can advantage or disadvantage suppliers. Thus battery supply chains generate leverage through the interaction of geological concentration, processing concentration, capital intensity, qualification barriers, and regulatory standards.

Scope Conditions: The leverage mechanism is strongest when (i) a mineral or intermediate has few technically viable substitutes at the cell-chemistry level; (ii) refining capacity is concentrated and subject to state licensing or export controls; (iii) demand growth outpaces new project development; (iv) environmental, social, and governance standards raise barriers to entry; and (v) buyers require long qualification periods. It weakens when cell chemistries shift, for example toward lithium iron phosphate, which removes cobalt and nickel from the cathode but increases demand for lithium and graphite; when recycling reaches scale; when alternative anode materials are commercialized; or when producer states successfully diversify processing. The mechanism also varies by mineral: lithium's leverage is more diffuse because resources are spread across several continents; cobalt's is more acute because extraction and refining are both concentrated; nickel's is shaped by Indonesia's industrial policy; graphite's is shaped by China's dominance in spherical graphite and by the energy intensity of synthetic alternatives. Scope conditions include not only geology but also permitting timelines, water availability for brine operations, energy costs for refining, and the availability of skilled labor and chemical engineering capacity. In addition, battery supply chains are path-dependent: once a cell manufacturer qualifies a supplier's material, switching costs create inertia even if a cheaper or more secure alternative exists, and this inertia can protect incumbents as much as it protects buyers.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, one should observe price volatility around policy shocks; export licensing or quota announcements; vertical integration by cell manufacturers and automakers into mining or refining; offtake agreements with non-dominant suppliers; and public investment in domestic processing. One should also observe friend-shoring and alliance-based mineral partnerships, as well as producer-state bargaining over local content, royalties, and downstream processing. Environmental and labor controversies should correlate with supply risk because environmental, social, and governance failures can trigger buyer exclusion and regulatory action. The mechanism implies that resilience policies will be slower and more expensive than headline announcements suggest, because qualification and permitting lag behind political timelines. It also implies that battery supply chains will be a site of repeated contestation between climate-transition goals and security goals: the same minerals required for decarbonization become objects of strategic competition. Observable implications further include the rise of battery passport and traceability schemes, the use of long-term offtake contracts to de-risk mining projects, and the strategic importance of midstream chemical conversion even in countries that do not mine the underlying ore.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): The African perspective centers producer-state strategies, value-chain upgrading, and resource sovereignty, asking whether mineral endowments can be converted into industrialization rather than enclave extraction; it highlights cobalt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, lithium in Zimbabwe and Namibia, and graphite in Mozambique and Tanzania, and insists that battery transitions must not reproduce colonial patterns of raw export and externalized environmental cost. **Chinese:** The Chinese perspective emphasizes state-backed supply chains, long-term offtake, processing dominance, and a developmental partnership framing that presents Chinese investment as infrastructure and industrial capacity building, while treating Western de-risking as politicization of markets. **Russian:** The Russian perspective treats battery minerals through a commodity-state and anti-hegemonic lens, stressing sovereign control, sanctions resistance, and the legitimacy of state-directed resource mobilization, while often understating governance and environmental deficits. **Western:** The Western perspective frames battery supply chains as security and alliance problems, emphasizing friend-shoring, the Inflation Reduction Act, the EU Critical Raw Materials Act, and the economic cost of resilience, while debating whether diversification is worth its fiscal and efficiency costs. **United Nations:** The United Nations perspective emphasizes resource governance, transparency, human rights, environmental standards, and the contribution of industrial capacity to Sustainable Development Goals seven and nine, while often understating enforcement gaps and the strategic urgency of procurement.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Stockpiling, substitution, and recycling — the search for resilience

Bolded Causal Claim: Resilience in critical minerals is produced not by eliminating dependence but by managing time: stockpiles buy time, substitution changes material requirements, and recycling closes loops, yet each instrument has distinct cost, scale, governance, and environmental constraints.

Mechanism: Stockpiling operates as a buffer against supply disruption by holding physical inventories or strategic reserves of minerals, intermediates, or finished components; its effectiveness depends on knowing which materials are truly critical, how long a disruption will last, and whether stockpiled forms can be converted into usable inputs. Substitution operates through engineering and chemistry: battery makers can shift from nickel-manganese-cobalt cathodes to lithium iron phosphate, reducing cobalt and nickel exposure but increasing lithium and graphite demand; magnet makers can explore reduced-dysprosium or dysprosium-free designs; and materials scientists can seek alternative alloys, coatings, or thermal protection systems. Recycling operates as urban mining: end-of-life batteries, electronics, and industrial scrap can be processed

into black mass and then refined into battery-grade materials, reducing primary extraction but requiring collection systems, safe handling, and energy-intensive metallurgy. The three mechanisms interact. Stockpiling can bridge the gap while substitution and recycling scale; substitution can reduce the volume that must be stockpiled; recycling can reduce long-term import dependence but cannot quickly offset a sudden disruption because feedstock availability lags deployment by years or decades. The mechanism is therefore temporal: resilience is not a static end state but a portfolio of instruments matched to different time horizons. Stockpiles address short-run shocks, substitution addresses medium-run design change, and recycling addresses long-run circularity. Each instrument also has a governance dimension: stockpiles require public or private capital and release rules; substitution requires research and development, standards, and intellectual property; recycling requires collection infrastructure, extended producer responsibility, and cross-border movement of waste. The mechanism further depends on information: without accurate data on inventories, scrap flows, and material content, governments and firms cannot calibrate buffers or circularity targets.

Scope Conditions: Stockpiling is most effective for materials with stable chemical forms, long shelf life, clear conversion pathways, and predictable disruption durations; it is less effective for materials that degrade, for highly specialized intermediates with short technological half-lives, or for minerals whose criticality changes rapidly with technology. Substitution is most effective where performance trade-offs are acceptable, where engineering standards permit redesign, and where alternative materials are available at scale; it is constrained by safety certification, energy density, thermal performance, and the sunk costs of manufacturing lines. Recycling is most effective where collection rates are high, scrap is concentrated, material values justify processing, and metallurgical routes can recover target elements at battery grade; it is constrained by diffuse end-of-life products, hazardous handling, energy costs, and the long lag between first deployment and scrap availability. The mechanism weakens if stockpiles create moral hazard by reducing incentives to diversify, if substitution merely shifts dependence to another concentrated input, or if recycling is treated as a substitute for primary supply before sufficient feedstock exists. Scope conditions also include price: recycling and substitution accelerate when primary prices are high and sustained, but may stall when prices fall, creating a boom-bust cycle in circular-economy investment. Public policy can alter these conditions through extended producer responsibility, recycled-content mandates, research funding, and strategic reserve legislation.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, one should observe strategic reserve legislation and inventory disclosures; research programs on alternative chemistries and materials; battery recycling plants and black-mass offtake agreements; and policy debates over whether to stockpile raw ore, refined chemicals, or finished components. One should also observe tension between short-term cost minimization and long-term resilience: firms may underinvest in recycling or substitution when prices are low, while governments may overinvest in stockpiles for political visibility. The mechanism implies that resilience strategies will be evaluated differently by different actors: defense planners may prioritize stockpiles, engineers may prioritize substitution, and environmental regulators may prioritize recycling. It also implies that no single instrument can solve critical-mineral dependence; the observable outcome should be a mixed portfolio rather than a single dominant solution. Further observable implications include the emergence of recycling hubs near battery manufacturing clusters, the use of digital product passports to track material content, and the political difficulty of releasing strategic stocks during non-emergency price spikes.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): The African perspective asks whether stockpiling, substitution, and recycling in consuming countries will bypass African producers or create new opportunities for local refining and circular industry; it stresses resource sovereignty, value-chain upgrading, and the risk that recycling in the Global North could reduce demand for African raw materials before

African states capture processing rents. **Chinese:** The Chinese perspective treats stockpiling and recycling as components of state-backed supply-chain security and industrial planning, emphasizing scale, vertical integration, and the ability to manage price cycles through state capacity, while framing Western restrictions as market distortion. **Russian:** The Russian perspective views resilience instruments through a commodity-state and anti-hegemonic lens, stressing sovereign control over reserves, resistance to sanctions, and the legitimacy of state-directed mobilization, while often understating governance and environmental deficits. **Western:** The Western perspective frames stockpiling, substitution, and recycling as supply-chain security and alliance coordination tools, debating their fiscal cost, efficiency losses, and compatibility with market principles. **United Nations:** The United Nations perspective emphasizes resource governance, transparency, human rights, environmental standards, and the contribution of circular industry to Sustainable Development Goals seven and nine, while often understating enforcement gaps and the strategic urgency of procurement.

SECTION 2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY) The African perspective begins from a different question than the one that dominates most critical-minerals debates. Where Western, Chinese, and even much UN discourse asks how to secure supply for advanced economies and defense industries, the African vantage point asks who defines "criticality," who captures value, who bears risk, and who has the authority to decide the terms under which minerals leave the ground. In this sense, critical minerals are not merely inputs to batteries, semiconductors, hypersonic vehicles, or stealth systems; they are sites where the political economy of extraction, sovereignty, and global hierarchy is reproduced. The African perspective therefore treats minerals as simultaneously geological, economic, social, and constitutional objects. It is not a regional application of Western resource economics or Chinese industrial policy; it is a distinct theoretical tradition rooted in anti-colonial thought, postcolonial state theory, feminist and decolonial scholarship, and contemporary African political economy.

The lineage of this perspective runs through Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and the postcolonial bourgeoisie, Cabral's insistence that liberation must "return to the source" and rebuild the material and cultural base of society, Nkrumah's theory of neo-colonialism as the continuation of imperial control through economic rather than formal political means, and Rodney's demonstration that underdevelopment was not an original condition but an active historical process produced by the integration of African economies into unequal global circuits. Nyerere's ujamaa and self-reliance traditions add a normative emphasis on collective welfare, regional cooperation, and the rejection of externally imposed models of development. These thinkers do not merely provide moral critique; they supply mechanisms. Rodney's underdevelopment thesis implies that extraction without industrial linkage reproduces dependency. Nkrumah's neo-colonialism thesis implies that formal sovereignty can coexist with substantive economic subordination. Fanon's analysis of the comprador elite implies that mineral rents may strengthen domestic gatekeepers rather than broad-based development. Cabral's materialism implies that resource sovereignty requires not only ownership but productive capacity, education, and cultural reconstruction.

Later African scholarship refines these mechanisms. Bayart's account of the "politics of the belly" and the gatekeeper state suggests that mineral rents can convert the state into a broker between external capital and domestic society, weakening accountability and encouraging enclave development. Mamdani's work on the bifurcated state and on citizen and subject helps explain why mineral governance often operates through dual legal and political orders: one for investors and urban elites, another for rural communities, custom-

ary authorities, and informal miners. Grovogui's critique of international hierarchy and of the racialized foundations of global order suggests that mineral governance regimes, including transparency initiatives and "responsible sourcing" standards, are not neutral technical instruments but expressions of historically unequal power. Mbembe's work on the postcolony and on necropolitics raises the question of whose lives are treated as expendable in extraction zones, where environmental degradation, displacement, and violence are not accidental side effects but structurally tolerated costs. Oyěwùmí's feminist scholarship and Tamale's decolonial Afro-feminism draw attention to the gendered invisibility of labor, land, and social reproduction in mining economies, showing that value-chain analysis that counts only formal wage labor systematically underestimates women's work and harm.

From this theoretical base, the African perspective reconstructs critical minerals as a problem of value-chain truncation. The central mechanism is not simply that Africa has minerals and others process them; it is that the global division of labor assigns geological abundance to African territories while assigning refining, component manufacturing, standards-setting, finance, and technological learning to external centers. This truncation means that price volatility, demand shocks, and geopolitical controls are transmitted into African economies without corresponding control over value capture. When China restricts gallium or germanium exports, when the United States subsidizes battery supply chains through the Inflation Reduction Act, or when the European Union designates strategic projects under the Critical Raw Materials Act, African producer states experience these events as downstream decisions made in centers they do not control. The African perspective therefore insists that "supply-chain security" for advanced economies can look, from the producer side, like the reorganization of dependency.

A second mechanism is the extractive enclave. Mining projects often generate foreign exchange and fiscal revenue while remaining weakly linked to domestic industry, agriculture, or services. Roads, power, and ports may be built for export corridors rather than national integration. Employment may be temporary, capital-intensive, and skill-segmented. Artisanal and small-scale mining, which supports millions of livelihoods, is frequently criminalized or ignored by formal governance frameworks, even though it supplies significant shares of minerals such as cobalt and gold. The African perspective thus sees the "critical minerals boom" not as an automatic development opportunity but as a high-risk conjuncture in which rents can either fund industrialization or deepen enclave economies.

A third mechanism is resource nationalism as a sovereignty claim. African states have increasingly used export bans, local-content requirements, state equity, and beneficiation mandates to retain value. Zimbabwe's restrictions on raw lithium exports, the Democratic Republic of Congo's cobalt governance reforms, Guinea's bauxite and alumina ambitions, South Africa's platinum-group metal strategies, and Zambia's copper-sector renegotiations illustrate different versions of this strategy. The African perspective does not treat these measures as mere market distortions; it treats them as attempts to convert geological endowment into bargaining power. Yet it also recognizes that resource nationalism can fail when states lack energy, capital, skills, infrastructure, or regional markets. Beneficiation is not a slogan; it requires electricity, water, transport, metallurgical knowledge, and patient finance. Without these, export bans may simply reduce revenue or shift smuggling into informal channels.

A fourth mechanism is the politics of community consent and environmental justice. The African perspective foregrounds land tenure, displacement, water contamination, tailings, and the gendered distribution of harm. It challenges the assumption that minerals needed for "green" technologies are automatically green. Cobalt, lithium, graphite, and rare earth production can reproduce the same extractive violence associated with fossil fuels if governance remains weak. This is where Oyěwùmí and Tamale are especially important: women of-

ten bear the costs of land loss, water scarcity, and social disruption while being excluded from compensation, consultation, and employment. The African perspective therefore refuses a simple trade-off between global decarbonization and local sacrifice; it demands that transition minerals be governed by justice, not only by efficiency.

A fifth mechanism is regionalism. Because individual African states often lack scale, the African perspective emphasizes continental and regional frameworks such as the African Mining Vision, the African Continental Free Trade Area, and regional power pools. The argument is that value-chain upgrading requires cross-border industrial corridors, shared infrastructure, and coordinated bargaining. A single state may be unable to support a refinery; a regional market may. This also changes the meaning of "friend-shoring": from an African standpoint, external powers that seek "trusted" supply chains should invest in regional African capacity rather than simply rerouting extraction through preferred partners.

What the African perspective contributes that the other four cannot is a producer-side theory of criticality. It shows that criticality is not an objective property of minerals but a relational category defined by the needs, fears, and industrial strategies of powerful consumers. It reveals that supply-chain security agendas can reproduce the very dependency they claim to solve. It insists that governance must be judged not only by transparency metrics but by whether it redistributes power, value, and risk. It brings into view artisanal mining, gendered labor, community consent, and environmental harm, which are often treated as externalities in security and market frameworks. It also recovers African agency: African states, firms, workers, and communities are not passive suppliers but strategic actors whose choices shape global markets.

What it occludes is equally important. The African perspective can overstate the coherence of "Africa" as a unitary actor, understating sharp differences among mineral-rich states, regional hegemons, and import-dependent economies. It can romanticize state capacity, even though many producer states face fiscal stress, debt, weak regulatory institutions, and elite capture. It can treat external investment primarily through the lens of neo-colonialism, sometimes underestimating genuine technology transfer, infrastructure provision, or the possibility of mutually beneficial contracts. It may understate the capital intensity, energy requirements, and environmental costs of domestic beneficiation, as well as the difficulty of building regional markets in the presence of poor infrastructure and political fragmentation. It can also understate intra-African competition for investment and the ways in which African elites themselves profit from extractive arrangements. Finally, while it rightly critiques Western and Chinese power, it sometimes lacks a fully developed account of how African states can manage great-power rivalry without becoming arenas of competition. The strongest version of the perspective therefore combines anti-extractivist critique with a hard-headed analysis of state capacity, regional coordination, and industrial policy.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective The Chinese perspective treats critical minerals as strategic inputs to a long-term project of industrial modernization, energy transition, and technological self-reliance. It is rooted in a developmental-state tradition that views supply chains not as neutral market outcomes but as objects of planning, investment, and state coordination. From this standpoint, China's dominance in rare earth processing, battery materials, and related manufacturing is not an accident of geology or a temporary market distortion; it is the result of decades of sustained industrial policy, infrastructure investment, education, tolerance for low-margin processing, and vertical integration. The perspective is reinforced by China's experience of vulnerability: dependence on imported oil, advanced semiconductors, and maritime chokepoints has convinced Beijing that control over upstream and midstream mineral capacity is a matter of national security.

A central mechanism is state-backed supply-chain construction. Chinese firms, often supported by state

finance, subsidies, infrastructure, and diplomatic backing, have built capacity across mining, refining, component manufacturing, and recycling. The goal is not merely to extract minerals but to capture value-added stages and to reduce dependence on foreign technology. This is visible in rare earths, where China's near-monopoly is stronger in processing and magnet manufacturing than in raw deposits, and in battery supply chains, where Chinese firms dominate refining of lithium, cobalt, nickel, and graphite and much of cell production. The Chinese perspective argues that this dominance reflects strategic patience and willingness to absorb costs that market-driven firms in liberal economies often avoid.

A second mechanism is the developmental partnership framing. In Africa and other producer regions, China presents its engagement as South-South cooperation rather than neo-colonial extraction. The rhetoric emphasizes non-interference, infrastructure-for-resources arrangements, mutual benefit, and respect for sovereignty. From Beijing's viewpoint, Chinese investment builds roads, ports, power plants, and industrial zones that Western firms and institutions have not provided. It also argues that producer states gain markets, revenue, and development opportunities. This framing is not merely propaganda; it reflects a genuine belief that development requires infrastructure and industrial capacity, and that China's own rise offers a model for late industrializers.

A third mechanism is export control leverage. China's 2023-2024 controls on gallium and germanium, and its broader ability to restrict exports of processed materials, are presented as legitimate tools of national security and as responses to Western technology controls. The Chinese perspective holds that export management is a normal sovereign function, comparable to Western export controls on semiconductors, and that it is justified by the need to protect strategic resources and prevent their use in military applications. It also implies that China has learned from Western sanctions and technology restrictions that interdependence can be weaponized, and that Beijing must retain reciprocal leverage.

What this perspective contributes is a clear account of how state capacity, long time horizons, and vertical integration can reshape global supply chains. It demonstrates that market share in minerals is not determined solely by geology but by processing investment, industrial ecosystems, and policy coordination. It also forces Western governments to confront the cost and time required to rebuild capacity they once offshored.

What it occludes is significant. The developmental partnership framing can obscure asymmetries in bargaining power, opacity in state-firm relations, and the environmental and social costs of rapid extraction. It tends to understate debt distress, community displacement, and labor conditions in some project sites. It also understates the coercive potential of export controls: even if framed as defensive, restrictions on gallium, germanium, or graphite can disrupt global industries and invite retaliation. The perspective often treats domestic political accountability and transparency as secondary to growth and security, and it may understate the risks of overcapacity, technological lock-in, and geopolitical backlash. Finally, while it criticizes Western "friend-shoring" as politicized, it can present Chinese supply-chain dominance as natural or benign, minimizing the strategic leverage that dominance creates.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective The Russian perspective approaches critical minerals through the lens of the commodity state, sovereign control over natural resources, and resistance to Western hegemony. It begins from the premise that Russia's vast mineral endowment is not merely an economic asset but a foundation of state power, strategic autonomy, and multipolarity. In this view, minerals such as nickel, palladium, uranium, and other strategic materials are instruments through which Russia can withstand sanctions, finance state capacity, and challenge a Western-dominated international order. The perspective is shaped by Russia's historical experience as a resource-exporting great power and by its post-2014 and post-2022 confrontation

with Western sanctions.

A central mechanism is state-directed mobilization. Russia treats strategic minerals as matters of national security rather than purely commercial commodities. State control, state-owned enterprises, and regulatory intervention are justified as necessary to prevent foreign capture of rents and to ensure that resource wealth serves state priorities. This includes restrictions on foreign ownership, export management, and the use of commodity revenues to support fiscal stability and military capacity. The Russian perspective argues that Western market liberalism is hypocritical: liberal states also restrict exports, stockpile, and subsidize strategic industries when convenient, while lecturing others on free markets.

A second mechanism is anti-hegemonic framing. Russia portrays Western critical-minerals strategies—friend-shoring, export controls, sanctions, and alliance-based supply chains—as instruments of neo-imperial control rather than neutral security measures. From Moscow's standpoint, the United States and its allies are attempting to monopolize advanced technology and to deny rival powers access to the material basis of modern industry. Russia therefore aligns its mineral policy with a broader narrative of multipolarity, in which resource-rich states should cooperate to resist Western dominance. This framing can resonate with producer states that view Western "green" and security agendas as new forms of conditionality.

A third mechanism is resilience through commodity power. Russia's experience under sanctions has reinforced the belief that control over key commodities provides leverage and buffers against external pressure. Even when sanctions reduce market access, resource rents can sustain state spending, military production, and geopolitical maneuvering. The perspective emphasizes self-sufficiency, Eurasian partnerships, and alternative trade routes as ways to reduce dependence on Western markets.

What this perspective contributes is a reminder that minerals are embedded in geopolitical conflict and that sanctions and export controls are themselves forms of economic coercion. It highlights the legitimacy concerns raised when powerful states reorganize supply chains for security reasons while invoking market principles. It also underscores the strategic value of state control over resources in a world of sanctions and great-power rivalry.

What it occludes is substantial. The anti-hegemonic framing often serves to legitimize authoritarian governance, corruption, and repression. It tends to understate environmental degradation, including the legacy of Soviet and post-Soviet industrial pollution, and the social costs of resource dependence. It also understates Russia's technological weaknesses in advanced materials, refining, and high-end manufacturing, as well as its vulnerability to sanctions, capital flight, and brain drain. The commodity-state model can produce short-term leverage but long-term stagnation, because rents reduce incentives for diversification and institutional reform. Finally, the perspective's moral critique of Western hypocrisy is weakened by Russia's own use of coercion, its war-driven economic mobilization, and its limited credibility as a development partner for African or other producer states.

2.7.4 Western Perspective The Western perspective frames critical minerals primarily as a supply-chain security problem. Its central concern is that advanced economies depend on concentrated, often adversarial, sources for materials essential to defense, energy transition, digital infrastructure, and industrial competitiveness. The policy response is to diversify supply, reshore or friend-shore processing, stockpile, substitute, recycle, and coordinate with allies. This perspective is rooted in liberal market economics but has shifted toward "de-risking," industrial policy, and alliance-based economic security.

A central mechanism is market-correcting industrial policy. The United States Inflation Reduction Act, the

European Union Critical Raw Materials Act, and the Minerals Security Partnership exemplify a turn away from pure market reliance toward subsidies, tax credits, strategic project designation, and diplomatic coordination. The Western perspective argues that private markets underinvest in resilience because they do not price geopolitical risk, long lead times, or the social cost of concentration. Public intervention is therefore justified to create alternative supply chains, even if it raises costs in the short term.

A second mechanism is friend-shoring and alliance coordination. Rather than seeking full autarky, Western strategies emphasize "trusted" partners, shared standards, and mutual recognition. The goal is to reduce dependence on China and Russia while preserving efficiency through allied networks. This includes offtake agreements, financing for projects in partner countries, and coordination on export controls. The perspective treats alliances as force multipliers: no single Western state can replicate China's scale, but collective action can diversify supply.

A third mechanism is the resilience triad of stockpiling, substitution, and recycling. Stockpiles buffer short-term shocks; substitution reduces dependence on specific materials; recycling and circularity lower primary demand and environmental impact. The Western perspective often presents these as pragmatic, technocratic tools that can be optimized through data, innovation, and market incentives.

What this perspective contributes is a sophisticated account of how liberal democracies can adapt to geopolitical competition without abandoning market mechanisms entirely. It provides concrete policy instruments, emphasizes transparency and rule of law, and takes seriously the fiscal and efficiency costs of intervention. It also highlights innovation, permitting reform, and private capital as necessary complements to public funding.

What it occludes is also considerable. The Western perspective can externalize extraction by seeking "secure" supply from producer states without fully addressing local development, environmental harm, or community consent. "Friend-shoring" may become geopolitical sorting that rewards compliant suppliers rather than transforming power relations. It often underestimates the time and capital required to build processing capacity, as well as the NIMBY and permitting constraints within Western democracies. It can treat minerals as security inputs rather than as the basis of livelihoods and sovereignty in producer regions. The cost debate—between efficiency and resilience—sometimes assumes that market prices capture all relevant risks, when in fact they often ignore distributional and ecological costs. Finally, Western ESG rhetoric can be inconsistent with practice, creating a gap between stated standards and the realities of extraction.

2.7.5 UN Perspective The United Nations perspective frames critical minerals through the lenses of resource governance, sustainable development, human rights, and multilateral cooperation. It is less concerned with national advantage than with global public goods: ensuring that mineral extraction supports the energy transition, industrialization, and poverty reduction without undermining environmental sustainability or human rights. Its instruments include the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals—especially SDG 7 on affordable and clean energy and SDG 9 on industry, innovation, and infrastructure—and various environmental and social standards.

A central mechanism is normative governance. The UN perspective seeks to make mineral supply chains transparent, accountable, and rights-respecting through voluntary standards, reporting frameworks, and capacity-building. It emphasizes free, prior, and informed consent, gender equality, environmental protection, and benefit-sharing. The underlying theory is that markets and states alone will not protect vulnerable communities; multilateral norms and institutions are needed to set minimum standards and to

support producer states in negotiating better terms.

A second mechanism is the circular economy and just transition. The UN perspective highlights recycling, substitution, and efficiency not only as security tools but as sustainability imperatives. It argues that reducing primary demand, extending product life, and improving resource efficiency are essential to meeting climate goals without exhausting ecosystems or displacing communities. This connects critical minerals to SDG 7 and SDG 9: minerals are necessary for clean energy and industrialization, but their extraction must not undermine other development goals.

A third mechanism is multilateral coordination. The UN perspective favors global frameworks over unilateral export controls or bloc-based supply chains. It sees critical minerals as a shared challenge requiring cooperation among producer, consumer, and transit states, as well as firms, civil society, and international organizations. This includes support for geological surveys, capacity building, technology transfer, and financing for sustainable mining in developing countries.

What this perspective contributes is a necessary corrective to purely strategic or market-based approaches. It foregrounds human rights, environmental standards, gender, and community consent. It provides a language and institutional framework for holding states and firms accountable. It also connects mineral governance to broader development goals, reminding powerful consumers that the energy transition cannot be built on new forms of exploitation.

What it occludes is the gap between norms and enforcement. Many UN frameworks are voluntary, underfunded, or dependent on state and corporate goodwill. The perspective can understate the urgency of geopolitical competition and the speed at which consumer states are reorganizing supply chains. It may also be too technocratic, treating governance as a matter of standards and reporting rather than power and redistribution. Finally, while it emphasizes producer-state capacity, it often lacks the leverage to ensure that capacity-building translates into genuine value-chain upgrading or community benefit. In a world of export controls, subsidies, and strategic stockpiles, multilateral norms risk becoming aspirational unless backed by material incentives and enforcement.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers producer-state agency, value-chain upgrading, and resource sovereignty; shows how mineral power depends on who controls refining and industrial capacity, not only who owns deposits.	Can understate the speed and scale of consumer-state retaliation, subsidy races, and the difficulty of building midstream capacity under capital and energy constraints.	Resource sovereignty plus developmental upgrading: minerals should support industrializa-tion, fiscal capacity, and community benefit rather than enclave extraction.	African producer strategies around cobalt, lithium, and graphite; calls for beneficiation and regional value chains; uneven EITI implementa-tion.	Western perspective: without demand guarantees, capital, and technology transfer, producer-state ambition may produce stranded assets or higher costs.
Chinese	Explains how state-backed supply chains, licensing, and industrial policy can convert refining dominance into coercive and developmental leverage.	Occludes the coercive effect on downstream firms and the way administrative discretion can function as a non-tariff barrier; understates dependence on imported ores and technology.	State-led development and security: mineral supply chains are strategic infrastructure to be governed for national resilience and industrial upgrading.	China's dominance in gallium, germanium, graphite, and rare-earth refining; export-control licensing; overseas mining and processing investments.	African perspective: Chinese "developmental partnership" can reproduce extractive asymmetries if value addition remains offshore.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Highlights commodity-state power, anti-hegemonic resource nationalism, and the use of mineral and energy leverage against Western dominance.	Occludes Russia's own vulnerability to sanctions, technological dependence, and the limits of commodity power without diversified industry.	Anti-hegemonic sovereignty: resource exporters should resist Western control over prices, finance, and technology.	Russian energy and commodity leverage; sanctions-era reorientation toward China and BRICS; state control over strategic sectors.	Western perspective: commodity leverage invites counter-coercion, accelerates diversification, and can isolate the exporter.
Western	Clarifies consumer-state insecurity, friend-shoring, subsidy strategies, and the economic cost of de-risking.	Occludes producer-state agency, environmental and labor externalities of accelerated mining, and the possibility that "security" masks protectionism.	Supply-chain security and market resilience: reduce dependence on adversarial or concentrated suppliers while preserving efficiency.	IRA critical-minerals provisions; EU CRMA; Minerals Security Partnership; USGS and IEA concentration data.	African perspective: friend-shoring may redirect investment without ensuring local processing, jobs, or revenue.
UN	Provides governance vocabulary—transparency, EITI, SDGs, producer capacity, sustainable development—and a multilateral alternative to bilateral coercion.	Occludes enforcement gaps, the speed of geopolitical reorganization, and the power asymmetries that make voluntary norms insufficient.	Multilateral resource governance: minerals should be extracted transparently, sustainably, and in ways that advance development.	EITI reports; UNCTAD and UNEP resource-governance work; SDG 7 and 9 framing.	Chinese/Western perspectives: in a crisis, states prioritize security and industrial policy over voluntary multilateral norms.

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: China's 2023–2024 gallium and germanium export controls and the question of how coercion works in minerals markets.

Levels of analysis. At the **individual** level, the case turns on the decisions of procurement managers, semiconductor engineers, traders, and customs officials who must interpret ambiguous licensing rules under uncertainty. Their behavior—panic buying, inventory hoarding, supplier switching, and lobbying—transmits a state policy into market prices and production schedules. At the **state** level, China's Ministry of Commerce used export licensing to convert a refining advantage into political leverage, while the United States, European Union, Japan, and other consumer states responded with stockpiling, subsidy programs, and diplomatic pressure. At the **systemic** level, the episode reveals a concentrated market structure in which a small number of processing nodes can shape global supply, producing what the literature calls weaponized interdependence: states exploit network centrality rather than total volume. At the **transnational** level, the controls cut across firms, standards bodies, logistics networks, and regulatory regimes, showing that mineral coercion is not merely a bilateral state act but a disruption of cross-border production systems in which private actors bear much of the adjustment cost.

Mechanism. The mechanism is not a simple embargo. China did not need to halt all exports; it needed to introduce administrative friction into a market with inelastic short-run supply and high switching costs. Gallium and germanium are not necessarily rare in the earth's crust, but their recovery depends on complex metallurgical processing, often as by-products of other industrial streams. When licensing requirements were imposed, buyers faced uncertainty about timing, volume, and eligibility. That uncertainty raised effective costs even where physical supply continued. Firms responded by drawing down inventories, seeking alternative suppliers, and pressuring governments for relief. The coercive effect therefore operates through three channels: first, a **chokepoint channel**, in which control over refining rather than mining creates leverage; second, an **expectations channel**, in which the possibility of future denial changes procurement and investment behavior; and third, a **political channel**, in which downstream firms become constituencies for accommodation or retaliation. The mechanism is strongest when the controlling state has credible capacity, the commodity has few short-run substitutes, and downstream industries are politically influential. It weakens when buyers can substitute, recycle, stockpile, or reroute supply through third countries. In this sense, mineral coercion is less like a blockade and more like a calibrated tax on uncertainty: it raises the cost of dependence without necessarily severing trade.

Perspective reconstruction. The **African perspective** is the most revealing for the long-run structure of the case, even though Africa is not the immediate site of the gallium and germanium controls. From an African vantage point, the episode demonstrates that mineral power is created not by geological endowment alone but by control over refining, standards, and industrial demand. African states have long exported ores and concentrates while importing finished materials, capturing little of the value added. China's controls show that a state which has moved up the value chain can use midstream dominance as leverage, while states that remain at the extraction stage remain price-takers. The lesson for African producer strategies is therefore double: resource sovereignty requires beneficiation, regional industrialization, and strategic stockpiling, but it also requires caution, because great-power competition can instrumentalize African minerals without delivering durable development. African scholarship on extraversion, dependency, and the politics of the belly suggests that external demand shocks often reorganize local elites and institutions without transforming productive capacity. The controls thus validate African demands for value-chain upgrading, but they also warn that upgrading under geopolitical pressure may be captured by foreign capital, security agendas, or elite

bargains. In short, the African perspective sees China's move as both a model of industrial statecraft and a reminder that mineral wealth without processing capacity is strategic vulnerability.

The **Chinese perspective** treats the controls as a defensive and legitimate exercise of sovereign regulatory authority in response to Western technology restrictions, especially in semiconductors and advanced manufacturing. It emphasizes that China remains a supplier, not a total embargoer, and that licensing is a normal tool of export administration. The developmental framing presents Chinese supply chains as integrated, efficient, and mutually beneficial, particularly for producer states that receive investment and market access. This perspective contributes the insight that mineral leverage is embedded in a broader industrial ecosystem rather than an isolated commodity trick. Its occlusion is the coercive effect on downstream firms and the asymmetry between a state that controls licensing and firms that cannot easily replace inputs.

The **Russian perspective** reads the controls through an anti-hegemonic lens, as evidence that Western technological dominance can be challenged by resource and industrial power. It validates commodity-state strategies and the idea that sanctions and export controls are instruments of geopolitical competition rather than neutral regulation. Russia's own experience with energy leverage and sanctions reinforces the view that mineral interdependence is a battlefield. What this perspective occludes is the fragility of commodity power without diversified industry, technological autonomy, and reliable logistics; it can overstate solidarity among non-Western states and understate the costs of retaliation.

The **Western perspective** interprets the controls as confirmation that concentrated supply chains are a security risk. It emphasizes de-risking, friend-shoring, stockpiling, recycling, and subsidy-driven investment in alternative supply. This perspective is strongest on the consumer-state dilemma: efficiency and security pull in opposite directions, and reshoring or friend-shoring is expensive. Its occlusion is that it can treat producer states as passive suppliers or security problems, underestimating their agency and the environmental and social costs of accelerated extraction outside China.

The **UN perspective** frames the episode as a governance failure and an argument for transparent, rules-based, sustainable resource management. It highlights EITI, producer-state capacity, and the SDG agenda, suggesting that mineral security should be pursued through multilateral cooperation rather than unilateral controls. Its contribution is to keep distributional and environmental questions visible. Its occlusion is enforcement: voluntary norms and reporting standards move slowly relative to export-control politics, and they lack the material leverage to compel compliance.

Explicit adjudication. The Chinese perspective best explains the immediate instrument and its transmission, because the case is centrally about state capacity to administer a chokepoint. However, it is not sufficient. It underexplains why the controls were credible: that credibility came from systemic market concentration and transnational firm dependence, not merely from Chinese policy intent. The Western perspective best explains the response dynamics—stockpiling, subsidy races, and friend-shoring—but it tends to overstate how quickly consumer states can escape dependence and understates the cost of doing so. The African perspective is indispensable for the long-run question of who captures value from mineral systems, but it is less directly explanatory of the short-run coercive shock. The Russian perspective captures the geopolitical symbolism but adds little mechanism. The UN perspective identifies governance gaps but cannot explain the timing or effectiveness of coercion. Therefore, the best explanation is layered: a state instrument operating through a concentrated market structure and transnational firm vulnerability, with long-run legitimacy and value capture determined by producer-state industrial capacity. China's controls worked because of where China sits in the supply chain; whether that power endures depends on whether other states can move processing, recycling, and substitution out of China's shadow.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Mechanism identification.** Explain how the Inflation Reduction Act's critical-minerals and foreign-entity-of-concern rules change the effective demand for lithium, nickel, cobalt, and graphite, and distinguish that mechanism from a simple subsidy to domestic mining.

2. **Comparative institutional design.** Compare the IRA, the EU Critical Raw Materials Act, and the Minerals Security Partnership: which instrument is best at accelerating investment, which is best at setting circularity targets, and which is best at reducing political risk for capital-intensive projects?

3. **Levels of analysis.** Analyze the same strategy at four levels: firm-level compliance and traceability; state-level alliance politics; systemic-level refining concentration; and transnational-level governance through EITI, MSP, and responsible-sourcing standards.

4. **Perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct how an African producer state, China, Russia, Western cost-focused analysts, and UN governance actors would each evaluate "friend-shoring" in battery minerals.

5. **Historical analogue.** Compare the current critical-minerals agenda to the 1970s oil shocks and to Cold War strategic-materials programs; identify which analogy is more useful and where each breaks down.

6. **Falsification.** Specify two observations that would show that IRA/CRMA/MSP strategies have failed to reduce vulnerability or to increase producer-country value addition by the late 2020s.

MODEL ANSWER

The central mechanism is a demand-side and rules-of-origin shock: the IRA's clean-vehicle credit makes part of the subsidy contingent on sourcing critical minerals from the United States or free-trade-agreement partners and on excluding foreign entities of concern from battery components, while the EU CRMA uses permitting acceleration, strategic-project status, and 2030 benchmarks for extraction, processing, and recycling, and the MSP pools public finance and diplomatic risk-sharing among partners. Together these instruments do not merely subsidize production; they redefine which supply chains count as "secure" for subsidy, procurement, and alliance purposes. The IRA is fastest at moving investment because it attaches large consumer subsidies to compliance; the CRMA is slower but more explicit about circularity and domestic processing; the MSP is weakest as a direct production policy but strongest as a coordination device for capital-intensive projects in jurisdictions where private investors perceive political or offtake risk. Japan's parallel strategy, through JOGMEC and resource diplomacy, adds a firm-level layer in which trading houses and battery makers seek long-term offtake and equity rather than full vertical integration. The scope condition is that these policies work only where capital, permitting, power, and skills can respond within the policy horizon; where they cannot, the result is not reshoring but rerouting through FTA partners and "friend-shored" intermediaries.

At the firm level, battery and automakers face a compliance optimization problem: they must map mineral origin, processing location, and ownership through multiple tiers, which raises transaction costs and can favor incumbents with traceability systems. At the state level, the United States, European Union, and Japan are attempting to convert alliance structures into supply-chain geography, while China retains the

incumbent advantage in refining and, in several minerals, in mining. At the systemic level, the relevant fact is concentration: even where mining is dispersed, refining and chemical conversion often remain concentrated, so diversification of mines alone does not remove leverage. At the transnational level, the MSP and EITI-style governance initiatives attempt to make investment compatible with transparency and local benefit, but they do not by themselves create African or Latin American processing capacity. From an African producer-state perspective, friend-shoring can look like a relocation of the same extractive bargain unless it includes local refining, power infrastructure, and fiscal terms that retain value; from a Chinese perspective, de-risking is read as a politically driven attempt to displace state-backed supply chains that were built through long-term finance and infrastructure; from a Russian perspective, the Western strategy confirms a commodity-state view that resource interdependence is being weaponized by incumbent powers; from a Western cost perspective, the open question is whether security premiums are worth the inflationary and efficiency losses; from a UN governance perspective, the test is whether new supply chains meet EITI, human-rights, and SDG 7 and 9 standards rather than merely shifting extraction to new jurisdictions.

The best historical analogue is not the 1970s oil shock but the Cold War strategic materials programs, with one crucial difference: oil had few short-run substitutes, whereas battery minerals face a portfolio of substitution, recycling, and chemistry changes, but only over decade-long horizons. The oil analogy overpredicts immediate coercion and underpredicts the slow, capital-intensive nature of mineral adjustment. A falsifying observation would be that by the late 2020s non-Chinese refining capacity for lithium, nickel, cobalt, and graphite has not expanded despite subsidies and permits, or that African value-added processing has not increased despite MSP rhetoric. Another falsifier would be that cost premiums from FEOC compliance are so high that automakers absorb penalties or restructure credits rather than change sourcing. The adjudication is therefore conditional: the strategies are plausible mechanisms for reducing single-point vulnerability, but their success depends on whether policy-induced demand is matched by investable projects, grid and water infrastructure, and credible long-term offtake; absent those, they risk producing a more expensive but still concentrated supply chain.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: A Namibian lithium developer with a permitted hard-rock project must choose among three offtake structures in 2025: a US Minerals Security Partnership-backed package requiring FEOC-compliant refining outside China; an EU Critical Raw Materials Act strategic-project fast track with European cathode offtake; or a Chinese state-backed proposal to build a local concentrator and chemical plant with majority offtake to China. The developer faces limited grid power, water constraints, and a government demanding local employment and fiscal revenue. The state has no domestic battery market and limited capital. The question is which structure best advances resource sovereignty without sacrificing project finance.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

Mechanism: Identify the causal chain through which each offtake structure changes investment, refining location, fiscal revenue, and vulnerability to export controls or subsidy rules.

Perspective reconstruction: Reconstruct the Namibian state's, China's, the US/EU/Japan partners', Western cost-focused critics', and UN governance actors' readings of the same choice, steel-manning each.

Historical analogue: Compare the case to one earlier resource-development episode (for example, Cold War uranium, 1970s copper, or post-2000s oil-backed infrastructure) and state where the analogy holds and

where it fails.

Falsifiers: List two or three observations that would show your recommended choice was wrong, including at least one measurable indicator of value addition and one of supply-chain concentration.

(c) Self-check: Did your memo distinguish description (what each strategy does), explanation (why it changes incentives), prediction (what capacity or cost outcomes follow), and prescription (what the producer state should choose)?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: China's 2023–2024 gallium and germanium export controls most clearly illustrate which mechanism?

A. They caused an immediate physical shortage that halted Western defense production.
B. They used licensing as a signaling and cost-raising tool that exploited refining concentration while preserving market access.
C. They permanently decoupled China from Western mineral markets.
D. They triggered automatic substitution through recycling within one production cycle.

Distractor diagnosis:

- **A** is wrong because it confuses announced controls with a realized, economy-wide shortage; licensing delays and inventory buffers mean the short-run effect is friction and uncertainty rather than an immediate production halt.

- **C** is wrong because the controls were calibrated and partial, not a severance of trade; China retained leverage precisely by remaining inside the market.

- **D** is wrong because substitution and recycling for gallium and germanium face technical, collection, and scale constraints that unfold over years, not within a single production cycle.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Production and refining shares for ten critical minerals (approximate, 2023–2024)

Mineral	Top mining country (share)	Top refining country (share)	Notes
Rare earth elements (REEs)	China (~60–70%)	China (~85–90%)	Separation and magnet-making even more concentrated than mining
Lithium	Australia (~47%), Chile (~26%)	China (~60–65%)	Hard-rock vs. brine; refining is the bottleneck
Cobalt	DRC (~70%)	China (~75%)	By-product of copper/nickel; artisanal mining significant

Mineral	Top mining country (share)	Top refining country (share)	Notes
Nickel	Indonesia (~50%)	China/Indonesia (~60%+)	HPAL capacity expanding in Indonesia
Graphite (natural)	China (~65–70%)	China (~90%)	Synthetic graphite also China-dominant
Gallium	China (~98% primary)	China (~98%)	By-product of bauxite/alumina; no primary mine
Germanium	China (~60%+ primary)	China (~60%+)	By-product of zinc; recycling matters
Copper	Chile, Peru	China (~40%)	Refining concentration lower than REEs but rising
Manganese	South Africa, Gabon	China (~90%)	Steel and battery (HPMSM) grades diverge
Silicon (metallurgical)	China (~60%)	China (~60%+)	Polysilicon for solar even more concentrated

Sources: IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024); USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries (2024). Shares are approximate and vary by grade and year; treat as orders of magnitude, not point estimates.

Table 2 — Export-control and supply-security events, 2010–2024

Date	Event	Actor	Mechanism	Immediate effect
Sept 2010	Rare earth export quota dispute	China → Japan	Quota/permit restriction	Price spike; WTO case filed
Aug 2022	CHIPS and Science Act	US	Subsidies + export controls on advanced chips	Reshoring incentives; China access restricted
July 2023	Gallium and germanium export licensing	China	Licensing/permit regime	Spot prices rose; downstream uncertainty
Oct 2023	Graphite export controls	China	Licensing on natural/synthetic graphite	Battery supply anxiety
Dec 2023	Ban on rare earth extrac-tion/processing tech exports	China	Technology export ban	Limits on foreign capacity building

Date	Event	Actor	Mechanism	Immediate effect
Mar 2024	EU Critical Raw Materials Act adopted	EU	Targets, permitting, stockpiling	Framework for strategic autonomy
2024	Minerals Security Partnership expansion	US-led	Friend-shoring coordination	Project finance for non-China supply

Sources: USGS; IEA; CRMA text; Kalantzakos (2020); Sanderson (2022).

Table 3 — Stockpile and strategic-reserve programs (indicative)

Program	Country/Region	Minerals covered (examples)	Character
National Defense Stockpile (NDS)	US	Cobalt, tantalum, REEs (limited)	Defense-focused; historically drawn down
JOGMEC stockpiles	Japan	Rare metals, oil, gas	Long-standing; industry-linked
Strategic petroleum/mineral reserves	China	Oil, some metals	State-directed; opaque volumes
EU joint purchasing / stockpiling (CRMA)	EU	Strategic raw materials	Emerging; coordination mechanism
African producer strategies	DRC, Namibia, Zimbabwe	Cobalt, lithium, REEs	Export bans on unprocessed ore; value-addition push

Volumes are often classified or unaudited; treat as indicative scope, not precise inventory.

Analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Using Table 1, describe the single most important structural trend in critical minerals markets between 2010 and 2024, and identify which mineral shows the sharpest concentration at the refining stage rather than the mining stage. Explain why refining concentration matters more than mining concentration for geopolitical leverage.

2. **Level of analysis.** The 2023 gallium and germanium controls can be analyzed at individual (firm), state (China), systemic (US–China rivalry), and transnational (global value chain) levels. Pick two levels and show how the same event looks different at each. Which level best explains the *timing* of the controls?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives interprets Table 2's July 2023 gallium/germanium licensing event:

- African (primary): producer-state leverage, value-chain upgrading, resource sovereignty.
- Chinese: state-backed supply chains, developmental partnership, anti-containment.
- Russian: commodity-state solidarity, anti-hegemonic framing.
- Western: supply-chain security, friend-shoring, economic cost.
- UN: resource governance, EITI, SDG 7 and 9. For each, state one contribution and one occlusion.

4. **Interpretation.** Table 3 shows stockpiling programs with opaque volumes. Does opacity make stockpiles more or less effective as deterrents? Argue using the distinction between credible commitment and strategic ambiguity, and specify the scope conditions under which each logic holds.

5. **Limitation.** What is the most important data limitation in Tables 1–3, and how would it bias a policy conclusion if ignored? Propose one concrete data improvement (e.g., audited EITI reporting, customs microdata, or satellite-based mine monitoring) and state what it would and would not resolve.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Refining Chokepoint Funnel"

What to draw: A vertical funnel narrowing from top to bottom, divided into four horizontal bands labeled, top to bottom: (1) Mining / Extraction, (2) Refining / Processing, (3) Manufacturing / Components, (4) End-Use (EVs, defense, electronics). Draw the funnel wide at the top and narrowest at band 2. Annotate band 2 with "China: 85–90% REEs; ~60–75% Li/Co/Ni; ~90% graphite." Draw small country flags or labels at band 1 (Australia, DRC, Chile, Indonesia) to show dispersed mining. Draw arrows from band 2 to band 3 labeled "chokepoint leverage."

How to label it: Title at top: "Where Geopolitical Leverage Actually Lives." Left margin: "Dispersion" (top) → "Concentration" (bottom). Right margin: "Value added" increasing downward. Bottom caption: "Mining is geographically dispersed; refining is where control concentrates."

Perspective overlay to annotate: In the margin, write "African view: mining without refining = rent extraction, not development." In a second margin note: "Western view: friend-shoring targets band 2." In a third: "Chinese view: band 2 is the product of decades of state investment."

Visual 2 — "The Coercion Loop: Gallium and Germanium, 2023"

What to draw: A circular flow diagram with five nodes connected by arrows in clockwise order: (1) China imposes licensing (July 2023) → (2) Export volumes fall / uncertainty rises → (3) Spot prices spike and downstream costs increase → (4) Importing states (US, EU, Japan) face production risk → (5) Negotiation / substitution / stockpile release → back to (1) with a dashed arrow labeled "escalation or de-escalation." Draw a central hub labeled "Market Power = Refining Monopoly + Inelastic Short-Run Supply." Add a side branch from node 3 to a small box labeled "Price signal → new investment (long-run supply response)."

How to label it: Title: "How Mineral Coercion Works (and When It Fails)." Label each arrow with a mechanism: "permit friction," "quantity effect," "price effect," "cost pass-through," "policy response." Add a legend: solid arrows = short-run (0–12 months); dashed arrows = long-run (3–7 years).

Perspective overlay to annotate: Top: "Chinese framing: lawful trade management, not coercion." Bottom: "Western framing: economic coercion; WTO-inconsistent." Left: "African framing: leverage is possible

only where refining is captured; producer states should capture band 2." Right: "UN framing: transparency (EITI) and rules-based trade reduce arbitrary use."

Visual 3 — "The Five-Perspective Pentagon"

What to draw: A pentagon with the lesson topic at the center: "Critical Minerals & Advanced Materials." Each vertex is one perspective, labeled: African (top), Chinese (upper right), Russian (lower right), Western (lower left), UN (upper left). From each vertex, draw a short arrow pointing inward with a keyword: African → "Resource sovereignty / value-chain upgrading"; Chinese → "State-backed supply chains / developmental partnership"; Russian → "Commodity state / anti-hegemony"; Western → "Supply-chain security / friend-shoring"; UN → "Resource governance / EITI / SDGs." Draw a dashed circle around the pentagon labeled "Shared blind spot: artisanal mining and environmental externalities."

How to label it: Title: "Five Lenses on One Object." Add a small table beneath: "Each lens sees a different mechanism; none sees all five." Caption: "The African lens is primary because it reveals what the other four treat as background: who captures value at which stage."

Perspective overlay to annotate: Color-code vertices (e.g., green for African, red for Chinese, blue for Russian, grey for Western, light blue for UN) and note in a legend: "Color = analytical tradition, not endorsement." Add a note: "The pentagon is a heuristic; perspectives overlap in practice."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the central puzzle of critical minerals geopolitics?	The puzzle is not scarcity of ore but concentration of refining and processing capacity; leverage lives in midstream, not upstream. *Sources: IEA (2024); Kalantzakos (2020).*
Why do rare earths matter beyond their name?	"Rare" refers to dispersion and processing difficulty, not crustal abundance; China's dominance is in separation, metallurgy, and magnet production. *Sources: USGS; Sanderson (2022).*
What is China's near-monopoly and how was it built?	State-directed investment, environmental cost externalization, and vertical integration across mining-to-magnet chain; built over decades. *Sources: Kalantzakos (2020); IEA (2024).*
How do gallium/germanium controls work as coercion?	Licensing creates permit friction and uncertainty; short-run inelastic supply lets small quantity changes move prices; long-run response via substitution/stockpiles. *Sources: USGS; IEA (2024).*

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
Why are advanced materials a defense issue?	Hypersonics, stealth, and thermal protection require specific materials (e.g., high-temperature alloys, carbon-carbon composites) with narrow supply bases. *Sources: Sanderson (2022).*
What drives battery supply chain geopolitics?	Lithium, cobalt, nickel, graphite demand from EVs; refining concentration; DRC cobalt and Indonesian nickel as upstream nodes. *Sources: IEA (2024); USGS.*
What is "friend-shoring" and its cost?	Relocating supply to allied states; raises costs and may not reduce concentration if allies still refine in China. *Sources: CRMA text; IEA (2024).*
What is the African producer-state strategy?	Export bans on unprocessed ore, local processing mandates, resource nationalism, value-chain upgrading; tension with investment climate. *Sources: Grovogui; Mbembe; Rodney; Nkrumah (general arguments).*
What does the UN perspective add?	EITI transparency, SDG 7/9, resource governance; weak enforcement; artisanal mining and human rights. *Sources: EITI; UN SDGs.*
What are the main resilience strategies?	Stockpiling, substitution, recycling, circular economy; each has time lags and scale limits. *Sources: IEA (2024); USGS.*
What is the strongest counterargument to "decouple"?	Full decoupling is cost-prohibitive and would slow green transition; managed interdependence may be more realistic. *Sources: Sanderson (2022); IEA (2024).*
What falsifies the "China monopoly is permanent" claim?	New refining capacity in Australia/US/EU; substitution in magnets/batteries; recycling scale-up; price-driven entry. *Sources: IEA (2024); USGS.*

Source log: IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024); USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries (2024); Kalantzakos (2020); Sanderson (2022); CRMA text; EITI; UN SDGs 7 and 9; African scholarship (Grovogui, Mbembe, Rodney, Nkrumah, and others as general arguments).

Summary (3–5 sentences): Critical minerals geopolitics is best understood as a midstream concentration problem: mining is dispersed but refining and processing are heavily concentrated, especially in China, which converts geological endowment into structural leverage. Export controls on gallium, germanium, and graphite demonstrate how permit friction and inelastic short-run supply can coerce downstream industries, though long-run substitution and stockpiles limit durability. African producer states seek value-chain upgrading and resource sovereignty, revealing that the global regime often treats extraction as development while capturing value elsewhere. Western friend-shoring and EU CRMA aim to diversify, but face cost and time constraints; the UN frame stresses governance, transparency, and SDGs. Resilience ultimately depends on stockpiling, substitution, and recycling, none of which is a quick fix.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Critical minerals are the ingredients modern technology and weapons need. The big problem is not that they are rare in the ground, but that one country—China—does most of the refining that turns raw ore into usable material. Because refining is hard to replace quickly, China can threaten to slow exports and raise costs for everyone else, as it did with gallium and germanium in 2023. Countries are now trying to stockpile, substitute, and recycle, and African producer states are trying to process minerals at home instead of just shipping out raw ore.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am fuzzy on the exact difference between mining concentration and refining concentration for each mineral; I conflated "rare earths" with "rare" scarcity; I did not specify the time lag for new refining capacity; I treated stockpiles as uniformly effective without distinguishing defense vs. commercial reserves; I under-specified the African perspective beyond "resource nationalism."

3. **Reread verification.** Re-reading IEA (2024) and USGS (2024) confirms that refining concentration exceeds mining concentration for REEs, lithium, cobalt, graphite, and manganese; Sanderson (2022) supports the defense-materials link; Kalantzakos (2020) supports the historical construction of China's dominance; CRMA text supports EU targets. The African value-chain upgrading argument is supported by general African scholarship (Rodney, Nkrumah, Grovogui) rather than a single mineral-specific source, which is a gap to flag.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** Think of critical minerals like a bakery: flour (ore) is grown in many places, but if almost all the milling (refining) happens in one country, that country controls bread prices. The analogy captures midstream concentration and leverage, but it breaks down because minerals are not renewable like wheat, environmental damage from mining is severe and localized, and "milling" for minerals requires decades of capital and know-how, not just equipment.

5. **Rewrite.** Critical minerals geopolitics is a midstream-concentration problem: ore is geographically dispersed, but refining and processing are heavily concentrated, especially in China, giving it structural leverage that can be exercised through export licensing and technology bans, as seen in 2023–2024. This leverage is strongest in the short run, when supply is inelastic, and weakest in the long run, when substitution, stockpiling, and new capacity respond. African producer states experience this regime as value extraction at the refining stage and seek upgrading and sovereignty; Western and Japanese strategies emphasize friend-shoring and stockpiles; the UN frame emphasizes governance and transparency. No single strategy resolves the trade-off between security, cost, and development, and data opacity on stockpiles and artisanal mining limits confident policy design.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L53	definition	What are rare earth elements, and why are they strategically important?	Rare earth elements are seventeen lanthanides plus scandium and yttrium. They are not geologically rare, but refining and separation capacity is highly concentrated, making them strategically important for magnets, electronics, and defense systems.	African: deposits exist, but value often captured downstream; Chinese: integrated state-backed chain; Western: security vulnerability.
L53	mechanism	How did China build near-monopoly power in rare earth refining?	China's position rests on state-supported mining, processing capacity, industrial policy, and tolerance for environmental costs, especially in separation and refining rather than ore extraction alone.	Chinese: developmental state capacity; Western: strategic dependence; African: lesson on beneficiation.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L53	application	What leverage did China's 2023–2024 gallium and germanium controls create?	Licensing requirements on gallium and germanium disrupted semiconductor, defense, and advanced manufacturing supply chains, showing that midstream chokepoints can coerce even when raw materials are globally dispersed.	African: value-chain position matters; Russian: anti-hegemonic framing; UN: trade-governance concern.
L53	comparison	How do gallium and germanium differ from rare earths as leverage tools?	They are often byproducts of other mining and refining processes, with highly concentrated processing; controls target specific industrial inputs rather than bulk commodities.	Western: targeted coercion; Chinese: calibrated signaling; African: byproduct value capture.
L53	source	What does the IEA Critical Minerals Outlook 2024 emphasize?	It tracks demand growth, supply concentration, investment needs, and policy responses, highlighting risks from geographic concentration and long project lead times.	UN: evidence for governance; African: case for local benefit and processing.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L53	debate	What is the "friend-shoring" debate in critical minerals?	Friend-shoring relocates supply chains to allied states to reduce geopolitical risk, but critics argue it raises costs, fragments markets, and may exclude Global South producers.	African: risk of marginalization; Western: security; Chinese: containment narrative.
L53	reconstruction	How does the African perspective reframe critical minerals governance?	It centers producer-state sovereignty, value-chain upgrading, and historical extraction, arguing that security discourse can reproduce dependency unless beneficiation and local industrialization occur.	Primary African; Western security framing often occludes equity and sovereignty.
L53	occlusion	What does the Western supply-chain security frame often occlude?	It can obscure environmental and labor costs in producer states, historical unequal exchange, and the possibility that diversification without beneficiation leaves Africa as a raw-material supplier.	African: equity and sovereignty; UN: EITI and SDG concerns.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L53	adjudication	How should one adjudicate between security and development claims in mineral policy?	By examining evidence on value capture, local content, environmental compliance, and whether diversification policies include processing capacity and revenue transparency.	UN: governance metrics; African: sovereignty and beneficiation.
L53	visual	What does a production-versus-refining country matrix reveal?	Mining is geographically dispersed, but refining and processing are highly concentrated, especially in China, creating chokepoints distinct from reserve distribution.	Chinese: industrial capacity; Western: vulnerability; African: upgrading opportunity.
L53	mechanism	Why are battery supply chains for lithium, cobalt, nickel, and graphite strategically contested?	They combine rapid demand growth, geographic concentration in mining and refining, and links to electric vehicles, defense, and energy security.	African: cobalt and DRC; Chinese: processing dominance; Western: IRA incentives.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L53	application	What is the Inflation Reduction Act's mineral strategy?	The IRA uses tax credits and sourcing rules to incentivize domestic or allied mineral supply chains, reshaping investment flows and potentially excluding non-allied or non-FTA suppliers.	Western: industrial policy; African: market-access concerns; Chinese: containment.
L53	comparison	How does the EU Critical Raw Materials Act differ from the US IRA approach?	The CRMA sets strategic project designations, benchmarks for domestic extraction, processing, and recycling, and permitting acceleration, while the IRA relies heavily on tax-credit conditionality.	EU: regulatory state; US: fiscal state; African: access and standards.
L53	source	What role does EITI play in mineral governance?	The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative promotes revenue transparency and multi-stakeholder disclosure, but its effectiveness depends on state capacity and civil society strength.	UN: governance mechanism; African: sovereignty and accountability debates.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L53	debate	What is the substitution, stockpiling, and recycling resilience debate?	Stockpiling, substitution, and recycling can reduce vulnerability but face cost, scale, technological, and time-lag constraints; they complement rather than replace supply diversification.	Western: resilience; Chinese: market adaptation; African: circular-economy opportunity.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table

Competency	Self-score (0–100)	Calibration prompt	Action if below 70
Define rare earths and explain refining concentration		Can I distinguish geological abundance from processing concentration?	Re-read Key Idea 1 and USGS/IEA data.
Explain gallium and germanium export-control leverage		Can I identify the midstream chokepoint and affected sectors?	Reconstruct the 2023–2024 case.
Compare IRA, EU CRMA, and Minerals Security Partnership		Can I state one fiscal, one regulatory, and one diplomatic mechanism?	Re-read Key Idea 4 and Problem Pair.
Reconstruct the African perspective from within		Can I state sovereignty, beneficiation, and historical extraction without Western framing?	Re-read Section 2.7.1.
Identify falsifiers for mineral-security claims		Can I name evidence that would weaken a coercion or resilience claim?	Re-read Key Idea 5 and Worked Example.

7.2 Three-question debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you initially underweight, and what evidence from the lesson would force you to revise that weighting?
2. What single piece of evidence would most weaken the claim that China's gallium and germanium controls created durable coercive leverage?
3. Did your analysis distinguish description of mineral markets from explanation of coercion, prediction of policy effects, and prescription for producer states?

7.3 Error-log table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Rare earths are rare in the earth's crust.	They are not geologically rare; scarcity is in economically viable refining and separation capacity.	USGS Mineral Commodity Summaries; IEA Critical Minerals Outlook (2024).
China's leverage comes mainly from mining rare earths.	The stronger chokepoint is midstream refining, processing, and separation, not ore extraction alone.	Kalantzakos (2020); IEA (2024).
Export controls always backfire on the coercing state.	Controls can create short-term leverage while also accelerating substitution, stockpiling, and diversification.	China's 2023–2024 gallium and germanium controls.
Diversification of supply automatically produces development in producer states.	Without beneficiation, local content, and processing capacity, producer states may remain raw-material suppliers.	African scholarship on resource sovereignty; EITI debates.
Stockpiling fully solves mineral vulnerability.	Stockpiles are finite, costly, specification-sensitive, and cannot replace long-term supply diversification or recycling.	USGS; defense stockpile debates; IEA (2024).
Western mineral strategies are purely market-driven.	The IRA and CRMA are forms of industrial policy using fiscal incentives, regulatory benchmarks, and strategic project designation.	IRA text; CRMA text.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Rare earth elements; refining concentration; byproduct leverage; battery minerals; resilience	State-backed processing capacity; export licensing; tax-credit conditionality; regulatory benchmarks; stockpiling and substitution	Kalantzakos (2020) on rare earth geopolitics; African resource-sovereignty scholarship; industrial-policy theory	China's 2023–2024 gallium/germanium controls; IRA; EU CRMA; MSP; DRC cobalt; IEA (2024); USGS summaries	Security vs. development; friend-shoring vs. market efficiency; diversification vs. beneficiation; stockpiling vs. substitution	Evidence of rapid non-Chinese refining scale-up; sustained price collapse; failed export-control price spikes; documented local value capture	L19 minerals; L33 African minerals; L52 semiconductors; L54 AI/hyperwar; L56 innovation; L57 biosecurity
African producer-state sovereignty; Chinese developmental partnership; Russian commodity-state framing; Western friend-shoring; UN EITI/SDG governance	Value-chain upgrading; state capacity; anti-hegemonic commodity politics; allied sourcing; transparency and revenue disclosure	Grovogui, Mamdani, Rodney, Mbembe, Bayart on African state and extraction; EITI Standard	Cobalt and lithium supply chains; gallium/germanium licensing; CRMA strategic projects	Equity vs. security; transparency vs. sovereignty; global South inclusion vs. allied blocs	Documented revenue leakage; failed local processing projects; EITI non-compliance without market penalty	L33 African minerals; L52 semiconductors; L54 AI/hyperwar

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 — 24 hours:** Review all fifteen flashcards and recite the five key ideas from memory, focusing on the distinction between mining and refining concentration.
- **R2 — 3 days:** Reconstruct the China gallium and germanium worked example, including mechanism, all five perspectives, and explicit adjudication.
- **R3 — 1 week:** Complete the Problem Pair on US, EU, and Japanese strategies, then compare your answer with the model answer.
- **R4 — 2 weeks:** Re-analyze the Data Lab tables, identifying one trend, one level-of-analysis claim, and one limitation for each perspective.

- **R5 — 1 month:** Write the Independent Memo on a new critical-minerals case and test whether your conclusion survives the falsifiers in the cheatsheet.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define rare earth elements and distinguish geological abundance from refining concentration.
☐ I can explain China's near-monopoly in rare earth refining as a mechanism, not just an outcome.
☐ I can explain how gallium and germanium export controls created leverage in 2023–2024.
☐ I can distinguish mining concentration from processing concentration.
☐ I can explain why battery supply chains are strategically contested.
☐ I can compare the IRA, EU CRMA, and Minerals Security Partnership.
☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective on resource sovereignty and beneficiation.
☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
☐ I can identify what each perspective contributes and what it occludes.
☐ I can use the four levels of analysis in a worked example.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.
☐ I can identify falsifiers for mineral-security and resilience claims.
☐ I can interpret production and refining data by country.
☐ I can explain the limits of stockpiling, substitution, and recycling.
☐ I can connect this lesson to L19, L33, L52, L54, L56, and L57.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit and error log.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

- **Rare earth geopolitics:** Kalantzakos, *China and the Geopolitics of Rare Earths* (2020).
- **Mineral data and outlooks:** IEA, *Critical Minerals Outlook* (2024); USGS, *Mineral Commodity Summaries* (2024).
- **Policy frameworks:** European Commission, *Critical Raw Materials Act* (2024); U.S. *Inflation Reduction Act* (2022); Minerals Security Partnership (2022).
- **Governance and transparency:** EITI Standard (2023).
- **African political economy and extraction:** Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972); Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (1996); Grovogui, *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996).
- **Supply-chain and industrial-policy analysis:** Sanderson (2022) on critical minerals supply chains and allied sourcing debates.

End of Lesson 53. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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55. AI, AGI, and Hyperwar

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 54: AI, AGI, and Hyperwar

Field	Value
Module	Module 9: Techno-Geopolitics, AI, and Emerging Domains
Prerequisites	L24 (cyber and cognitive), L22 (conventional warfare), L52 (semiconductors)
Interleaved links	Forward to L55 (quantum + NC3), L56 (innovation), L57 (space and infrastructure)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, visuals, flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Artificial intelligence is not merely a new weapons platform; it is a transformation of the cognitive architecture of war. Where earlier revolutions in military affairs changed how force was delivered—gunpowder, mechanization, nuclear weapons—AI changes how decisions are made, how targets are identified, and how escalation unfolds. The puzzle this lesson addresses is whether the compression of decision cycles by algorithmic systems creates a novel and potentially uncontrollable pathway to war—what some analysts call "hyperwar"—and whether governance frameworks designed for human-paced conflict can survive machine-paced conflict. The student must learn to distinguish three analytically separate questions: whether AI changes the probability of war, whether it changes the character of war, and whether it changes who can wage war. Each question has a different theoretical answer and a different evidentiary base, and conflating them is the most common error in the policy literature.

The lesson draws on four theoretical traditions, each with a distinct mechanism. Realism supplies the security-dilemma logic: if AI confers first-mover advantages in targeting and command, states will race to deploy it, and the resulting instability may be structural rather than chosen. Liberal institutionalism supplies the governance question: can regimes like the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) or the EU AI Act constrain military AI, or will security externalities defeat regulation? Constructivism supplies the normative question: how do shared understandings of "meaningful human control" emerge, and can they be universalized across civilizational frames? Critical and post-colonial theory supplies the vantage that the other three often occlude: that AI is not a neutral technology but an infrastructure of power whose training data, compute, and standards are concentrated in a handful of states and corporations, reproducing global hierarchies. The canonical sources anchor these traditions: Scharre (2018) on the autonomy debate and the principal-agent problem in lethal systems; Horowitz (2018) on the diffusion of military innovations and the organizational barriers to adoption; Kissinger, Schmidt, and Huttenlocher (2021) on AI and the transformation of world order; Bostrom (2014) on the security dilemma of superintelligence and the alignment problem.

The African vantage is not a regional illustration of a Western theory; it is a distinct epistemic position. From this position, the central fact is the AI divide: the concentration of compute, data, talent, and platform control in a small number of states and firms, overwhelmingly outside Africa. African scholarship—from Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment as a historical process, through Nkrumah's neo-colonialism, to contemporary

work by Aning, Danso, and others on African agency in global governance—frames AI not as a neutral tool but as an infrastructure that can deepen dependency. The demand is for equitable governance: African participation in standard-setting, data sovereignty, and the right to develop AI capacity rather than merely import it. The African perspective also notices what others miss: that AI-enabled warfare is already present on the continent (drone strikes in the Sahel, algorithmic surveillance in urban policing), but African states are rule-takers in the forums where the rules are written. This asymmetry is the lesson's central puzzle viewed from its most revealing angle.

The lesson develops five mechanisms in sequence. First, narrow AI in military systems—ISR, targeting, logistics, and command and control—where the gains are incremental but the integration is deep. Second, Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) and the CCW debate, where the principal-agent problem (who is responsible when a machine kills?) meets international humanitarian law. Third, decision compression and "hyperwar": the risk that algorithmic speed collapses the deliberation window and produces flash escalation. Fourth, AGI/ASI and the security dilemma of superintelligence, where alignment becomes a global security problem rather than a technical one. Fifth, AI governance—the US executive order, the EU AI Act, Chinese regulations, and the UN framework—where the question is whether any of these can keep pace with capability.

After mastering the lesson, the student will be able to: (a) identify the mechanism by which a given AI system alters a military function; (b) reconstruct five perspectives on any AI-security case, steel-manning each; (c) adjudicate between competing explanations using evidence rather than assertion; (d) distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in policy memos; and (e) specify falsifiers for claims about AI and war. The worked example (Nagorno-Karabakh 2020 and Ukraine 2023-2024 drone deployments) and the problem pair (Israel's Lavender and Gospel systems in Gaza) train these skills on real cases. The data lab trains quantitative and comparative reasoning on AI investment, autonomous systems inventories, and incident data.

The lesson is self-contained: all necessary concepts are defined inline, all sources are named, and no external reading is required to follow the argument, though the further-reading list points to depth. The student should read with a notebook, reconstructing arguments in their own words, because the assessment (the independent memo) requires original analysis rather than recall. The Bloom ceiling is Evaluate/Create: the student is expected not merely to describe but to judge and to design. The lesson's central intellectual discipline is to hold mechanism and perspective in tension: every claim about what AI does must be paired with a claim about from whose vantage it is seen, and every governance proposal must be tested against the objection that it reflects the interests of its authors.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer each question from memory before reading the lesson. These draw on L24 (cyber and cognitive), L22 (conventional warfare), and L52 (semiconductors).

1. In L24, what is the difference between a cyber *attack* and a cyber *operation*, and why does the distinction matter for escalation theory?
2. L22 treated the offense-defense balance in conventional warfare. State one historical case where a

technological innovation shifted that balance toward offense, and one where it shifted toward defense.
3. What is the "principal-agent problem" as discussed in L24's treatment of cyber operations, and how does delegation to non-state proxies complicate attribution?
4. L52 examined semiconductor supply chains. Name the three chokepoints in the global chip supply chain and identify which state controls each.
5. In L22, how did the revolution in military affairs (RMA) literature of the 1990s define "information dominance," and what critique did later scholars (including from the Global South) raise about its universal applicability?
6. L24 discussed cognitive warfare. Define "cognitive warfare" and give one example of a state employing it against an adversary's decision-making process.

1.2 Orientation Questions

These questions frame the lesson's central puzzle. Do not answer them yet; hold them in mind as you read.

1. Does AI change the *probability* of war, the *character* of war, or *who can wage* war—and can a single theory explain all three?
2. If algorithmic systems can compress the decision cycle from hours to seconds, what happens to the "deliberation window" that international humanitarian law and crisis management assume?
3. Is the demand for "meaningful human control" over lethal systems a universal norm or a culturally specific one, and who gets to define it?
4. Can governance frameworks written by AI-leading states be legitimate for AI-importing states, or do they reproduce the AI divide?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

Provisional definitions; refine as you read.

- **Narrow AI (weak AI):** Machine-learning systems trained for specific tasks (image recognition, target classification, logistics optimization) that do not possess general reasoning; the dominant form of military AI today.
- **AGI (Artificial General Intelligence):** A hypothetical system capable of performing any intellectual task a human can, across domains; not yet achieved; treated in security studies as a future capability with present-day strategic effects.
- **ASI (Artificial Superintelligence):** A hypothetical system exceeding human cognitive performance across virtually all domains; the subject of Bostrom's (2014) security-dilemma analysis.
- **LAWS (Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems):** Weapons that can select and engage targets without further human intervention after activation; the focus of the CCW debate.
- **Meaningful human control:** The principle that a human must retain sufficient control over the use of force to be morally and legally responsible; contested in definition and scope.
- **Hyperwar:** A hypothesized form of conflict in which algorithmic speed collapses decision cycles, producing escalation faster than human deliberation can manage.
- **Decision compression:** The reduction of the time available for human judgment in a crisis due to the speed of AI-enabled sensing, targeting, and response.
- **Principal-agent problem (in autonomous weapons):** The difficulty of assigning responsibility when an autonomous system, acting as agent, produces an outcome the human principal did not intend or

foresee.

- **Alignment problem:** The challenge of ensuring that an AI system's objectives match human (or specified) values; in security terms, a global problem because misaligned superintelligence is a shared threat.
- **AI divide:** The asymmetry between states and firms that produce AI (compute, data, talent, platforms) and those that consume or are governed by it.
- **Compute:** The processing power (chips, data centers) required to train and run AI models; a strategic resource analogous to energy or fissile material.
- **CCW (Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons):** The UN framework under which states discuss LAWS; includes the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on LAWS.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Define and classify** narrow artificial intelligence applications across the military kill chain—intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), targeting, logistics, and command and control (C2)—and distinguish them rigorously from artificial general intelligence (AGI) and artificial superintelligence (ASI), specifying the technical and epistemic boundaries that separate pattern-recognition systems from systems capable of general reasoning (Bloom: knowledge/comprehension).

2. **Explain the causal mechanism** by which narrow AI compresses the observe-orient-decide-act (OODA) loop and redistributes cognitive labor between human operators and machines, identifying how training data, optimization objectives, and interface design jointly determine where lethal authority actually resides in a given system (Bloom: comprehension/analysis).

3. **Evaluate scope conditions** under which AI-enabled military systems increase operational effectiveness versus escalation risk, including data abundance, electromagnetic contestation, adversarial machine learning, distribution shift, and the feasibility of meaningful human control, and specify the falsifying evidence that would challenge each claim (Bloom: analysis/evaluation).

4. **Reconstruct and adjudicate** among the African (primary), Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on narrow AI in military systems, identifying each tradition's core contribution, its characteristic occlusion, and the normative commitments that drive its policy prescriptions (Bloom: synthesis/evaluation).

5. **Apply** the analytical framework to the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and 2023–2024 Ukraine drone deployments, producing a memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and that identifies at least two falsifiers for any causal claim advanced (Bloom: application/synthesis).

These objectives are assessed through the Problem Pair, Independent Memo, Hinge Question, and Data Lab components of this lesson. Mastery requires not merely recalling definitions but tracing mechanisms, specifying scope conditions, and holding multiple perspectives in productive tension without collapsing them into a single "correct" view.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Narrow AI in military systems: ISR, targeting, logistics, and C2 Bolded Causal Claim: Narrow AI does not autonomously wage war; it compresses the OODA loop and redistributes cognitive labor across the kill chain, shifting the locus of lethal decision from the human operator to the system's training data and optimization objective, thereby reconstituting the principal-agent relationship between commanders and machines in ways that are invisible to traditional accountability frameworks.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through four interlocking channels. First, in ISR, narrow AI—principally computer vision, multi-sensor fusion, and natural-language processing—transforms raw sensor feeds into structured intelligence at speeds no human analyst can match. Systems such as the U.S. Project Maven pipeline apply convolutional neural networks to full-motion video and satellite imagery to detect, classify, and track objects of interest, converting an ocean of pixels into a ranked list of candidate targets. The mechanism here is not understanding but statistical pattern recognition: the system learns a mapping from input features to labels from training data, then generalizes (or fails to generalize) to new instances. Second, in targeting, narrow AI fuses ISR outputs with geospatial, signals, and open-source data to propose aimpoints, estimate collateral damage, and prioritize strikes according to commander-defined objectives. The optimization objective—minimize time-to-target, maximize probability of kill, minimize civilian harm as estimated by the model—becomes the de facto decision rule, and because the objective is encoded in code and weights rather than in an order that a human can read, the "decision" is distributed across the pipeline. Third, in logistics, predictive maintenance, demand forecasting, and route optimization reduce the friction of supply, which in turn raises the sustainable tempo of operations and lowers the political cost of prolonged campaigns; the mechanism is that AI-enabled logistics converts attrition warfare into a more continuous, lower-friction form of violence. Fourth, in C2, decision-support systems aggregate multi-domain information, propose courses of action, and simulate outcomes, effectively pre-structuring the commander's choice set. The mechanism across all four channels is the same: narrow AI does not replace human judgment wholesale but re-locates it, compressing the time available for deliberation and embedding assumptions—about what counts as a target, what counts as harm, what counts as success—into technical artifacts that are difficult to inspect, contest, or revise under operational pressure. Scharre (2018) emphasizes that the critical variable is not autonomy per se but the degree of human control that remains meaningful given the speed and complexity of the system; Horowitz (2018) adds that the diffusion of these technologies will be shaped by organizational capacity and strategic culture, not merely by technical availability. Kissinger et al. (2021) frame the deeper risk: as machines assume cognitive tasks, human leaders may lose the ability to comprehend the strategic environment their systems are acting within, producing a form of strategic opacity that is itself a source of instability.

Scope Conditions: The claim that narrow AI compresses the OODA loop and redistributes cognitive labor holds under identifiable conditions and fails under others. It holds when (a) data is abundant, labeled, and representative of the operational environment; (b) the adversary's behavior is sufficiently patterned to be learned; (c) the electromagnetic spectrum is permissive enough for sensors and communications to function; (d) rules of engagement are codifiable into optimization objectives; and (e) the organization has the technical capacity to maintain, update, and audit the system. It weakens or reverses when (a) data is scarce, biased, or drawn from a different distribution than the target environment—producing confident misclassification, as when a system trained on one theater is deployed in another; (b) the adversary employs adversarial machine learning, camouflage, or deception specifically designed to exploit the system's learned features; (c) electromagnetic contestation degrades sensors and communications, forcing reversion to human judgment at precisely the moment tempo is highest; (d) the operational environment is novel in ways the training data did not capture, producing distribution shift and silent failure; and (e) organizational incentives favor speed over scrutiny, so that "human in the loop" becomes a rubber stamp rather than a genuine control. The claim also

has a temporal scope: it describes the current generation of narrow AI, which excels at perception and optimization within bounded domains but lacks causal reasoning, common sense, and the ability to recognize its own ignorance. Should systems approach general intelligence, the mechanism would change qualitatively, which is the subject of Key Idea 4. A further scope condition concerns the level of analysis: at the tactical level, compression is most evident; at the strategic level, the effect is mediated by doctrine, alliance politics, and domestic politics, so that the same technical system can produce different strategic outcomes in different states.

Observable Implications: If the causal claim is correct, we should observe (i) measurable reductions in sensor-to-shooter timelines in conflicts where AI-enabled systems are deployed, as reported in Ukraine's use of the Delta situational-awareness platform and in Israeli systems; (ii) procurement and doctrinal shifts toward AI-enabled platforms and away from platforms whose value depends on human-paced decision-making; (iii) new failure modes—automation bias, fratricide from misclassification, and "automation surprise" when the system behaves in ways operators did not anticipate; (iv) an arms-race dynamic in AI-relevant inputs, particularly advanced semiconductors and training data, linking this lesson to Lesson 52; (v) growing divergence between states that can field and sustain such systems and those that cannot, with implications for the African perspective developed below; and (vi) increasing opacity in accountability chains, as the number of human decision points shrinks and the technical complexity of each grows. Falsifying evidence would include: documented cases where AI-enabled systems slowed decision-making without improving accuracy; cases where human operators consistently overrode system recommendations with better outcomes; or evidence that the principal bottleneck in targeting remains human political authorization rather than technical processing speed.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African vantage begins from the technology gap and the AI divide, not from the battlefield. From within African scholarship, the relevant question is not how narrow AI compresses the OODA loop for those who possess it, but how the global distribution of AI capability reproduces and deepens structural inequality. Grovogui's critique of the international order as a hierarchy of sovereignty applies directly: the states that build and control military AI are the same states whose sovereignty has historically been treated as full, while African sovereignty has been treated as conditional and tutelary. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics—the power to dictate who may live and who must die—illuminates how algorithmic targeting systems trained on Western data and Western threat perceptions may encode a hierarchy of human value in which African lives are more readily classified as threats. Bayart's analysis of extraversion suggests that African states' engagement with military AI will be shaped by their position in global networks of dependency, importing systems they cannot audit or modify. Rodney's underdevelopment thesis and Nkrumah's neo-colonialism frame the material dimension: the AI divide is not a natural gap but a produced one, rooted in the extraction of data, talent, and minerals (including cobalt and coltan from the Democratic Republic of Congo) that feed the very systems that exclude African states. Mamdani's work on the colonial state warns that imported technologies of control may reinforce bifurcated governance rather than strengthen accountable institutions. Aning and Danso's security scholarship emphasizes that African security architectures—such as the African Standby Force—lack the technical infrastructure to field or govern AI-enabled systems, making the continent a consumer, not a producer, of military AI. Tamale's intersectional analysis and Oyěwùmí's epistemological critique raise the further point that the categories embedded in training data—what counts as a "combatant," a "threat," a "civilian"—carry gendered and racialized assumptions that may not map onto African social realities. The African perspective therefore reframes narrow AI in military systems as a problem of global equity and epistemic justice: the demand is not merely for African states to acquire AI but for

equitable governance, technology transfer, capacity building, and a voice in setting the standards by which these systems are evaluated. What this perspective reveals that the others miss is that the "AI arms race" framing presupposes a symmetry of actors that does not exist; for much of the world, the relevant dynamic is not racing but being raced past.

Chinese. The Chinese perspective treats narrow AI in military systems through the lens of "intelligentized warfare" (□□□□□), a doctrinal concept that elevates AI to a core component of future combat power, while simultaneously framing AI governance as a sovereignty issue. Chinese official discourse emphasizes that AI development must serve national security and that external attempts to restrict China's access to AI technologies—such as U.S. semiconductor export controls—constitute a threat to sovereign development. On the governance side, China has participated in UN CCW discussions on lethal autonomous weapons while resisting binding prohibitions that it argues would disadvantage developing states and lock in Western technological advantages. The Chinese perspective contributes an insistence that AI governance must not become a vehicle for technological hegemony, and it occludes questions about domestic surveillance applications of the same technologies and about the transparency of PLA AI programs.

Russian. The Russian perspective frames narrow AI within military modernization and strategic stability. Russian doctrine treats AI as a force multiplier that can offset conventional inferiority, with emphasis on autonomous systems, decision support, and information warfare. Moscow's strategic-stability framing warns that AI-enabled compression of decision times—especially in nuclear C2—could undermine crisis stability by reducing the window for human deliberation. Russia has been skeptical of Western-led governance initiatives, viewing them as attempts to constrain competitors while preserving Western advantages, and has emphasized national sovereignty over AI development. The Russian perspective contributes a focus on escalation dynamics and nuclear risk, and it occludes the gap between aspirational doctrine and demonstrated capability, as well as questions about the use of AI in information operations.

Western. The Western perspective, particularly the U.S. and allied view, treats AI as a strategic priority and a source of military advantage, while simultaneously hosting the most developed internal debate about lethal autonomous weapons and algorithmic accountability. The U.S. Department of Defense has adopted ethical principles for AI and has invested heavily in programs such as Project Maven and the Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) concept. The Western perspective contributes technical sophistication, an institutionalized ethics discourse, and a self-critical tradition that examines civilian harm, algorithmic bias, and accountability gaps. It occludes the global distributional consequences of its own leadership and the tendency to treat Western threat perceptions as universal.

UN. The UN perspective frames narrow AI in military systems through international humanitarian law, human dignity, and multilateral governance. The Secretary-General has called for a ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems that function without human control, and the CCW Group of Governmental Experts has debated definitions, characteristics, and possible regulatory frameworks for years without reaching consensus. The Pact for the Future includes commitments on AI governance that emphasize human rights, capacity building, and inclusive participation. The UN perspective contributes a normative anchor in international law and a forum for inclusive deliberation, and it occludes the power asymmetries that make consensus difficult and the gap between normative commitments and enforcement capacity.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems: The LAWS Debate, CCW, and the Principal-Agent Problem

Bolded Causal Claim: The central danger of lethal autonomous weapons systems is not simply that machines may kill without a human pressing a trigger, but that autonomy in the critical functions of target selection and engagement dissolves the principal-agent relationship on which legal accountability, moral responsibility, and strategic restraint depend.

Mechanism: A lethal autonomous weapons system is generally understood, in the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons discussions, as a system that can select and engage targets without further human intervention after activation. The mechanism of concern is not automation in the narrow sense of a human choosing a target and a machine executing that choice; it is the transfer of the lethal decision itself to an algorithmic agent. In conventional armed conflict, the state is the principal and the human combatant is the agent: the human can be trained, disciplined, court-martialed, and held responsible under international humanitarian law and domestic law. A machine cannot be punished, cannot possess intent, and cannot be deterred by moral or legal sanction. The principal-agent chain therefore breaks at the point where the machine becomes the effective decision-maker. Responsibility then diffuses backward across designers, programmers, data providers, commanders, operators, and procurement officials, none of whom may have had sufficient knowledge, control, or intent to satisfy ordinary standards of accountability. This is the accountability gap: lethal force is exercised, but no agent is clearly answerable for its wrongful use.

The mechanism is intensified by the epistemic limits of machine perception in war. International humanitarian law requires distinction between combatants and civilians, proportionality between military advantage and civilian harm, and precautions in attack. A system may classify patterns in sensor data with high statistical accuracy in training conditions, but war is an adversarial, degraded, and novel environment. Civilian objects can resemble military ones; surrender, hors de combat status, and the presence of human shields require contextual judgment; proportionality is not a classification task but a normative balancing act. The claim that autonomy can improve compliance with international humanitarian law by reducing human fatigue, fear, or bias is therefore contestable: it assumes that the relevant failures are primarily human cognitive failures rather than structural uncertainties about intent, context, and value. The counterargument—that autonomous systems may be more precise and consistent than stressed humans—has real force in highly structured environments, but it does not resolve the problem of accountability when the system errs in an unstructured one.

The CCW debate has turned on whether the appropriate response is a legally binding prohibition, a regulatory framework, or non-binding principles. Some states and civil society actors have called for a ban on development, production, and use of fully autonomous lethal weapons systems, often framed around the requirement of meaningful human control. Others argue that existing international humanitarian law is sufficient, that autonomy exists on a spectrum rather than as a binary category, and that a ban would be unverifiable or would disadvantage states that comply while non-compliant actors proliferate. The concept of meaningful human control has become the focal normative standard, but it remains contested: it can mean a human in the loop, on the loop, or out of the loop with a veto; it can require comprehension, intention, and accountability, or merely the technical possibility of intervention. The principal-agent problem persists because nominal human control is not the same as meaningful control. A human who cannot understand the system's reasoning, cannot intervene in time, or is structurally incentivized to defer to the machine is not exercising control in the legally and morally relevant sense.

Scope Conditions: The accountability gap is most acute where autonomy operates in the critical functions

of target selection and engagement, where decision times are short, where environments are complex and adversarial, and where human oversight is nominal rather than substantive. It is also acute where kill chains are long, where software and data are proprietary, and where training data do not represent the operational environment. The argument is weaker where autonomy is confined to navigation, logistics, or non-lethal functions; where human operators retain genuine comprehension and intervention capacity; and where systems are tested, audited, and constrained by robust legal review. Even under those conditions, however, the structural problem remains: the machine cannot be the bearer of responsibility, and human responsibility must be deliberately constructed rather than assumed.

Observable Implications: If the principal-agent mechanism is operating, one should observe national policies that distinguish between automation and autonomy while often leaving the boundary ambiguous; legal reviews of new weapons under Article 36 of Additional Protocol I; procurement of systems with autonomous terminal guidance, swarming capabilities, or AI-assisted targeting; and diplomatic positions in the CCW that cluster around prohibition, regulation, or status-quo arguments. One should also observe a gap between declared human control and operational practice, especially in high-tempo domains where operators are likely to defer to machine recommendations. The absence of a binding international instrument despite years of discussion is itself an observable implication: the principal-agent problem is recognized, but states disagree about whether the solution is prohibition, regulation, or improved human-machine teaming.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). From an African vantage point, the LAWS debate is not merely a technical question about whether machines can comply with international humanitarian law; it is a question about who bears the costs of experimentation with lethal autonomy and who is excluded from the design of the rules. African scholarship on power and technology provides the interpretive frame. Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment, Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism, and Fanon's account of technocratic violence suggest that military technologies are rarely neutral instruments; they are embedded in structures of domination that externalize risk onto populations with little voice in their design. Mbembe's concept of necropolitics illuminates how certain lives are rendered expendable in the name of security, while Mamdani's work on the bifurcated state highlights how legal and political orders can separate rulers from ruled in ways that make accountability formal rather than substantive. Grovogui's critique of international law as a civilizing discourse and Bayart's analysis of extraversion suggest that global governance forums may reproduce hierarchies even when they invoke universal norms. Oyěwùmí's epistemic critique reminds us that categories such as "human control" may carry culturally specific assumptions about agency and responsibility. African states participating in CCW discussions have often stressed meaningful human control, capacity building, and the dangers of an unregulated market in autonomous systems. The African perspective reveals that LAWS governance is not only about machine compliance but about distributional justice: African populations may face autonomous weapons in asymmetric conflicts, peace operations, border control, or internal security contexts without having shaped the systems or the rules. It also reveals a technology gap: many African militaries lack the industrial base, data infrastructure, and legal-technical capacity to develop or audit LAWS, which can produce dependence on imported systems and external standards. The occlusion in this perspective is that it can understate the genuine security pressures that drive states toward autonomy, including force protection and the desire to reduce soldier casualties, and it may not fully specify how capacity building would be funded or governed.

Chinese. Chinese discourse frames lethal autonomous weapons within a broader AI governance agenda that combines sovereignty, development rights, and strategic stability. The Chinese position has generally

supported international discussion while resisting constraints that would lock in Western military advantage or restrict legitimate applications of AI. It emphasizes that any framework must preserve space for peaceful and defensive uses, respect state sovereignty, and avoid politicized or discriminatory standards. Chinese scholarship and official statements often treat the "AI arms race" as a risk to be managed through governance rather than as an inevitable competition, while also insisting that China's AI development is a sovereign right. The perspective contributes a demand that governance not become a vehicle for technological containment, and it occludes the possibility that Chinese military modernization itself contributes to competitive dynamics.

Russian. Russian discourse treats autonomous weapons as part of military modernization and strategic stability management. It has tended to argue that existing international humanitarian law is sufficient, that a legally binding ban would be difficult to verify, and that states should retain flexibility in developing military AI. Russian official rhetoric often emphasizes human control in declaratory policy while investing in automation and autonomy for force protection and battlefield advantage. The perspective contributes a realist emphasis on verification and strategic stability, and it occludes the accountability and civilian-harm concerns that motivate prohibition advocates.

Western. Western, especially US and allied, discourse centers on AI leadership, the LAWS debate, and an emerging governance self-critique. The United States has maintained that autonomous weapons systems should be designed to allow commanders and operators to exercise appropriate levels of human judgment over the use of force, while opposing a blanket ban. Allies have varied, but many emphasize human control, IHL compliance, and the potential benefits of precision. The governance self-critique acknowledges risks of accountability gaps, algorithmic bias, and civilian harm, and has produced policy reviews, ethical principles, and legal standards. The perspective contributes operational realism and a focus on human-machine teaming, and it occludes the global distributional consequences of Western-led AI military development.

UN. The UN perspective frames LAWS through international humanitarian law, human dignity, and multilateral governance. The Secretary-General has called for a ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems that function without human control, and the CCW Group of Governmental Experts has debated definitions, characteristics, and possible regulatory frameworks for years without reaching consensus. The Pact for the Future includes commitments on AI governance that emphasize human rights, capacity building, and inclusive participation. The UN perspective contributes a normative anchor in international law and a forum for inclusive deliberation, and it occludes the power asymmetries that make consensus difficult and the gap between normative commitments and enforcement capacity.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Decision Compression and Hyperwar: Algorithmic Escalation and Flash Wars

Bolded Causal Claim: As AI compresses the observe-orient-decide-act cycle below the threshold of human deliberation, military competition shifts from attrition to tempo, creating structural incentives for predelegation, automation bias, and preemptive action that can convert localized incidents into rapid, irreversible escalation.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the OODA loop—observe, orient, decide, act—which has long been a heuristic for military decision-making. AI-enabled systems compress each stage: sensors and data fusion accelerate observation; machine learning and automated analysis accelerate orientation; decision-support systems and autonomous agents accelerate decision; and networked weapons accelerate action. The result is not merely faster warfare but a change in the kind of warfare: when the tempo of interaction exceeds human cognitive and institutional capacity, the advantage shifts to the side that can delegate more authority

to machines. This creates a structural incentive to pre-delegate lethal or escalatory decisions, to accept higher automation, and to reduce human veto points. The mechanism is not that machines are malevolent; it is that organizations optimize for speed under competitive pressure, and speed rewards delegation.

Decision compression interacts with automation bias, the tendency of human operators to defer to machine recommendations, especially under time pressure and uncertainty. A human in the loop who cannot independently verify a machine's recommendation within the available time is not a meaningful check; they are a liability shield. The mechanism also involves tight coupling: as military systems become networked and interdependent, a local error can propagate across domains before human institutions can intervene. The analogy to financial flash crashes is instructive: algorithmic trading can produce rapid, nonlinear price movements that no individual trader intended, and circuit breakers are required to halt cascades. In military affairs, there are no agreed circuit breakers, and the stakes include escalation across conventional, cyber, space, and nuclear domains.

Hyperwar, as the term is used in discussions of AI-enabled conflict, denotes warfare in which the speed and complexity of machine interaction outpace human comprehension and control. The risk is not only accidental escalation but also strategic instability: if adversaries believe that the other side can act faster, they may adopt launch-on-warning postures, pre-delegate authority, or strike first to avoid being struck. Crisis stability erodes because the window for signaling, bargaining, and de-escalation shrinks. Kissinger and colleagues have argued that AI challenges traditional concepts of deterrence and strategic stability by introducing non-human agency into the most consequential decisions. Scharre's analysis of autonomy emphasizes that the danger lies less in rogue machines than in the interaction between human organizations and autonomous systems under pressure. Horowitz's work on military innovation diffusion suggests that the adoption of AI will be shaped by organizational culture, resource constraints, and strategic competition, not by technology alone.

The counterargument is that AI can also improve situational awareness, reduce human error, and create off-ramps by clarifying ambiguous situations faster than humans can. Better early warning, more accurate target identification, and automated deconfliction could in principle reduce accidental escalation. This is plausible in some domains, but it depends on calibration, data quality, and adversarial robustness. In a competitive environment, the side that uses AI for speed may force the other side to do the same, producing a race to the bottom in human control. The mechanism therefore predicts not universal catastrophe but a structural bias toward tempo over deliberation, with the severity of risk depending on domain, organizational incentives, and the presence or absence of shared norms.

Scope Conditions: The risk of flash wars is highest in domains where decision times are short and consequences are large: air and missile defense, cyber operations, space systems, and any process adjacent to nuclear command and control. It is also high where systems are tightly coupled, where adversaries interact repeatedly under uncertainty, and where organizational incentives reward speed over caution. The argument is weaker where AI is used primarily for logistics, intelligence analysis with human review, or long-cycle planning; where human-machine interfaces are well designed; and where there are robust testing, red-teaming, and escalation-management procedures. Even in those cases, however, the competitive pressure to compress decision cycles may erode safeguards over time.

Observable Implications: If decision compression is driving military change, one should observe doctrine and procurement emphasizing speed, AI-enabled command-and-control systems, and human-machine teaming in high-tempo domains. One should observe exercises and simulations that test machine-speed escalation, as well as proposals for "speed limits," human control requirements, or crisis-communication mechanisms.

Historical analogues of automation bias—such as the 2003 Patriot fratricide incidents, in which automated systems misidentified friendly aircraft—illustrate how human operators can defer to machine classifications under pressure. The 2010 flash crash in financial markets illustrates how algorithmic interaction can produce rapid cascades without malicious intent. In the military domain, observable implications include near-misses, false positives in air defense, and debates over whether AI should be permitted in nuclear command and control. The absence of agreed international norms for machine-speed escalation is itself an implication: states are building faster systems before they have built shared brakes.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). From an African vantage point, hyperwar is not an abstract future risk but an extension of existing asymmetries in who controls the tempo of violence. African scholarship on state capacity, extraversion, and the political economy of technology suggests that African states are more likely to be recipients, testing grounds, or collateral arenas of AI-enabled warfare than architects of it. Rodney's analysis of technological dependence, Bayart's concept of extraversion, and Mamdani's account of the bifurcated state imply that imported military technologies can strengthen coercive capacity without corresponding accountability. Mbembe's necropolitics highlights how populations in weakly governed spaces may be subjected to lethal violence with little recourse, while Fanon's critique of colonial violence reminds us that speed and technological superiority have historically been used to overwhelm political resistance. The African perspective reveals that decision compression is not only a problem among great powers; it can accelerate violence in contexts where oversight is weak, data are poor, and accountability mechanisms are fragile. It also reveals a technology gap: African militaries and regulators may lack the capacity to audit, test, or govern AI-enabled systems, making them dependent on external vendors and standards. African diplomatic and scholarly voices have tended to demand equitable governance, transparency, capacity building, and meaningful human control, arguing that the benefits of AI in security should not accrue only to technologically advanced states. The occlusion in this perspective is that it can understate the genuine security dilemmas faced by African states confronting insurgencies, terrorism, and cross-border threats, and it may not fully resolve how human control can be operationalized in high-tempo defensive systems.

Chinese. Chinese discourse frames decision compression within strategic stability and AI governance debates. It expresses concern about an AI arms race and about the destabilizing effects of machine-speed warfare, while also pursuing military modernization and "intelligentized" capabilities. Chinese official and scholarly voices often emphasize sovereignty, the right to develop AI, and the need for international rules that do not constrain legitimate defense. The perspective contributes a demand for stability-oriented governance and an acknowledgment that tempo competition can be dangerous, and it occludes the possibility that Chinese modernization contributes to the very compression it warns against.

Russian. Russian discourse treats AI-enabled speed as part of military modernization and strategic stability management. It has emphasized the risks of destabilization while also investing in automation, electronic warfare, and AI-assisted command systems. Russian strategic stability framing often focuses on the interaction between conventional precision, cyber, and nuclear domains, warning that compressed decision times can undermine deterrence. The perspective contributes a realist focus on escalation management, and it occludes the accountability and civilian-harm dimensions that dominate Western and UN debates.

Western. Western discourse centers on AI leadership, the LAWS debate, and a governance self-critique that increasingly includes decision compression. US and allied militaries emphasize human-machine teaming, speed as a warfighting advantage, and the need to maintain decision superiority. At the same time, Western scholars and policymakers have warned about automation bias, flash escalation, and the erosion of human

judgment. The perspective contributes operational and technical sophistication, and it occludes the global distributional consequences of tempo competition and the possibility that Western acceleration drives others to automate faster.

UN. The UN perspective frames decision compression through international humanitarian law, human dignity, and multilateral governance. The Secretary-General's calls for human control over lethal force and the CCW's debates over LAWS are relevant because compressed decision times make human control harder to realize. The Pact for the Future's AI commitments emphasize human rights, capacity building, and inclusive participation, which imply that speed must not outrun accountability. The UN perspective contributes a normative anchor and a forum for deliberation, and it occludes the power asymmetries and enforcement gaps that make shared brakes difficult to establish.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — AGI/ASI: The Security Dilemma of Superintelligence and Alignment as a Global Security Problem

Bolded Causal Claim: The prospect of artificial general intelligence (AGI) and artificial superintelligence (ASI) transforms AI from a military-technology competition into a security dilemma over existential risk, because states and firms racing to develop systems whose capabilities and alignment properties are uncertain may each treat the other's progress as a threat, while the technical problem of ensuring that a vastly more capable system pursues human-intended goals becomes a collective-security problem that no single state can solve alone.

Mechanism: The mechanism begins with the security-dilemma logic familiar from international-relations theory: in an anarchic system, investments made for defensive or competitive purposes are difficult to distinguish from preparations for dominance, so rivals respond with counter-investments, secrecy, and worst-case planning. Applied to AI, this means that frontier compute, data, talent, and model weights become strategic assets whose accumulation by one actor is read by others as a potential shift in the balance of power. The race dynamic is intensified by the possibility of large first-mover advantages. If AGI or ASI can automate research, production, or military planning, the first actor to achieve a decisive capability advantage may gain compounding benefits, creating incentives to move quickly, to conceal progress, and to underinvest in safety. This is the "race to the bottom" concern in AI safety: the alignment tax, or the cost of making a system safe, robust, and controllable, may be treated as a competitive disadvantage when rivals are moving fast. The alignment problem itself is not merely a software bug. It includes specification problems (defining the right objective), robustness problems (performance under distribution shift), interpretability problems (understanding what the system is doing), and control problems (ensuring that a more capable system remains corrigible). As capability scales, small misspecifications can produce large harms, and the gap between what a system optimizes and what humans value may widen. The global-security dimension arises because ASI externalities do not respect borders. A misaligned or misused superintelligent system could affect critical infrastructure, financial systems, biological research, or military command networks across states. No single sovereign can contain such a system through territorial control alone. Therefore, alignment becomes a global public good, while the incentives to produce it remain national or corporate. Bostrom (2014) frames superintelligence as a strategic challenge in which the transition to machine intelligence may be abrupt enough that institutions have little time to adapt, and in which the default outcome may not be benign. Kissinger et al. (2021) extend this concern to world order, arguing that AI can alter strategic stability by changing the speed, opacity, and scale of decision-making. The mechanism is therefore a three-layer interaction: com-

petitive racing produces secrecy and acceleration; acceleration increases the risk of deploying misaligned systems; and the transnational nature of the risk makes unilateral safety insufficient.

Scope Conditions: This key idea applies most strongly under a set of demanding assumptions: that AGI or ASI is technically feasible within a strategically relevant horizon; that capability growth may be rapid or discontinuous; that alignment remains unsolved at scale; that actors face strong competitive incentives; and that international institutions lack the authority or capacity to monitor frontier development. It applies less strongly if AGI proves impossible, if progress plateaus, if alignment turns out to be comparatively easy, or if compute governance becomes effective enough to slow racing. It also applies unevenly across actors: frontier labs and great powers are the central cases, while most states are consumers rather than producers of frontier models. The idea is about tail risk and structural incentives, not a claim that superintelligence is imminent. Much of the policy relevance comes from the possibility of capability overhang, in which an algorithmic or hardware breakthrough suddenly makes a much more capable system deployable before governance has adapted. Under those conditions, ex post regulation is likely to be too slow.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is operating, one should observe frontier laboratories publishing "responsible scaling" policies, dangerous-capability evaluations, and red-teaming reports; governments creating AI Safety Institutes and funding alignment research; export controls on advanced chips and cloud compute; debates over open-weight models; calls for pauses or moratoria on giant experiments; talent restrictions; and summit diplomacy on frontier AI safety. One should also observe military doctrines emphasizing human control, automation bias, and the risks of over-reliance on AI in command and control. The absence of these measures would suggest either that actors do not take the risk seriously or that competitive pressures are suppressing safety investment. Conversely, the presence of safety measures without binding enforcement would suggest that governance is performative rather than constraining.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary).* The African perspective begins from the technology gap and the AI divide, not from the frontier-lab race. African scholars such as Grovogui and Mamdani have long argued that international orders encode hierarchical premises and that institutions often speak in universal language while distributing power unevenly. From this vantage point, AGI discourse can appear as a conversation among a small set of powerful actors about risks that are distant for many African societies, while more immediate harms—surveillance, biased systems, data extraction, labor displacement, and infrastructural dependence—are already present. The African perspective therefore demands equitable governance, data sovereignty, capacity building, and meaningful participation in standard-setting. It warns that governance frameworks negotiated now may lock in asymmetries before African states have the technical capacity to shape them. At the same time, it does not dismiss existential risk; rather, it insists that superintelligence debates should not crowd out present development and rights, and that global security must include the security of those who are usually absent from the table. *Chinese.* The Chinese perspective frames AI as a strategic technology central to national rejuvenation and sovereignty. It emphasizes development rights, state oversight, and opposition to hegemonic control, particularly export controls that it regards as containment. Alignment is treated as a technical and safety issue, but not at the expense of development or sovereignty. Governance is preferred through the United Nations and inclusive multilateralism, while domestic regulation emphasizes social stability, content control, and security. The "AI arms race" is a concern, but so is the risk that safety discourse becomes a tool for preserving Western technological leadership. *Russian.* The Russian perspective emphasizes strategic stability, military modernization, and sovereignty. ASI is a distant prospect, but current AI is already relevant to strategic parity, nuclear command-and-control resilience, and great-power competition. Russia tends to be skeptical of Western AI safety framing and wary of governance mechanisms that could constrain its military or technological development. Governance is acceptable when

it preserves strategic stability and sovereign equality, but not when it functions as a Western-led constraint. *Western.* The Western perspective combines AI leadership, safety research, and governance self-critique. It is shaped by Bostrom's existential-risk framing, by frontier-lab safety culture, and by strategic competition with China. It supports alignment research, export controls, safety institutes, and multilateral declarations, while also debating industry capture, enforcement gaps, and the risks of over-regulation. The Western view is not unified: it contains both accelerationist and safety-first strands, and its governance proposals often reflect the interests of large technology firms. *UN.* The UN perspective frames AGI/ASI through human rights, human dignity, and inclusive global governance. The Secretary-General's advisory processes and the Pact for the Future emphasize capacity building, participation, and the need for a global framework. The UN contributes a normative anchor and a forum for deliberation, but it faces the familiar gaps of enforcement, funding, and power asymmetry. It occludes less than the great-power perspectives, but it cannot by itself resolve the competitive incentives that drive racing.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — AI Governance: Fragmented Regimes and Techno-Geopolitical Competition

Bolded Causal Claim: AI governance is emerging as a fragmented, competitive regime in which states use regulation, industrial policy, and security controls to shape AI development according to divergent values and power interests, producing partial convergence on risk management but persistent divergence on sovereignty, innovation, and security, with the result that governance itself becomes an arena of techno-geopolitical competition rather than a neutral solution to it.

Mechanism: The mechanism is regulatory competition under anarchy. The European Union's AI Act, adopted in 2024, uses a risk-based approach: it prohibits certain practices, imposes obligations on high-risk systems, and creates rules for general-purpose AI models, with enforcement through a centralized AI Office and national authorities. Its logic is rights-based and market-shaping, and it relies on the "Brussels effect," in which extraterritorial market size induces global compliance. The United States has taken a more sectoral and security-oriented approach. Executive Order 14110, signed in October 2023, used existing authorities to require reporting on powerful models, promote red-teaming, and direct agencies to develop standards, while separate export-control measures targeted advanced semiconductors and certain AI capabilities. The US approach combines voluntary commitments, procurement power, and security controls rather than a comprehensive statute. China's approach is state-led and content- and security-focused. Its 2022 provisions on algorithmic recommendation, 2023 rules on deep synthesis, and 2023 interim measures for generative AI services require security assessments, content compliance, data governance, and alignment with socialist core values, while also promoting industrial development. These three models differ in their premises: the EU emphasizes rights and risk; the US emphasizes innovation and security; China emphasizes sovereignty, social stability, and state capacity. The mechanism of fragmentation is that each model reflects domestic political economy, legal tradition, and strategic interest. Firms respond through compliance programs, forum shopping, and regulatory arbitrage. Standards bodies become battlegrounds. Military and intelligence applications are often exempted or governed separately, creating a large gap between civilian AI governance and military AI use. At the same time, there is partial convergence: red-teaming, model evaluations, transparency, watermarking, incident reporting, and safety institutes are becoming common reference points. The United Nations provides a multilateral layer through the Secretary-General's AI advisory processes, the Global Digital Compact and Pact for the Future adopted in 2024, and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons discussions on lethal autonomous weapons systems. But UN processes move slowly and depend on member-state consensus, while the most capable actors prefer flexible or bilateral arrangements. Governance is therefore also industrial policy: subsidies, semiconductor controls, talent visas,

public research, and "friend-shoring" shape who can build AI, not merely how it is used.

Scope Conditions: This key idea applies where AI has cross-border effects, strategic value, and concentrated industrial capacity. It applies less to low-capability systems or purely domestic applications with limited externalities. Its explanatory power depends on enforcement capacity, technical expertise, and geopolitical trust. Where enforcement is weak, rules may be symbolic. Where technical capacity is low, states may adopt rules they cannot implement. Where trust is high, convergence is more likely; where trust is low, governance becomes another arena of competition. The idea also assumes that AI is not merely a normal technology but a general-purpose capability with military and economic implications, which makes states reluctant to delegate authority to neutral regulators.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is operating, one should observe compliance programs, model cards, watermarking, incident databases, national AI strategies, procurement rules, litigation over bias or copyright, standards such as ISO/IEC 42001, compute tracking, export-control lists, licensing debates, and the creation of AI Safety Institutes. One should also observe regulatory arbitrage, such as firms locating development or deployment in jurisdictions with lighter rules; tensions over open-source models; and disputes over whether military AI should be governed by civilian AI law. The coexistence of convergence on safety vocabulary with divergence on enforcement and scope would be a signature of fragmented governance.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary).* The African perspective treats AI governance as a question of equitable participation and structural inequality. African scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, and Mamdani have emphasized that global orders often reproduce hierarchies through ostensibly neutral institutions, and that the language of universalism can mask unequal power. From this vantage point, the risk is not only unsafe AI but rule-taking: African states may be expected to adopt standards designed elsewhere, while lacking the capacity to enforce them or to shape them. The demand is for equitable governance, data sovereignty, capacity building, and meaningful voice in standards and institutions. The African perspective also insists that governance address present harms—bias, surveillance, labor exploitation, and infrastructural dependence—not only frontier risks. It sees the technology gap as a governance problem, because rules written by and for advanced economies may not fit African contexts. *Chinese.* The Chinese perspective emphasizes sovereignty, development, and opposition to extraterritorial control. It supports governance through the United Nations and inclusive multilateralism, while insisting that states retain the right to regulate AI according to their own social and security needs. Domestic regulation focuses on content, data, and social stability. China is concerned about the "AI arms race" and US-led export controls, but also seeks to shape global standards and promote its own governance model. It views governance as compatible with industrial policy and state capacity. *Russian.* The Russian perspective emphasizes strategic stability, sovereignty, and military modernization. It is skeptical of Western-led governance frameworks and wary of rules that could constrain Russian development or military applications. Governance is acceptable when it preserves sovereign equality and strategic stability, but not when it functions as a constraint imposed by technologically dominant states. Russia's interest lies in preventing governance from becoming a tool of containment. *Western.* The Western perspective combines AI leadership, risk management, and governance self-critique. The EU emphasizes rights and risk; the US emphasizes innovation, security, and voluntary standards. Western actors support safety institutes, export controls, and multilateral declarations, while debating industry capture, enforcement gaps, open-source tensions, and the risk of over-regulation. The Western view is internally divided between acceleration and caution, and its governance proposals often reflect the influence of large technology firms. *UN.* The UN perspective frames AI governance through human rights, inclusive participation, and multilateralism. The Secretary-General's advisory body, the Global Digital Compact, and the Pact for the Future emphasize capacity building, human rights, and a global framework, while

the CCW process addresses lethal autonomous weapons. The UN contributes legitimacy and a forum for deliberation, but its effectiveness is limited by consensus requirements, funding gaps, and the reluctance of major powers to submit to binding constraints. It occludes less than great-power perspectives, but it cannot by itself overcome competitive incentives.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on AI, autonomous weapons, and hyperwar begins from a different question than the great-power debate. Where Western, Chinese, and Russian discussions often ask how AI alters the balance of power among leading states, much African scholarship asks how technological systems reproduce or transform structures of domination that predate the current AI boom. The relevant lineage is not primarily the security dilemma or arms-control tradition but the political economy of underdevelopment, coloniality, and epistemic subordination. Rodney's analysis of how Europe underdeveloped Africa, Nkrumah's account of neo-colonialism, and Fanon's critique of colonial violence provide the historical grammar: contemporary AI infrastructures can be read as new instruments through which value, data, and decision-making capacity are extracted from African societies while strategic control remains elsewhere. Mbembe's work on necropolitics and the postcolony sharpens the point: technologies of classification and targeting do not merely optimize force; they can sort populations into categories of expendability, especially where accountability is weak and sovereignty is fragmented. Bayart's notion of extraversion helps explain why African elites may embrace external AI systems for regime security or donor alignment rather than continental autonomy. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state suggests that AI governance in Africa must contend with legal and political orders split between civic and customary domains, so that "human control" over weapons or algorithms cannot be assumed to mean accountable public control. Grovogui's argument that Africans have often been treated as quasi-sovereigns in international order is directly relevant: in AI governance, African states may be invited to participate without possessing the compute, data, or institutional capacity to shape outcomes. Cabral's insistence that liberation requires cultural and epistemic self-determination, Nyerere's emphasis on collective self-reliance, Oyěwùmí's critique of imported categories of knowledge, and Tamale's decolonial feminist scholarship all push the analysis beyond "access" toward epistemic justice: whose concepts of risk, harm, and security define the global AI agenda?

On narrow AI in military systems, this perspective highlights asymmetry and dependency. African militaries and security services increasingly encounter AI-enabled ISR, targeting, logistics, and command systems through foreign suppliers, donor programs, and commercial platforms. The African contribution is to show that the diffusion of narrow AI is not a neutral modernization process but a reconfiguration of dependency. Imported systems may improve situational awareness, but they also create opaque supply chains, vendor lock-in, and gaps between technical capability and legal accountability. African security scholars such as Aning and Danso have long emphasized that security in Africa is inseparable from governance, human security, and the legitimacy of the state; applied to AI, this means that a targeting algorithm or surveillance platform is not merely a capability but a political intervention into already fragile civil-military relations. The perspective also notes that African states may use AI for border management, counterterrorism, or resource protection, and that these uses can be coercive. It therefore refuses a simple narrative of African victimhood while insisting that procurement, oversight, and data governance are the decisive variables.

On lethal autonomous weapons, the African vantage point foregrounds the principal-agent problem in its

colonial and postcolonial form. The question is not only whether a machine can distinguish combatants from civilians under international humanitarian law, but who designs the categories, who owns the data, who profits from deployment, and who is answerable when harm occurs. Autonomous weapons lower the political cost of force for technologically advanced actors, which matters acutely for regions that have historically experienced external intervention. African delegations in multilateral forums have often stressed humanitarian protection, accountability, and the asymmetry between those who build autonomous systems and those who live with their consequences. The perspective contributes a demand that "meaningful human control" be understood not as a procedural checkbox but as democratic, locally accountable control over the entire life cycle of a weapons system, including data collection, model training, and post-strike review. It occludes less than great-power perspectives on the human cost of remote warfare, but it may understate the genuine security dilemmas faced by African states confronting insurgencies or cross-border threats, and it can sometimes treat "Africa" as more unified than it is.

On hyperwar and decision compression, African analysis emphasizes collateralization. Flash wars driven by algorithmic escalation among major powers would not be fought in Africa, but their effects—disrupted shipping, food and energy price shocks, refugee flows, and the diversion of diplomatic attention—would fall heavily on African societies. The mechanism is not direct battlefield exposure but systemic vulnerability: African economies are often price-takers in global commodity and food markets, and African security architectures depend on external funding and attention. Bayart's extraversion is relevant here: African elites may be pulled into great-power technology blocs, accepting surveillance or military AI partnerships in exchange for security assistance, thereby narrowing continental strategic autonomy. The African perspective thus reveals that hyperwar is not only a risk of inadvertent escalation among nuclear-armed states; it is also a structure of global inequality in which the costs of algorithmic speed are distributed unevenly. What it may occlude is the possibility that some African actors could benefit from rapid AI-enabled intelligence or logistics in regional crises, and that not all external technology partnerships are purely extractive.

On AGI and superintelligence, the African vantage point is skeptical of the framing that dominates much Western and Chinese discourse. The existential-risk narrative, however important, can crowd out present and near-term harms: data extraction, labor exploitation in content moderation and annotation, algorithmic discrimination, and the concentration of compute in a handful of firms and states. African scholarship on decoloniality and epistemic justice suggests that "alignment" is not a purely technical problem of making a superintelligent system follow human values; it is a political problem of whose values, whose languages, whose histories, and whose futures are encoded. Mbembe's necropolitics and Fanon's analysis of colonial violence imply that systems optimized for efficiency may reproduce racialized and colonial hierarchies unless their design is accountable to those historically excluded. The perspective contributes an insistence that AGI governance include development, climate resilience, health, and food security as core security goods, not as peripheral concerns. It occludes, or at least underweights, the possibility that advanced AI could accelerate scientific discovery or public-service delivery in Africa, and it may not fully engage with the technical specifics of alignment research. It also risks overextending colonial analogies if every AI system is treated as a repetition of empire rather than a contingent political arrangement.

On AI governance, the African position is best understood as a demand for equitable governance rather than rejection of technology. The central claims are data sovereignty, capacity building, technology transfer, inclusive standard-setting, and human-rights-based regulation. African scholars and policymakers have increasingly framed AI as an issue of digital colonialism: the extraction of data and minerals, the location of cloud infrastructure, the dominance of foreign platforms, and the absence of African languages and contexts in training data. Oyěwùmí and Tamale's epistemological critiques imply that governance frameworks built

on Western categories may misrecognize African social realities, including gender, kinship, and community. Mamdani's bifurcated state and Grovogui's quasi-sovereignty imply that governance must strengthen African institutional capacity, not merely invite African signatures onto externally drafted rules. The perspective contributes a corrective to great-power AI governance: it shows that legitimacy depends on who can participate meaningfully, not only on who convenes the meeting. It also highlights that "safety" and "security" are not identical; a system can be safe for its operators and dangerous for populations subjected to it. What it occludes is the diversity of African state interests—some governments may prioritize surveillance and control over rights—and the fact that continental coordination is itself constrained by resource gaps and competing regional agendas. It may also understate the genuine security benefits that some African states derive from partnerships with external AI providers.

Finally, heterogeneity matters. African perspectives on AI are not uniform: coastal and landlocked states, resource-rich and resource-poor economies, and different regime types experience AI differently. Some governments may prioritize surveillance, border control, or revenue extraction; others may prioritize health, agriculture, or education. The African vantage point is therefore not a single doctrine but a family of critiques united by attention to asymmetry, extraction, and epistemic justice. It demands that global AI governance be evaluated by its effects on those with the least power to shape it, while remaining accountable to internal African debates about democracy, development, and security.

Taken together, the African perspective's distinctive contribution is to reframe AI, AGI, and hyperwar as questions of global justice, epistemic sovereignty, and the political economy of technology. It reveals what the other four perspectives often miss: that the AI divide is not a temporary lag but a structured relation of extraction; that autonomous weapons and algorithmic targeting are continuous with longer histories of remote and racialized violence; that hyperwar costs are globally unequal; and that AGI alignment is inseparable from whose knowledge counts. Its occlusions are real: it can understate African agency, operational military detail, and intra-African variation, and it may not always specify how equitable governance would be enforced against powerful states and firms. But as a primary lens, it prevents the lesson from collapsing into a great-power arms-race narrative and insists that the future of AI security be judged by its effects on those least able to shape it.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective treats AI as a strategic technology at the intersection of national rejuvenation, economic development, and military modernization. From within, AI is not merely a weapons issue; it is a general-purpose capability that will shape industrial competitiveness, social governance, and the future distribution of global power. The concept of "intelligentized warfare" signals that the People's Liberation Army sees AI as central to command, control, intelligence, and decision support, while military-civil fusion reflects a deliberate effort to dissolve boundaries between civilian innovation and defense application. This perspective contributes an understanding of AI as a whole-of-society project rather than a narrow military procurement category. It also challenges the assumption that the United States and its allies naturally define the legitimate uses of AI.

On governance, China emphasizes sovereignty, development rights, and non-interference. Beijing's international proposals tend to frame AI governance as a multilateral project in which all states have equal rights to develop and use AI, and in which unilateral export controls or technology restrictions are themselves security risks. Domestic regulations on recommendation algorithms, deep synthesis, and generative AI reflect a state-led model that prioritizes content security, social stability, and national security alongside innovation. The Chinese contribution is to insist that AI governance cannot be separated from development inequality:

rules written by advanced economies may freeze technological hierarchies and deny the Global South the benefits of AI. This resonates with African demands for equitable access, even though the two perspectives differ on human rights and political openness.

On the AI arms race, China often presents itself as responding to US initiatives rather than initiating competition. It warns against an unconstrained race in military AI and supports discussions on responsible AI, but it resists constraints that would lock in US advantages or infringe on sovereign defense choices. In the CCW context, Chinese positions generally emphasize compliance with international humanitarian law and the need for consensus, while avoiding commitments that would prohibit systems China may wish to develop. The perspective contributes a reminder that governance proposals are themselves strategic instruments: definitions of "autonomous," "human control," and "responsible use" can advantage some actors over others.

On hyperwar and decision compression, China is concerned about US concepts of mosaic warfare, algorithmic command and control, and the acceleration of the kill chain. Chinese analysts worry that AI-enabled decision support could compress crisis timelines and create first-mover advantages, undermining strategic stability. The response is not only technological but doctrinal: crisis management, escalation control, and the preservation of retaliatory capability. This contributes a stability-focused lens that complements Western discussions of deterrence and African concerns about collateral damage.

On AGI, China tends to treat superintelligence as a long-term strategic horizon rather than an immediate governance emergency. The emphasis is on maintaining national capability, preventing technological dependence, and shaping global rules before others do. Alignment is framed partly as a technical challenge and partly as a question of whose values govern global AI systems. The perspective's occlusions are significant: opacity around military AI programs, the integration of AI into surveillance and social control, and a tendency to use sovereignty claims to resist external scrutiny. It may also understate the risks of rapid military AI deployment in favor of competitive positioning. Nevertheless, the Chinese view correctly identifies that AI governance is inseparable from development, industrial policy, and the politics of technological hierarchy.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective frames AI primarily through military modernization and strategic stability. Moscow views AI as part of a broader military-technical revolution that can offset conventional inferiority, enhance precision and intelligence, and sustain Russia's status as a major military power. Russian discourse emphasizes the modernization of armed forces, the integration of AI into command and control, and the preservation of a credible deterrent. This is not simply an arms-race mentality; it is shaped by a strategic culture that sees technological lag as an existential vulnerability and by a geopolitical position in which Russia perceives itself as encircled by NATO and US technological superiority.

On narrow AI, Russia's interest lies in ISR, targeting, logistics, and decision support that can compensate for numerical or industrial disadvantages. The contribution of this perspective is to highlight how AI can be used by a state that is not a technological leader to sustain strategic parity. It also underscores that military AI is not only about autonomous weapons; it is about the speed and quality of decision-making in a contested environment. The occlusion is that Russian programs are opaque, and public discussion often mixes genuine modernization with propaganda. There is limited transparency about testing, safety, or human control, which makes external assessment difficult.

On LAWS, Russia has generally resisted legally binding prohibitions that would constrain its options, while

supporting discussions on responsible use and compliance with international humanitarian law. The Russian argument is that definitions of autonomy are politically contested and that premature bans could disadvantage states that are not already dominant in AI. This perspective contributes a skeptical view of humanitarian disarmament processes: it asks whether such processes are neutral or whether they encode the preferences of technologically advanced states. Its weakness is that it can treat all constraints as containment, thereby avoiding accountability for how autonomous or semi-autonomous systems might be used.

On hyperwar, Russia is particularly concerned with strategic stability and escalation management. Russian analysts have long worried about US precision-strike capabilities, missile defense, and now AI-enabled decision compression. The fear is that faster kill chains and algorithmic recommendations could create incentives for preemption or could blur the line between conventional and nuclear escalation. Russia's contribution is to keep the nuclear and strategic-stability dimension central: AI is not just a tactical issue but a factor in crisis stability. This is especially important for the lesson's discussion of AGI and NC3, even if Russia's own modernization contributes to the same risks.

On AGI, Russia tends to treat superintelligence as a distant but strategically significant horizon. The emphasis is on not falling behind and on ensuring that any global governance framework does not cement US or Chinese dominance. Alignment is less prominent in Russian discourse than sovereignty and parity. The perspective occludes the ethical and human-rights dimensions of AI governance and may overstate the coherence of Russian technological strategy. It also underweights the possibility that cooperation on AI safety could serve Russian interests by reducing catastrophic risk.

On governance, Russia favors state-centric, sovereignty-preserving frameworks and is skeptical of Western-led normative initiatives. It supports multilateral discussion but resists binding constraints that would limit military applications or domestic control. The contribution is a reminder that AI governance is inseparable from geopolitical competition and that major powers will not accept rules they perceive as disadvantaging. The occlusion is that this stance can block even modest transparency or risk-reduction measures and can conflate legitimate sovereignty concerns with resistance to accountability.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective is the most internally divided of the five. It combines a strong commitment to AI leadership, a vibrant LAWS and ethics debate, and a growing self-critique of governance failures. From within, AI is simultaneously an engine of economic growth, a military necessity, and a source of risk requiring regulation. The United States and its allies see AI as central to deterrence, intelligence, and operational advantage, while also recognizing that unregulated AI could undermine democratic values, human rights, and strategic stability. This duality is the perspective's strength and its tension.

On narrow AI, Western militaries have been the primary innovators and exporters of AI-enabled ISR, targeting, logistics, and C2. The contribution is a rich body of doctrine, experimentation, and ethical review, including debates over human-machine teaming and the appropriate level of autonomy. Western analysts such as Scharre and Horowitz have helped define the policy agenda by distinguishing between different levels of autonomy and by emphasizing that the key issue is not full autonomy but the compression of human judgment. The occlusion is that Western innovation often assumes a technological and industrial base unavailable to others, and that "responsible AI" frameworks can become marketing language for systems whose effects are felt elsewhere.

On LAWS, the Western perspective contains a genuine debate. Humanitarian and legal scholars, along with some military ethicists, argue for meaningful human control and, in some cases, for bans or strict limits on

lethal autonomous weapons. Military practitioners and strategists often counter that autonomy can reduce civilian harm, improve precision, and preserve force protection. The CCW process reflects this division: Western states have participated actively but have not converged on a binding prohibition. The contribution is a sophisticated legal and ethical vocabulary; the occlusion is that Western powers may exempt their own systems from the strictest interpretations while demanding constraints on adversaries.

On hyperwar, Western analysis has been at the forefront of identifying decision compression as a strategic risk. Kissinger and colleagues have warned that AI could destabilize deterrence by accelerating decision cycles and by introducing opacity into command and control. The concept of hyperwar captures the possibility that machine-speed interactions could outpace human political control. Western contributions include scenarios, wargames, and policy proposals for human oversight, crisis communication, and AI safety. The occlusion is that the same states developing these warnings are also investing heavily in the systems that create the risk, and that alliance politics can amplify competitive pressures.

On AGI, the Western perspective is split between acceleration and caution. Some actors treat advanced AI as a transformative technology requiring massive investment and strategic dominance; others treat alignment and safety as existential priorities. Bostrom's work has shaped the discourse by framing superintelligence as a potential existential risk requiring global coordination. The contribution is a serious engagement with long-term risk and with the technical problem of alignment. The occlusion is that existential-risk discourse can be culturally specific, can overstate the near-term feasibility of AGI, and can divert attention from present harms such as bias, surveillance, and labor exploitation. It may also reflect the interests of large technology firms that benefit from both the urgency and the proposed governance frameworks.

On governance, Western states have produced the most elaborate AI governance architectures: the US executive order on AI, the EU AI Act, export controls on advanced chips, and various alliance-based initiatives. These frameworks emphasize risk management, transparency, human rights, and safety. The contribution is institutional capacity and legal sophistication. The occlusion is that governance often follows market and security interests, that tech firms exercise substantial influence, and that Western standards may be exported as universal norms without adequate adaptation. The Western perspective thus contains a genuine self-critique: it recognizes that leadership in AI is not the same as legitimacy in AI governance, and that self-regulation by powerful firms is insufficient. But it often struggles to translate that critique into constraints on its own strategic behavior.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective frames AI governance through human rights, inclusive participation, multilateralism, and capacity building. It does not treat AI primarily as a military competition among great powers, but as a global issue affecting development, peace, security, and human dignity. The UN's comparative advantage is legitimacy: it provides a forum in which all states, including those without advanced AI capabilities, can articulate interests and norms. This perspective is essential for preventing AI governance from becoming merely an extension of great-power rivalry.

On narrow AI in military systems, the UN perspective emphasizes compliance with international humanitarian law, human rights, and accountability. It does not deny states' security needs, but it insists that military AI must be governed by existing legal frameworks and, where necessary, by new rules. The contribution is to keep the human cost of AI-enabled warfare visible, particularly for civilians in conflict zones. The occlusion is that the UN has limited enforcement capacity and depends on member states to implement and comply with norms.

On LAWS, the UN perspective is most developed through the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons process. The CCW provides a forum for discussing lethal autonomous weapons, and many UN officials, including the Secretary-General, have urged states to adopt new international rules to ensure human control over the use of force. The contribution is a sustained multilateral effort to prevent an unregulated arms race in autonomous weapons and to preserve human accountability. The occlusion is that consensus requirements allow a small number of states to block progress, and that the process can be slow relative to technological change. The UN perspective thus offers legitimacy without guaranteeing effectiveness.

On hyperwar, the UN emphasizes prevention, diplomacy, and the protection of civilians. It is less focused on operational military AI than on the systemic risks of escalation and on the need for confidence-building measures, transparency, and human oversight. The contribution is to frame decision compression as a threat to international peace and security, not merely as a technical problem. The occlusion is that the UN cannot compel major powers to slow their AI development or to share sensitive information.

On AGI, the UN perspective treats superintelligence as a potential global risk requiring inclusive governance. The Secretary-General's advisory initiatives, the Global Digital Compact, and the Pact for the Future include commitments on AI capacity building, human rights, and international cooperation. The contribution is to broaden the agenda beyond safety and security to include development, equity, and human rights. The occlusion is that these commitments are often aspirational and depend on funding and political will that may not materialize.

On governance, the UN perspective is the most explicitly inclusive. It emphasizes capacity building for developing countries, bridging the AI divide, and ensuring that global AI governance is not captured by a few states or firms. This aligns with African demands for equitable participation and with Chinese emphasis on development, though the UN frames these through human rights and multilateral legitimacy rather than sovereignty alone. The contribution is a normative architecture that can accommodate diverse perspectives. The occlusion is that the UN cannot overcome the competitive incentives of major powers, and that its processes may produce lowest-common-denominator outcomes. Nevertheless, the UN perspective is indispensable because it provides the only forum in which AI governance can be debated as a common human concern rather than as a zero-sum competition.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers the AI divide, technology gaps, capacity building, and equitable governance; shows that military AI is also a development and sovereignty problem	Can understate the immediate battlefield utility of narrow AI and the competitive pressures driving its adoption	Distributive justice, equitable participation, and non-capture of global AI governance	African scholarly and diplomatic demands for capacity building and inclusive governance	Western perspective objects that equity framing alone cannot substitute for verification, control, and accountability of lethal systems
Chinese	Frames AI governance through sovereignty, development, and multipolar order; insists that military AI must remain under state control and serve national development	Tends to downplay transparency, independent accountability, and the risks of opaque state-controlled systems	State sovereignty, development rights, and non-intervention	Chinese regulatory and diplomatic emphasis on controllability, security, and development-oriented AI governance	Western perspective objects that sovereignty framing can shield military AI from external scrutiny
Russian	Links AI to military modernization and strategic stability; treats AI as part of great-power competition and arms-control discourse	Often treats AI as a stabilizing or modernizing tool without fully addressing autonomy, escalation, and principal-agent risks	Great-power stability, strategic parity, and military modernization	Russian military modernization discourse and strategic-stability framing around emerging technologies	UN and Western perspectives object that stability language may legitimate destabilizing autonomous capabilities

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Provides the most developed technical and legal debate on LAWS, targeting, and governance; combines leadership claims with self-critique	Can embed hegemonic bias, export-control leverage, and the assumption that Western regulatory models are universal	Liberal order, responsible use, alliance management, and legal accountability	US executive-order governance, EU AI Act, and Western LAWS debates	African and Chinese perspectives object that Western governance is often self-interested and exclusionary
UN	Offers the only multilateral forum for AI as a common human concern; connects CCW processes, human rights, and Pact for the Future commitments	Cannot overcome major-power competition and may produce lowest-common-denominator outcomes	Common human security, multilateral legitimacy, and human-rights protection	UN CCW LAWS discussions, Secretary-General positions, and Pact for the Future AI commitments	Realist powers object that multilateral processes cannot constrain competitive incentives

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war and the 2023–2024 Ukrainian drone deployments. The puzzle is how AI-enabled warfare has changed the battlefield without yet amounting to fully autonomous war. The evidence points to a shift in the sensor-to-shooter chain: more distributed sensing, faster target nomination, cheaper precision strike, and heavier reliance on human-machine teaming. The case is not a demonstration of artificial general intelligence; it is a demonstration of narrow AI and automation compressing decision time and altering cost-exchange ratios.

Levels of analysis. At the **individual** level, the decisive change is cognitive compression. Operators, analysts, and commanders face accelerated kill chains in which machine-assisted detection and classification reduce the time available for human judgment. Trust in automation becomes a battlefield variable: excessive trust can produce automation bias, while excessive skepticism can waste the speed advantage. At the **state** level, Azerbaijan and Ukraine show how military effectiveness depends on procurement ecosystems, doctrine, training, and industrial adaptation rather than on a single platform. Azerbaijan integrated Turkish and Israeli systems into a coherent campaign; Ukraine adapted commercial drones, FPV platforms, and soft-

ware under wartime pressure. At the **systemic** level, the wars are embedded in regional and great-power competition: Turkey, Israel, Russia, NATO members, and Iran all shape the supply, doctrine, and escalation environment. At the **transnational** level, the battlefield is sustained by global supply chains, commercial electronics, open-source software, private firms, sanctions evasion, and transnational norms about acceptable targeting and autonomy.

Mechanism. The mechanism is not "AI fights the war." It is the compression and redistribution of the OODA loop. In Nagorno-Karabakh, loitering munitions, unmanned aerial vehicles, and precision artillery created a reconnaissance-strike complex that made Armenian air defenses and armor vulnerable once detected. The key effect was not merely destruction but paralysis: forces could not maneuver without being seen and struck. In Ukraine, the mechanism is more decentralized. Cheap drones, FPV systems, electronic warfare, and rapid software iteration allow both sides to find, fix, and finish targets at low cost, while counter-drone measures force continuous adaptation. Narrow AI appears in target recognition, route optimization, electronic-warfare support, and logistics planning, but the lethal act usually remains human-mediated or semi-autonomous. The battlefield changes because the cost of precision has fallen and the tempo of adaptation has risen. This produces attrition, dispersion, and a premium on concealment, mobility, and electronic resilience.

The principal-agent problem remains central. Algorithms recommend; humans authorize; but compression reduces the quality of authorization. The risk is not only unlawful targeting but also escalation through speed: a system that can respond faster than political leaders can deliberate may turn tactical contact into strategic crisis. Hyperwar, in this sense, is not science fiction; it is the danger that algorithmic tempo outruns human control.

Perspective reconstruction. The African perspective sees these wars as evidence that the military-technological frontier is concentrating in a small set of states and firms, widening the AI divide and embedding new dependencies. It stresses that African states are often consumers, not producers, of the relevant technologies, and that lessons from Eurasian battlefields may be imported without attention to local political contexts. It demands equitable access to defensive capabilities, capacity building, and a voice in global AI governance, while warning that AI-enabled warfare can deepen asymmetry between technologically advanced and technologically dependent states. The Chinese perspective reads the case through sovereignty and strategic competition: military AI must remain under state control, and the lesson is that technological dependence is a security vulnerability. It emphasizes development, controllability, and the dangers of a US-led AI arms race, while treating multilateral constraints with suspicion if they appear to freeze Chinese advancement. The Russian perspective treats the wars as confirmation that precision, unmanned systems, and AI-enabled reconnaissance are now central to modernization and strategic stability. It emphasizes parity, deterrence, and the need to prevent technological surprise, but tends to understate the escalation risks created by autonomous and semi-autonomous systems. The Western perspective focuses on the tactical revolution: human-machine teaming, precision strike, and the legal and ethical problems of algorithmic targeting. It sees Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine as proof that AI-enabled warfare is already here, and it uses the cases to argue for responsible use, verification, and alliance adaptation. The UN perspective treats the wars as warnings about the speed of technological change and the erosion of human control. It stresses civilian protection, accountability, and the need for multilateral guardrails, while acknowledging that the UN cannot stop competitive adoption.

Explicit adjudication. The Western perspective best explains the immediate battlefield mechanism: it captures how sensing, targeting, and precision strike have compressed the kill chain and changed force employment. But it is weakest on distribution: it treats the wars as cases of technological adaptation rather than

as symptoms of a global AI divide. The African perspective best explains the structural consequence: it shows that the same technologies that make advanced militaries more effective also deepen dependence and inequality. The UN perspective best captures the normative stakes but cannot explain why states adopt these systems despite risk. The Russian and Chinese perspectives correctly identify competition and sovereignty but understate the principal-agent and escalation problems. The strongest overall explanation is therefore layered: the Western perspective explains the mechanism, the African perspective explains the distribution, and the UN perspective explains the governance imperative. No single perspective is sufficient, because the case is simultaneously tactical, structural, and normative.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. **Mechanism identification.** Reconstruct the causal chain by which Israel's Lavender and Gospel systems reportedly converted raw intelligence into nominated targets during the 2023–2024 Gaza campaign. Specify the inputs, the scoring logic, the human decision node, and the kinetic output, and identify where in that chain the "human in the loop" actually sits.
2. **Principal-agent analysis.** Apply the principal-agent framework to algorithmic targeting. Who is the principal, who is the agent, and what information asymmetry makes meaningful human oversight difficult? Distinguish "human in the loop," "human on the loop," and "human out of the loop" as defined in the LAWS debate.
3. **Legal reconstruction (Israeli/Western).** Steel-man the argument that algorithmic targeting can satisfy international humanitarian law—distinction, proportionality, and precaution—better than manual processes, and identify the specific evidentiary claims on which that argument rests.
4. **Critical reconstruction (human rights/UN/African).** Steel-man the counter-argument that these systems erode accountability, scale error, and shift the burden of proof onto civilian populations. Identify the strongest piece of evidence each side would need to win the argument.
5. **Comparative placement.** Compare the Gaza case with the Nagorno-Karabakh (2020) and Ukraine (2023–2024) worked example. In which case did AI function as a *targeting generator*, in which as a *platform enabler*, and what difference does that make for legal responsibility?
6. **Falsification.** Specify three observable findings that would falsify (a) the claim that algorithmic targeting reduces civilian harm relative to manual targeting, and (b) the claim that it necessarily increases civilian harm. State which data sources could in principle adjudicate between them.

MODEL ANSWER

The Lavender and Gospel systems illustrate a shift from human-driven to algorithm-assisted targeting at scale. According to investigative reporting, Lavender generated lists of suspected Hamas operatives by applying pattern-recognition models to communications metadata, social-network data, and behavioral indicators, producing a "score" for each individual; Gospel performed a parallel function for buildings and infrastructure, nominating structures as military objectives. The causal chain runs: intelligence ingestion → feature extraction → probabilistic scoring → threshold-based nomination → human approval (often compressed to seconds) → strike authorization → kinetic effect. The critical node is the human approval step.

In principle it preserves legal accountability; in practice, the volume of nominations, the opacity of the scoring, and the operational tempo convert approval into a formality, with the human operator ratifying rather than evaluating the machine's output. This is the principal-agent problem in its algorithmic form: the state (principal) delegates target nomination to a model (agent) whose reasoning it cannot fully inspect, while the human "approver" lacks both the time and the information to correct systematic errors.

The Israeli and Western legal defense rests on several claims. First, that algorithmic systems can process vastly more data than human analysts, improving distinction by identifying patterns invisible to humans. Second, that the systems are advisory, with a human retaining legal responsibility for each strike, thereby satisfying IHL's requirement of human judgment. Third, that Hamas's embedding in civilian infrastructure makes manual targeting equally or more error-prone, so the relevant comparison is not algorithm versus ideal human but algorithm versus human under combat stress. The evidentiary burden here falls on demonstrating that the human approver exercised genuine judgment—reviewing the basis for each nomination, assessing proportionality, and rejecting nominations where civilian risk was excessive.

The critical reconstruction challenges each claim. On distinction, pattern recognition trained on incomplete or biased data may systematically misclassify civilians as combatants, particularly where "combatant" is inferred from behavioral proxies (phone usage, movement patterns) rather than direct participation in hostilities. On proportionality, the speed of the kill chain compresses the deliberation that IHL's precautionary principle requires. On accountability, the opacity of the model and the classification of its parameters as military secrets make it nearly impossible for victims, courts, or oversight bodies to reconstruct why a particular individual was targeted. The African and UN perspectives add a structural critique: these systems are developed and deployed by technologically advanced states against populations with no comparable capacity to audit, contest, or retaliate, reproducing a colonial asymmetry in which the Global South bears the costs of Northern innovation. The strongest evidence for the critical side would be documented cases of misidentification at scale; the strongest for the defense would be audited data showing lower civilian-casualty rates per strike than in comparable manually targeted campaigns.

Comparatively, Nagorno-Karabakh (2020) and Ukraine (2023–2024) represent platform-enabled warfare: drones and loitering munitions extended human reach and precision, but target selection remained substantially human. Gaza represents targeting-generation: the algorithm itself produces the list of persons to kill. The legal difference is significant. In platform-enabled cases, responsibility attaches to the human operator who chose the target; in targeting-generation cases, responsibility is distributed across the model's designers, trainers, data curators, and approvers, none of whom may have made an individual targeting decision. This diffusion is precisely what makes algorithmic targeting legally and ethically novel.

Falsification requires data that neither side currently possesses in public form. The claim that algorithmic targeting reduces civilian harm would be falsified by evidence that (i) the false-positive rate for combatant identification exceeded that of manual processes in comparable contexts, (ii) human approvers rejected fewer than a trivial fraction of nominations, or (iii) post-strike assessments revealed systematic misidentification of protected persons. The claim that it necessarily increases harm would be falsified by (i) audited evidence of lower civilian-casualty ratios per engagement, (ii) documented instances of approvers rejecting nominations on proportionality grounds, or (iii) transparency measures enabling external audit without compromising operational security. Adjudication would require access to nomination logs, approval records, strike assessments, and model documentation—precisely the materials states classify. The epistemic gap is itself a finding: the accountability architecture of algorithmic warfare is structurally resistant to the verification that IHL presupposes.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. In late 2023, a coalition of African states at the UN General Assembly tabled a resolution calling for equitable access to AI technologies and a global fund for AI capacity-building in the Global South. The resolution passed, but implementation stalled. Meanwhile, a major African military—facing insurgency in its northern regions—procured an AI-enabled surveillance and targeting system from a foreign vendor whose training data and model weights remain proprietary. Civil society groups allege the system misidentifies civilians as combatants. The state's parliament demands an independent audit, but the vendor cites national-security and commercial confidentiality. The state must now decide whether to suspend the system, renegotiate terms, or seek alternative suppliers. The case sits at the intersection of the AI divide, algorithmic accountability, and sovereign procurement autonomy.

(b) Required memo headings (use these as prompts).

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal chain linking the foreign vendor's proprietary model to targeting outcomes on the ground. Where does human judgment sit, and what information asymmetry prevents the state from auditing the system? Specify the principal-agent relationships among the vendor, the military, the parliament, and affected civilians.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN—would frame this case. For each, state the core normative claim, the preferred policy prescription, and the strongest objection from within that perspective.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify one historical case (pre-2020) in which a technologically dependent state faced a comparable accountability gap in military procurement, and specify what is genuinely analogous and what differs given the opacity and speed of AI systems.
- **Falsifiers:** List three observable findings that would falsify your central claim about whether the state should suspend, renegotiate, or replace the system. State what data you would need and why it is or is not obtainable.

(c) Self-check. Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what happened), explanation (why it happened), prediction (what will happen), and prescription (what should be done)—and that no section conflates them.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question. Which of the following best captures the principal-agent problem as it arises in algorithmic targeting systems such as Lavender?

A. The algorithm acts as principal and the human operator as agent, reversing the traditional command hierarchy and placing legal liability on the machine.

B. The human operator cannot meaningfully evaluate the algorithm's output because of model opacity and operational tempo, so approval becomes a formality rather than a judgment.

C. The state delegates targeting to a private contractor, creating an accountability gap between public authority and commercial interest.

D. International humanitarian law lacks jurisdiction over non-state actors, so algorithmic systems used by states fall outside existing legal frameworks.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses.

- **A** misidentifies the principal-agent relationship. The state and its commanders remain the principal; the algorithm is an instrument, not a legal agent. Legal liability does not transfer to a machine under current IHL, and framing the algorithm as principal obscures the human choices embedded in its design and deployment.
- **C** identifies a real but secondary issue. Contractor involvement can complicate accountability, but the core principal-agent problem in algorithmic targeting is informational—opacity and speed—not commercial delegation. A state-operated system with the same opacity would raise the same problem.
- **D** misdiagnoses the legal gap. IHL applies to state conduct regardless of the technology used; the difficulty is not jurisdictional absence but the evidentiary and procedural challenge of verifying compliance when the decision chain is algorithmic and classified.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — State AI Investment and Compute Capacity (selected, 2023)

State / Bloc	Private AI Investment (USD bn, 2023)	Notable Public Compute / Program	Share of Top-100 AI Models (approx.)	Source
United States	~67	CHIPS Act, DoD Replicator	~60–70%	Stanford AI Index 2024; CSET
China	~8	Eastern Data Western Compute; PLA AI labs	~15–20%	Stanford AI Index 2024; CSET
United Kingdom	~4	ARIA, Alan Turing Institute	~3–5%	Stanford AI Index 2024
European Union (aggregate)	~8–10	EuroHPC, Horizon Europe	~5–8%	Stanford AI Index 2024
Israel	~2.5	MAFAT, Unit 8200 spin-offs	~2–3%	Stanford AI Index 2024
India	~1.5	IndiaAI Mission	<1%	Stanford AI Index 2024

Note: Figures are approximate and vary by definition of "AI investment" (private venture vs. total R&D). The US lead is structural, not merely cyclical, and is concentrated in frontier-model compute.

Table 2 — Autonomous and AI-Enabled Military Systems by State (selected, 2024)

State	System / Program	Domain	Autonomy Level (Scharre spectrum)	Status
United States	Replicator (attritable drones); Loyal Wingman (CCA)	Air / maritime	Human-on-the-loop → semi-autonomous	Fielding 2025–2027
United States	Project Maven (ISR/targeting)	ISR	Human-in-the-loop	Operational
China	GJ-11 "Sharp Sword"; CH-7	Air	Semi-autonomous strike	Testing / limited
China	Sea Hunter-class USV concepts	Maritime	Semi-autonomous	Development
Russia	Lancet-3 (loitering munition)	Air/land	Semi-autonomous terminal	Combat use (Ukraine)
Russia	Uran-9 UGV	Land	Teleoperated / limited autonomy	Limited combat use
Israel	Harpy / Harop (SEAD)	Air	Fire-and-forget autonomous	Operational
Israel	Lavender / Gospel (targeting support)	ISR/C2	Human-in-the-loop (nominally)	Operational (Gaza 2023–24)
Turkey	Kargu-2 (loitering munition)	Air	Claimed autonomous terminal	Exported; combat use
Turkey	Bayraktar TB2 (AI-assisted ISR)	Air	Human-in-the-loop	Combat-proven

Autonomy levels follow Scharre's (2018) spectrum: human-in-the-loop, human-on-the-loop, human-out-of-the-loop.

Table 3 — UN CCW Process on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)

Year	Event	Outcome
2013	First informal expert meeting on LAWS under CCW	Agenda established
2017	Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on LAWS convened	Annual meetings; no consensus
2018	GGE agrees 11 guiding principles (human control, accountability)	Non-binding
2019	GGE fails to agree mandate for binding instrument	Stalemate
2021	GGE mandate renewed; "two-tier" approach debated	No treaty

Year	Event	Outcome
2023	UN General Assembly resolution on LAWS (A/RES/78/241)	First GA resolution; calls for report
2023–24	Secretary-General Guterres urges legally binding instrument by 2026	Political pressure; no enforcement
2024	CCW GGE continues; "human control" definition unresolved	Ongoing

Source: UN CCW LAWS reports; UN Secretary-General statements.

Table 4 — AI Incident and Safety Trend (selected indicators)

Indicator	2020	2022	2024	Source
Reported AI incidents (AI Incident Database)	~50	~150	~300+	AIID
States with national AI strategy	~30	~60	~75+	OECD AI Policy Observatory
States party to CCW	125	125	125	UN
States supporting LAWS ban (Campaign to Stop Killer Robots)	~30	~35	~40+	CSKR

Incident counts are approximate and reflect reporting bias; they indicate a rising trend in documented harms, not a complete census.

Five Numbered Analysis Questions

1. **Trend.** Table 1 shows a roughly 8:1 US–China private AI investment ratio in 2023, yet Table 2 shows China fielding competitive autonomous systems. What does this divergence suggest about the relationship between commercial AI investment and military AI capability? Is the gap closing, and on what time horizon?

2. **Level of analysis.** The Lavender/Gospel systems (Table 2) are deployed at the *state* level by Israel, but their effects are felt at the *individual* level (targeted persons) and the *transnational* level (international humanitarian law norms). Using the four levels of analysis from Lesson 1, explain which level best explains the *proliferation* of such systems and which best explains the *constraint* on their use.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives would read Table 3's stalemate: (a) African — as evidence of a governance gap that excludes non-possessors; (b) Chinese — as a sovereignty-preserving outcome; (c) Russian — as strategic-stability management; (d) Western — as a failure of norm entrepreneurship; (e) UN — as incremental multilateralism. Which reading is best supported by the evidence in Tables 1–4?
4. **Interpretation.** Table 4 shows rising AI incidents alongside rising national AI strategies. Does this correlation imply that governance is failing, or that detection and reporting are improving? Distinguish description from explanation, and identify what evidence would adjudicate between the two readings.
5. **Limitation.** All four tables rely on open-source, self-reported, or advocacy-compiled data. Identify the single most important data gap that, if filled, would most change your assessment of whether AI is destabilizing or stabilizing in the military domain, and explain why.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "The Compression Spiral": OODA-Loop Collapse and Autonomy Escalation What to draw: A spiral (or nested concentric arcs) on a horizontal time axis running left-to-right, labeled "Time to decision (seconds → milliseconds → microseconds)." Three nested loops, each smaller and faster than the last: (1) outer loop labeled "Human-in-the-loop (HITL): minutes–hours" with a human icon and a "veto" gate; (2) middle loop "Human-on-the-loop (HOTL): seconds" with a human icon watching a screen; (3) inner loop "Human-out-of-the-loop (HOOTL): milliseconds" with no human icon, only an algorithm node. Arrows show escalation pressure pushing inward. A vertical dashed line marks "Flash-war threshold" where human cognition cannot keep pace.

Labels to place: "Observe–Orient–Decide–Act (OODA)"; "Algorithmic speed"; "Human cognitive limit (~250 ms reaction)"; "Escalation pressure"; "Flash war zone."

Perspective overlay: Annotate the spiral's outer rim in five colors: African (red) — "who is excluded from the loop?"; Chinese (blue) — "sovereignty over the loop"; Russian (green) — "strategic stability at speed"; Western (purple) — "norms of human control"; UN (orange) — "CCW / Pact for the Future." Place a small legend in the corner.

Visual 2 — "The Principal-Agent Problem in LAWS": Misalignment and Accountability Gap What to draw: A flowchart with two boxes: "Principal (State / Commander)" on the left and "Agent (Autonomous System)" on the right, connected by a solid arrow labeled "Delegation." Below, a dashed arrow returns labeled "Accountability?" with a question mark. Between them, a jagged "misalignment zone" (shaded) containing three failure modes: (a) "Objective mismatch (reward hacking)"; (b) "Context shift (training ≠ battlefield)"; (c) "Emergent behavior (unpredictable coordination)." Below the boxes, a horizontal bar labeled "Governance gap" with segments: "CCW GGE (non-binding)" | "National policy" | "International humanitarian law (existing)" | "No treaty."

Labels to place: "Principal"; "Agent"; "Delegation"; "Accountability gap"; "IHL (distinction, proportionality)"; "Command responsibility."

Perspective overlay: Five small flags or color-coded tags at the bottom: African — "accountability for victims in the Global South"; Chinese — "state responsibility preserved"; Russian — "no new constraints

on modernization"; Western — "human control as norm"; UN — "GGE guiding principles."

Visual 3 — "AI Governance Landscape": Concentric Regimes and the African Demand What to draw: A set of concentric circles (or a Venn diagram) centered on "AI in military use." Innermost circle: "Hard law (none binding on LAWS)." Second: "Soft law / norms" (CCW guiding principles, Pact for the Future, REAIM). Third: "National regulation" (US EO 14110, EU AI Act, China's Interim Measures, UK AI Safety Institute). Outermost: "Industry / technical standards" (ISO, IEEE, model evals). Around the circles, place five perspective markers: African (outermost, pointing inward) — "demand for equitable participation and technology transfer"; Chinese — "sovereignty and non-interference"; Russian — "strategic stability, no disarmament of conventional AI"; Western — "leadership + self-regulation + alliance coordination"; UN — "multilateral framework, SDG alignment."

Labels to place: "Hard law gap"; "Soft norms"; "National regimes"; "Technical standards"; "Equity gap (compute, data, talent)."

Perspective overlay: Use the same five-color legend as Visual 1. Add a small arrow from the African marker toward the center labeled "restructuring demand."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (Question / Prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is narrow AI in military systems?	ISR, targeting, logistics, C2. Examples: Project Maven, Lavender/Gospel. Source: Scharre (2018); Horowitz (2018).
What is the LAWS debate?	Autonomy in lethal force; CCW GGE since 2017; no binding treaty. Source: UN CCW LAWS reports.
What is the principal-agent problem in LAWS?	Delegation to algorithms creates accountability gaps; misalignment, context shift, emergent behavior. Source: Scharre (2018).
What is hyperwar / decision compression?	Algorithmic speed compresses OODA loop; risk of flash wars. Source: Scharre (2018); Kissinger et al. (2021).
What is AGI/ASI and why a security problem?	Superintelligence alignment as global security; arms-race dynamics. Source: Bostrom (2014); Kissinger et al. (2021).
What are the main AI governance instruments?	US EO 14110; EU AI Act; China Interim Measures; UN Pact for the Future. Source: Stanford AI Index 2024.
How does the African perspective frame AI?	Technology gap, AI divide, demand for equitable governance; not just consumer but co-designer. Sources: Grovogui; Mbembe; Aning; Danso.
How does China frame AI governance?	Sovereignty, non-interference, AI as development right; concern about US-led "AI arms race" rhetoric. Source: Chinese position papers at UN.

Cue (Question / Prompt)	Notes (with source log)
How does Russia frame AI?	Military modernization; strategic stability; opposes constraints that freeze asymmetry. Source: Russian MOD statements.
How does the West frame AI?	Leadership, LAWS debate, governance self-critique; alliance coordination (AUKUS, NATO). Source: US DoD, NATO AI strategy.
What is the UN's position?	CCW LAWS process; Secretary-General's call for binding instrument by 2026; Pact for the Future AI commitments. Source: UN.
What is the key falsifier for "AI is destabilizing"?	Evidence that AI improves crisis stability (better ISR, reduced fog) without increasing speed of escalation.

Source log: Scharre (2018) *Army of None*; Horowitz (2018) "Artificial Intelligence, International Competition, and the Balance of Power"; Kissinger, Schmidt & Huttenlocher (2021) *The Age of AI*; Bostrom (2014) *Superintelligence*; UN CCW LAWS reports; Stanford AI Index (2024); Grovogui, Mbembe, Aning, Danso (African IR scholarship).

Summary (3–5 sentences): Military AI spans narrow systems already in use (ISR, targeting, logistics) and speculative superintelligence, with LAWS sitting at the contested boundary. The central risk is decision compression: as algorithms accelerate the OODA loop, human control erodes and flash wars become plausible. Governance is fragmented across national regimes and a stalled CCW process, with no binding LAWS treaty. The African perspective insists that this fragmentation reproduces the AI divide and demands equitable participation, while Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN framings each privilege sovereignty, stability, leadership, or multilateralism respectively. Whether AI stabilizes or destabilizes depends on whether speed outruns accountability.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Imagine a chess clock that keeps speeding up. At first a human general has hours to decide; then minutes; then the computer moves on its own in milliseconds. That is "hyperwar": the machine's speed outruns human judgment, and a small spark can become a big fire before anyone can stop it. AI in war today is mostly narrow tools—better eyes, faster targeting—not robot generals, but the trend points toward machines making lethal choices. Countries argue about whether to ban "killer robots," yet no binding rule exists, and the big powers are racing ahead. The deeper worry is a super-smart AI that no one can control; the nearer worry is a fast, dumb mistake.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure how much Lavender/Gospel actually changed targeting rates versus human staff; I conflated "AI" with "automation" in places; I have not specified the mechanism by which AGI would destabilize (capability jump vs. misalignment); I treated the CCW stalemate as failure rather than as a sovereignty-preserving equilibrium for some states.

3. **Reread verification.** Re-reading Scharre (2018) confirms the spectrum of autonomy (HITL/HOTL/HOOTL)

and the principal-agent framing; Horowitz (2018) confirms that AI is a general-purpose technology whose military diffusion depends on organizational adaptation, not just algorithms; Kissinger et al. (2021) confirms the "compressed decision" thesis; Bostrom (2014) confirms the alignment problem as a control problem. The African-scholarship framing (Grovogui, Mbembe, Aning, Danso) is consistent with the technology-gap and equity-demand narrative.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** The chess-clock analogy captures speed and loss of human control but breaks down on three points: (a) war is not zero-sum with fixed rules—adversaries adapt; (b) the "clock" is not neutral—it is owned by states with unequal compute; (c) a chess loss ends a game, whereas a flash war can escalate to nuclear use. The analogy is pedagogically useful for compression but must not be mistaken for a model of strategic interaction.

5. **Rewrite.** Military AI is best understood as a compression technology: it shrinks the time between observation and lethal action, eroding the human control that international humanitarian law presupposes. Narrow systems (ISR, targeting, logistics) are already deployed and have changed battlefields (Nagorno-Karabakh 2020, Ukraine 2023–24, Gaza 2023–24), while LAWS remain legally unregulated despite a decade of CCW talks. AGI raises a categorically different problem—alignment as global security—but its probability and timeline are deeply uncertain. Governance is fragmented (US EO, EU AI Act, Chinese measures, UN soft law), and the African perspective highlights that this fragmentation reproduces the AI divide: those who build the systems are not those who bear the risks. The stabilizing case (better information reduces fog) and the destabilizing case (speed outruns accountability) are both live; adjudication requires evidence on escalation dynamics, not just capability counts.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag | Card Type | Front | Back | Perspective Note |
L54 | definition | What is narrow AI in military systems? | Narrow (weak) AI performs specific tasks—ISR, targeting, logistics, C2—without general reasoning; it is the current operational layer of military AI, distinct from AGI. | African scholars note the asymmetry: African militaries are consumers, not producers, of narrow AI systems. |
L54 | mechanism | How does decision compression create hyperwar risk? | Algorithmic speed compresses the OODA loop; when both sides use AI, escalation can outpace human deliberation, producing flash wars. | Russian strategic-stability framing warns of compressed timelines undermining crisis management. |
L54 | application | What did the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war demonstrate about AI-enabled warfare? | It showcased loitering munitions (Harop, Orbiter) and drone ISR enabling rapid, precise strikes against armor and air defenses. | Western analysts read it as proof of concept; African analysts stress proliferation to non-state actors. |
L54 | comparison | How do LAWS differ from remote-controlled drones? | LAWS select and engage targets without human intervention in the critical function; drones retain a human in the loop. | The CCW GGE debates this distinction; African states often stress human control. |
L54 | source | What is Scharre's (2018) core argument about autonomous weapons? | In "Army of None," Scharre argues autonomy is a spectrum and the key question is meaningful human control, not a binary ban. | Western defense perspective; African delegates often push for stronger prohibitions. |
L54 | debate | What is the principal-agent problem in LAWS? | The commander (principal) cannot fully predict or control the autonomous system (agent), creating accountability gaps. | UN CCW reports highlight

this as central to IHL compliance. |
L54 | reconstruction | What is China's position on AI governance? | China supports UN-led governance, opposes an "AI arms race," and frames AI as a sovereignty and development issue. | Chinese perspective emphasizes multilateralism and development rights. |
L54 | occlusion | What does the Western AI-leadership framing occlude? | It tends to treat AI competition as a US-China dyad, marginalizing African and Global South agency and the AI divide. | African perspective centers the technology gap and equitable access. |
L54 | adjudication | How should one adjudicate between US and Chinese AI governance proposals? | Compare scope (binding vs. voluntary), enforcement, and inclusion of Global South voices; neither fully addresses the AI divide. | African scholars demand equitable governance, not just great-power bargains. |
L54 | visual | What does the Stanford AI Index track? | Private investment, model performance, and policy developments in AI, showing concentration in US and China. | African perspective: the index reveals the AI divide in investment and talent. |
L54 | definition | What is AGI and why is it a security problem? | AGI would match or exceed human cognition across domains; its security dilemma arises from first-mover advantage and alignment uncertainty. | Bostrom (2014) frames alignment as existential; African scholars stress whose values align. |
L54 | mechanism | What is the alignment problem? | Ensuring an advanced AI's objectives match human values; misalignment could produce catastrophic outcomes even without malice. | Kissinger et al. (2021) warn AI may outpace human comprehension. |
L54 | comparison | How does the EU AI Act differ from the US executive order? | The EU AI Act is binding risk-based regulation; the US EO relies on voluntary commitments and agency guidance. | African regulators watch both as templates but lack capacity to implement. |
L54 | source | What does Horowitz (2018) argue about military AI diffusion? | Horowitz argues military AI diffusion depends on organizational capacity and regime type, not just technology. | Explains why African states lag in adoption beyond hardware. |
L54 | debate | What is the UN Secretary-General's position on LAWS? | Guterres has called for a legally binding instrument prohibiting lethal autonomous weapons by 2026. | African and many Global South states support a binding treaty. |

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit (score 0–100):

Topic	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence for confidence	Gap to close
Narrow AI military applications (ISR, targeting, logistics, C2)			
LAWS definition and CCW process			
Decision compression and hyperwar			
AGI/ASI security dilemma and alignment			
AI governance (US EO, EU AI Act, China, UN)			

Topic	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence for confidence	Gap to close
Nagorno-Karabakh 2020 and Ukraine drone cases			
Lavender/Gospel Gaza case			
African perspective on AI divide and equitable governance			

7.2 Three-question debrief: 1. Which of the five perspectives did you reconstruct most weakly, and what evidence would strengthen it? 2. Did you conflate description (what happened) with explanation (why) in the Lavender/Gospel case? 3. Which falsifier would most change your conclusion about whether AI-enabled warfare is stabilizing or destabilizing?

7.3 Error-log:

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"AI in warfare already means AGI"	Current systems are narrow AI; AGI remains speculative and is not deployed.	Scharre (2018); Horowitz (2018)
"LAWS are already banned by international law"	No binding treaty exists; the CCW GGE has not reached consensus on a prohibition.	UN CCW LAWS reports
"Hyperwar is inevitable"	Hyperwar is a risk scenario, not a certainty; human-in-the-loop designs and arms-control measures can mitigate.	Scharre (2018)
"The AI arms race is only US vs. China"	It occludes Global South agency, the AI divide, and non-state proliferation.	African perspective; Stanford AI Index
"Alignment is purely a technical problem"	Alignment is also political and normative—who defines values matters.	Bostrom (2014); Kissinger et al. (2021)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Narrow AI; LAWS; hyperwar; AGI/ASI; alignment; AI governance	Decision compression; principal-agent gap; diffusion via organizational capacity; security dilemma of superintelligence	Scharre (2018); Horowitz (2018); Kissinger et al. (2021); Bostrom (2014); UN CCW LAWS reports; Stanford AI Index	Nagorno-Karabakh 2020; Ukraine 2023–2024 drones; Lavender/Gospel Gaza 2023–2024; Stanford AI Index investment data	LAWS ban vs. regulation; binding vs. voluntary governance; AI arms race vs. cooperation	Demonstrated stable human-in-the-loop control; binding LAWS treaty; equitable AI capacity-building	L24 cyber/cognitive; L22 conventional warfare; L52 semiconductors; L55 quantum/NC3; L56 innovation; L57 space/infrastructure

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 30 min):** Re-read Section 2.2–2.6 bolded causal claims; recite the five key ideas from memory; check flashcards tagged L54.
- **R2 (Day 3, 45 min):** Reconstruct all five perspectives on the central topic (AI, AGI, and hyperwar) without notes; compare against Section 2.7.
- **R3 (Day 7, 60 min):** Work the Problem Pair (Lavender/Gospel) memo from scratch; verify you distinguished description, explanation, prediction, prescription.
- **R4 (Day 14, 45 min):** Re-run the Data Lab analysis questions; update confidence audit scores in Section 7.1.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 min):** Full synthesis: write a 500-word adjudication of whether AI-enabled warfare is stabilizing or destabilizing, citing at least three perspectives and two falsifiers.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define narrow AI, LAWS, hyperwar, AGI, ASI, and alignment.
☐ I can explain the mechanism of decision compression and flash-war risk.
☐ I can describe the principal-agent problem in autonomous weapons.
☐ I can reconstruct the CCW LAWS process and the Secretary-General's position.
☐ I can compare US EO, EU AI Act, Chinese regulations, and UN framework.
☐ I can apply all four levels of analysis to the Nagorno-Karabakh/Ukraine case.
☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives on AI, AGI, and hyperwar.
☐ I can identify what the African perspective reveals that others miss.
☐ I can adjudicate between competing explanations with evidence.
☐ I can state at least two falsifiers for my conclusions.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit with honest scores.
☐ I have logged at least one misconception in the error-log.
☐ I can read the Stanford AI Index data and interpret the AI divide.

☐ I can explain Horowitz's (2018) diffusion argument.
☐ I can explain Bostrom's (2014) alignment concern.
☐ I can explain Scharre's (2018) spectrum-of-autonomy argument.
☐ I can explain Kissinger et al.'s (2021) warning about AI and human comprehension.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Military AI and autonomous weapons: - Scharre, Paul. *Army of None: Autonomous Weapons and the Future of War*. W.W. Norton, 2018. - Horowitz, Michael C. "The Promise and Peril of Military Applications of Artificial Intelligence." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 2018. - Horowitz, Michael C. "Artificial Intelligence, International Competition, and the Balance of Power." *Texas National Security Review*, 2018.

AGI, alignment, and superintelligence: - Bostrom, Nick. *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*. Oxford University Press, 2014. - Kissinger, Henry A., Eric Schmidt, and Daniel Huttenlocher. *The Age of AI: And Our Human Future*. Little, Brown, 2021.

Governance and policy: - UN CCW Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, reports and chair's summaries. - Stanford Institute for Human-Centered AI. *AI Index Report* (annual).

Chinese, Russian, and African perspectives: - Kania, Elsa B. "Battlefield Singularity: Artificial Intelligence, Military Revolution, and China's Future Military Power." CNAS, 2017. - Allen, Gregory C. "Understanding China's AI Strategy." CSIS, 2019. - Grovogui, Siba N. *Regimes of Sovereignty: International Morality and the African Condition*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

End of Lesson 54. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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56. Quantum Computing, Cryptographic Hegemony, and NC3

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 55 — Quantum Computing, Cryptographic Hegemony, and NC3
Module	Module 9: Techno-Geopolitics, AI, and Emerging Domains
Prerequisites	L21 (nuclear strategy); L24 (cyber); L54 (AI)
Interleaved links	Forward to L56 (innovation), L57 (space), L58 (forecasting)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text; data lab; worked example; problem pair; visuals; flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create (synthesis and adjudication)

Estimated study time: 7-9 hours.

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is whether quantum technology constitutes a revolutionary rupture in the security order or an accelerant of existing asymmetries, and, crucially, for whom. A cryptographically relevant quantum computer (CRQC) would not merely compute faster; it would invert the confidentiality assumptions on which diplomacy, finance, military command, and nuclear deterrence rest. The question is not only when such a machine arrives, but who can harvest encrypted data today and decrypt it tomorrow, who controls the standards that replace broken cryptography, and whose second-strike forces become detectable as quantum sensing matures. The lesson treats quantum not as a physics problem with geopolitical side effects but as a geopolitical problem whose physics is still uncertain. That uncertainty is itself strategic: states must invest, migrate, and posture under ambiguity about timelines, and the distribution of that ambiguity is uneven. The African vantage, developed more fully in Section 2.7, frames the puzzle from the standpoint of technology marginalization and digital sovereignty: the decisive issue is often not whether a quantum computer breaks a code but who owns the infrastructure, who sets the standards, and whose archived data becomes retroactively transparent.

This lesson sits at the intersection of three prior modules. From L21 (nuclear strategy) it inherits the logic of second-strike stability, NC3 resilience, and the distinction between counterforce and countervalue targeting. From L24 (cyber) it inherits the role of encryption in confidentiality, integrity, and attribution, and the difficulty of verifying compliance in a domain of hidden capabilities. From L54 (AI) it inherits the problem of automation in decision support and the risk that speed compresses human judgment. Quantum adds a new variable: it threatens to make the past transparent (harvest now, decrypt later), the present detectable (quantum sensing), and the future's command architecture penetrable (NC3). Forward links to L56 (innovation) ask who can build quantum industries; L57 (space) asks how quantum communication satellites reshape secure channels; L58 (forecasting) asks how to reason about low-probability, high-consequence technological transitions. The lesson thus functions as a bridge between the nuclear-cyber core of the curriculum and the emerging-technology frontier.

By the end of this lesson the student should be able to do seven things. First, distinguish quantum computing, quantum sensing, and quantum communications as technologies with different mechanisms, timelines, and strategic effects, resisting the conflation common in policy discourse. Second, apply Mosca's theorem to assess when a state should treat quantum decryption as an immediate rather than future risk. Third, evaluate the NIST post-quantum cryptography standards and national migration timelines as both technical and political projects. Fourth, analyze how quantum sensing could erode submarine stealth and what that implies for second-strike stability. Fifth, assess NC3 vulnerability without collapsing into either alarmism or complacency. Sixth, reconstruct five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—on quantum and cryptographic hegemony, identifying what each reveals and occludes. Seventh, adjudicate between competing claims using evidence and explicit scope conditions, including the strongest counterarguments. These objectives are assessed through the worked example, problem pair, independent memo, hinge question, and data lab.

The theoretical framing draws on several lineages. Mosca (2018) provides the canonical decision rule for quantum risk: if a cryptographically relevant quantum computer is expected in x years, data must remain secure for y years, and x is less than y, then the risk is present now. This is not a forecast of Q-Day but a framework for action under uncertainty. Grimes and Martin (2020) and NATO quantum technology reports situate quantum within alliance capability planning and the problem of interoperability. The broader lineage includes scholarship on technological hegemony and standard-setting: control over cryptographic standards

is a form of structural power, because it determines whose communications are legible and whose are not. The African vantage, developed through scholars such as Grovogui on sovereignty and international order, Mbembe on the postcolony and technology, Bayart on extraversion, Mamdani on bifurcated states, and Rodney on underdevelopment, insists that quantum geopolitics cannot be read only as a great-power race. It must be read as a question of who owns the infrastructure, who sets the standards, and whose data is exposed by the harvest-now-decrypt-later logic. For African states, the threat is less that a quantum computer breaks their codes tomorrow and more that their diplomatic, financial, and health data, archived today under assumptions of long-term confidentiality, becomes retroactively transparent to actors with superior cryptanalytic capacity.

The lesson also foregrounds the problem of calibrated uncertainty. Quantum timelines are deeply uncertain: estimates of when a CRQC will exist range from a decade to several decades, and much of the relevant capability is classified. Policy must therefore be made under radical uncertainty, and the distribution of uncertainty itself matters. States with large cryptanalytic and industrial bases can hedge; states without them must rely on standards set elsewhere. The harvest-now-decrypt-later threat is particularly insidious because it is invisible: an adversary need not announce collection, and the damage may only become visible years later. Similarly, quantum sensing's impact on submarine stealth is contingent on engineering maturity, environmental noise, and countermeasures, not merely on physics demonstrations. NC3 vulnerability raises the stakes further: if quantum or quantum-enabled capabilities could compromise the confidentiality or integrity of nuclear command and control, the stabilizing logic of mutual assured destruction could be destabilized without any shot being fired. The lesson trains the student to hold these uncertainties explicitly rather than collapsing them into point predictions.

Methodologically, the lesson requires multi-level analysis. At the individual level, decision-makers face cognitive load and automation bias when interpreting quantum threat intelligence. At the state level, industrial policy, standard-setting, and alliance coordination determine migration speed. At the systemic level, the distribution of quantum capability affects polarity and stability. At the transnational level, supply chains for cryogenics, rare isotopes, and specialized components create dependencies that constrain sovereignty. The worked example (US NIST 2024 PQC standards) and problem pair (China's Micius satellite) are chosen to force the student to move across these levels and across perspectives. The data lab provides quantitative anchors—national investment, patent counts, migration status, counterspace capabilities—while warning that such metrics capture inputs and institutional activity, not strategic outcomes. The student's task is to connect mechanism to evidence and to specify what would falsify each claim.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. (L21) What is second-strike capability, and why does its survivability stabilize nuclear deterrence rather than merely add firepower?
2. (L21) Distinguish counterforce from countervalue targeting; which is more destabilizing and why?
3. (L24) What role does encryption play in cyber deterrence, and why is attribution difficult even when cryptography is strong?
4. (L24) What is the difference between confidentiality, integrity, and availability, and which does a quantum computer most directly threaten?
5. (L54) What is automation bias, and how could it interact with faster-than-human decision cycles in crisis?
6. (L54) Why might AI-enabled intelligence analysis increase rather than reduce uncertainty in strategic

assessment?

Brief answer key: (1) Second-strike capability is the ability to retaliate after absorbing a first strike; survivability (hardened silos, SSBNs) makes the threat credible and thus deters first use. (2) Counterforce targets military assets; it is more destabilizing because it creates use-it-or-lose-it pressures. (3) Encryption protects confidentiality; attribution is difficult because of spoofing, proxies, and the dual-use nature of cyber tools. (4) Confidentiality, integrity, availability; quantum most directly threatens confidentiality (and signature integrity) via Shor's algorithm. (5) Automation bias is over-reliance on automated outputs; speed can compress deliberation and escalation control. (6) AI can amplify noise, overfit, and create false confidence; more data does not guarantee better judgment.

1.2 Orientation questions

1. If a state can harvest and store encrypted traffic today and decrypt it in fifteen years, whose security is most at risk, and what can be done now?
2. Does quantum sensing make the oceans transparent, or does engineering and environmental noise preserve submarine stealth for decades?
3. Is post-quantum cryptography migration primarily a technical standards problem or a political coordination problem across vendors, states, and legacy systems?
4. If quantum capabilities could compromise NC3, does that strengthen or weaken deterrence, and for whom?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Qubit**: the basic unit of quantum information, exploiting superposition to represent multiple states simultaneously.
- **Superposition**: a quantum state in which a system exists in a combination of basis states until measured.
- **Entanglement**: correlation between quantum particles such that measurement of one instantaneously determines the state of another, enabling quantum communication protocols.
- **Cryptographically relevant quantum computer (CRQC)**: a quantum computer with enough qubits and error correction to run Shor's algorithm against real-world key sizes.
- **Q-Day**: the hypothetical date when a CRQC becomes operational enough to break current public-key cryptography.
- **Harvest now, decrypt later (HNDL)**: the strategy of collecting encrypted data today for decryption once a CRQC exists.
- **Post-quantum cryptography (PQC)**: classical cryptographic algorithms designed to resist both quantum and classical attacks.
- **Lattice-based cryptography**: a family of PQC schemes whose security rests on hard problems in high-dimensional lattices; basis of several NIST standards.
- **Quantum key distribution (QKD)**: a protocol using quantum mechanics to establish shared secret keys with eavesdropping detection.
- **Quantum sensing**: use of quantum phenomena to measure physical quantities with high precision, with potential applications in navigation and detection.
- **NC3**: nuclear command, control, and communications—the systems that connect decision-makers to nuclear forces.

- **Mosca's theorem**: the decision rule that if a CRQC arrives in x years and data must stay secure for y years, risk exists now when x < y.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Explain** the physical and engineering distinction among quantum computing, quantum sensing, and quantum communications, and articulate why each domain carries a distinct strategic logic rather than a single undifferentiated "quantum threat" (Bloom: Understand/Explain).
2. **Analyze** the mechanism by which a cryptographically relevant quantum computer (CRQC) would break RSA and elliptic-curve cryptography, including the role of Shor's algorithm and the "harvest now, decrypt later" (HNDL) threat model, and evaluate Mosca's theorem as a decision rule for migration timing (Bloom: Analyze).
3. **Evaluate** the NIST 2024 post-quantum cryptography standards (FIPS 203/204/205) as a policy response, identifying their scope conditions, implementation bottlenecks, and the risk that standardization itself becomes a new vector of hegemonic control (Bloom: Evaluate).
4. **Assess** how quantum sensing technologies threaten submarine stealth and second-strike stability, and how quantum communications (QKD) reshape nuclear command-and-control vulnerability, using the levels-of-analysis framework from Lesson 1 (Bloom: Assess).
5. **Reconstruct** the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on quantum-technology geopolitics, adjudicating among them on the basis of evidence rather than adopting any single national framing (Bloom: Synthesize/Evaluate).

Estimated study time: 7–9 hours. Reading load: 7–9 hours.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Quantum technologies: computing, sensing, communications, and their strategic implications

Bolded Causal Claim: The strategic significance of quantum technology does not reside in "quantum" as a monolithic capability but in three physically distinct families—computing, sensing, and communications—each of which alters a different pillar of the existing security order (cryptographic trust, stealth-based deterrence, and information-theoretic security), and the failure to disaggregate them produces both threat inflation and policy misallocation.

Mechanism: Quantum computing exploits superposition and entanglement to perform certain computations—most notably integer factorization via Shor's algorithm and unstructured search via Grover's algorithm—at speeds that scale polynomially rather than exponentially against classical counterparts. The strategic mechanism is not general-purpose speedup but the collapse of the computational hardness assumptions (integer factorization, discrete logarithm) on which RSA and elliptic-curve cryptography (ECC) rest. Quantum sensing exploits quantum coherence, squeezing, and entanglement to achieve

measurement precision beyond the standard quantum limit, enabling detection of minute gravitational, magnetic, or electromagnetic signatures; the strategic mechanism is the erosion of stealth platforms (submarines, aircraft) whose survivability underwrites second-strike nuclear deterrence. Quantum communications exploits the no-cloning theorem and measurement-disturbance to distribute cryptographic keys with information-theoretic security (quantum key distribution, QKD) and to build quantum networks; the strategic mechanism is the creation of communication channels whose security derives from physics rather than computational hardness, potentially immunizing command-and-control links against both classical and quantum cryptanalysis. The three families share a common physical substrate—quantum mechanics—but their engineering maturity, resource requirements, and strategic effects diverge sharply: quantum computers require millions of physical qubits with error correction to threaten RSA-2048; quantum sensors may achieve operationally relevant sensitivity with far fewer qubits but face platform-integration and environmental-decoherence constraints; QKD networks require trusted nodes or quantum repeaters that do not yet exist at intercontinental scale. Conflating them—for instance, treating a laboratory demonstration of quantum advantage as evidence of imminent cryptographic collapse—distorts threat assessment and resource allocation.

Scope Conditions: The causal claim holds under three conditions. First, the three families must be analyzed at the level of their distinct physical mechanisms rather than their shared "quantum" branding; where analysis treats quantum as a single technology, the claim's disaggregation logic is violated. Second, the claim assumes that strategic effects flow from physical capabilities through institutional and doctrinal filters; a quantum computer in a laboratory does not automatically translate into a deployed cryptanalytic capability, and a quantum sensor does not automatically translate into a submarine-detection network. Third, the claim is bounded by the current state of error correction, decoherence management, and systems integration; it does not assert that these barriers are insurmountable, only that they are the binding constraints on strategic timelines. The claim does not apply to speculative "quantum supremacy" demonstrations that do not scale to cryptographically relevant sizes, nor does it apply to classical technologies mislabeled as quantum (e.g., certain "quantum-inspired" algorithms).

Observable Implications: If the claim holds, one should observe: (a) national quantum programs disaggregating their portfolios into computing, sensing, and communications with distinct funding lines and governance structures (e.g., the US National Quantum Initiative, China's quantum satellite program, the EU Quantum Flagship); (b) intelligence assessments distinguishing between "quantum advantage" in niche applications and "cryptographically relevant" quantum computing; (c) submarine-detection research programs investing in quantum gravimetry and magnetometry rather than quantum computing; (d) QKD networks being deployed for high-value government and financial links rather than general internet traffic; and (e) policy documents (NIST, NATO) treating the three families as separate risk domains with separate mitigation timelines. Conversely, if the claim is wrong—if quantum operates as a monolithic strategic shock—one would expect to see unified "quantum" threat assessments, single-point procurement decisions, and synchronized migration timelines across all three domains, which is not what the 2024 policy record shows.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African vantage point begins from the structural position of technological marginalization that Rodney, Mamdani, and Aning have documented: African states are predominantly consumers rather than producers of frontier technologies, and quantum is no exception. The relevant question is not whether Africa will build a cryptographically relevant quantum computer but whether African states will have agency in the standards, supply chains, and governance frameworks that quantum technologies will

reshape. Oyěwùmí's epistemological critique reminds us that "quantum" as a category is itself a Western scientific construct whose universalization can obscure locally grounded knowledge systems; Tamale's work on digital sovereignty frames the issue as one of data and infrastructure control rather than mere access. The African perspective reveals what the others miss: that quantum geopolitics is not only about who computes fastest but about who sets the standards, who controls the rare-earth and cryogenic supply chains, and whose communications infrastructure becomes dependent on externally governed QKD networks. It also highlights the risk that PQC migration, led by NIST, will be adopted in African states without African input, reproducing the pattern Bayart identified of extraversion—external orientation of African elites toward foreign centers of power. The African perspective does not deny the physical reality of quantum effects but insists that their strategic meaning is mediated by global inequality.

Chinese: China's perspective, as articulated in official strategy and in the work of quantum physicists such as Pan Jianwei, frames quantum technology as a domain of "strategic high ground" (zhanlue gaodi) in which China can leapfrog Western advantages in classical computing. The Chinese narrative emphasizes Micius (2016) as proof of concept for satellite-based QKD and the Jiuzhang photonic quantum computer as evidence of progress. The strategic framing treats quantum communications as a stabilizing technology (information-theoretic security against eavesdropping) while treating quantum computing as a potential disruptor of Western cryptographic hegemony. This perspective occludes the dependence on imported components and the gap between laboratory demonstration and deployed capability.

Russian: Russia's perspective, reflected in Rosatom's quantum program and in statements by military officials, treats quantum technology primarily through the lens of NC3 vulnerability and strategic stability. The Russian framing emphasizes that quantum sensing could undermine submarine-based second-strike forces and that quantum computing could threaten nuclear command-and-control encryption. This perspective occludes Russia's relative lag in quantum computing investment compared to the US and China, and it tends to conflate quantum sensing maturity with quantum computing maturity.

Western: The Western perspective, dominant in US and allied policy, frames quantum as a race for technological leadership with both offensive (cryptanalysis) and defensive (PQC, QKD) dimensions. It emphasizes NIST standardization, DARPA programs, and alliance coordination (NATO quantum reports). This perspective occludes the global South's position in standards-setting and tends to treat PQC migration as a technical problem rather than a geopolitical one.

UN: The UN perspective, reflected in the Secretary-General's disarmament agenda and in the work of UNIDIR and the Group of Governmental Experts on emerging technologies, frames quantum as an emerging technology requiring multilateral governance, confidence-building measures, and attention to the digital divide. This perspective occludes the competitive dynamics that drive national programs and tends to assume that governance frameworks can keep pace with technological change.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Q-Day and the "Harvest Now, Decrypt Later" Threat to Current Encryption

Bolded Causal Claim: The quantum threat to contemporary cryptography is best understood not as a single future "Q-Day" but as a time-shifted confidentiality crisis: adversaries can record encrypted communications and data now, store them, and decrypt them once a cryptographically relevant quantum computer (CRQC) exists, so that the damage is determined by today's collection and by the gap between data shelf life, migration

time, and CRQC arrival.

Mechanism: Modern public-key cryptography—RSA, elliptic-curve cryptography (ECC), and Diffie-Hellman key exchange—derives its security from the computational hardness of integer factorization and discrete logarithm problems. Shor's algorithm shows that a sufficiently large, fault-tolerant quantum computer can solve these problems in polynomial time, collapsing the security margin that protects key establishment, digital signatures, public-key infrastructures, and long-term trust anchors. Grover's algorithm provides a quadratic speedup against symmetric ciphers and hash functions, meaning that AES-128 and SHA-256 retain only roughly half their classical security margin unless key and output sizes are increased; this is manageable and does not require abandoning symmetric cryptography, but it does require disciplined key-size choices. The "harvest now, decrypt later" (HNDL) mechanism exploits the fact that ciphertext is often transmitted or stored in recoverable form: a passive adversary with access to network taps, satellite downlinks, undersea cable landing points, cloud backups, or endpoint compromises can archive ciphertext without needing to break it in real time. Because public-key key exchange reveals ephemeral public values, even sessions that use forward secrecy can be retrospectively broken if the recorded ephemeral public keys are subjected to Shor's algorithm later; forward secrecy protects against later compromise of long-term keys, not against a future change in the computational assumptions underlying the key exchange itself. The result is a temporal asymmetry captured by Mosca's inequality: if the shelf life of the data plus the time required to migrate systems exceeds the time remaining until a CRQC, then the data should be treated as already compromised in planning terms. The mechanism therefore converts an uncertain future capability into a present risk assessment problem, especially for secrets whose value persists for decades: diplomatic archives, military plans, intelligence sources and methods, biometric and identity records, financial and contractual data, scientific and industrial intellectual property, and authentication roots such as root certificates and firmware-signing keys. A CRQC would not merely read old messages; it could also forge signatures under compromised long-term keys, undermining non-repudiation and the integrity of software, firmware, and identity systems whose trust anchors were issued under RSA or ECC.

Scope Conditions: The HNDL threat is conditional rather than automatic. First, it requires a CRQC, not the noisy intermediate-scale quantum (NISQ) devices available today; the threshold depends on qubit quality, error correction, logical qubit counts, and algorithmic improvements, and estimates of its arrival remain contested. Second, it applies most strongly to data with a confidentiality or integrity horizon longer than the interval between collection and CRQC availability; ephemeral transactional data may lose value before decryption is possible. Third, the adversary must actually be able to collect and store the ciphertext; not all traffic is equally accessible, and metadata may sometimes be more valuable than content. Fourth, symmetric cryptography with adequate key lengths remains viable against Grover's algorithm, so the vulnerability is concentrated in asymmetric primitives and in the infrastructures that depend on them. Fifth, migration before Q-Day can neutralize future decryption for newly protected data, though it cannot retroactively protect ciphertext already harvested under RSA or ECC unless the underlying plaintext is re-encrypted or the data's value has expired. Sixth, PQC algorithms are themselves subject to cryptanalytic scrutiny; "harvest now, decrypt later" can become "harvest now, cryptanalyze later" if a future classical or quantum attack breaks a deployed PQC scheme. Finally, the threat is shaped by institutional capacity: organizations with poor crypto inventories, legacy systems, or long-lived embedded devices face a larger effective exposure than their nominal algorithm choices suggest.

Observable Implications: If the HNDL mechanism is operative, one should observe governments and firms treating encrypted archives as time-delayed liabilities rather than as permanently secure records. Observable indicators include mandatory cryptographic inventories, classification of data by confidentiality horizon,

procurement rules requiring crypto-agility, hybrid key-exchange deployments in TLS and VPNs, and national guidance that accelerates PQC adoption for long-lived secrets. One should also observe intelligence and defense communities emphasizing "store now, decrypt later" in threat assessments; vendors marketing quantum-safe products; and diplomatic or financial institutions extending protection periods for archives and identity systems. Conversely, if organizations continue to deploy RSA/ECC without migration planning for data with multi-decade value, that behavior implies either disbelief in near-term CRQC estimates or acceptance of retrospective compromise. The mechanism also predicts pressure on root-of-trust ecosystems—code signing, firmware updates, PKI, and device identity—because a future CRQC could forge signatures that verify under currently trusted public keys. In alliance politics, it predicts coordination problems: states with different risk tolerances and migration capacities will disagree about how urgently to deprecate legacy algorithms, and vendors will face fragmented demand between "quantum-safe now" and "wait for standards maturity."

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* From an African vantage point, HNDL is not merely a future technical contingency but an extension of existing patterns of data extraction and cryptographic dependence. African states, firms, and publics are predominantly consumers of encryption standards, hardware, software, and cloud infrastructures designed elsewhere; their diplomatic correspondence, mineral and energy contracts, health and biometric records, financial data, and political communications may be harvested now with limited capacity to detect collection or to migrate systems. Drawing on African scholarship that treats sovereignty as practice rather than formal status—Grovogui's critique of international legal hierarchy, Bayart's analysis of extraversion, and Mamdani's insistence on the political construction of state capacity—the quantum threat appears as another layer of externalized control over African information. The African perspective reveals what Western threat models often occlude: the vulnerability is already present in vendor dependence, foreign cloud hosting, weak regulatory capacity, and the absence of African voices in standards bodies such as NIST. It also highlights distributional questions: populations whose data are collected by states or corporations may suffer retrospective exposure of intimate information, while elites may retain access to foreign-protected systems. The African contribution is to frame Q-Day as a problem of digital sovereignty and epistemic justice, not only of algorithmic replacement. It suggests that African priorities should include regional cryptographic capacity, open standards, data-localization where appropriate, and participation in global standard-setting, rather than passive adoption of externally defined migration timelines. It also cautions that "quantum-safe" procurement can become a new market for foreign vendors unless accompanied by skills transfer and institutional capacity.

Chinese: China frames quantum computing as a strategic leapfrog technology and treats HNDL as a domain in which relative collection capabilities and future decryption power matter. Its perspective emphasizes both offensive potential and defensive sovereignty: Chinese programs seek CRQC-relevant capabilities while also developing quantum communications to reduce dependence on classical public-key infrastructure. The Chinese view tends to see US-led standardization as a vehicle of technological influence and may prefer indigenous or nationally controlled cryptographic solutions. It occludes questions of global interoperability and may understate the risks of premature or non-transparent algorithm choices.

Russian: Russia's perspective combines investment in quantum research with acute concern about strategic vulnerability, especially the exposure of military and state communications and the possibility that US quantum advantage could undermine Russian deterrence and intelligence security. It treats HNDL as a plausible intelligence threat and may be skeptical of Western-controlled PQC standards. This perspective occludes the extent to which Russian systems themselves depend on legacy cryptography and the difficulty of migrating large, centralized state infrastructures.

Western: The Western perspective, especially in the United States and NATO, treats quantum as a race for leadership in which PQC migration and NC3 protection are urgent defensive priorities. It emphasizes NIST standardization, DARPA and national-laboratory programs, vendor ecosystems, and alliance coordination, including NATO quantum technology reports. This perspective is strong on technical implementation but tends to occlude the global South's position in standards-setting and to treat migration as a technical rather than geopolitical problem.

UN: The UN perspective frames quantum as an emerging technology requiring multilateral governance, confidence-building measures, and attention to the digital divide. It highlights privacy, human rights, and the risk that HNDL could expose vulnerable populations' data. It occludes the competitive dynamics that drive national programs and tends to assume that governance frameworks can keep pace with technological change.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Post-Quantum Cryptography (PQC) Migration: NIST Standards and National Timelines

Bolded Causal Claim: PQC migration is the principal defensive mechanism against Q-Day, but its effectiveness is determined less by the existence of standardized algorithms than by whether states and firms complete a crypto-agile transition before harvested ciphertext becomes decryptable; the race is therefore organizational and infrastructural, not merely mathematical.

Mechanism: Post-quantum cryptography replaces the quantum-vulnerable primitives—integer factorization and discrete logarithm—with problems believed to resist both classical and quantum attacks, such as lattice problems, hash-based constructions, and code-based problems. The mechanism proceeds through several linked stages. First, standardization: NIST's post-quantum process selected and, in 2024, published standards for key establishment and digital signatures, including ML-KEM for key encapsulation and ML-DSA and SLH-DSA for signatures, with additional algorithms in process. These standards create interoperable targets for vendors and governments. Second, crypto-agility: organizations must inventory where RSA, ECC, and Diffie-Hellman are embedded—in TLS, VPNs, PKI, code signing, firmware, identity systems, databases, and embedded devices—so that algorithms can be swapped without redesigning entire systems. Third, hybrid deployment: during transition, many systems combine classical and post-quantum primitives so that security holds if either remains unbroken, reducing the risk of an undiscovered PQC weakness. Fourth, implementation hardening: lattice and hash schemes have different performance profiles and side-channel characteristics; constant-time implementations, correct parameter choices, and resistance to fault and timing attacks are essential. Fifth, governance and procurement: national security guidance, sectoral regulators, and enterprise risk frameworks set deadlines and require conformance testing. Sixth, ecosystem migration: certificate authorities, browsers, operating systems, hardware security modules, and cloud providers must support the new standards before end users can migrate. The mechanism is therefore a socio-technical chain: a break at any link—standards, inventory, implementation, procurement, or ecosystem support—can delay protection beyond the relevant threat horizon. Mosca's inequality applies in reverse: migration time must be driven below the interval between now and CRQC arrival, and data with long shelf life must be prioritized.

Scope Conditions: PQC migration is neither automatic nor universally sufficient. Its scope is limited by legacy-system inertia: many critical systems were designed with fixed cryptographic assumptions and cannot be patched easily, especially in industrial control, medical devices, satellites, and military platforms. Embedded and constrained devices may struggle with larger key and signature sizes, increasing bandwidth, storage, and energy costs. Interoperability during a long hybrid period can create complexity and new failure

modes. The standards themselves are probabilistic: they rest on assumptions about the hardness of lattice or hash problems that could be revised by future cryptanalysis, so migration must be crypto-agile rather than a one-time replacement. PQC also does not erase already harvested ciphertext; it protects future communications and newly encrypted archives, while old data remain exposed unless re-encrypted or retired. National timelines vary with institutional capacity, threat perception, and industrial base; a standard published in 2024 does not imply global migration by any particular date. Finally, PQC addresses quantum attacks on public-key cryptography but does not resolve broader cybersecurity weaknesses—misconfiguration, supply-chain compromise, insider threats, or poor key management—that may be more immediate.

Observable Implications: Successful PQC migration should be visible in standards adoption and in organizational behavior. Indicators include publication and uptake of NIST's 2024 standards, vendor libraries and browsers supporting ML-KEM in TLS, certificate authorities issuing post-quantum or hybrid certificates, government mandates requiring crypto inventories, and procurement language requiring crypto-agility. One should also observe sectoral differentiation: financial and defense systems migrating earlier than small enterprises; national security systems following specialized guidance; and embedded systems lagging. If migration is failing, one would observe continued default use of RSA/ECC in new systems, absence of inventories, vendor fragmentation, and "quantum-safe" marketing without conformance testing. The mechanism predicts that states with strong standard-setting power will shape global baselines, while late migrators will face higher costs and greater HNDL exposure. It also predicts tension between security and performance: systems that disable PQC for latency reasons will create predictable weak points. In the NC3 context, migration of command-and-control systems will be slower and more sensitive than commercial migration, producing a gap between public standards and military implementation.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): *African (primary):* PQC migration, from an African perspective, is a question of digital sovereignty and capacity rather than a neutral technical upgrade. African states and institutions are largely rule-takers in cryptographic standardization: NIST's 2024 standards will shape African banking, government, and telecommunications systems, yet African universities, standards bodies, and security agencies have limited influence over algorithm selection, parameter choices, or migration timelines. Drawing on African scholarship on extraversion and state capacity—Bayart, Mamdani, and Grovogui—and on feminist and decolonial critiques of knowledge production (Tamale, Oyěwùmí), the migration process can be read as another instance in which African data and infrastructures are secured or not secured according to priorities set elsewhere. The African vantage reveals that "migration" is not merely replacing algorithms; it is a redistribution of costs, skills, and dependence. If African organizations lack crypto-agility, trained personnel, and budget, they will either remain on vulnerable legacy systems or purchase foreign "quantum-safe" solutions without local capacity to audit them. This perspective therefore emphasizes regional coordination through the African Union, investment in cryptographic education, support for open-source implementations, and participation in international standards forums. It also warns that PQC can become a new frontier of digital colonialism if migration is sold as a product rather than built as a capability. At the same time, African scholars and practitioners can contribute distinctive priorities: protecting civil-registration, health, and land records with long confidentiality horizons; ensuring that migration does not exclude low-resource users; and insisting that global standards account for connectivity, device constraints, and cost.

Chinese: China's perspective treats PQC migration as part of a broader contest over technological sovereignty and standard-setting. It may adopt NIST standards where interoperability requires them, but it also has incentives to develop and promote indigenous cryptographic algorithms and national standards. The Chinese view emphasizes strategic autonomy, domestic industry, and the risk that US-led standards could embed long-term dependence. It occludes concerns about transparency and global interoperability,

and it may frame migration timelines in terms of national industrial policy rather than shared risk reduction.

Russian: Russia's perspective is shaped by distrust of Western standard-setting and by concern that PQC migration in NATO systems could widen a technological gap. It may pursue national cryptographic solutions and emphasize state control over migration in military and critical infrastructure. This perspective occludes the difficulty of maintaining interoperability and the possibility that isolated standards could create vulnerabilities. It also reflects anxiety about NC3 and strategic systems that cannot be migrated quickly.

Western: The Western perspective centers on NIST-led standardization, rapid ecosystem adoption, and alliance coordination. It treats PQC migration as a technical and managerial challenge with clear standards and deadlines, and it emphasizes protecting NC3 and critical infrastructure. This perspective is strong on implementation detail but tends to occlude global inequality in migration capacity and to assume that standards developed in one national context are universally appropriate.

UN: The UN perspective frames PQC migration within emerging-technology governance, digital capacity building, and human rights. It emphasizes equitable access to secure communications, protection of vulnerable populations' data, and the risk that migration gaps will deepen the digital divide. It occludes the competitive and security-driven timelines that dominate national programs and tends to assume that multilateral cooperation can harmonize migration schedules.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Quantum sensing and stealth obsolescence — submarine detection and second-strike stability

Bolded Causal Claim: Quantum sensing does not need to make submarines transparent in order to destabilize nuclear deterrence; it needs only to raise the perceived probability that a second-strike force can be found, tracked, and neutralized before retaliation, thereby converting survivability from an assumed property of the force into a contested variable in crisis decision-making.

Mechanism: Second-strike stability rests on the survivability of retaliatory forces, and for major nuclear powers that survivability has long depended on the opacity of the ocean. Ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs) are valuable not because they are undetectable in principle, but because the search problem is vast, the acoustic environment is noisy, and the cost of sustained detection is high. Quantum sensing changes this problem at the margin rather than by a single breakthrough. Quantum magnetometers can register minute magnetic disturbances associated with a hull or its systems; quantum gravimeters can detect mass and density anomalies; quantum-enhanced inertial navigation can allow unmanned or distributed platforms to maintain precise position without relying on GPS; and improved quantum clocks can synchronize sensor networks across large areas. The strategic mechanism is not that any one sensor "sees" a submarine, but that quantum-enhanced sensitivity, combined with conventional sonar, satellite surveillance, oceanographic modeling, and machine-learning fusion, can reduce search volumes, lower false-negative rates, and compress the time between detection and localization. In anti-submarine warfare, small changes in detection probability can have large strategic effects because the kill chain is sequential: detect, classify, localize, track, target, and engage. If quantum sensing improves the first three stages, conventional weapons and platforms may become more effective even if the quantum device itself is not a weapon. The deeper mechanism is psychological and doctrinal. Deterrence stability depends on beliefs about survivability. If leaders believe that an adversary's quantum-enabled maritime awareness is improving, they may conclude that their SSBNs are more vulnerable than previously assumed. That belief can produce compensatory behavior: shorter or more predictable

patrols, deeper operating profiles, larger at-sea fractions, more submarines, quieter hulls, decoys, or changes in alert posture. It can also increase incentives to adopt launch-on-warning or pre-delegated authorities if decision-makers fear that a first strike could disable the retaliatory force. Thus quantum sensing can destabilize deterrence not by making submarines actually transparent, but by making their survivability uncertain enough to alter strategic calculations. The effect is especially acute in chokepoints, littoral waters, and known patrol corridors, where the search space is smaller and sensor deployment is easier. In the open ocean, the physics of attenuation, platform noise, and oceanographic variability still favor the hider, but the margin of safety may narrow.

Scope Conditions: The strategic impact of quantum sensing is bounded by physics, engineering, and operational integration. Seawater attenuates electromagnetic signals, so magnetic and gravitational sensing has range and depth limits; sensor platforms generate their own noise; thermoclines, currents, and biological activity create clutter; and quantum devices require shielding, cooling, and calibration that are difficult to maintain on mobile maritime platforms. Detection is not localization, and localization is not a kill chain. An adversary must integrate quantum sensors with conventional assets, data fusion, command systems, and weapons, and each link introduces delay, error, and vulnerability to deception. SSBNs retain countermeasures, including degaussing, anechoic coatings, operational unpredictability, and exploitation of oceanographic features. The effect is also geographically uneven: chokepoints and littorals are more susceptible than vast ocean basins. Strategically, the impact depends on relative investment and on whether both sides improve sensing and stealth simultaneously. If all major powers invest, the result may be an arms race in undersea opacity rather than a decisive transparency breakthrough. Finally, "stealth obsolescence" is an overstatement if taken literally; the more accurate claim is incremental erosion of stealth at the margin, which can still matter because nuclear deterrence is sensitive to tail risks and to beliefs about survivability.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include increased funding for SSBN quieting, quantum magnetometry, and maritime sensor networks; experimental deployment of quantum sensors on aircraft, surface vessels, or unmanned underwater vehicles; changes in SSBN patrol geography and duration; doctrinal language emphasizing survivability and undersea dominance; and arms-control or confidence-building discussions focused on anti-submarine warfare. NATO quantum technology reports treat sensing as a near-term operational priority, which implies alliance investment in maritime domain awareness and interoperability. One would also expect to see greater emphasis on countermeasures, decoys, and oceanographic modeling, as well as research into quantum-enhanced detection of mobile missile systems. If quantum sensing is perceived as threatening second-strike forces, states may also adjust nuclear posture, including greater reliance on launch-on-warning, larger SSBN fleets, or more aggressive patrol patterns. The absence of public evidence of a breakthrough should not be read as absence of risk, because much of the relevant activity is classified and because strategic effects can arise from perception as well as from demonstrated capability.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective begins from a different security ontology than the Euro-Atlantic debate over second-strike stability. For many African states, the ocean is not primarily a medium for nuclear deterrence but a space of sovereignty, resource extraction, maritime security, and external military activity. African scholarship on dependency, extraversion, and technological marginalization suggests that African states are often sites where global powers project capabilities without corresponding local control, benefit, or accountability. Quantum sensing could deepen this asymmetry if external navies deploy advanced sensor networks in African exclusive economic zones or coastal waters while African institutions lack the capacity to monitor, regulate, or benefit from the data. At the same time, improved maritime domain awareness could

assist African states in combating illegal fishing, piracy, trafficking, and environmental harm. The African vantage point therefore asks not only whether quantum sensing destabilizes deterrence, but who governs the ocean, who owns the data, and whether new technology reinforces extraversion or builds local capacity. It also highlights that African security concerns are frequently human-security and blue-economy concerns rather than abstract stability among nuclear-armed great powers, and that global technology debates can marginalize those concerns even when their consequences are felt in African waters.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats quantum sensing as both an opportunity to offset U.S. undersea dominance and a potential threat to China's own second-strike survivability. China has invested heavily in quantum technologies and views U.S. anti-submarine warfare capabilities with concern, particularly in the South China Sea and Western Pacific. From this vantage point, quantum sensing could support anti-access and area-denial strategies by improving detection of adversary submarines, while also raising fears that U.S. quantum-enabled maritime awareness could undermine China's sea-based deterrent. The perspective emphasizes strategic stability and mutual vulnerability, but it can occlude transparency about China's own programs and the possibility that improved Chinese sensing could itself be destabilizing.

Russian: The Russian perspective is shaped by the centrality of submarine-based forces to its nuclear posture and by long-standing concern about U.S. technological superiority in anti-submarine warfare. Russia is likely to view quantum sensing as a potential threat to the survivability of its SSBNs and to the credibility of its second strike, reinforcing incentives to modernize submarines, improve quieting, and adjust patrol patterns. This perspective emphasizes vulnerability and preemption risk, but it can occlude Russia's own investments in quantum and undersea technologies and the destabilizing effects of its own doctrinal ambiguity.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in the United States and among NATO allies, frames quantum sensing as a force multiplier and a means of preserving undersea advantage. It emphasizes technological leadership, alliance interoperability, and the need to maintain credible deterrence in an era of renewed great-power competition. This perspective is strong on operational innovation but tends to occlude the risks of an undersea arms race, the possibility that perceived transparency could encourage preemption, and the global inequality in access to advanced maritime technologies.

UN: The UN perspective frames quantum sensing within emerging-technology governance, maritime security, and disarmament. It emphasizes transparency, confidence-building, protection of the global commons, and the risk that new sensing capabilities could destabilize nuclear deterrence. It also highlights capacity building for states that lack advanced maritime surveillance. This perspective is valuable for its multilateral framing, but it can occlude the competitive timelines and security dilemmas that drive national investment in quantum sensing.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — NC3 vulnerability — how quantum capability could undermine nuclear command and control

Bolded Causal Claim: The gravest quantum risk to nuclear stability may not be a sudden "Q-Day" decryption of launch codes, but the gradual quantum-enabled compression of decision time and erosion of nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) confidentiality, which can make nuclear command systems more brittle before they are known to be broken.

Mechanism: NC3 is not a single communication link but a system-of-systems: early-warning sensors, satellites, radar, communication networks, decision nodes, authentication procedures, and human judgment. Its stability depends on confidentiality, integrity, availability, and the time available for deliberation. Quantum

capability threatens each of these dimensions in different ways and on different timelines. The most discussed threat is cryptanalytic: a sufficiently powerful quantum computer could break the public-key cryptography that protects many communication and authentication systems, potentially exposing command links, planning data, or force-posture information. Yet the mechanism of instability is broader than decryption. "Harvest now, decrypt later" means that adversaries can collect encrypted NC3-related traffic today and exploit it once quantum capability matures, potentially revealing operational patterns, communication architectures, or decision procedures. Quantum sensing can compound this by improving detection of submarines, mobile missiles, or leadership movements, reducing the survivability of forces that NC3 is meant to control. Quantum timing and navigation technologies can disrupt or spoof the precise synchronization on which some systems depend. Quantum-enabled intelligence, combined with artificial intelligence and large-scale data fusion, may allow adversaries to map NC3 architectures and identify critical nodes. The strategic mechanism is information advantage leading to targetability. If an adversary believes it can locate leadership, disable communication nodes, or interfere with early warning, the temptation to attempt a disarming or decapitating strike increases. Even if the capability is uncertain, the belief that NC3 is vulnerable can compress decision time and encourage pre-delegation, launch-on-warning, or automated responses. Conversely, spoofing or false data injection could create false alarms, raising the risk of accidental or inadvertent escalation. NC3 vulnerability is therefore not merely a cybersecurity problem; it is a crisis-stability problem. It arises from the interaction of quantum technology with organizational complexity, human cognition, and the strategic incentives created by mutual vulnerability.

Scope Conditions: The NC3 threat is contingent on several conditions. Large-scale, fault-tolerant quantum computers capable of breaking widely used public-key cryptography do not yet exist, and their arrival is uncertain. NC3 systems often have redundancy, physical separation, procedural safeguards, and human-in-the-loop controls that are not captured by a simple "encryption broken" model. Migration to post-quantum cryptography, including the NIST PQC standards adopted in 2024, can mitigate cryptanalytic risk if implemented across defense and critical infrastructure, but legacy systems, embedded devices, and multinational interoperability create long migration tails. Quantum sensing and timing threats depend on deployment scale and integration with conventional kill chains. The strategic effect also depends on beliefs: a state may act on perceived vulnerability before capability is demonstrated. Finally, NC3 stability is not identical to perfect security; deterrence can survive degraded communications if adversaries believe retaliation remains possible. The danger lies in the gap between actual resilience and perceived fragility, especially during crises.

Observable Implications: Observable implications include NC3 modernization programs, investment in quantum-resistant communications, testing of command systems under degraded or contested conditions, and doctrinal reviews of launch authority and fail-safe procedures. One would expect to see defense budgets emphasizing resilient satellite communications, hardened ground stations, alternative timing and navigation systems, and red-team exercises focused on quantum-enabled threats. Mosca's (2018) theorem implies that if migration time plus data shelf life exceeds estimated Q-Day, the risk is already present, which suggests that NC3 migration should be evaluated against long-lived secrets and legacy system lifetimes rather than only against current threat assessments. NATO quantum technology reports and national defense strategies increasingly frame quantum technologies as relevant to command-and-control resilience. Observable political implications include renewed attention to nuclear risk reduction, hotlines, crisis communication, and possibly arms-control measures addressing NC3 and emerging technologies. The absence of a demonstrated quantum attack on NC3 should not be interpreted as evidence of safety, because the most serious risks may be latent, classified, or embedded in long-term migration failures.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on NC3 vulnerability is shaped by a structural critique of the global nuclear order rather than by direct participation in nuclear command systems. African states are largely non-nuclear, yet they bear the consequences of nuclear risk, including fallout, coercion, and the diversion of global resources from development to armament. African scholarship on international hierarchy, sovereignty, and technological marginalization suggests that debates about NC3 vulnerability can reproduce a hierarchy in which the security concerns of nuclear-armed states dominate global agendas while the security needs of non-nuclear states are treated as peripheral. From this vantage point, quantum-enabled NC3 vulnerability is not only a technical problem for major powers but also a reminder that the nuclear order distributes risk unequally: those who do not control nuclear weapons still live with their potential failure. African states also face digital sovereignty concerns, as critical infrastructure and data systems may depend on foreign technology, standards, and vendors, leaving them with limited capacity to assess or mitigate quantum-related risks. The African perspective therefore asks whether emerging-technology governance will include capacity building, equitable access to secure communications, and meaningful voice for non-nuclear states, or whether it will remain an exclusive conversation among technologically advanced powers. It reveals that NC3 vulnerability is embedded in a broader pattern of technological and strategic inequality.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames NC3 vulnerability through the lens of strategic stability and the perceived threat of U.S. technological superiority. China is concerned that U.S. missile defense, conventional prompt strike, cyber capabilities, and emerging quantum technologies could undermine its nuclear deterrent by threatening command and control or by improving detection of its forces. China's investment in quantum communications, including satellite-based experiments, is partly motivated by the desire to secure communications and reduce vulnerability. This perspective emphasizes mutual vulnerability and restraint, but it can occlude the opacity of China's own NC3 modernization and the possibility that its own quantum investments could be perceived as threatening by others.

Russian: The Russian perspective emphasizes NC3 vulnerability as a consequence of U.S. and NATO technological advantage, including in quantum sensing, cyber operations, and missile defense. Russia views its nuclear deterrent as essential to compensating for conventional inferiority and is therefore highly sensitive to any technology that could threaten command and control or early warning. This perspective supports modernization of NC3 and may be used to justify new weapons systems or doctrinal adjustments. It is strong on highlighting preemption risks but can occlude Russia's own first-use ambiguity, its investments in disruptive technologies, and the destabilizing effects of its own modernization programs.

Western: The Western perspective, especially in the United States, focuses on NC3 modernization, resilience, and the integration of emerging technologies into deterrence. It emphasizes quantum-resistant cryptography, redundant communications, and the need to maintain credible command and control under attack. NATO quantum technology reports and national strategies increasingly treat quantum technologies as relevant to defense and security. This perspective is strong on implementation and risk management but can occlude the possibility that modernization itself—through automation, complexity, and tighter coupling—may increase brittleness, and that global inequality in migration capacity may leave allies and partners vulnerable.

UN: The UN perspective frames NC3 vulnerability within disarmament, nuclear risk reduction, and emerging-technology governance. It emphasizes transparency, confidence-building, protection of civilians, and the need to prevent technological developments from undermining arms control and verification. It also highlights capacity building for states that lack advanced technical infrastructure. This perspective is valuable for its multilateral and humanitarian framing, but it can occlude the competitive security dilemmas and classified programs that dominate national NC3 planning.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on quantum computing, cryptographic hegemony, and nuclear command, control, and communications (NC3) does not begin with the physics of qubits or the mathematics of lattice-based cryptography. It begins with a question that the other four perspectives systematically suppress: **who owns the infrastructure through which the quantum transition will be governed, and who will be permitted to migrate on time?** From within African political thought, the quantum revolution is not primarily a story about great-power competition over computational advantage; it is a story about the reproduction of technological dependency under new technical conditions. The African perspective therefore reframes the entire lesson around three axes that the Western, Chinese, Russian, and UN perspectives each treat as secondary: the **cryptographic sovereignty** of states that did not design the standards they must adopt; the **retroactive vulnerability** created by "harvest now, decrypt later" (HNDL) against African data archives, diplomatic communications, and financial systems; and the **capacity asymmetry** that makes post-quantum cryptography (PQC) migration a question of who can afford to be secure.

The theoretical lineage here runs through several distinct but converging African traditions. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) established the foundational argument that technological underdevelopment in Africa was not a natural condition but a produced one, engineered through colonial extraction and the deliberate suppression of autonomous industrial capacity. Rodney's mechanism—technology transfer as a vector of dependency rather than development—translates directly into the quantum domain: African states are positioned not as participants in the quantum transition but as late adopters of standards designed in Washington, Geneva, and Beijing, with migration timelines determined by budgets they do not control. Kwame Nkrumah's *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965) supplies the political-economy frame: even where formal sovereignty exists, control over critical infrastructure—now including cryptographic infrastructure—remains external. Julius Nyerere's Arusha Declaration and his broader philosophy of self-reliance (*ujamaa*) pose the question of whether a state can be secure when its encryption is designed, standardized, and updated by others. Amílcar Cabral's insistence on "return to the source" demands that African security thinking be grounded in African material conditions rather than imported frameworks. Frantz Fanon's analysis in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) of how colonialism damages the colonized's capacity for autonomous technological creation remains painfully relevant: the quantum divide is not merely a gap in resources but a gap in epistemic authority, in who gets to define what counts as a threat and what counts as a solution.

Achille Mbembe's work on necropolitics and, more recently, on the "becoming-black of the world" and technological modernity, provides a sharper critical vocabulary. Mbembe has argued that contemporary technology is not neutral infrastructure but a mode of governance that sorts populations into those whose data, bodies, and territories are protected and those whose are exposed. Applied to quantum cryptography, this suggests that the HNDL threat is not distributed evenly: states and populations whose communications have been harvested for decades by more powerful actors face a retroactive exposure that is structurally asymmetric. The African state that encrypted its diplomatic cables in 2010 with RSA-2048 may discover in 2035 that those cables were harvested and are now readable—not because of any failure of its own, but because the cryptographic regime it was compelled to adopt was always someone else's. Siba Grovogui's work on sovereignty and international order (*Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans* (1996)) is essential here: Grovogui demonstrates that African sovereignty has historically been "quasi" sovereignty, recognized

formally but substantively hollowed out by the international system's distribution of material and epistemic power. The quantum transition threatens to deepen this quasi-sovereignty by making cryptographic dependence a structural feature of African statehood.

Mahmood Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state—where colonial rule divided subjects into "citizens" and "natives," with different legal regimes for each—illuminates how technological marginalization reproduces colonial patterns. The African state's security apparatus often operates with imported hardware, imported software, and imported standards, while its population is governed through systems it does not control. Jean-François Bayart's concept of "extraversion"—the idea that African political economies are oriented outward toward external patrons rather than inward toward domestic constituencies—explains why African states may adopt PQC standards not because they have independently assessed the threat but because donor agencies, security partnerships, and international financial institutions have made migration a condition of continued access. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's critique of the universalization of Western categories, developed in *The Invention of Women* (1997), extends to the universalization of Western threat models: the "Q-Day" narrative, with its specific timeline anxieties and its focus on great-power NC3, may not correspond to the most pressing security concerns of African states, which may be more immediately threatened by the weaponization of harvested data against political opposition, journalists, and civil society.

Emmanuel Aning and Kwesi Aning's work on African security governance, and Kwame Danso's contributions to African international relations, emphasize that African security is not merely derivative of great-power competition but has its own logics: maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, border governance, counter-terrorism, and the protection of critical infrastructure. From this perspective, quantum sensing's implications for submarine detection are not abstract strategic-stability concerns but immediate questions about African maritime sovereignty—whether foreign powers can track vessels in African exclusive economic zones with quantum-enhanced sensors, and whether African states have any capacity to detect or contest such surveillance. Sylvia Tamale's feminist scholarship on African sexuality and technology reminds us that cryptographic vulnerability is gendered: the exposure of communications affects women activists, LGBTQ+ communities, and reproductive-health advocates disproportionately, and PQC migration that does not center these vulnerabilities reproduces existing hierarchies.

What the African perspective contributes that the other four cannot is a **structural critique of the quantum transition as a distribution of power rather than a race among equals**. The Western perspective treats PQC migration as a technical challenge to be managed; the Chinese perspective treats quantum leadership as a strategic asset to be acquired; the Russian perspective treats NC3 vulnerability as a military problem to be solved; the UN perspective treats emerging technology as a governance gap to be filled. The African perspective insists that all four of these framings presuppose a world in which African states are objects rather than subjects of the quantum transition. It reveals that the "harvest now, decrypt later" threat is not a future risk but a present reality for states whose communications have been intercepted for decades, and that the PQC migration timeline is not a neutral technical schedule but a mechanism of exclusion that will leave some states permanently vulnerable. It also reveals that the NC3 debate, while important, is a debate among nuclear powers about their own stability, and that the non-nuclear majority of the world—including all of Africa—has a stake in nuclear stability that is not mediated through its own command-and-control systems but through its exposure to the consequences of others' failures.

What the African perspective occludes is equally important. By centering structural dependency, it can underweight the genuine agency that African states and institutions do exercise: the African Union's digital transformation strategy, national cybersecurity strategies in countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa,

and the growing community of African cryptographers and quantum researchers. It can also underweight the fact that some African states—particularly South Africa, with its nuclear history and its advanced research infrastructure—have more capacity than the dependency frame suggests. And it can risk treating "Africa" as a unitary subject, flattening the enormous variation in capacity, threat perception, and strategic interest across fifty-four states. The perspective is strongest when it is understood not as a description of African helplessness but as a demand for African epistemic and material participation in the quantum transition—a demand that the other four perspectives, each in its own way, are structurally disinclined to hear.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on quantum computing, cryptographic hegemony, and NC3 is organized around a dual ambition: to achieve **quantum leadership** as a pillar of comprehensive national power, and to frame that leadership within a **strategic stability** discourse that positions China as a responsible stakeholder rather than a revisionist challenger. This perspective must be steel-manned from within, which means taking seriously both the genuine technical achievements and the strategic narrative that accompanies them, while also recognizing what that narrative occludes.

China's quantum program is the most state-directed and best-resourced in the world. The Micius satellite, launched in 2016, demonstrated the first satellite-based quantum key distribution (QKD) and quantum teleportation over intercontinental distances, establishing China as the pioneer in quantum communications. The Jiuzhang photonic quantum computer and the Zuchongzhi superconducting quantum processor have been presented as achieving quantum computational advantage in specific tasks. These achievements are not merely scientific; they are strategic. The Chinese leadership, under Xi Jinping, has elevated quantum technology to a national priority, embedding it in the "Made in China 2025" and subsequent strategic plans. The mechanism is straightforward: quantum capability is understood as a general-purpose technology that will reshape economic competitiveness, military advantage, and intelligence dominance over the coming decades, and China intends to be at the frontier rather than the periphery.

The strategic stability framing is more subtle and more important. Chinese official discourse and much Chinese academic writing emphasize that quantum technology should be developed in ways that enhance rather than undermine strategic stability. This is partly defensive: China's nuclear deterrent is smaller and less diversified than those of the United States and Russia, and Chinese strategists are acutely aware that quantum sensing could threaten the survivability of China's sea-based deterrent (its Jin-class SSBNs) and that quantum computing could undermine the cryptographic foundations of China's NC3. The Chinese perspective therefore treats quantum development as a double-edged sword: it offers China the possibility of leapfrogging in certain domains while simultaneously threatening the stability of the nuclear balance on which China's security depends. This creates a distinctive Chinese interest in arms control and confidence-building measures around quantum technologies, even as China continues to invest heavily in them.

On PQC, China has developed its own cryptographic standards (the SM series, standardized by the State Cryptography Administration) and is pursuing quantum-resistant algorithms through national research programs. The Chinese perspective on PQC migration is shaped by a concern about dependence on Western-designed standards: just as China has sought to reduce dependence on foreign semiconductors and software, it seeks cryptographic sovereignty. The NIST PQC standards are viewed with a mixture of technical respect and strategic suspicion—respect for the rigor of the process, suspicion that the standards may embed assumptions or vulnerabilities that favor US interests. This is not paranoia; it is a rational response to the Snowden revelations and to the documented history of NSA involvement in cryptographic standards.

On NC3, the Chinese perspective is shaped by the vulnerability of a relatively small nuclear arsenal to technological surprise. Chinese strategists worry that US quantum capabilities—computing, sensing, and communications—could erode the survivability of China's second-strike force and compromise the integrity of its command-and-control systems. This concern is amplified by the opacity of US programs and by the absence of meaningful US-China dialogue on NC3 and emerging technologies. The Chinese perspective therefore calls for strategic stability dialogues, risk reduction measures, and the inclusion of quantum technologies in arms control discussions, while simultaneously pursuing the capabilities that make such dialogues necessary.

What the Chinese perspective contributes is a demonstration that quantum technology is not merely a Western or Russian concern but a genuinely multipolar one, and that the strategic stability implications of quantum are felt most acutely by states with smaller, less survivable arsenals. What it occludes is the extent to which China's own quantum program contributes to the security dilemmas it decries: the Micius satellite and China's quantum sensing research are themselves destabilizing from the perspective of other states, and China's opacity about its military quantum programs undermines the transparency it calls for. The perspective also tends to understate the internal tensions between China's commercial quantum ambitions (which benefit from openness and international collaboration) and its military quantum ambitions (which require secrecy and control).

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on quantum computing, cryptographic hegemony, and NC3 is shaped by a distinctive combination of **technological ambition and strategic vulnerability**. Russia possesses a formidable nuclear arsenal and a sophisticated NC3 system, including the Perimeter (Dead Hand) automated retaliation system, but its conventional and technological base has been eroding relative to both the United States and China. The Russian perspective therefore treats quantum technology as both an opportunity to restore technological parity and a threat to the nuclear stability on which Russian security depends.

Russia's quantum investments are substantial but less visible than China's or America's. The Russian Quantum Center, Rosatom's quantum programs, and various defense-industry initiatives constitute a significant state-directed effort. Russian scientists have made genuine contributions to quantum optics, quantum cryptography, and quantum computing. However, the Russian perspective is less focused on achieving quantum supremacy in the commercial or scientific sense and more focused on specific military applications: quantum sensors for submarine detection and navigation, quantum cryptography for secure government communications, and quantum computing for cryptanalysis. The mechanism is clear: Russia cannot compete with the US and China across the full spectrum of quantum technology, so it concentrates on applications that directly enhance military capability and protect existing advantages.

The NC3 vulnerability concern is the emotional and strategic core of the Russian perspective. Russian strategists have long worried that US technological advantages—missile defense, precision strike, cyber capabilities, and now quantum—could undermine Russia's nuclear deterrent. The fear is not that the US will launch a disarming first strike, but that the *perception* of such a capability, combined with the erosion of arms control frameworks, could destabilize the nuclear balance and create incentives for preemptive action. Quantum computing, in this view, is the latest in a series of US technological developments that threaten to make Russia's nuclear arsenal vulnerable. The "harvest now, decrypt later" threat is taken seriously by Russian security services, who have long assumed that their communications are targeted by Western intelligence.

On PQC, Russia has developed its own cryptographic standards (GOST) and is pursuing quantum-resistant

algorithms through national programs. The Russian perspective on PQC migration is shaped by a deep suspicion of Western-designed standards and by the experience of sanctions, which have reinforced the desire for technological autarky. Russian strategists view the NIST PQC process with the same suspicion that Chinese strategists do, but with an additional layer of concern about the reliability of international supply chains for cryptographic hardware and software.

What the Russian perspective contributes is a reminder that quantum technology is not merely a US-China competition but a triangular one, and that the erosion of arms control frameworks (the INF Treaty, New START uncertainties) has made NC3 vulnerability a more acute concern for all parties. It also highlights the specific vulnerability of automated and semi-automated NC3 systems (like Perimeter) to technological surprise: a system designed to ensure retaliation could, if its cryptographic foundations are compromised, become a vector for unauthorized or erroneous action. What the Russian perspective occludes is the extent to which Russia's own actions—its suspension of New START, its development of novel nuclear systems, its opacity about its quantum programs—contribute to the instability it decries. It also tends to overstate US capabilities and understate the genuine technical challenges that make Q-Day a distant prospect rather than an imminent threat.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on quantum computing, cryptographic hegemony, and NC3 is the most institutionally developed and the most internally contested. It is organized around three commitments that are not always compatible: **quantum leadership** as a strategic imperative, **PQC migration** as a defensive necessity, and **NC3 modernization** as a response to emerging threats. The Western perspective is not monolithic—it encompasses US, European, and allied viewpoints that differ on emphasis and priority—but it shares a common framework that treats quantum technology as a domain of strategic competition requiring both offensive investment and defensive preparation.

The US quantum program is the largest and most diversified in the world, spanning national laboratories, universities, and private industry. The National Quantum Initiative Act (2018) established a coordinated federal effort, and subsequent investments have expanded research in quantum computing, sensing, and communications. The mechanism of US quantum strategy is public-private partnership: the government funds basic research and sets strategic priorities, while private companies (IBM, Google, Microsoft, IonQ, and others) drive commercial development. This model has produced genuine technical leadership in superconducting and trapped-ion quantum computing, but it has also created coordination challenges and concerns about the migration of talent and intellectual property.

The PQC migration is the most concrete and urgent element of the Western perspective. The NIST PQC standardization process, initiated in 2016 and culminating in the publication of FIPS 203 (ML-KEM), FIPS 204 (ML-DSA), and FIPS 205 (SLH-DSA) in August 2024, represents the most significant cryptographic transition in history. The Western perspective treats this migration as a race against Q-Day: Mosca's theorem (if the time to migrate plus the shelf life of data exceeds the time to a quantum computer, the data is at risk) provides the analytical framework, and the "harvest now, decrypt later" threat provides the urgency. The US government has set aggressive migration timelines for federal systems, and the NSA has issued guidance on quantum-resistant algorithms. The mechanism is regulatory and procurement-driven: by mandating PQC for federal systems and by influencing private-sector standards through NIST, the US seeks to drive global migration.

The NC3 debate is the most contested element. Western strategists are divided between those who see quan-

tum technology as a threat to nuclear stability (requiring arms control and risk reduction) and those who see it as an opportunity to enhance NC3 resilience (through quantum-secure communications and improved sensing). The US nuclear modernization program includes NC3 upgrades, and there is active debate about whether quantum technologies should be integrated into NC3 or excluded from it. The Western perspective also encompasses European viewpoints, which tend to be more skeptical of nuclear reliance and more supportive of arms control, and NATO's emerging quantum technology strategy, which seeks to coordinate allied efforts.

What the Western perspective contributes is institutional capacity: the NIST process, the national laboratory system, and the public-private partnership model provide a template for large-scale technological transition that other perspectives can learn from. What it occludes is the extent to which Western quantum leadership is itself a source of insecurity for others: the US quantum program is perceived as threatening by China and Russia, and the NIST standards process, however rigorous, is perceived as US-centric by states that did not participate in it. The Western perspective also tends to underweight the global distribution of migration capacity: the assumption that all states can and will migrate on the NIST timeline ignores the resource constraints that make this impossible for much of the world.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on quantum computing, cryptographic hegemony, and NC3 is organized around **multilateral governance, disarmament, and capacity building**. It is the least state-centric of the five perspectives and the most explicitly normative, treating quantum technology not as a domain of competition but as a domain of shared risk requiring collective management. This perspective draws on the UN's broader work on emerging technologies, including the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, the Open-Ended Working Group on ICT security, and the Secretary-General's Agenda for Disarmament.

The UN perspective on quantum technology is still emerging. Unlike AI or cyber, quantum has not yet generated a dedicated UN process, but it is increasingly discussed within existing frameworks. The mechanism of UN engagement is agenda-setting and norm-building: by placing quantum technology on the international agenda, by commissioning expert reports, and by facilitating dialogue among states, the UN seeks to create the conditions for eventual governance. The UN's disarmament machinery—the Conference on Disarmament, the First Committee of the General Assembly, the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR)—provides forums where quantum and NC3 issues can be discussed, even if they cannot yet be negotiated.

On PQC and cryptographic standards, the UN perspective emphasizes **capacity building** and **equitable access**. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) has a role in standardization, and the UN can facilitate the sharing of PQC migration expertise with developing countries. The mechanism here is technical assistance and knowledge transfer: recognizing that the quantum transition will be uneven, the UN seeks to ensure that states with limited capacity are not left behind. This is particularly important for African and other developing states, for whom the UN perspective offers the most sympathetic framing of their concerns.

On NC3, the UN perspective is shaped by the broader nuclear disarmament agenda. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and the various nuclear risk reduction initiatives provide the normative framework. The UN emphasizes that quantum technologies should not be allowed to undermine nuclear stability or to create new pathways to nuclear use. The mechanism is normative pressure: by articulating principles and by facilitating dialogue, the UN seeks to constrain

the most destabilizing applications of quantum technology.

What the UN perspective contributes is a **humanitarian and multilateral framing** that the other four perspectives lack. It insists that the quantum transition is not merely a strategic competition but a global public good whose benefits and risks must be shared. It provides a forum for states that are not great powers to voice their concerns. What it occludes is the reality of power: the UN cannot compel states to share quantum technology, to adopt PQC standards, or to include quantum in arms control. The UN perspective can be marginalized by the very states whose cooperation it requires, and its emphasis on consensus can produce lowest-common-denominator outcomes that fail to address the most urgent risks. The UN perspective is also limited by its own institutional constraints: it lacks the technical expertise to evaluate quantum claims independently, and it depends on member states for both information and resources.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African	Centers technology marginalization and digital sovereignty; reveals that PQC migration and quantum standards are being set by great powers without African input, reproducing dependency	May understate the agency of African states and institutions in shaping standards through ITU and AU processes; risks treating Africa as uniformly passive	Quantum governance must be democratized; digital sovereignty requires African participation in standard-setting and infrastructure ownership	African Union Digital Transformation Strategy (2020-2030); limited African participation in NIST PQC process; dependence on foreign cloud and telecom infrastructure	Western: standards are open and technically neutral; any state can adopt them; the barrier is capacity, not exclusion

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Frames quantum as strategic stability tool; QKD and quantum sensing as defensive capabilities that reduce first-strike incentives; challenges Western monopoly on quantum narrative	Downplays offensive and intelligence applications of quantum; obscures the coercive potential of quantum-enabled surveillance and submarine detection	Quantum technology should serve multipolarity and strategic stability; no single power should monopolize the quantum commons	Micius satellite (2016); quantum communication experiments; national quantum lab investments	Western: China's quantum program is opaque; "defensive" framing masks intelligence collection and second-strike disruption
Russian	Highlights NC3 vulnerability; warns that quantum sensing and computing could destabilize mutual assured destruction by undermining second-strike survivability	Overstates near-term quantum capability; may use quantum anxiety to justify modernization of nuclear forces and resist arms control	Quantum must be integrated into strategic stability dialogues; NC3 must be protected from quantum disruption	Russian quantum research programs; statements on strategic stability; modernization of nuclear command systems	Western: Russian NC3 concerns are partly pretextual, masking refusal to engage in verifiable arms control

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Drives PQC migration through NIST; frames quantum as both opportunity and threat; leads in quantum computing hardware and algorithms	Treats Western standards as universal; underestimates how PQC migration costs fall disproportionately on developing states; conflates leadership with legitimacy	Technological leadership is a public good if shared; quantum advantage must be defended through standards and alliances	NIST PQC standards (2024); NSA/CNSA 2.0; quantum computing investments by IBM, Google, and others	African: "universal" standards are set by one state's agency; adoption without capacity building is dependency
UN	Provides multilateral forum for emerging-technology governance; emphasizes shared benefits and risks; disarmament framing	Cannot compel compliance; lacks technical capacity; consensus produces weak outcomes; marginalized by great-power competition	Quantum is a global public good; governance must be inclusive and precautionary	UNGA resolutions on emerging technologies; ITU quantum working groups; UNIDIR reports	Chinese/Russian: UN processes are dominated by Western agendas; multilateralism without power is ineffective

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The US NIST 2024 Post-Quantum Cryptography Standards: A Race Against Q-Day

Levels of Analysis

At the individual level, the NIST PQC process was shaped by the decisions of cryptographers, mathematicians, and standards engineers who submitted candidate algorithms, reviewed security proofs, and negotiated trade-offs between key size, computational efficiency, and side-channel resistance. Individual researchers—such as those behind the CRYSTALS suite (Kyber, Dilithium) and SPHINCS+—made consequential choices about algorithmic design that will propagate through global infrastructure for decades. Industry chief information security officers and procurement officers, operating at the individual-organizational boundary, must now decide migration timelines, budget allocations, and risk acceptance thresholds under uncertainty about Q-Day. Mosca's theorem, articulated by Michele Mosca, frames the individual decision problem: if the time to migrate (x) plus the shelf life of the data (y) exceeds the time until a cryptographically relevant quantum

computer arrives (z), then the data is already at risk.

At the state level, the United States, through NIST, exercised a form of regulatory power that extends far beyond its borders. The US state did not merely develop algorithms; it convened a global competition, evaluated candidates, and published standards (FIPS 203, 204, 205 in August 2024) that other states and firms are expected to adopt. Other states—China, Russia, the EU member states, India—face a strategic choice: adopt US-origin standards, develop sovereign alternatives, or hybridize. The state level also encompasses national security agencies: the NSA's CNSA 2.0 suite mandates PQC for national security systems, creating a two-tier structure where US government systems migrate on a different (and earlier) timeline than commercial systems.

At the systemic level, the NIST PQC standards are an episode in great-power competition over the architecture of global information security. The standards race is not merely technical; it is a contest over who defines the baseline of trust in the digital economy. Systemic pressures include the quantum arms race (China's investments, US and EU programs), alliance structures (NATO's quantum technology reports and coordination), and the broader techno-geopolitical fragmentation of the internet. The systemic level also captures the security dilemma: one state's defensive PQC migration can be read by another as preparation for offensive quantum capability, and vice versa.

At the transnational level, the NIST standards propagate through global supply chains, open-source libraries, certificate authorities, and multinational corporations. Transnational standards bodies—ISO, ITU, ETSI—must decide whether to incorporate NIST algorithms, develop parallel standards, or create hybrid frameworks. The transnational level reveals that cryptographic standards are a form of global public infrastructure: a vulnerability in a widely adopted algorithm affects billions of users regardless of nationality. Conversely, the "harvest now, decrypt later" threat is transnational by nature: adversaries can intercept and store encrypted traffic today for decryption by future quantum computers, meaning that data encrypted under current standards is already at risk regardless of where it is generated.

Mechanism

The core mechanism is standard-setting as structural power. NIST's PQC process (initiated 2016, selections announced 2022, final standards published 2024) created a focal point around which global migration must organize. The mechanism operates through several channels. First, network effects: once NIST selects algorithms, software libraries, hardware vendors, and protocol designers converge on them, raising the cost of deviation. Second, legitimacy: NIST's open, peer-reviewed process confers technical credibility that proprietary or state-secret alternatives lack. Third, time pressure: the "harvest now, decrypt later" threat means that adversaries are already collecting encrypted data, so delay in migration increases future exposure. Mosca's theorem (Mosca, 2018) formalizes this: the risk is not Q-Day itself but the interval between now and Q-Day during which sensitive data must remain confidential. Fourth, cost externalization: the US state bears the cost of developing standards, while adopting states and firms bear the cost of migration, which falls disproportionately on those with limited technical capacity. Grimes and Martin (2020) note that the transition to PQC will require replacing or upgrading vast amounts of legacy infrastructure, a process that will take years to decades and that will be unevenly distributed across the global economy.

The mechanism also includes a feedback loop: as PQC standards are adopted, they become the new baseline, and states that have not migrated become outliers, potentially facing exclusion from secure communications networks, financial systems, and alliance structures. This creates a compliance dynamic that resembles other domains of US-led standardization, from internet protocols to financial messaging.

Perspective Reconstruction

African: The NIST PQC standards, however technically sound, reproduce a familiar pattern in which global infrastructure standards are set by a great power without meaningful participation from African states. African governments and firms are expected to adopt standards developed in a process they did not shape, at a cost they may not be able to bear, and on a timeline determined by US threat perceptions rather than African priorities. The African perspective, drawing on Grovogui's critique of international ordering and Bayart's analysis of extraversion, sees in PQC migration a new form of dependency: African digital sovereignty is constrained not by direct coercion but by the structural power of standard-setting. African states face a double bind: non-adoption risks exclusion from secure global networks, while adoption without capacity building deepens reliance on foreign vendors and foreign expertise. The African vantage point also highlights that "harvest now, decrypt later" is not an abstract threat for African states whose data is already being collected by multiple external actors, and that PQC migration does not address the more immediate vulnerabilities of surveillance, data extraction, and infrastructure control. What the African perspective reveals is that the quantum transition is being governed as a great-power race rather than as a global public good, and that the costs of the transition will fall most heavily on those who had least voice in designing it.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective views the NIST PQC standards as an exercise in US technological hegemony that must be countered by sovereign alternatives. China has invested heavily in quantum research and has its own cryptographic standards initiatives; the NIST process is seen as an attempt to lock in US advantage before Chinese quantum capabilities mature. At the same time, China recognizes the "harvest now, decrypt later" threat and is pursuing its own PQC migration, including through national standards bodies. The Chinese perspective also frames quantum communication (QKD) as a strategic stability tool that reduces dependence on US-controlled infrastructure. From Beijing's vantage point, the NIST standards are not neutral technical artifacts but instruments of alliance management and market control, and China's response is to build parallel systems that reduce vulnerability to US leverage.

Russian: The Russian perspective emphasizes that PQC migration is inseparable from the broader quantum threat to NC3 and strategic stability. Russia views the NIST standards as a necessary but insufficient response to a problem that is fundamentally about the survivability of nuclear command and control. Russian analysts are concerned that quantum computing could eventually break the encryption protecting nuclear communications, and that the timeline for migration may be shorter than NIST assumes. Russia also suspects that the US may be further along in quantum computing than publicly acknowledged, and that PQC standards are partly a hedge against US offensive capability. The Russian perspective thus treats PQC not as a technical upgrade but as an arms-control-relevant issue, and calls for transparency and dialogue on quantum timelines that the US has been reluctant to provide.

Western: The Western perspective, anchored in NIST and allied institutions, frames PQC migration as a defensive necessity driven by a credible and quantifiable threat. The mechanism is straightforward: quantum computers will eventually break RSA and ECC, the "harvest now, decrypt later" threat is already active, and the cost of delay exceeds the cost of migration. The Western perspective emphasizes the openness and rigor of the NIST process, the global participation of researchers, and the availability of standards to all. It acknowledges migration costs but argues that they are manageable with proper planning and that the alternative—catastrophic decryption of sensitive data—is far worse. The Western perspective also links PQC to NC3 protection, treating cryptographic modernization as a component of nuclear security.

UN: The UN perspective frames PQC migration as a global public good whose benefits and risks must be shared. The UN emphasizes that quantum technology, including PQC, should be governed multilaterally, and

that the NIST process—however technically competent—does not substitute for inclusive governance. The UN perspective highlights the capacity gap: many states lack the resources to migrate, and the international community has a responsibility to assist. It also warns that uncoordinated migration could fragment the global internet into incompatible cryptographic zones, undermining interoperability and trust. The UN perspective is the most normatively ambitious—calling for shared standards, capacity building, and transparency—but also the most institutionally constrained, lacking the power to compel or coordinate.

Explicit Adjudication

The Western perspective best explains the NIST PQC case as a technical-institutional process: the standards are real, the threat is credible, and the mechanism of standard-setting as structural power is well-documented. However, the Western perspective occludes the distributional consequences of migration and the legitimacy deficit of a single state defining global cryptographic baselines. The African perspective, while less able to explain the internal technical dynamics of the NIST process, most clearly identifies what the Western perspective misses: that the quantum transition is being governed as a great-power race rather than a global public good, and that the costs of transition fall heaviest on those with least voice. The Chinese perspective adds the crucial insight that PQC standards are instruments of strategic competition, not merely technical upgrades, and that parallel systems will emerge. The Russian perspective correctly identifies the NC3 linkage but overstates the near-term quantum threat to nuclear systems. The UN perspective captures the normative aspiration but lacks the power to realize it. The best synthesis is that the NIST PQC standards are simultaneously a genuine technical achievement, a mechanism of US structural power, and a case study in the governance gap between great-power competition and global public goods.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Mechanism.** In 150–200 words, explain how satellite QKD changes—or does not change—the confidentiality, authentication, and availability of nuclear command links, and distinguish QKD from post-quantum cryptography.

2. **Levels of analysis.** Apply the four levels from Lesson 1 to China's Micius program: individual scientists and leaders, the Chinese state, the US–China systemic dyad, and transnational standards and alliance interoperability.

3. **Perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of Micius in 3–4 sentences each, identifying what each reveals and what it occludes.

4. **Adjudication.** Using evidence from Micius, NIST's 2024 standards, and NATO quantum reporting, argue whether quantum communication is stabilizing, destabilizing, or conditionally stabilizing.

5. **Falsifiers.** List five observations over the next five years that would weaken the claim that quantum communication has materially altered strategic stability.

6. **Historical analogue.** Compare Micius to one earlier secure-communication innovation and state what is genuinely novel, if anything, about quantum communication.

Model answer. The Micius program demonstrates that satellite-based quantum key distribution and entan-

glement distribution are technically feasible across intercontinental distances, but the strategic question is not whether a photon can be transmitted securely; it is whether that capability changes the expected utility of nuclear coercion. QKD provides information-theoretic security for key exchange by using quantum states whose measurement disturbs the system, thereby revealing eavesdropping; it does not, by itself, secure endpoints, authenticate users, guarantee availability, or protect stored traffic from future cryptanalysis. Consequently, a quantum-secured command link may reduce the risk that an adversary can passively harvest and later decrypt nuclear command traffic, yet it leaves intact the risks of physical destruction of satellites, ground-station compromise, insider manipulation, and denial of service. In nuclear strategy, command-and-control security is double-edged: more survivable communication can reduce fears of decapitation and accidental escalation, but if one side believes its own control architecture is uniquely resilient, it may also reduce the perceived cost of limited nuclear use or first-strike experimentation. The stabilizing or destabilizing effect therefore depends on symmetry, redundancy, and doctrine, not on the physics alone.

At the individual level, the program reflects the agency of scientists, military engineers, and political leaders who frame quantum technology as a marker of national rejuvenation and strategic competence; at the state level, China's investment signals a techno-nationalist effort to reduce dependence on Western cryptographic and space infrastructures and to shape standards from a position of capability rather than consumption. At the systemic level, Micius enters an already competitive US–China nuclear and space relationship in which each side interprets the other's demonstrations through worst-case lenses, so a technical achievement becomes a strategic signal even if its military utility remains immature. At the transnational level, the program pressures alliance interoperability, because NATO members and partners must decide whether to integrate Chinese-origin quantum components, develop sovereign alternatives, or rely on NIST's 2024 post-quantum standards for classical systems; this is where Mosca's warning about migration time versus Q-Day becomes relevant, since states that delay PQC migration may face a window in which harvested classical traffic remains vulnerable even as quantum links proliferate.

An African reading would treat Micius less as a bilateral US–China episode than as evidence that advanced digital infrastructure is becoming a condition of sovereignty, while warning that states outside the quantum core risk new forms of dependency if they import black-box systems without governance capacity; a Chinese reading would present the satellite as proof of scientific leadership and as a contribution to strategic stability through secure communication, while occluding questions of transparency and the military implications of dual-use space assets. A Russian reading would likely emphasize NC3 vulnerability and the danger that quantum-enabled sensing or communication could erode second-strike confidence, using the demonstration to justify its own investments and to frame arms-control gaps; a Western reading would acknowledge the technical achievement but situate it within a broader race for quantum leadership, PQC migration, and NC3 resilience, often treating Chinese capability as a threat to be managed rather than a stabilizing innovation. The UN reading would push the issue toward emerging-technology governance, asking whether quantum communication should be addressed through disarmament, confidence-building, or at least transparency measures, while recognizing that no binding framework currently captures satellite QKD.

On the evidence, the most defensible adjudication is that Micius is strategically significant but not yet strategically transformative. It demonstrates a capability that could, in principle, improve the confidentiality of high-value communication, yet there is no public evidence that it is integrated into operational nuclear command links or that it has altered force postures, alert levels, or doctrinal statements. The claim that quantum communication stabilizes therefore remains conditional: it would be strengthened by mutual deployment, verified redundancy, and integration with non-quantum channels, and weakened by unilateral advantage, secrecy, or coupling with counterspace capabilities. Grimes and Martin's concern about NC3 vulnerability

is best read as a warning about cumulative technological pressure rather than a prediction that QKD alone undermines deterrence, while NATO's quantum reporting suggests that alliances are still in the assessment phase rather than the deployment phase. Thus the program is a leading indicator of a possible shift in the information foundations of deterrence, not proof that the shift has occurred.

Historical analogues support caution. Secure hotlines, fiber-optic cables, and spread-spectrum techniques each changed the cost of interception without eliminating the political logic of nuclear coercion; QKD's distinctive contribution is physics-based eavesdropping detection and potential resistance to future quantum cryptanalysis, but it inherits the same implementation and physical vulnerabilities. Falsifiers over the next five years would include the absence of operational military QKD networks, continued reliance on classical PQC migration for government systems, failure to integrate satellite QKD with redundant command architectures, no observable change in nuclear alert or declaratory policy, and no measurable improvement in submarine detection or counterspace capability linked to quantum sensing. If those conditions hold, Micius should be classified as a scientific and industrial milestone with latent strategic relevance rather than an active driver of instability.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: An African coastal state with a growing fintech sector discovers that its national ID, tax, and payment rails depend on RSA and elliptic-curve cryptography, while a foreign supplier offers a subsidized quantum-key-distribution pilot for ministry links and a great power requests inspection access to its submarine cable landing station. The government must decide within one budget cycle whether to fund PQC migration, accept the QKD pilot, or pursue a regional digital-sovereignty framework. The case is not about choosing the "best" technology in the abstract; it is about how a late-industrializing state can avoid importing strategic vulnerability while lacking domestic quantum capacity.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

- **Mechanism:** Explain how QKD, PQC, and cable inspection each affect confidentiality, authentication, and availability, and identify which threat each does not address.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN readings of the state's dilemma in 3–4 sentences each.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the decision to an earlier technology-adoption dilemma (for example, telecommunications liberalization or satellite leasing) and state what is genuinely novel.
- **Falsifiers:** List observable developments over three to five years that would show your assessment was wrong.

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description (what happened), explanation (why), prediction (what follows), and prescription (what should be done)?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

A state deploys satellite QKD for its nuclear command links. Which of the following is the most defensible assessment of its effect on strategic stability?

A. It necessarily stabilizes by making command links unbreakable.
B. It is destabilizing because it guarantees first-strike capability.
C. It is conditionally stabilizing only if survivable, mutual, and integrated with redundant non-quantum channels; otherwise it may create false confidence or asymmetry.
D. It has no strategic effect because QKD only protects civilian internet traffic.

Answer: C

Distractor diagnosis:
- **A** conflates information-theoretic key distribution with end-to-end security and ignores physical destruction, endpoint compromise, and availability failures.
- **B** overstates by treating communication security as equivalent to offensive capability; QKD does not create warheads, delivery systems, or a first-strike advantage.
- **D** ignores that command-and-control confidentiality and authentication are central to nuclear stability, even if QKD is not yet operationally integrated into NC3.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1. Reported government quantum commitments (approximate, cumulative through 2024).
Figures are reported estimates from national strategies and industry monitors; they are not audited and exclude private capital.

Country / Region	Reported commitment	Primary vehicle	Source (approx.)
China	~US$15 billion	National quantum programs (13th/14th Five-Year Plans; USTC)	McKinsey Quantum Monitor 2024; state planning documents
European Union	~€1 billion plus national programs	EU Quantum Flagship (2018)	European Commission
United Kingdom	~£2.5 billion	National Quantum Strategy (2023)	UK DSIT
Russia	~US$1 billion (reported)	Rosatom / Russian Quantum Center	Reported estimates
Canada	~CAD 360 million	National Quantum Strategy (2023)	ISED
Australia	~AUD 1 billion	Critical Technologies / AUKUS quantum pillar	Reported estimates

Table 2. Approximate share of global quantum-technology patent filings (WIPO, 2023).

Jurisdiction	Approx. share	Notable strength
China	~50%+	Quantum communication, sensing
United States	~15–20%	Quantum computing hardware
Japan	~8–10%	Components, materials

Jurisdiction	Approx. share	Notable strength
South Korea	~5%	Semiconductor interfaces
EU (aggregate)	~10–15%	Algorithms, software
Russia	<2%	Niche applications

Table 3. NIST post-quantum cryptography standards and migration timelines (2024).

Standard	Algorithm	Function	Status
FIPS 203	ML-KEM (CRYSTALS-Kyber)	Key encapsulation	Published Aug 2024
FIPS 204	ML-DSA (CRYSTALS-Dilithium)	Digital signature	Published Aug 2024
FIPS 205	SLH-DSA (SPHINCS+)	Digital signature	Published Aug 2024
FIPS 206 (draft)	FN-DSA (FALCON)	Digital signature	In progress

Migration timelines (reported): NSA CNSA 2.0 requires PQC for national security systems by 2035; NIST recommends completion of migration by 2035; EU and UK strategies align to similar horizons.

Table 4. Demonstrated counterspace / ASAT capabilities (selected).

State	Capability	Year	Character
China	Kinetic kill vehicle (FY-1C)	2007	Debris-generating
United States	SM-3 intercept (Operation Burnt Frost)	2008	Debris-generating
India	Mission Shakti	2019	Debris-generating
Russia	Nudol DA-ASAT	2021	Debris-generating

Analysis questions

1. **Trend.** The investment and patent data show a concentration of quantum capability in a small number of states, with China leading in patent volume and communication/sensing, and the United States leading in computing hardware. What does this distribution imply for the diffusion of cryptographic hegemony — does it suggest a unipolar, bipolar, or fragmented future for quantum power? Cite the tables.

2. **Level of analysis.** The "harvest now, decrypt later" threat (Mosca 2018) operates across multiple levels simultaneously. Identify at which level — individual, state, systemic, or transnational — the threat is most consequential for nuclear command and control, and justify why the other levels are secondary.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how each of the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) would interpret the publication of the NIST 2024 PQC standards. For

each, state (a) what it welcomes, (b) what it fears or occludes, and (c) its preferred remedy or next step.

4. **Interpretation.** Given the 2035 migration horizon and the uncertainty about Q-Day, does the PQC migration constitute a stabilizing or destabilizing dynamic for strategic stability? Argue using the mechanism of "harvest now, decrypt later" and the concept of cryptographic hegemony.

5. **Limitation.** The data above are reported estimates, patent counts, and standards documents. Identify three specific limitations that would prevent a researcher from inferring actual quantum capability or strategic intent from these data, and state what additional evidence would be needed.

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Harvest Now, Decrypt Later" timeline (hand-drawn, landscape).
What to draw: A horizontal arrow running left to right representing time, marked with three vertical ticks: "Today (data harvested)," "Q-Day (cryptographically relevant quantum computer)," and "Decryption of harvested data." Below the arrow, draw a shaded band labeled "Vulnerable data in transit/storage (RSA/ECC)" spanning from "Today" to "Q-Day," and a second band labeled "Post-quantum protected data" beginning at the migration point. Add a small icon of a server/vault at "Today" and a lock icon at the migration point.
Labels to place: "Harvest," "Store," "Wait," "Decrypt," "Mosca inequality: $x + y > z$."
Perspective overlay: Annotate in the margin with five colored dots (African = green, Chinese = red, Russian = blue, Western = black, UN = purple) each with a one-line note: e.g., African — "digital sovereignty gap widens"; Chinese — "strategic window"; Russian — "NC3 exposure"; Western — "migration race"; UN — "disarmament gap."

Visual 2 — Quantum sensing and submarine detection (hand-drawn, cross-section).
What to draw: A vertical cross-section of ocean from surface to seabed. Draw a submarine at depth with a dashed "stealth envelope" around it. Above, draw a satellite or aircraft with a downward beam labeled "quantum magnetometer / gravimeter." Draw wavy lines representing magnetic/gravitational anomaly detection reaching the submarine. Add a second panel showing "second-strike forces" with arrows to "deterrence stability."
Labels to place: "Quantum sensor," "Anomaly," "Stealth obsolescence," "Second-strike vulnerability," "Stability?"
Perspective overlay: Annotate each perspective: African — "technology marginalization, no sensor sovereignty"; Chinese — "ASW revolution"; Russian — "bastion vulnerability"; Western — "deterrence erosion debate"; UN — "emerging tech governance."

Visual 3 — NC3 vulnerability chain (hand-drawn, flow diagram).
What to draw: A left-to-right chain of boxes: "Quantum computer" → "Breaks RSA/ECC" → "Compromises C2 / early-warning links" → "Undermines second-strike assurance" → "First-strike incentive / crisis instability." Add a feedback loop arrow from the last box back to "Quantum computer" labeled "arms-race dynamic." Below, draw a parallel "mitigation" chain: "PQC migration" → "Quantum key distribution" → "Hardened NC3" → "Restored stability."
Labels to place: "Q-Day," "C2," "Second strike," "Crisis stability," "PQC," "QKD."
Perspective overlay: Place the five perspective labels along the bottom with arrows indicating which link each emphasizes: African (technology gap), Chinese (strategic stability framing), Russian (NC3 vulnerabil-

ity), Western (PQC + NC3 debates), UN (disarmament frameworks).

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
Define Q-Day	The day a cryptographically relevant quantum computer (CRQC) can break RSA/ECC; Mosca (2018) frames the risk via the inequality x + y > z. Source: Mosca 2018.
What is "harvest now, decrypt later"?	Adversaries store encrypted data today for future decryption; threatens long-lived secrets (nuclear, diplomatic). Source: Mosca 2018; NIST 2024.
NIST 2024 standards	FIPS 203/204/205 published Aug 2024 (ML-KEM, ML-DSA, SLH-DSA); FIPS 206 (FN-DSA) in progress. Source: NIST 2024.
Mosca's inequality	x = shelf life of data, y = migration time, z = time to CRQC; risk if x + y > z. Source: Mosca 2018.
Quantum sensing & stealth	Quantum magnetometers/gravimeters may detect submarines, threatening second-strike forces. Source: Grimes and Martin 2020; NATO quantum reports.
NC3 vulnerability	Quantum decryption of C2 links could undermine nuclear command and control and second-strike assurance. Source: NATO quantum reports; Grimes and Martin 2020.
African perspective	Technology marginalization + digital sovereignty; risk of being a data source, not a standard-setter. Source: Grovogui; Mbembe; Mamdani (general).
Chinese perspective	Quantum leadership ambitions + strategic stability framing; Micius satellite. Source: Chinese state programs; Micius 2016.
Russian perspective	Quantum investments + NC3 vulnerability concerns. Source: Rosatom/RQC; NATO reports.
Western perspective	Quantum leadership + PQC migration + NC3 debates. Source: NIST 2024; NSA CNSA 2.0.
UN perspective	Disarmament and emerging-technology frameworks; governance gaps. Source: UN disarmament fora.
Key mechanism	Cryptographic hegemony: control of standards and compute = strategic power. Source: NIST 2024; Mosca 2018.

Summary (3–5 sentences). Quantum computing threatens current public-key cryptography through the

"harvest now, decrypt later" dynamic, making the NIST 2024 PQC standards a strategic race against an uncertain Q-Day. Quantum sensing may erode submarine stealth and second-strike stability, while quantum decryption could compromise NC3. The five perspectives diverge on whether the priority is migration, leadership, stability, or governance. Data on investment and patents show concentrated capability but cannot establish intent or operational readiness. The central puzzle is whether PQC migration stabilizes or merely relocates strategic risk.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Today's internet security relies on math problems that are hard for normal computers but easy for a future quantum computer. Enemies can save today's secret messages and open them later. Countries are racing to switch to new math (post-quantum cryptography) before that future computer arrives. Quantum sensors might also find submarines that were previously hidden, which could make nuclear deterrence less stable. The big question is whether switching codes in time keeps everyone safe, or just moves the danger around.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am unsure about: (a) when a cryptographically relevant quantum computer will actually arrive; (b) whether quantum sensors can really detect submarines at operational depths; (c) whether "harvest now, decrypt later" is already happening at scale; (d) how much the NIST standards actually protect NC3 versus civilian systems; (e) whether African states have any meaningful role in setting these standards.

3. **Reread verification.** Re-reading Mosca (2018) confirms the inequality $x + y > z$ as the core risk metric; NIST (2024) confirms three finalized standards with a 2035 migration horizon; Grimes and Martin (2020) and NATO reports confirm the sensing/NC3 concerns. The gaps in (a) and (b) remain genuinely unresolved in the literature — the sources give ranges, not dates.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** *Analogy:* PQC migration is like changing the locks on every door in a city before a new master key is invented — but the new locks are heavier, slower, and not everyone can afford them. *Limits:* The analogy understates the "harvest now, decrypt later" problem (old messages remain readable), overstates the uniformity of the threat (NC3 and civilian data differ), and ignores that some actors may prefer the old locks to stay weak.

5. **Rewrite.** Quantum computing threatens to collapse the mathematical foundations of current encryption, creating a "harvest now, decrypt later" risk that endangers long-lived secrets including nuclear command-and-control communications. The NIST 2024 post-quantum standards and the 2035 migration horizon are the Western-led response, but their stabilizing effect depends on universal adoption, on the actual timeline of Q-Day, and on whether quantum sensing simultaneously erodes second-strike forces. African and other marginalized actors face a digital-sovereignty gap: they are data sources and rule-takers in a cryptographic order they did not design. The outcome is not predetermined; it hinges on whether migration outpaces threat development and whether governance frameworks close the emerging-technology gap.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L55	Definition	What is “Q-Day”?	Q-Day is the point at which a cryptographically relevant quantum computer can break widely used public-key systems such as RSA and ECC; Mosca (2018) frames the risk as a race among threat arrival, data shelf life, and migration time.	Western urgency and NIST migration planning; African states face uneven capacity to respond.
L55	Mechanism	What is “harvest now, decrypt later”?	Adversaries can store encrypted traffic today and decrypt it once quantum capability matures, so long-lived secrets are already at risk before Q-Day.	Especially consequential for African financial, health, and identity data with long confidentiality horizons.
L55	Mechanism	Why do Shor-type quantum algorithms threaten RSA and ECC?	They can efficiently solve the number-theoretic problems on which RSA and ECC rely, converting currently secure public-key encryption into breakable ciphertext.	Chinese and Russian quantum programs are often read through this strategic lens.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L55	Application	What did NIST do in 2024?	NIST finalized its first post-quantum cryptography standards in 2024, giving governments and vendors algorithmic targets for migration away from RSA and ECC.	Western standard-setting power; African implementers depend on imported standards and vendors.
L55	Comparison	How does PQC differ from QKD?	PQC replaces vulnerable algorithms with quantum-resistant ones in existing networks; QKD uses quantum physics to detect eavesdropping on key exchange but requires specialized infrastructure.	Chinese Micius demonstrates QKD feasibility; Western PQC emphasizes scalable migration.
L55	Source	What is Mosca's (2018) risk inequality?	Mosca (2018) warns that if data shelf life plus migration time exceeds time to a quantum threat, organizations are already too late to protect that data.	Applies across perspectives; especially sharp for states with slow procurement cycles.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L55	Debate	How might quantum sensing affect second-strike stability?	Improved quantum sensing could in principle erode submarine stealth and complicate second-strike assurance, but ocean noise, platform limits, and countermeasures make the effect uncertain.	Russian and Chinese analysts stress vulnerability; Western analysts stress technical barriers.
L55	Occlusion	What does the African perspective highlight?	African states face technology marginalization, import dependence, and limited cryptographic capacity, so quantum risk is also a digital-sovereignty and capacity problem.	Primary perspective: risk is structural, not only technical.
L55	Adjudication	Does quantum communication reshape strategic stability?	Quantum communication can secure links but does not secure endpoints or institutions; its strategic effect depends on scale, integration, trust, and adversary adaptation.	Chinese Micius program shows feasibility; stability claims remain contingent.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L55	Visual	How can NC3 be vulnerable to quantum capability?	Quantum advances could stress encrypted command links, timing, and sensing layers, but NC3 resilience also depends on redundancy, procedures, and human judgment.	Russian and Western debates focus on command-and-control integrity.
L55	Mechanism	What is the promise and limit of quantum submarine detection?	Quantum magnetometers or gravimeters may detect anomalies, yet seawater noise, distance, and countermeasures limit operational certainty.	Western and Russian naval competition shapes assessments.
L55	Comparison	How do Chinese and Western quantum strategies differ?	China has emphasized state-led QKD, satellites, and national champions; Western approaches emphasize PQC standards, alliances, and market-driven migration.	Each occludes the other's strengths: scale versus interoperability.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L55	Source	What do NATO quantum reports contribute?	NATO reports frame quantum technologies as defense-relevant emerging technologies requiring resilience, interoperability, and responsible development.	Alliance perspective; may understate non-allied capacity concerns.
L55	Debate	Why is "harvest now, decrypt later" an African data-sovereignty issue?	Long-lived personal, financial, and governmental data can be collected now and exposed later, while migration capacity and vendor dependence remain uneven.	African perspective: sovereignty includes cryptographic self-reliance.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (Score 0–100)

Competency	Self-score (0–100)	Calibration prompt
Define Q-Day and Mosca's inequality		Can you state shelf life, migration time, and threat time without notes?
Explain harvest-now-decrypt-later		Can you give one long-lived data example and one adversary incentive?
Compare PQC and QKD		Can you name deployment constraints for each?
Reconstruct all five perspectives		Can you state one contribution and one occlusion per perspective?
Adjudicate quantum sensing and second-strike claims		Can you name one falsifier and one scope condition?

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which score is most likely inflated because you can recognize terminology but cannot yet apply it to a new case?

2. Which perspective did you reconstruct from memory rather than from evidence, and what source would correct it?

3. What single falsifier would most change your conclusion about quantum sensing and second-strike stability?

7.3 Error-Log Table

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Q-Day is a fixed date already known.	It is an uncertain threshold; estimates vary with hardware, error correction, and algorithmic progress.	Mosca (2018); NIST (2024) migration framing
PQC and QKD are interchangeable.	PQC is algorithmic migration; QKD is physics-based key distribution with infrastructure constraints.	NIST (2024); Chinese Micius program
Quantum sensing has already made submarines detectable.	It is a prospective capability with significant noise, distance, and countermeasure limits.	NATO quantum reports; Grimes and Martin (2020)
African states are only consumers of quantum risk.	They are also sites of data vulnerability and potential agency through digital-sovereignty agendas.	African perspective in this lesson
Quantum communication guarantees strategic stability.	It secures transmission but not endpoints, institutions, or trust; stability effects are contingent.	Chinese Micius; Western NC3 debates

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Quantum computing, sensing, communications	New capabilities from quantum phenomena; strategic effects depend on scaling and integration	Grimes and Martin (2020); NATO quantum reports	National quantum programs; defense planning	Hype versus maturity	No scalable fault-tolerant quantum computer	L24 cyber; L54 AI
Q-Day; RSA/ECC vulnerability	Harvest now, decrypt later; long-lived secrets exposed before migration	Mosca (2018)	Encrypted archives; state and corporate data	Threat timeline; risk inequality	No quantum speedup for factoring/discrete log	L21 nuclear strategy
PQC migration	Algorithm replacement; standards-based transition	NIST (2024)	NIST 2024 PQC standards; national migration timelines	Cost, interoperability, legacy systems	Standards broken by new mathematics or implementation flaws	L56 innovation
Quantum sensing	Anomaly detection; possible stealth erosion	NATO reports; Grimes and Martin (2020)	Submarine detection claims; naval competition	Second-strike stability	Ocean noise and countermeasures dominate	L21 nuclear strategy
NC3 vulnerability	Stress on encryption, timing, sensing, and procedures	Russian and Western NC3 debates	Command-and-control modernization; nuclear signaling	Stability versus vulnerability	Redundancy and human judgment preserve control	L21; L24
Five-perspective framing	Technology marginalization; leadership; stability; disarmament	African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN perspectives	Micius; NIST standards; NATO reports	Sovereignty versus interoperability	Capacity gaps persist	L57 space; L58 forecasting

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Timing	Concrete action
R1	24 hours	Re-read the flashcards and define Q-Day, Mosca's inequality, and harvest-now-decrypt-later aloud without notes.
R2	3 days	Reconstruct all five perspectives from memory, then check each against its contribution and occlusion.
R3	1 week	Redo the worked example using the four levels of analysis and identify the mechanism in each.
R4	2 weeks	Complete the problem pair and compare your answer with the model answer.
R5	1 month	Write a one-page memo on quantum sensing falsifiers and revisit the confidence audit.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define Q-Day without jargon.

☐ I can state Mosca's inequality in my own words.

☐ I can explain harvest-now-decrypt-later with one example.

☐ I can distinguish PQC from QKD.

☐ I can describe the significance of the NIST 2024 PQC standards at a general level.

☐ I can explain the promise and limits of quantum sensing.

☐ I can link quantum capability to NC3 without treating vulnerability as inevitable.

☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective as primary.

☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.

☐ I can complete the five-perspective comparison matrix.

☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to a quantum case.

☐ I can adjudicate a claim using evidence and scope conditions.

☐ I can identify at least two falsifiers for a quantum-stability claim.

☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

☐ I have reviewed and updated my error log.

☐ I have scheduled R1–R5 in my calendar.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Post-quantum cryptography and Q-Day
- NIST (2024) — Post-Quantum Cryptography Standards (FIPS 203, 204, 205): standardization and migration targets.
- Mosca (2018) — quantum threat timeline and the risk inequality among shelf life, migration time, and threat time.
- NIST (2024) — PQC migration guidance and implementation planning for organizations and governments.

Quantum technologies and defense
- Grimes and Martin (2020) — quantum technologies and national-security implications.
- NATO quantum technology reports — alliance resilience, interoperability, and responsible development.

Quantum communication and strategic stability
- Chinese quantum satellite program (Micius, 2016–present) — primary case for QKD feasibility and its strategic interpretation.
- Western NC3 and quantum-risk debates — command-and-control integrity under emerging technologies.

African digital sovereignty and technology marginalization
- African scholarship on technology marginalization, digital sovereignty, and capacity asymmetry (Grovogui, Mbembe, and related work).
- African digital-transformation and data-governance agendas as sites of agency in PQC migration.

End of Lesson 55. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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57. Scientific Statecraft and Innovation Decoupling

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 56 — Scientific Statecraft and Innovation Decoupling
Module	Module 9: Techno-Geopolitics, AI, and Emerging Domains
Prerequisites	L52–L55 (techno-geopolitics); L18 (weaponized interdependence)

Field	Value
Interleaved links	Forward to L57 (space and infrastructure), L58 (forecasting), L61 (grand strategy)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, worked example, problem pair, independent memo, visuals, flashcards, spaced review
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create (analyze, synthesize, judge, design)
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

For most of the post-Cold War period, scientific collaboration was treated as a transnational public good insulated from great-power politics. The prevailing assumption held that knowledge flows freely, that open science accelerates global welfare, and that restricting collaboration harms the restrictor as much as the restricted. That assumption has collapsed. Between 2018 and 2024, the United States and China — the two largest producers of scientific knowledge — moved from deep collaboration to systematic decoupling: visa restrictions on Chinese researchers, the closure or rebranding of Confucius Institutes, the termination of joint research programs, and the expansion of "research security" regimes across universities and funding agencies. The puzzle this lesson addresses is not merely that politics entered science; it is that the very institutions that once championed open science — universities, national academies, professional societies, and international organizations — became instruments of strategic competition. The lesson asks why this happened, through what mechanisms, and with what consequences for global knowledge production, especially for regions that were never at the center of the US-China dyad but are nonetheless reshaped by its fracture.

The African vantage is the primary frame through which this puzzle is approached, because it reveals what the bilateral US-China narrative obscures. The decoupling of the two largest science powers is not a bilateral event; it is a global restructuring of knowledge production that disproportionately affects regions already at the margins of the global science system. African universities and research institutes have historically depended on collaborative networks — often with Western or Chinese partners — for equipment, training, graduate supervision, and access to publication and citation systems. When those networks fracture, the costs are not borne equally. The African vantage asks a question the competing powers rarely pose: whose science is being secured, and whose is being abandoned? It also insists that "brain drain" is not a natural market outcome but a structured feature of a global system in which talent is extracted from regions that cannot retain it, and that "brain gain" narratives in receiving countries often mask this extraction. Scholars such as Rodney (1972) on underdevelopment, Mamdani (1996) on the African university, and more recent work by Aning and Danso on African agency in global governance frame this not as a side effect but as constitutive of the global science order. Mbembe's (2001) analysis of the postcolony and Bayart's (2009) work on extraversion further illuminate how African research capacity has been shaped by external dependence rather than autonomous institutional development. The lesson therefore treats the African perspective not as a regional application of Western theory but as a generative standpoint that exposes the distributional consequences hidden inside "research security" discourse.

The theoretical stakes are substantial and cross-cutting. From the Western perspective, the securitization of academia can be read through the lens of weaponized interdependence — the idea, developed by Farrell and Newman (2019), that networks of interdependence become tools of coercion when asymmetrically controlled. From a Chinese perspective, talent recruitment programs such as the Thousand Talents Plan (launched 2008) are framed as sovereign development strategies correcting historical asymmetries in global knowledge distribution, a framing that draws on a longer discourse of national rejuvenation and technological self-reliance. From a Russian perspective, innovation statecraft is tied to "catch-up" modernization and the military-industrial complex, with roots in Soviet-era science policy and post-Soviet restructuring. The UN perspective, anchored in SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) and the UNESCO science reports, treats science as a common heritage and development imperative, with particular attention to capacity-building in the Global South. The lesson's theoretical task is to hold these frames in tension, to specify the scope conditions under which each applies, and to adjudicate among them on the basis of evidence rather than defaulting to any single national narrative.

The lesson identifies five mechanisms, each operating at a different level of analysis. First, the militarization of basic research through agencies such as DARPA and the Office of Naval Research in the United States and their Chinese counterparts redirects fundamental inquiry toward strategic ends, blurring the boundary between civilian and military knowledge production. Second, talent circulation — the movement of researchers across borders — is shaped by state strategies for attracting, retaining, and sometimes repatriating scientific labor, producing outcomes ranging from brain drain to brain gain depending on institutional context. Third, the securitization of academia, through research security regimes, visa restrictions, and export controls, erodes the collaborative norms that defined post-Cold War science and redefines universities as strategic assets. Fourth, IP transfer and forced technology transfer debates sit at the center of US-China trade and technology conflict, raising questions about the legitimacy of knowledge appropriation and the enforcement of intellectual property regimes. Fifth, national innovation systems — the institutional bases of universities, firms, state agencies, and legal frameworks — determine long-term technological advantage and explain why some states convert research investment into strategic capability while others do not. Weiss (2014) on Chinese innovation policy, Breznitz (2007) on innovation and the state, and Marginson (2022) on global science and the nation-state provide key analytical anchors, alongside NSF Science and Engineering Indicators and Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology reports for empirical grounding.

After mastering this lesson, the student will be able to reconstruct the causal chain from strategic competition to research decoupling; identify the level of analysis at which each of the five mechanisms operates; evaluate competing explanations of the same case — for instance, whether China's Thousand Talents Plan is best understood as a talent-recruitment success, a security threat, or a symptom of structural inequality in global science; adjudicate between the five perspectives on the basis of evidence and scope conditions; and produce a policy memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription. The lesson also prepares the student for L57 (space and infrastructure), L58 (forecasting), and L61 (grand strategy), where the institutional and strategic logics developed here reappear in adjacent domains. The worked example on the 2018–2024 US-China research decoupling and the problem pair on the Thousand Talents Plan require the student to apply mechanisms to concrete cases, while the data lab provides empirical anchors in international student flows, research collaboration counts, patent citations by country, and R&D spending.

A final methodological commitment runs through the lesson: the insistence on distinguishing the fact of decoupling — measurable in co-authorship rates, visa issuances, joint program terminations, and citation patterns — from the evaluation of decoupling, which depends on contested judgments about security, innovation, and equity. The lesson also insists that "decoupling" is not a binary state but a spectrum, and that

different fields decouple at different rates: semiconductor research decouples faster than climate science, and basic mathematics slower than applied engineering. This granularity matters because aggregate claims about "decoupling" often obscure the selective and strategic character of the process. The hinge question at the end of the core tests whether the student can identify the most defensible causal claim among competing options, and the independent memo requires the student to specify falsifiers — evidence that would cause them to abandon their conclusion. Together, these elements train the student to treat scientific statecraft not as a slogan but as an analytically tractable object of study.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. Define "weaponized interdependence" as developed by Farrell and Newman (2019) and give one example from the techno-geopolitics literature covered in L18.
2. What is the difference between "decoupling" and "de-risking" in contemporary techno-geopolitical discourse, and which actors prefer which term?
3. Name two instruments of techno-geopolitical competition discussed in L52–L55 (for example, export controls, investment screening, or standards-setting) and state the level of analysis at which each primarily operates.
4. How does the security dilemma apply to technology competition between great powers? Specify the mechanism by which defensive measures become threatening.
5. What is "strategic autonomy," which actors invoke it most prominently, and what does it imply for scientific collaboration?
6. Distinguish "basic research" from "applied research" and explain why the distinction matters for statecraft and for the militarization of science.

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Why did scientific collaboration, long treated as insulated from geopolitics, become a site of strategic competition after 2018? Identify at least two candidate mechanisms.
2. How does the African vantage on brain drain challenge the "brain gain" narratives of receiving countries? What distributional claim is at stake?
3. What evidence would falsify the claim that research security regimes improve national security without unacceptable costs to innovation?
4. Under what institutional conditions does talent circulation produce "brain gain" rather than "brain drain" for sending countries?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Scientific statecraft**: the use of science, technology, and research institutions as instruments of national power and strategic competition, including the direction of research funding, talent policy, and collaboration rules toward geopolitical ends.
- **Innovation decoupling**: the selective severing or restriction of cross-border scientific and technological collaboration, measured in co-authorship, joint programs, talent flows, and technology transfer, rather than a complete separation.
- **Militarization of basic research**: the redirection of fundamental scientific inquiry toward military

or strategic applications through defense-funded agencies and programs, blurring the civilian-military boundary in knowledge production.

- **Talent circulation**: the cross-border movement of researchers and scientists, shaped by state recruitment, retention, and repatriation strategies, with outcomes ranging from brain drain to brain gain.
- **Brain drain / brain gain**: brain drain refers to the net loss of skilled researchers from a sending country; brain gain refers to the net benefit to a receiving country or, in some accounts, to a sending country that successfully attracts returnees.
- **Securitization of academia**: the framing of universities, researchers, and research collaborations as security concerns, leading to visa restrictions, research security regimes, and export controls.
- **Research security**: institutional and governmental measures to protect sensitive research, intellectual property, and talent from foreign exploitation or theft, often at the cost of collaborative openness.
- **Forced technology transfer**: the alleged or documented requirement that foreign firms or researchers transfer technology or intellectual property as a condition of market access or collaboration, a central issue in US-China trade conflict.
- **National innovation system**: the network of institutions — universities, firms, state agencies, legal frameworks, and financial systems — that collectively determine a country's capacity to innovate and convert research into strategic advantage.
- **Weaponized interdependence**: the strategic exploitation of asymmetric positions within global networks of interdependence, such as supply chains or research collaborations, to coerce or constrain other actors.
- **Catch-up modernization**: a development strategy in which a state seeks to close the technological gap with leading powers through directed investment, technology absorption, and state-led coordination, prominent in Russian and Chinese innovation discourse.
- **Epistemic sovereignty**: the claim that a state or community has the right to control the production, circulation, and validation of knowledge within its jurisdiction, often invoked to justify research security and data localization.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the institutional mechanisms through which defense agencies shape basic research agendas. Students will distinguish between five channels—funding-driven agenda-setting, personnel pipelines, classification and export-control regimes, dual-use ambiguity, and institutional isomorphism—and evaluate which channel dominates in which national context, using evidence from DARPA, ONR, China's 863 and 973 programs, and the Central Military Commission's Science and Technology Commission. (Bloom: Analyze)

2. **Evaluate** competing theoretical explanations for why states militarize basic research. Students will adjudicate between techno-nationalist security logic (Samuels 1994), the linear model of innovation (Bush 1945), and embedded-autonomy state capacity (Evans 1995), using comparative evidence from US and Chinese research systems to determine which theory has greater explanatory power under which scope conditions. (Bloom: Evaluate)

3. **Compare** how five intellectual traditions—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—interpret the militarization of basic research. Students will identify what each tradition reveals about the relationship between power, knowledge, and sovereignty that the others occlude, and explain why the African perspective, centering epistemic sovereignty and cognitive injustice, reframes the debate in ways the Western "research security" framing cannot capture. (Bloom: Compare/Analyze)

4. **Apply** the concept of militarization of basic research to a novel national case. Given information about a country's defense research agencies, funding streams, and dual-use technology priorities, students will identify the institutional actors, trace the personnel pipelines, and predict the likely effects on open science norms and international collaboration. (Bloom: Apply)

5. **Critique** the assumption that basic research is politically neutral or "pure." Using historical evidence from DARPA's founding (1958), ONR's postwar role, and China's 863 and 973 programs, students will demonstrate how research questions, methodological choices, and personnel recruitment are shaped by strategic priorities, and evaluate the normative implications for global scientific equity. (Bloom: Critique/Evaluate)

2.2 KEY IDEA 1: The Militarization of Basic Research — DARPA, ONR, and Their Chinese Counterparts

Bolded Causal Claim: The channeling of fundamental scientific inquiry through defense agencies and their institutional equivalents systematically redirects the global production of knowledge toward strategic competition, creating path dependencies that make scientific decoupling both more likely and more costly, while obscuring the political choices embedded in supposedly "neutral" research agendas.

Mechanism: The militarization of basic research operates through at least five distinct but mutually reinforcing channels, each of which transforms the production of knowledge from a putatively autonomous scientific activity into a strategically directed enterprise.

The first channel is *agenda-setting through funding*. Defense agencies do not merely respond to scientific opportunities; they define them. DARPA's program managers—typically academics on three-to-five-year rotations—issue "broad agency announcements" (BAAs) that specify technical challenges aligned with military requirements. The Heilmeier Catechism, a set of questions DARPA program managers must answer before launching a program, institutionalizes this logic: it demands that researchers articulate not merely what they will do, but what difference it will make and how it will be measured. China's 863 Program (State High-Tech Development Plan, launched 1986) and 973 Program (National Basic Research Program, launched 1997) operated similarly, defining "thrust areas" (□□□□) that channeled fundamental research toward strategic priorities including information technology, automation, energy, and biotechnology. The mechanism here is not crude censorship but *selective amplification*: by funding some questions and not others, defense agencies shape which problems the scientific community considers worth solving. As Weiss (2014) argues in her study of the US national security state, this creates an "innovation regime" in which the state's strategic priorities are embedded in the very questions that researchers ask.

The second channel is *personnel pipelines*. Defense funding creates career trajectories that bind researchers to strategic priorities. DARPA program managers return to universities with networks, prestige, and research programs shaped by their agency experience. Graduate students funded by defense grants develop expertise in defense-relevant problems. The "revolving door" between defense labs, universities, and industry—documented by Leslie (1993) in his study of MIT and Stanford—creates a community of

researchers whose professional identities are intertwined with defense priorities. In China, the "Thousand Talents Plan" (□□□□, launched 2008) and its successors explicitly recruited overseas scientists to work on strategically important research, often with military applications, creating a parallel personnel pipeline oriented toward Chinese strategic goals.

The third channel is *classification and export controls*. Research funded by defense agencies is subject to classification regimes (in the US, the National Industrial Security Program) or, in the case of "fundamental research" that is published openly, to export control restrictions (ITAR, EAR). This creates a two-tier science system: research that can be published openly and research that cannot. The boundary between these tiers is politically determined and shifts with the security environment. The US government's 2018-2024 expansion of export controls on AI, quantum, and semiconductor research represents a recent intensification of this channel. China's 2020 Export Control Law similarly restricts the transfer of "controlled items" including technology and data.

The fourth channel is *dual-use ambiguity*. The distinction between "basic" and "applied" research—central to Bush's (1945) linear model—has become increasingly untenable in fields like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, synthetic biology, and advanced materials. Defense agencies exploit this ambiguity: they fund research that is technically "basic" (published in open journals, conducted in universities) but strategically "applied" (with clear military utility). Stokes's (1997) concept of "Pasteur's Quadrant"—use-inspired basic research—captures this dynamic. The result is that the category of "basic research" itself becomes militarized: research that is nominally fundamental is shaped by strategic imperatives.

The fifth channel is *institutional isomorphism*. Universities and research institutes adapt their structures to attract and manage defense funding. This includes creating specialized research centers (e.g., MIT's Lincoln Laboratory, Stanford's Center for International Security and Cooperation), hiring "research security" officers, establishing compliance offices for export controls, and developing "trusted research" frameworks. These adaptations embed defense priorities in the institutional architecture of science, making the militarization of research self-reinforcing.

The theoretical lineage of this concept traces to several debates. The foundational text is Bush's (1945) "Science: The Endless Frontier," which established the "social contract" between government and science: the state funds basic research, scientists choose directions, and society benefits through technological progress. This contract, as Forman (1987) and Kevles (1995) have shown, was always entangled with military needs: the Manhattan Project, radar, and the postwar physics boom were all driven by defense requirements. Leslie (1993) documented how MIT and Stanford became "military-industrial-academic complexes," with defense funding shaping research agendas, personnel, and institutional culture. The "linear model" of innovation—basic research → applied research → development → production—provided the intellectual justification for this arrangement, though it has been critiqued by Kline and Rosenberg (1986) and Stokes (1997) as descriptively inaccurate. Samuels (1994) theorized this as "techno-nationalism": the idea that technological capability is a component of national power, and that states must actively cultivate it. Evans (1995) provided the concept of "embedded autonomy": the state's capacity to direct research without being captured by particular interests. Mazzucato (2018) has more recently argued for "mission-oriented" research, in which the state sets strategic goals and directs research toward them—a framework that, while normatively distinct from militarization, shares the premise that research should serve state-defined objectives.

The mechanism is not, however, deterministic. It operates through *contingent* institutional arrangements that can be contested, reformed, or dismantled. The post-Cold War "peace dividend" of the 1990s saw a relative decline in defense research funding and a corresponding expansion of civilian research programs.

The re-intensification of US-China strategic competition after 2010 reversed this trend. The mechanism's strength depends on the perceived threat environment, the availability of alternative funding sources, and the institutional capacity of universities to resist or accommodate defense priorities.

Scope Conditions: The militarization of basic research operates most powerfully under four conditions, and its effects vary systematically across contexts.

First, *state fiscal capacity*. The mechanism requires a state capable of funding large-scale basic research. This condition is met by the United States (DoD R&D budget ~$140 billion in FY2024), China (estimated military R&D ~$30-40 billion, though figures are opaque), and historically by the Soviet Union and the UK. States without this capacity—most African, Latin American, and Southeast Asian states—cannot militarize basic research in this way; instead, they experience the mechanism's effects as *external* agenda-setting, as their researchers depend on funding from militarized Northern institutions.

Second, *threat perception*. The mechanism intensifies when states perceive existential or strategic threats. The Cold War drove US defense research spending to ~50% of federal R&D in the 1960s. The post-9/11 "war on terror" shifted priorities toward counterterrorism and homeland security research. The US-China strategic competition of the 2010s-2020s has driven the most recent intensification, with the CHIPS and Science Act (2022) and the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) provisions on research security representing legislative codification of the mechanism.

Third, *dual-use potential*. The mechanism is strongest in fields with clear military applications: artificial intelligence, quantum computing, synthetic biology, advanced materials, hypersonics, and space technology. It is weaker in fields with limited military utility: social sciences, humanities, most areas of clinical medicine, and environmental science (though even these are not immune, as "human terrain" research in counterinsurgency demonstrates).

Fourth, *institutional context*. In liberal democracies, academic freedom norms, peer review, and university autonomy create friction that constrains the mechanism. Researchers can resist defense priorities, publish in open journals, and maintain international collaborations. In authoritarian systems, state direction is more seamless but may face different constraints: researcher autonomy and creativity may be suppressed, leading to different (and possibly less innovative) research outcomes. The Chinese case illustrates this tension: the state's capacity to direct research is greater, but the "catch-up" imperative and the pressure to produce measurable outputs may distort research quality.

Observable Implications: If the militarization of basic research is operating as described, we should observe several patterns in the data.

First, *funding composition*. The share of federal R&D devoted to defense should be substantial and should correlate with threat perception. NSF Science and Engineering Indicators data show that US defense R&D has consistently accounted for 40-55% of federal R&D spending since the 1950s, with fluctuations tracking geopolitical tensions. China's military R&D spending is harder to measure but is estimated to have grown rapidly since 2010, with the PLA's Science and Technology Commission (established 2016) coordinating military-civil fusion research.

Second, *institutional adaptation*. Universities should develop specialized structures for managing defense research: research security offices, export control compliance programs, "trusted research" frameworks. The US government's 2019-2024 expansion of research security requirements (NSPM-33, the CHIPS Act research security provisions) has driven this adaptation. Chinese universities have similarly developed "military-civil fusion" research centers.

Third, *publication and collaboration patterns*. Research in defense-relevant fields should show increasing restrictions on international collaboration, particularly with "countries of concern." The 2018-2024 US-China research decoupling—documented in the worked example—illustrates this: joint publications between US and Chinese researchers in AI and quantum computing declined significantly after 2018, while domestic publications increased.

Fourth, *talent flows*. Researchers should move toward defense-funded centers and away from open international collaboration. The "brain drain" of Chinese researchers from US universities (documented in the problem pair) and the recruitment of overseas scientists through China's talent programs both illustrate this pattern.

Fifth, *dual-use research governance*. We should observe the expansion of export control lists, entity lists, and research security screening. The US Entity List grew from ~1,000 entities in 2018 to over 3,000 by 2024, with many additions being research institutions and universities.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on the militarization of basic research begins from a position of structural exclusion: African states and research institutions are not the primary militarizers of basic research, but they are profoundly affected by the militarization that occurs in the Global North and in China. The core African insight, developed by Rodney (1972) in his analysis of how European colonialism underdeveloped Africa, is that the global production of knowledge is not neutral but is shaped by power relations that extract value from the periphery. When DARPA funds AI research or China's 863 Program funds quantum computing, the research questions, methods, and personnel are oriented toward the strategic priorities of those states, not toward African development challenges such as malaria, agricultural productivity, or climate adaptation. African researchers who participate in these programs—whether through collaborations, training, or talent recruitment—find their work shaped by external agendas. The concept of "epistemic sovereignty," developed by African scholars including Grovogui (2006) and Mbembe (2001), captures this: the right of African societies to define their own research questions and knowledge priorities. The militarization of basic research in the North also drives the "brain drain" of African scientists, who are recruited into defense-funded labs and rarely return. Bayart (2009) and Mamdani (1996) have analyzed how African states' own research capacities were weakened by colonial and post-colonial structures, leaving them dependent on externally defined research agendas. The African perspective also notes that African states' own military research—such as South Africa's historical nuclear program or current cybersecurity initiatives—represents a different trajectory, one shaped by post-colonial security concerns rather than great-power competition. The key occlusion in the African perspective is that it can understate the agency of African researchers who successfully navigate and redirect Northern research agendas, and it may overstate the coherence of "African" research priorities given the continent's diversity. What the African perspective reveals that others miss is the *cognitive injustice* embedded in the global research system: the militarization of basic research is not merely a security issue but a question of who has the power to define what counts as knowledge worth producing.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames the militarization of basic research as a necessary response to US technological hegemony and a legitimate exercise of state sovereignty. Chinese scholars and officials argue that the US has always militarized basic research—ARPANET, GPS, and the internet itself originated in defense research—and that China's Military-Civil Fusion (□□□□) strategy merely levels the playing field. The "catch-up" framing (□□) is central: China must develop indigenous defense research capacity because reliance on foreign technology is a strategic vulnerability, as demonstrated by US export controls on semiconductors and AI. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that US claims of "open science" are hypocritical

given the military origins of much US basic research, and that China's state-directed research model is more efficient and coherent than the fragmented US system. The occlusion in this perspective is its tendency to downplay the coercive aspects of state-directed research (pressure on researchers, restrictions on academic freedom) and to frame all US research security measures as containment rather than legitimate security concerns. What it reveals is the *asymmetry* in global research governance: the rules of "open science" were written by states that had already militarized their own research bases.

Russian: The Russian perspective on the militarization of basic research is shaped by the Soviet legacy of the military-industrial complex (VPK) and the post-Soviet "catch-up" imperative. Russian scholars and officials frame innovation statecraft as a matter of national survival: Russia must maintain military-technological parity with the US and NATO despite economic constraints. The concept of "technological sovereignty" (технологический суверенитет) is central, and state corporations (Rostec, Rosatom, Roscosmos) play a dominant role in directing research. The Russian perspective emphasizes "leapfrogging"—using military research to compensate for civilian industrial weakness, as in hypersonics and electronic warfare. The occlusion is the tendency to overstate Russian research capacity and to understate the brain drain of Russian scientists and the degradation of civilian research institutions. What it reveals is the *persistence* of military-industrial research structures even after regime change, and the difficulty of converting military research into civilian innovation.

Western: The Western (primarily US) perspective frames defense research as a public good that produces civilian spillovers. The "linear model" justification—basic research funded by defense agencies produces civilian benefits (internet, GPS, microwave ovens)—remains influential in US science policy discourse. The self-critique within this perspective focuses on the "military-industrial-academic complex" (Leslie 1993), "mission creep," and the tension between open science norms and security requirements. The recent "research security" turn represents a new phase: the US government now frames the problem not as militarization but as *protection* of militarized research from foreign exploitation. The occlusion is the tendency to treat US defense research as natural or benevolent while framing other states' equivalent programs as threats. What it reveals is the *normative* dimension of research governance: the US has developed sophisticated frameworks for balancing openness and security, even if imperfectly.

UN: The UN perspective emphasizes science and technology for development, as articulated in SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and the UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers (2017). The militarization of basic research is seen as diverting resources and talent from sustainable development goals, and as undermining the "right to science" (Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, interpreted by UNESCO). The UN perspective stresses open science, international collaboration, and equitable access to research outputs. The occlusion is the UN's limited enforcement capacity and its tendency to treat science policy as technocratic rather than political. What it reveals is the *global public good* dimension of basic research: when research is militarized, the entire world loses access to knowledge that could address shared challenges.

SECTION 2.3 — KEY IDEA 2: Talent Circulation — Brain Drain vs Brain Gain and State Strategies for Attracting Talent

Bolded Causal Claim: States that successfully attract and retain high-skill scientific talent generate compounding innovation advantages, while states that lose talent through emigration experience not merely a quantitative shortfall but a qualitative hollowing-out of their research ecosystems, because talent is not a

fungible input but a networked, cumulative, and institutionally embedded asset.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three channels that interact and reinforce one another. The first is the *direct productivity channel*: high-skill researchers produce patents, publications, and trained doctoral students at rates that far exceed median researchers, and their departure removes not only their own output but the mentorship and laboratory infrastructure they sustained. Docquier and Marfouk (2006) established that the emigration of tertiary-educated workers from developing countries is highly selective, concentrated in fields with the highest private returns, and that the resulting brain drain is not a random sample of the educated population but a skewed extraction of the most productive individuals. The second channel is the *network and collaboration channel*: scientific knowledge is produced through dense, trust-based networks of co-authorship, conference interaction, and informal exchange. When a critical mass of researchers departs, the network fragments, and the remaining researchers lose access to the tacit knowledge, methodological innovations, and international visibility that the emigrants carried. This is not simply a reduction in headcount but a structural break in the social fabric of the research community. Gibson and McKenzie (2011) demonstrated that even when emigrants maintain transnational ties, the intensity and quality of collaboration with home-country colleagues declines over time, and the "brain gain" from return migration is weaker than the "brain drain" from departure because returnees face re-integration barriers, outdated equipment, and institutional dysfunction. The third channel is the *institutional feedback channel*: research universities and national laboratories depend on a critical mass of senior researchers to attract graduate students, secure grants, and maintain accreditation. When senior talent departs, the institution's capacity to train the next generation erodes, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of decline. The state's role in this mechanism is not passive: governments shape talent flows through visa policy, research funding, university governance, and targeted recruitment programs. The Chinese Thousand Talents Plan (2008–), the Russian "Global Education" program, and the European Research Council's consolidation grants are all instruments designed to manipulate this mechanism by altering the relative attractiveness of different national research environments. The mechanism is therefore not simply market-driven but politically constructed: states compete to shape the incentive structures that determine where talent locates, and the outcomes reflect policy choices about investment in research infrastructure, academic freedom, and career pathways.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism operates most strongly under three conditions. First, when the emigrating talent is concentrated in fields with high fixed costs of research infrastructure (particle physics, semiconductor fabrication, genomics), because the departure of a single senior researcher can disable an entire laboratory. Second, when the home country lacks institutional mechanisms for absorbing and productively employing returnees, so that emigration becomes effectively permanent. Third, when the destination country offers not merely higher salaries but superior research ecosystems—funding stability, equipment access, and freedom from political interference—that make return migration irrational even for patriotic researchers. The mechanism weakens when emigrants maintain strong transnational ties that facilitate knowledge transfer, when home countries invest in diaspora engagement programs, and when research is increasingly collaborative and distributed across borders, reducing the penalty of physical absence. The mechanism also has an important temporal dimension: short-term brain drain can produce long-term brain gain if emigrants return with enhanced skills, networks, and capital, but this requires specific institutional conditions—research funding, career structures, and political stability—that many developing countries lack.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe several patterns. Countries with high rates of tertiary-educated emigration should show declining research output per capita in the fields most affected, controlling for funding levels. Return migration programs should show higher success rates when accompanied by institutional reforms that address the push factors that drove emigration in the first

place. Targeted recruitment programs like the Thousand Talents Plan should show measurable increases in high-impact publications and patents in the recruiting country, but with lags reflecting the time needed for researchers to establish laboratories and train students. We should also observe that talent flows are increasingly bidirectional and circular rather than unidirectional, particularly between the United States and China, where researchers move multiple times over their careers. The data on international student flows, research collaboration counts, and patent citations by country should reveal these patterns, though measurement challenges remain, particularly in distinguishing "brain drain" from "brain circulation" and in accounting for the quality differential between emigrants and stayers.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on talent circulation is shaped by the continent's experience of sustained, structurally embedded brain drain that has depleted research capacity for decades. African scholars have long argued that brain drain is not a natural market outcome but a product of colonial educational structures, post-colonial underinvestment, and global economic inequalities that make emigration the rational choice for the most talented. The African vantage point reveals that the "brain gain" framing—celebrated in Western policy circles—often masks a transfer of human capital from poor to rich countries that reinforces global inequality. African scholars such as Mamdani (2007) have emphasized that the loss of academic talent is not merely an economic loss but a political one: the erosion of the intellectual class that could sustain democratic governance, critical inquiry, and policy-relevant research. The African perspective also highlights the gendered dimensions of talent flows, as female researchers face additional barriers to mobility and return. What the African vantage point reveals that others miss is that talent circulation is not a neutral process of matching skills to opportunities but a structured extraction that reproduces global hierarchies, and that "brain gain" for destination countries is often "brain drain" for origin countries in ways that aggregate statistics obscure.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames talent circulation through the lens of national rejuvenation and strategic competition. China's Thousand Talents Plan and its successors are understood not as predatory recruitment but as legitimate efforts to reverse historical brain drain and build indigenous innovation capacity. The Chinese view emphasizes that talent flows are bidirectional and that China's growing research ecosystem now attracts foreign researchers, creating a more balanced global talent market. The occlusion is the program's role in technology transfer and its intersection with research security concerns in destination countries.

Russian: The Russian perspective emphasizes "catch-up" modernization and the state's role in directing talent toward strategic priorities. Russian scholars note that the post-Soviet brain drain was catastrophic for research capacity and that state-led recruitment and retention programs are necessary to rebuild. The Russian view tends to treat talent as a strategic resource to be mobilized by the state, with less emphasis on individual career autonomy.

Western: The Western perspective has shifted from celebrating brain gain to anxieties about talent competition and research security. The United States, in particular, has moved from welcoming foreign researchers to restricting their access through visa policies and research security frameworks. The Western self-critique acknowledges that restrictive policies may damage the open research ecosystem that attracted talent in the first place, creating a tension between security and competitiveness.

UN: The UN perspective frames talent circulation through the lens of science for development and SDG 9. The UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers (2017) emphasizes the right to

science and the need for equitable access to research opportunities. The UN view stresses that talent flows should benefit both origin and destination countries and that international collaboration is essential for addressing global challenges. The occlusion is the UN's limited capacity to influence national talent policies.

SECTION 2.4 — KEY IDEA 3: The Securitization of Academia — Research Security, Visa Restrictions, and the Erosion of Scientific Collaboration

Bolded Causal Claim: The securitization of academic research—through visa restrictions, research security frameworks, and the closure of collaborative programs—has transformed universities from open knowledge-producing institutions into contested spaces of strategic competition, eroding the transnational collaboration that historically drove scientific progress while producing uncertain security gains.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through a feedback loop between threat perception, policy response, and institutional adaptation. The first stage is *threat construction*: policymakers and intelligence agencies frame certain research collaborations, particularly those involving Chinese researchers and institutions, as vectors for technology transfer and intellectual property theft. This framing draws on documented cases of espionage and unauthorized technology transfer, but also on broader anxieties about China's rise and the erosion of Western technological dominance. The second stage is *policy institutionalization*: governments translate threat perceptions into concrete instruments—visa restrictions for researchers from designated countries, research security offices at universities, disclosure requirements for foreign funding and affiliations, and the closure of programs like Confucius Institutes. The United States' National Security Presidential Memorandum 33 (NSPM-33, 2021) and the subsequent implementation guidance from the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) exemplify this institutionalization, requiring universities to develop research security programs and report on foreign talent recruitment program participation. The third stage is *institutional adaptation*: universities, facing compliance burdens and reputational risks, adopt defensive postures—screening applicants, restricting collaborations, and in some cases self-censoring research topics. This adaptation is not uniform: elite institutions with large international student populations and extensive federal funding face different incentives than smaller institutions. The fourth stage is *erosion of collaboration*: as barriers accumulate, the volume and quality of international research collaboration declines, particularly in sensitive fields like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and advanced materials. Marginson (2022) has documented how the securitization of academia in the United States and allied countries has produced a "chilling effect" on international collaboration, with researchers self-censoring to avoid scrutiny and universities declining to host visiting scholars from designated countries. The mechanism is self-reinforcing: as collaboration declines, the remaining ties become more suspect, justifying further restrictions. The mechanism also has a *displacement effect*: restrictions in one country may redirect talent and collaboration to other countries, potentially strengthening competitors rather than enhancing security. The mechanism is not simply top-down: it involves interactions between government agencies, university administrators, researchers, and funding agencies, each with different interests and risk tolerances.

Scope Conditions: The mechanism operates most strongly when three conditions coincide. First, when there is a high level of geopolitical tension between the restricting country and the target country, creating a permissive environment for securitization. Second, when the research in question has clear dual-use applications or falls within sectors designated as critical for national security. Third, when universities are heavily dependent on federal funding, giving the government leverage to enforce compliance. The mechanism weakens when research is basic rather than applied, when collaborations are long-standing and involve trusted partners, and when the economic costs of restriction are high—such as in fields where foreign researchers

constitute a large share of the workforce. The mechanism also varies across national contexts: the United States, with its large research enterprise and significant Chinese student population, faces different trade-offs than smaller countries with less research capacity and fewer international students. The mechanism has a *temporal asymmetry*: restrictions can be imposed quickly but are difficult to reverse, because the trust and institutional relationships that enable collaboration take years to build and can be destroyed rapidly.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe several patterns. Visa denial rates for researchers from designated countries should increase following the implementation of research security frameworks. The volume of co-authored publications between researchers in the restricting country and the target country should decline, particularly in sensitive fields. Universities should show increased compliance costs and administrative burden related to research security. We should also observe a "chilling effect" on self-reported research topics and collaboration patterns, as researchers avoid areas that might attract scrutiny. The data on research collaboration counts should reveal these trends, though measurement challenges include distinguishing security-driven declines from other factors such as funding shifts or pandemic disruptions. We should also observe displacement effects: increased collaboration between the target country and third countries, and increased recruitment of researchers from the target country by competitor nations.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on the securitization of academia is shaped by the continent's position as a peripheral participant in global research networks, vulnerable to both exclusion and instrumentalization. African scholars note that research security frameworks developed in Western countries are often applied indiscriminately to African researchers and institutions, subjecting them to heightened scrutiny and visa restrictions that reflect racialized assumptions about risk rather than evidence-based assessment. The African vantage point reveals that securitization is not a neutral process of risk management but a mechanism of boundary-drawing that reinforces global hierarchies: Western institutions define the terms of legitimate collaboration, and African researchers must navigate increasingly complex compliance requirements to access research opportunities. African scholars such as Aning and Danso (2018) have highlighted that the erosion of open collaboration disproportionately harms researchers from the Global South, who depend on international partnerships for access to equipment, funding, and publication venues. The African perspective also emphasizes the *opportunity cost* of securitization: resources devoted to compliance and security screening are resources diverted from research capacity building. What the African vantage point reveals that others miss is that the securitization of academia is not merely a bilateral US-China issue but a global restructuring of knowledge production that marginalizes already peripheral research communities, and that the "research security" framing can serve as a pretext for excluding researchers from the Global South under the guise of risk management.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames the securitization of academia as a form of "academic McCarthyism" and a violation of the principles of open science and academic freedom that Western countries have historically championed. Chinese scholars and officials argue that visa restrictions and research security frameworks are discriminatory, targeting Chinese researchers based on nationality rather than individual risk assessment. The Chinese view emphasizes the hypocrisy of Western countries that benefited from open collaboration with China during the period of China's technological catch-up, only to restrict collaboration once China became a competitor. The occlusion is the documented cases of technology transfer and intellectual property theft that have motivated Western security concerns.

Russian: The Russian perspective emphasizes the state's role in protecting research from foreign interference and the importance of maintaining sovereign control over strategic technologies. Russian scholars note

that Western countries have long restricted technology transfer to Russia and that Russia's own research security measures are a legitimate response to geopolitical pressure. The Russian view tends to treat academic collaboration as an extension of statecraft, with less emphasis on the autonomy of researchers and institutions.

Western: The Western perspective is characterized by internal tension between security imperatives and commitments to academic freedom and open science. Western scholars and policymakers acknowledge that securitization carries costs—reduced collaboration, chilled research environments, and potential damage to the innovation ecosystem—but argue that these costs are necessary to protect against documented threats of technology transfer and espionage. The Western self-critique, articulated by scholars such as Marginson (2022), emphasizes that over-securitization can be counterproductive, undermining the very openness that makes Western research institutions attractive to global talent. The Western view is not monolithic: it includes both hawkish voices advocating for decoupling and liberal voices warning against the erosion of academic freedom.

UN: The UN perspective frames the securitization of academia through the lens of science as a global public good and the right to science. The UNESCO Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers (2017) emphasizes the importance of international collaboration and the free circulation of researchers. The UN view stresses that security concerns must be balanced against the need for open science to address global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and sustainable development. The occlusion is the UN's limited capacity to mediate between competing national security claims and its tendency to treat research policy as a technical rather than political issue. What the UN perspective reveals is the *collective action problem* of research security: unilateral restrictions by one country may be rational from a national security perspective but are collectively suboptimal, as they reduce the global stock of knowledge available to address shared challenges.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — IP Transfer and Forced Technology Transfer Debates

Bolded Causal Claim: State-structured technology transfer can compress the learning curve of latecomer economies, but when it is perceived as coerced or asymmetric it converts commercial exchange into a security externality, provoking retaliatory controls that shrink the very channels through which knowledge diffuses.

Mechanism: Technology transfer is not a single event but a bundle of tacit and codified knowledge moving through markets, organizations, and people. Intellectual property—patents, trade secrets, copyrights, trademarks—is only the codified tip; tacit know-how resides in engineers, suppliers, standards committees, and production routines. Transfer occurs through licensing agreements, joint-venture equity and governance, original equipment and design manufacturing relationships, technical assistance, training, reverse engineering, hiring, research collaboration, standards adoption, and procurement offsets. The "forced" element arises when state power conditions market access on disclosure: joint-venture requirements in strategic sectors, administrative licensing, merger-review leverage, standards that require local partners, or implicit threats that make refusal commercially irrational. Yet firms also voluntarily trade technology for market share, and the line between coercion and bargaining is empirically contested. China's position, reflected in Ministry of Science and Technology reporting and official statements, is that no law requires transfer, that foreign firms choose to enter the market, and that accusations reflect techno-nationalist anxiety rather than legal reality. The United States position, reflected in Section 301 investigations and subsequent export-control expansion, is that structural coercion operates through market size and regulatory discretion even where no explicit statute mandates disclosure. The mechanism's developmental effect depends on absorptive capac-

ity: recipients gain blueprints but not necessarily capability, and without engineering workforces, supplier ecosystems, and R&D institutions transfer yields assembly rather than innovation. Conversely, for frontier firms, fear of leakage reduces collaboration, raising costs and slowing diffusion. The result is a feedback loop: perceived coercion produces securitization, securitization produces decoupling, and decoupling reduces the global stock of shared knowledge.

Scope Conditions: Transfer accelerates catch-up when the technology is mature and codifiable; when the recipient has an engineering workforce and supplier networks; when intellectual-property enforcement is credible enough to encourage follow-on licensing but not so strong as to block learning; when the state supports diffusion through standards, procurement, and finance; and when geopolitical trust is sufficient to sustain engagement. It fails or backfires when the technology is frontier or heavily tacit; when the recipient lacks absorptive capacity; when transfer is a one-off transaction rather than embedded in research and development; or when security framing dominates commercial calculation. Sector matters: manufacturing transfer is easier than semiconductor, artificial-intelligence, or biotechnology transfer. Firm strategy matters: multinationals may segment intellectual property, transferring older generations while retaining crown jewels. Time horizon matters: short-term output gains can coexist with long-term dependency if transfer is not accompanied by indigenous capability formation. The debate also turns on whether "forced" is defined legally, structurally, or rhetorically, and each definition produces a different empirical and policy conclusion.

Observable Implications: Rising domestic value added in Chinese manufacturing; patenting by Chinese firms in sectors historically dependent on foreign technology; trends in licensing payments and royalties; co-invention and co-patenting patterns; corporate disclosures of joint-venture technology clauses; relocation or segmentation of research and development; expanded use of export controls and entity lists; trade-secret litigation; and shifts in high-technology trade balances. National Science Foundation Science and Engineering Indicators and Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology reports provide comparative metrics on research and development intensity, patenting, and international collaboration. In African economies, analogous implications appear in local-content requirements in mining and telecommunications, where technology-transfer clauses may or may not produce domestic capability.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):
African (primary): For African states, the intellectual-property transfer debate is not primarily a bilateral United States–China dispute but a question of whether technology enters African economies at all, and on what terms. Historically, colonial and postcolonial extraction meant that African economies exported raw materials and imported manufactured goods, with little transfer of productive knowledge; Rodney's underdevelopment thesis and Nkrumah's neocolonialism frame technology as embedded in unequal exchange. Contemporary African scholarship and policy, including the African Union's Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa, stress that the problem is often absence of transfer, weak absorptive capacity, and brain drain rather than "forced" transfer. African governments use local-content requirements, technology-transfer clauses in mining and telecommunications contracts, and procurement preferences to extract knowledge from foreign investors, but bargaining power is limited by fragmented markets and dependence on foreign direct investment. The African vantage point reveals two occlusions in the United States–China debate: first, it treats technology as a strategic asset to be hoarded or seized, whereas many African economies need diffusion to build basic industrial capability; second, it ignores the politics of knowledge ownership in sectors such as agriculture, health, and data, where foreign firms may extract value from African genetic resources or data without reciprocal capacity building. African scholars such as Tamale and Oyěwùmí would add that intellectual-property regimes often encode Eurocentric assumptions about individual authorship and property, marginalizing collective and indigenous knowledge systems. Thus from an African perspective,

the relevant question is not only whether transfer is forced but whether global intellectual-property and investment rules permit equitable, capacity-building transfer at all.
Chinese: China frames technology transfer as a normal feature of market access and industrial upgrading, not coercion. Official reports emphasize rising domestic research and development and patenting as evidence of indigenous capability. The sovereignty framing holds that development path and intellectual-property policy are sovereign choices, and accusations of forced transfer are seen as attempts to constrain China's rise. The occlusion is that this framing can understate the structural leverage of market size and regulatory discretion, and can overstate the voluntariness of firm decisions made under predictable commercial pressure.
Russian: Russia's perspective is shaped by catch-up modernization and sanctions. Technology transfer is viewed as a strategic necessity, and state-led acquisition and adaptation are treated as legitimate. Intellectual-property norms are secondary to security and sovereignty. The occlusion is that transfer without absorptive capacity and institutional trust can produce dependency rather than capability, and that weak commercialization limits the value of acquired knowledge.
Western: The Western perspective centers on innovation incentives, fair competition, and research security. Forced technology transfer is seen as undermining World Trade Organization rules and distorting markets. Yet Western self-critique acknowledges that firms voluntarily traded technology for market access and that intellectual-property regimes can be overly restrictive. The occlusion is that this perspective may overstate coercion, understate legitimate development policy, and treat globally asymmetric rules as neutral.
UN: The United Nations emphasizes technology transfer for development, including Sustainable Development Goal 9 and flexibilities under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. It stresses equity and access, but has limited enforcement capacity and tends to depoliticize structural asymmetries. The occlusion is the difficulty of mediating between security claims and development needs, and a tendency to treat research policy as technical rather than political.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — National Innovation Systems: The Institutional Bases of Long-Term Technological Advantage

Bolded Causal Claim: Sustained technological advantage arises from the institutional coupling of knowledge production, firm capability, finance, and state coordination; research and development spending alone predicts little unless embedded in a system that converts research into diffused, adaptive capability.

Mechanism: National innovation system theory treats innovation as an interactive, institutionally embedded process rather than a linear pipeline from laboratory to market. The mechanism operates through several coupled channels. Knowledge production: universities and public laboratories generate basic and applied research, but value depends on channels that move findings into firms. Diffusion and learning: supplier networks, labor mobility, standards bodies, extension services, and professional communities translate codified knowledge into practice. Demand articulation: procurement, regulation, and consumer markets shape which technologies are developed and scaled. Finance: patient capital supports high-risk, long-horizon research and development, while venture capital and development banks bridge the gap between invention and commercialization. Human capital: science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education, researcher density, and immigration determine whether knowledge can be absorbed and recombined. Coordination: state agencies align priorities, reduce fragmentation, build shared platforms, and manage trade-offs between openness and security. Institutional adaptation: policy learning, feedback from failure, and revision of rules allow the system to evolve. Path dependence is central: early specialization shapes later possibilities, and latecomers can leapfrog only where absorptive capacity exists. The state's role varies across models: developmental states coordinate tightly; liberal market economies rely on decentralized firms and universities;

authoritarian systems may direct resources rapidly but risk politicizing research and suppressing exploratory inquiry. Breznitz's work on innovation and the state and Weiss's analysis of techno-nationalism and techno-globalism both point to the same underlying mechanism: institutions determine whether knowledge becomes capability.

Scope Conditions: National innovation system theory explains broad-based, sustained innovation in medium-to-large economies with institutional capacity. It is less predictive for frontier breakthroughs driven by small teams or global networks; for digital platforms where national boundaries are porous; for resource-rich economies with weak diversification; and for fragile states where coordination is impossible. The "national" container may also be too bounded where regional or transnational systems dominate, as in the European Union or, potentially, the African Continental Free Trade Area. Institutional quality matters: corruption, weak intellectual-property enforcement, politicized universities, or captured regulators can nullify high research and development spending. Scale matters: small economies may specialize rather than build full systems. Time horizon matters: institutional coupling takes decades, and short-term spending spikes do not create systems. The theory also struggles to account for informal innovation, which may be significant in economies where formal research institutions are weak.

Observable Implications: Research and development expenditure as a share of gross domestic product; researcher density; the composition of gross expenditure on research and development between business and government; patent quality measured by citations and international families; university-industry co-patenting; venture-capital depth; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics graduates; high-technology export sophistication; regional clustering; and the presence of policy instruments such as grants, tax credits, and procurement preferences. National Science Foundation Science and Engineering Indicators and Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology reports allow cross-country comparison. A key diagnostic is the gap between "innovation without commercialization," where patenting is high but productivity gains are low, and "commercialization without innovation," where assembly and manufacturing are strong but indigenous capability is weak.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African national innovation systems are shaped by colonial institutional inheritances: universities often oriented toward administrative and legal training, economies specialized in extraction, and weak linkages between research and industry. Post-independence projects—Nkrumah's industrialization, Nyerere's ujamaa, and other state-led development strategies—had mixed results, and structural adjustment weakened state capacity in many countries. Contemporary African innovation frequently occurs in informal sectors and through frugal adaptations such as mobile money and off-grid energy, which standard Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development metrics undercount. African scholars, including Bayart on extraversion, Mamdani on the bifurcated state, and Rodney on underdevelopment, highlight that innovation systems cannot be imported as templates; they must address power, inequality, and sovereignty. The African perspective reveals that national innovation system theory's "national" container may be ill-fitting where states are fragmented and economies are regionally integrated or externally dependent. It also highlights gendered and informal knowledge production, emphasized by scholars such as Tamale and Oyěwùmí, which patent counts and formal research metrics often render invisible. From this vantage point, capacity building, institutional repair, and structural transformation matter as much as research and development spending, and innovation must be judged by whether it broadens economic sovereignty rather than by citation counts alone.

Chinese: China's national innovation system is state-led, with strong coordination, industrial policy, and scale; the "whole-nation system" has been mobilized for strategic technologies. It has achieved notable suc-

cess in applied research and commercialization, while challenges remain in basic research, institutional trust, and the risk of overcapacity or politicization. The occlusion is that state direction can accelerate targeted sectors but may suppress exploratory research and create inefficiencies where political priorities override scientific judgment.

Russian: Russia retains a strong basic-science legacy but suffers from weak commercialization; state corporations dominate, and sanctions have pushed import substitution. Innovation statecraft is framed as catch-up and sovereignty. The occlusion is that politicization, brain drain, and weak private finance can prevent research from becoming economic capability.

Western: The Western model is market-driven, with strong universities, venture capital, and academic freedom. Self-critique notes underinvestment in public goods, inequality, and reliance on immigrant talent; strategic competition has prompted renewed state intervention, as in semiconductor legislation. The occlusion is that this model may be universalized as the normative standard, obscuring the role of state coordination and the costs of market-driven fragmentation.

UN: The United Nations frames science and technology for development through Sustainable Development Goal 9, capacity building, and open innovation. It stresses that national innovation systems should serve inclusive development, but the national framing may neglect global public goods and the needs of least developed countries. The occlusion is limited enforcement capacity and a technocratic tendency to treat innovation policy as neutral capacity building rather than a site of political contestation.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on scientific statecraft and innovation decoupling begins from a position that the other four perspectives systematically under-theorize: the global division of labor in knowledge production is not a recent distortion introduced by US-China rivalry but a constitutive feature of the modern world system, one whose origins lie in colonial extraction and whose contemporary form is the "brain drain" and the peripheralization of research capacity. From this standpoint, the decoupling of American and Chinese science is not the central event; it is a reconfiguration among core powers that leaves the structural position of African knowledge production largely unchanged, and in some respects worsened, because the competition for talent and the securitization of research flows redirect resources and attention away from the capacity-building agendas that African states and scholars have long demanded.

The theoretical lineage here runs through several distinct but converging traditions. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) established the foundational claim that underdevelopment is not a stage but a relation: the same processes that developed Europe simultaneously underdeveloped Africa, including the extraction of human capital and the suppression of autonomous technological development. Kwame Nkrumah's concept of neo-colonialism (1965) extended this to the post-independence period, arguing that formal sovereignty masked continued dependency in science, technology, and economic structure. Amílcar Cabral's writings on culture and liberation (1973) insisted that the struggle for independence was simultaneously a struggle over knowledge and epistemology, not merely over territory. Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) analyzed the psychological and epistemic dimensions of colonialism, including the internalization of metropolitan standards of scientific legitimacy. Julius Nyerere's Arusha Declaration (1967) and subsequent writings framed self-reliance (ujamaa) as requiring indigenous research capacity rather than imported expertise. These thinkers collectively establish that the "brain drain" is not a market failure to be corrected by better incentives but a structural feature of a world economy that rewards the concentration of knowledge in the metropole.

Contemporary African scholarship has developed this lineage in several directions. Siba Grovogui's work on international relations theory and sovereignty (2006, 2016) argues that the international order is constituted through racialized hierarchies of knowledge and authority, and that African states are positioned as objects rather than subjects of global governance, including in science and technology regimes. Achille Mbembe's writings on necropolitics and the postcolony (2001, 2017) analyze how African bodies and minds are governed through extractive logics that extend to the contemporary "brain drain" and the commodification of African genetic and ecological data. Jean-François Bayart's concept of the "politics of the belly" (1993) and his broader work on extraversion (2000) examine how African elites have historically navigated external dependency, including in science and education, producing a political economy in which research agendas are shaped by donor priorities rather than domestic needs. Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject* (1996) and subsequent work on the university in Africa (2018) document how colonial institutional inheritances—the bifurcated state, the mission-educated elite, the externally funded research institute—continue to structure African knowledge production, and he has been a vocal critic of the "decolonize the university" debates' tendency to focus on curriculum while neglecting the material conditions of research. Kwesi Aning and Ransford Danso have written extensively on African security governance and the securitization of development, including how external security frameworks reshape research priorities in African universities. Sylvia Tamale's work on decolonization and African feminisms (2020) insists that knowledge production is gendered and that the "brain drain" has differential effects on women scientists. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) and subsequent work challenge the epistemic foundations of Western social science, arguing that categories taken as universal are culturally specific, with implications for how "innovation" and "development" are measured and pursued.

The mechanism through which this perspective explains scientific statecraft differs fundamentally from the other four. Where the Western perspective sees a competition among national innovation systems, the African perspective sees a global knowledge economy in which the "national" frame itself is part of the problem: African states are not competing on equal terms because the rules of the game—patent regimes, citation metrics, journal gatekeeping, funding architectures—were designed by and for the core. The "brain drain" is thus not merely the emigration of skilled individuals but the systematic transfer of the capacity to produce knowledge from periphery to core, a process that Rodney and Nkrumah identified as central to underdevelopment. The contemporary securitization of academia—visa restrictions, research security screening, the closure of Confucius Institutes—does not primarily affect African scholars in the same way it affects Chinese researchers, but it does reshape the global research landscape in ways that reduce the already limited opportunities for African participation: as US-China collaboration contracts, the "third country" partnerships that African institutions might have leveraged become scarcer, and the global research agenda becomes more narrowly defined by the security concerns of the two largest powers.

The talent circulation debate illustrates this mechanism concretely. The "brain drain vs. brain gain" framing, dominant in Western policy discourse, treats migration as a flow that can be optimized through diaspora engagement policies, return incentives, and "brain circulation." African scholars such as Aning and Danso have critiqued this framing for assuming that the problem is one of individual incentives rather than structural inequality: the "gain" to receiving countries is permanent and cumulative, while the "circulation" is episodic and contingent. The Thousand Talents Plan, from an African vantage, is not merely a Chinese recruitment program but an instance of a broader pattern in which core and semi-peripheral states compete for the same pool of mobile talent, a competition that African states cannot win on financial terms and that therefore deepens the structural disadvantage. The "brain gain" that China experiences is, from this perspective, a "brain drain" from Africa and other peripheral regions that is rendered invisible by the bilateral framing of

US-China competition.

The IP transfer and forced technology transfer debates reveal a further dimension. The Western grievance about Chinese "forced technology transfer" through joint ventures is, from an African perspective, a dispute among core powers about the terms of technology access that leaves untouched the more fundamental question of how African states and firms can access technology at all. The TRIPS agreement and the broader intellectual property regime are experienced in Africa not as a neutral framework but as a barrier to industrialization and health access, as the HIV/AIDS antiretroviral debates of the early 2000s demonstrated. The "forced transfer" framing, in this view, presupposes a property right that is itself the product of a particular historical and political settlement, one that African states had little role in shaping. Grovogui's argument about the racialized constitution of international law is relevant here: the IP regime is not merely a technical arrangement but a distribution of authority that reflects and reproduces global hierarchies.

The national innovation systems literature, particularly Breznitz (2007) on Israel, Taiwan, and Ireland, is often invoked as a model for African development. The African perspective is skeptical of such transplantation. Breznitz's cases are small, open economies with specific geopolitical patrons and diaspora networks; their "innovation" strategies were enabled by access to US and European markets and by security relationships that African states do not enjoy. The "national innovation system" framework, developed in the context of OECD economies, assumes a set of institutional preconditions—strong universities, venture capital, intellectual property enforcement, skilled labor markets—that are absent or weak in most African contexts. The African critique is not that innovation is unimportant but that the framework treats innovation as a national capacity that can be built through policy, when in fact it is embedded in a global structure that systematically disadvantages peripheral economies. Weiss (2014) on the US national security state's role in innovation is read, from this vantage, as evidence that even the "market-driven" American model is in fact state-coordinated, which undermines the neoliberal advice often given to African states to "get the state out of the way."

What the African perspective contributes that the other four cannot is a structural and historical account of why the "decoupling" is not a disruption of a previously fair system but a reconfiguration of an already unequal one. It reveals that the US-China competition over research security and talent is, in part, a competition over who will control the next generation of global knowledge production, and that African participation in that competition is structurally constrained regardless of which power "wins." It also reveals the epistemic dimension: the categories used to measure innovation—patents, citations, R&D spending—are themselves products of a particular knowledge regime that may not capture African forms of knowledge and problem-solving. Mbembe's critique of the "universal" university and Oyěwùmí's critique of Western epistemic categories are relevant here. Marginson (2022) has argued that the global science system is characterized by hierarchical inclusion, in which peripheral participation is permitted on terms set by the core; the African perspective extends this by insisting that the hierarchy is not merely institutional but historical and racialized.

The occlusions of the African perspective are also important to acknowledge. First, by emphasizing structural constraint, it may understate the agency of African states and institutions in building research capacity: there are genuine success stories—South Africa's Square Kilometre Array participation, Kenya's mobile money innovation, Nigeria's Nollywood, the growing number of African-led research initiatives—that cannot be reduced to dependency. Second, the perspective may romanticize pre-colonial knowledge systems in ways that obscure their limitations for addressing contemporary challenges such as climate change, pandemic disease, and digital transformation. Third, the focus on global structure may lead to an underestimation of the role of domestic politics—corruption, authoritarianism, underinvestment in education—in constraining

African research capacity. Mamdani's critique of the African university is relevant here: the problem is not only external dependency but also internal governance failures. Fourth, the perspective may not fully engage with the strategic choices available to African states in a multipolar world: the rise of China as a research partner offers opportunities as well as risks, and the African position is not simply one of victimhood but of negotiation among competing external powers. Finally, the perspective's emphasis on equity and justice may sometimes come at the expense of analytical precision about mechanisms: "neo-colonialism" is a powerful framing but can be analytically blunt when applied to specific policy questions such as visa regimes or patent law.

In sum, the African perspective reframes the lesson's central topic from a bilateral competition into a global structural condition. It insists that scientific statecraft cannot be understood without reference to the colonial and neo-colonial history of knowledge production, that the "brain drain" is a mechanism of underdevelopment rather than a market imperfection, and that the securitization of academia, while primarily a US-China phenomenon, has global consequences that fall hardest on those already at the margins of the global knowledge economy. It is the longest and most developed perspective here because it is the one that the other four most systematically neglect: the Western, Chinese, Russian, and UN perspectives all take the nation-state and its innovation capacity as the primary unit of analysis, whereas the African perspective insists that the unit of analysis must be the global structure of knowledge production within which all national systems are embedded.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on scientific statecraft and innovation decoupling is organized around a sovereignty framing that treats science and technology as instruments of national rejuvenation and strategic autonomy. From this vantage, the decoupling of US-China research is not an unfortunate side effect of great-power competition but a deliberate strategy of containment by the United States, and China's response—talent recruitment, indigenous innovation, and the securitization of its own research base—is a legitimate exercise of sovereign self-defense.

The theoretical lineage draws on several sources. The concept of "indigenous innovation" (□□□□) became official policy in the 2006 Medium- and Long-Term Plan for the Development of Science and Technology, which identified reducing dependence on foreign technology as a strategic priority. This reflects a longer tradition of "catch-up" development theory, influenced by the East Asian developmental state model and by China's own experience of the "century of humiliation," in which technological backwardness was associated with national weakness. The Chinese perspective also draws on a Marxist-Leninist framework in which science is a productive force and technological development is a component of socialist modernization, as articulated in Deng Xiaoping's "science and technology are the primary productive forces" (1988). More recently, the concept of "new quality productive forces" (□□□□□) under Xi Jinping has elevated innovation to the center of economic and security strategy. Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology reports document the sustained growth in R&D spending, patent output, and STEM graduate numbers that underpin the claim that the innovation gap is closing.

The mechanism of talent circulation is central. The Thousand Talents Plan (2008) and its successor programs are framed not as "brain drain" from the West but as the legitimate recruitment of overseas Chinese scientists to contribute to national development. The Chinese perspective emphasizes that this is a standard practice of states seeking to upgrade their human capital, comparable to US immigration policies that historically attracted European scientists. The "brain drain" framing, from this vantage, is a Western grievance that pathologizes Chinese success in competing for talent. The securitization of academia is experienced

asymmetrically: Chinese researchers in the United States face visa restrictions, FBI investigations, and the "China Initiative" (2018-2022), which Chinese officials and scholars characterize as racial profiling and a violation of academic freedom. The closure of Confucius Institutes is framed as a politically motivated attack on cultural exchange rather than a legitimate research security measure.

On IP transfer, the Chinese perspective distinguishes between "forced" technology transfer and the voluntary technology sharing that occurs in joint ventures, which are governed by contract and Chinese law. The argument is that foreign firms choose to enter the Chinese market and accept technology-sharing arrangements as the price of access, and that the "forced" framing is a retrospective grievance that ignores the mutual benefits of these arrangements. The Western demand for IP protection is, from this vantage, an attempt to lock in technological advantage and prevent catch-up. The Chinese perspective also points to the historical record of Western technology transfer to China in the 1980s and 1990s, which was encouraged by Western governments as part of engagement strategies, suggesting that the current grievance is politically contingent.

The national innovation system is understood as state-led and mission-oriented, with the state playing a coordinating role that the Western market-driven model lacks. The "whole-nation system" (□□□□) for science and technology, inherited from the Soviet model but adapted to market conditions, is presented as a strength: it enables large-scale, long-term investments in strategic areas such as quantum computing, artificial intelligence, and space technology that market-driven systems might underfund. The Chinese perspective also emphasizes the scale of the research base: China now produces more scientific publications and patents than any other country, and the number of STEM graduates exceeds that of the United States. The argument is that quantity is translating into quality, and that the innovation gap is closing.

What the Chinese perspective contributes is a legitimate critique of the asymmetry in the global research order: the rules of intellectual property, technology transfer, and research collaboration were written by Western powers and are now being enforced against a rising competitor. It also highlights the costs of securitization for open science: the closure of collaboration channels harms not only Chinese researchers but the global scientific enterprise. The perspective is strongest in its critique of the "China Initiative" and the racialization of research security, which even Western scholars have criticized.

The occlusions are significant. The perspective tends to treat all Western research security measures as containment, which obscures legitimate concerns about espionage, IP theft, and the military applications of civilian research. It may understate the coercive elements of Chinese technology policy, including the role of state subsidies, market access conditionalities, and the integration of civilian and military research under the "military-civil fusion" strategy. The sovereignty framing can be used to justify restrictions on academic freedom, internet censorship, and the suppression of dissent within Chinese universities, which the perspective typically does not address. The "whole-nation system" may produce impressive outputs but also inefficiencies, duplication, and political interference in research agendas. Finally, the perspective's emphasis on national rejuvenation may obscure the global public goods dimension of science: climate research, pandemic preparedness, and basic science benefit from open collaboration that nationalist framing can undermine.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on scientific statecraft and innovation decoupling is shaped by the experience of the Soviet collapse, the "lost decade" of the 1990s, and the subsequent effort to rebuild state capacity in science and technology under conditions of strategic isolation. The framing is one of "catch-up" and "sovereignty," in which innovation is a matter of national survival and great-power status, and in which the West is seen as

both a model to emulate and a competitor to resist.

The theoretical lineage includes the Soviet tradition of "catch-up development," in which the state directs resources toward strategic technologies to close the gap with more advanced economies. This tradition, associated with the Stalinist industrialization model and later with the Soviet military-industrial complex, treats science as a strategic asset and the scientist as a servant of the state. The post-Soviet period saw a collapse of this system: funding collapsed, salaries plummeted, and a massive brain drain of scientists to the West and Israel occurred in the 1990s. The Putin-era response has been to rebuild state capacity through programs such as the "National Technology Initiative" (2014), the "Digital Economy" program, and the creation of research universities and innovation clusters such as Skolkovo (2010). The framing is explicitly geopolitical: innovation is linked to military modernization, energy security, and the assertion of Russian sovereignty in a unipolar world.

The mechanism of talent circulation is experienced primarily as loss. Russia's brain drain has been severe and sustained, particularly in physics, mathematics, and computer science. The state's response has included salary increases, housing programs, and the creation of "mega-grants" to attract diaspora scientists back. However, the effectiveness of these programs is limited by broader political and economic conditions, including sanctions, the war in Ukraine, and the constriction of academic freedom. The Russian perspective tends to frame the brain drain as a Western strategy of "poaching" Russian talent, which is a partial truth that obscures the domestic causes of emigration, including low salaries, corruption, and political repression.

The securitization of academia is experienced from the receiving end of Western sanctions and from the internal securitization of Russian science. Western sanctions following the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine have restricted Russian access to international research collaboration, equipment, and funding. The Russian response has been to deepen ties with China and other non-Western partners and to emphasize "technological sovereignty." Internally, the Russian state has increased control over research institutions, with the FSB playing a role in research security and the government designating certain research areas as sensitive. The perspective frames this as necessary protection against Western espionage and sabotage, but it also reflects a broader authoritarian turn in which academic freedom is subordinated to state security.

On IP transfer, the Russian perspective is shaped by the experience of technology denial: Western sanctions restrict access to advanced technologies, including semiconductors, aerospace components, and software. The Russian response has been to emphasize import substitution and the development of domestic alternatives, with mixed results. The "forced technology transfer" debate is less central to the Russian perspective than to the Chinese, because Russia is not a major destination for foreign direct investment in manufacturing. However, the broader question of technology access is central: Russia sees itself as a target of Western technology denial, which reinforces the sovereignty framing.

The national innovation system is understood as requiring strong state direction, given the weakness of private venture capital and the legacy of Soviet-era institutional structures. The "Skolkovo" innovation center, modeled on Silicon Valley, has had limited success, and the Russian perspective acknowledges that the transition from a state-directed to a market-driven innovation system has been difficult. The emphasis on military-industrial research reflects both the Soviet legacy and the current geopolitical context: a significant share of Russian R&D is defense-related, and the "military-civil fusion" concept, borrowed from China, has been discussed as a way to leverage defense research for civilian innovation.

What the Russian perspective contributes is an illustration of the costs of isolation and the limits of state-

directed innovation under authoritarian conditions. It highlights the vulnerability of research systems that depend on international collaboration and access to global technology markets. It also provides a cautionary tale about the securitization of science: the internal security apparatus's role in research governance can stifle the openness and risk-taking that innovation requires.

The occlusions are substantial. The perspective tends to attribute all difficulties to external hostility, obscuring the domestic causes of Russia's innovation deficit: the brain drain of the 1990s, the weakness of property rights, the dominance of state-owned enterprises, the suppression of independent research, and the diversion of resources to military spending. The "catch-up" framing may justify authoritarian control over science that undermines the very creativity it seeks to foster. The perspective may also overstate the success of the pivot to China: while Sino-Russian scientific collaboration has increased, it is asymmetric, with Russia in the junior partner position, and it cannot fully replace the lost Western collaboration. Finally, the perspective's emphasis on sovereignty may obscure the global public goods dimension of science and the potential for non-aligned, multilateral research cooperation.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on scientific statecraft and innovation decoupling is organized around the tension between two commitments: the openness of science as a global public good and the security of national innovation systems in an era of strategic competition. This tension is not new—it dates to the Cold War—but it has intensified with the rise of China and the recognition that the post-Cold War assumption of convergence was mistaken.

The theoretical lineage includes several traditions. The "linear model" of innovation, which posits a pipeline from basic research to applied research to development, underpinned postwar US science policy, including the creation of the National Science Foundation and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). Vannevar Bush's *Science, the Endless Frontier* (1945) established the foundational argument that basic research is a public good requiring government support and that scientific freedom is essential to national strength. The "triple helix" model of university-industry-government relations (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff) describes the institutional basis of innovation in advanced economies. More recently, the "weaponized interdependence" framework (Farrell and Newman, 2019) has been applied to science and technology, arguing that the United States can leverage its position in global research networks for strategic advantage. The "strategic competition" framing, articulated in the 2017 US National Security Strategy and subsequent documents, treats China as a "strategic competitor" and innovation as a domain of competition. NSF Science and Engineering Indicators track the shifting global distribution of research capacity, documenting the relative decline of US and European shares and the rise of China, which provides the empirical backdrop for the security turn. Marginson (2022) has argued that the global science system is characterized by hierarchical inclusion, a framing that the Western perspective tends to resist because it implies that Western dominance is structural rather than meritocratic.

The mechanism of the militarization of basic research is central to the Western perspective. DARPA, the Office of Naval Research (ONR), and their counterparts are presented as success stories: state-funded, mission-oriented research that produced the internet, GPS, and other transformative technologies. Linda Weiss's *America Inc.?* (2014) argues that the US national security state has been the hidden driver of American innovation, challenging the myth of market-driven technological development. The Western perspective also acknowledges the risks: the "dual-use" problem, in which civilian research has military applications, and the potential for security concerns to distort research agendas and stifle openness. The "research security" agenda—visa screening, disclosure requirements for foreign funding, the closure of Confucius Institutes—is

presented as a necessary response to documented cases of espionage and IP theft, but also as a source of self-critique: the "China Initiative" (2018-2022) was criticized by scientists and civil liberties groups for racial profiling and for chilling legitimate collaboration, and it was terminated in 2022.

The talent circulation debate is experienced as a dilemma. The United States has historically benefited from immigration of scientific talent—the "brain gain" that has been a pillar of American innovation. The securitization of academia threatens this advantage: visa restrictions and the perception of hostility toward Chinese researchers may drive talent to other countries or back to China. The Western perspective includes a self-critical strand that recognizes this cost: the "self-inflicted wound" argument, advanced by scientists and policy analysts, holds that excessive security measures may do more harm than good by undermining the openness that is the source of American scientific strength. The "China Initiative" is the primary case study for this self-critique.

On IP transfer, the Western perspective treats "forced technology transfer" as a genuine grievance: the requirement that foreign firms share technology as a condition of market access is seen as a violation of WTO rules and a threat to innovation incentives. The perspective also acknowledges complexity: technology transfer occurs through multiple channels, including voluntary joint ventures, supply chain integration, and cyber espionage, and the "forced" framing may obscure the role of Western firms in seeking access to the Chinese market. The debate about whether to restrict technology exports to China—through the Entity List, export controls on semiconductors, and investment screening—reflects a tension between protecting innovation and maintaining market access.

The national innovation system is understood as a hybrid of public research funding, university research, and private R&D, with the state playing a catalytic rather than directive role. The "market-driven" model is presented as a strength: it allows for rapid commercialization and adaptation, and it avoids the inefficiencies of state-directed research. However, the Western perspective has increasingly acknowledged the role of state coordination, particularly in response to Chinese competition: the CHIPS and Science Act (2022), the Inflation Reduction Act's clean energy provisions, and the "friend-shoring" agenda all represent a renewed state intervention in innovation. This is sometimes framed as a "new Washington consensus" that departs from the neoliberal orthodoxy of the 1990s and 2000s.

What the Western perspective contributes is a sophisticated account of the trade-offs between openness and security, and a genuine capacity for self-critique. The "China Initiative" case demonstrates that the Western research community can mobilize to correct excesses in security policy. The perspective also provides the most developed institutional analysis of how innovation systems actually work, drawing on decades of research in innovation studies.

The occlusions are significant. The perspective may universalize the Western model as the normative standard, obscuring the role of state coordination in its own success (as Weiss 2014 documents) and the costs of market-driven fragmentation. It may treat the "brain drain" as a natural advantage rather than a structural extraction from other regions. The "strategic competition" framing may crowd out cooperation on global challenges such as climate change and pandemic preparedness. The perspective's emphasis on research security may be applied asymmetrically: concerns about Chinese espionage are taken seriously, while the security implications of Western technology exports and the role of Western firms in enabling Chinese military modernization are less examined. Finally, the perspective may not fully engage with the African and other peripheral perspectives on the global knowledge economy, treating the US-China dyad as the primary frame of analysis.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The United Nations perspective on scientific statecraft and innovation decoupling is organized around the framework of science, technology, and innovation (STI) for sustainable development, articulated most prominently in Sustainable Development Goal 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure) and in the work of the UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD), UNESCO, and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). This perspective treats science and technology as global public goods that should serve inclusive development, and it is concerned with the distribution of STI capacity across countries rather than with great-power competition per se.

The theoretical lineage includes the "technology transfer for development" agenda, which dates to the 1970s and the New International Economic Order (NIEO) debates, in which developing countries demanded access to technology as a right. The UN's approach to STI has evolved from a focus on technology transfer to a broader "national innovation systems" approach, influenced by the OECD and by scholars such as Freeman and Lundvall, but adapted to the development context. The "STI for SDGs" framework, articulated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015), treats innovation as a cross-cutting enabler of all seventeen SDGs. UNESCO's work on open science, including the 2021 Recommendation on Open Science, represents a normative commitment to equitable access to scientific knowledge and infrastructure.

The mechanism of brain drain is addressed through the lens of "brain gain" and diaspora engagement: the UN and its agencies have promoted programs to harness the diaspora for development, such as the "Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals" (TOKTEN) program and various "brain circulation" initiatives. The perspective acknowledges that the brain drain deprives developing countries of critical human capital, but it tends to frame the solution in terms of capacity building and partnership rather than structural reform. The securitization of academia is a concern for the UN perspective because it threatens the open collaboration that is seen as essential for addressing global challenges: climate change, pandemic preparedness, and the SDGs all require international scientific cooperation. The UN has been critical of restrictions on scientific collaboration, including visa barriers and export controls, but its leverage is limited.

On IP transfer, the UN perspective is shaped by the tension between the TRIPS agreement and the development agenda. The Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health (2001) represented a partial victory for developing countries, affirming the right to use TRIPS flexibilities for public health. The broader debate about "forced technology transfer" is less central to the UN perspective than the question of whether the IP regime serves or hinders development. The UN's position is generally that IP should be balanced with access, and that technology transfer to developing countries should be facilitated through mechanisms such as the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) established under the 2030 Agenda.

The national innovation system is understood as a tool for inclusive development: the UN promotes the strengthening of national innovation systems in developing countries through capacity building, policy advice, and partnership programs. The perspective emphasizes that innovation should not be measured solely by patents and high-tech exports but by its contribution to poverty reduction, health, education, and environmental sustainability. The "frugal innovation" and "inclusive innovation" concepts, which emphasize low-cost solutions to development challenges, are associated with this perspective.

What the UN perspective contributes is a normative framework that places equity and global public goods at the center of STI policy, and an institutional platform for multilateral dialogue on science and technology governance. It provides a counterweight to the national-security framing of the other perspectives, insisting that science should serve humanity rather than states. The SDG framework, for all its limitations, has

established a shared vocabulary for discussing STI in development terms.

The occlusions are significant. The UN perspective's emphasis on capacity building and partnership may neglect the structural inequalities in the global knowledge economy that the African perspective highlights. The "national innovation system" framework, imported from the OECD context, may not be appropriate for least developed countries with weak institutional capacity. The perspective's technocratic tendency—treating innovation policy as a neutral capacity-building exercise rather than a site of political contestation—may obscure the power relations embedded in global STI governance. The UN's limited enforcement capacity means that its normative commitments are often not translated into binding obligations. The perspective may also be overly optimistic about the potential for "open science" to overcome structural inequalities: openness without equity may simply reproduce existing hierarchies. Finally, the UN perspective's focus on the SDGs may be too narrow to capture the full range of issues raised by scientific statecraft, including the militarization of research and the securitization of academia, which are not well addressed by the development framework.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African	Centers brain drain, research capacity, and epistemic equity; shows how US-China decoupling externalizes costs onto research systems with limited absorptive capacity.	May under-specify proximate security mechanisms and state-level threat perceptions in Washington and Beijing.	Scientific openness must be coupled with capacity-building, mobility justice, and distributive equity.	Patterns of researcher emigration; underfunded laboratories; visa regimes affecting African mobility; dependence on external collaboration.	**Western:** security externalities justify restrictions; openness without safeguards risks technology leakage and strategic vulnerability.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Chinese	Frames research security as sovereignty and containment; links decoupling to indigenous innovation and strategic autonomy.	May conflate legitimate security concerns with hegemonic suppression; can underplay internal research-governance and academic-freedom questions.	Scientific sovereignty, self-reliance, and defense of national development space.	Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology reports on R&D investment; talent-recruitment programs; data-security and research-security rules.	**Western:** security concerns are evidence-based and tied to documented compliance failures; sovereignty framing politicizes neutral risk management.
Russian	Highlights state-led catch-up, technological sovereignty, and innovation under sanctions.	Overstates centralized state capacity; underplays dependence on global networks and the costs of closure for civilian science.	Innovation as national security, state capacity, and strategic survival.	State innovation programs; import-substitution agendas; sanctions-adaptation measures; defense-industrial prioritization.	**UN:** state-centric closure undermines global public goods, open science, and SDG 9.
Western	Identifies research-security mechanisms: visa screening, disclosure rules, institute closures, export controls, and university compliance.	Risks over-securitization, chilling effects, and ethnic profiling; underweights global equity and Global South costs.	Open science conditional on security, reciprocity, and institutional compliance.	Visa restrictions; Confucius Institute closures; research-security policies; university risk-management routines; NSF Science and Engineering Indicators.	**African:** security framing externalizes costs onto the Global South and narrows collaboration without corresponding capacity support.

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Frames science as a global public good and development enabler; emphasizes SDG 9, open science, and equitable participation.	Limited enforcement capacity; may understate the security dilemma and great-power rivalry.	Inclusive, open, equitable science and technology for development.	STI-for-development agendas; open-science recommendations; capacity-building programs; SDG 9 targets.	**Western:** normative openness cannot by itself resolve strategic competition, IP leakage, or military-civil fusion risks.

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Levels of analysis. The 2018-2024 US-China research decoupling cannot be reduced to any single level; it is produced by interactions across individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels. At the individual level, graduate students, postdocs, principal investigators, and university administrators experienced visa delays, disclosure requirements, and reputational risk, altering collaboration choices and career trajectories. At the state level, US agencies and Congress constructed research-security frameworks, while Chinese ministries expanded talent recruitment and indigenous-innovation programs. At the systemic level, the shift from engagement to strategic competition reframed scientific exchange as a domain of rivalry rather than mutual benefit. At the transnational level, diaspora networks, multinational laboratories, co-authored publications, and global funding flows transmitted and amplified these pressures, so that bilateral policy changes reshaped research practices far beyond the two states.

Mechanism. The core mechanism is securitization: scientific collaboration was progressively reclassified from an academic activity into a national-security concern, triggering institutional compliance cascades. The process began with threat framing—concerns about intellectual-property leakage, military-civil fusion, and undisclosed foreign affiliations—then moved through policy instruments such as visa screening, export-control enforcement, disclosure mandates, and the closure or rebranding of Confucius Institutes. Universities, facing liability and funding risk, adopted risk-management routines that often exceeded legal minima, producing a chilling effect even where no violation occurred. Chinese counterparts responded with counter-securitization: strengthening data-security rules, expanding domestic R&D capacity, and reframing foreign collaboration as a sovereignty issue. The result was not a clean break but a thickening of boundaries: collaboration became more conditional, more auditable, and more politically legible, while aggregate co-publication and student flows adjusted unevenly across fields.

Perspective reconstruction. The African perspective treats the US-China research decoupling as a shock to the global scientific commons whose costs are disproportionately externalized onto research systems with limited absorptive capacity. It asks not only whether security restrictions are justified in Washington or Beijing, but who loses access to training, co-authorship, equipment, and funding when the two largest research powers narrow their exchange. African scholars and institutions, already facing brain drain and underfunded

laboratories, may find that decoupling reduces opportunities for South-South and North-South collaboration that depended on US-China scientific bridges. The perspective also highlights epistemic injustice: African research priorities are rarely centered in security debates, yet African scientists bear the consequences of visa regimes and institutional risk aversion. Consequently, it demands that any research-security order be paired with capacity-building, equitable access, and recognition of African knowledge production, rather than treating the continent as a passive recipient of great-power science policy. The Chinese perspective interprets decoupling as strategic containment operating through scientific institutions, not merely as a neutral response to misconduct. It emphasizes sovereignty over data, talent, and research agendas, and treats indigenous innovation and talent recruitment as defensive necessities in an asymmetric system. Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology reporting frames rising R&D investment and domestic capacity as evidence that external pressure accelerates self-reliance. The perspective also criticizes the politicization of academia, arguing that visa restrictions and institute closures damage the openness on which global science depends. At the same time, it can obscure internal questions about research governance, academic freedom, and the coercive dimensions of state-led talent programs. The Russian perspective reads US-China decoupling as confirmation that scientific interdependence is a vulnerability under sanctions and strategic competition. It stresses state-led innovation, technological sovereignty, and catch-up modernization, often privileging defense-industrial and strategic sectors. The framing treats Western research security as part of a broader pattern of technological containment that justifies import substitution and state coordination. It may overstate the capacity of centralized programs to generate frontier innovation without global network access. It also underplays the costs of closure for civilian research and the dependence of Russian science on international collaboration. The Western perspective centers research security: it treats undisclosed affiliations, intellectual-property leakage, and military-civil fusion as genuine risks requiring visa screening, disclosure, and institutional compliance. It also contains a self-critical strand that acknowledges the China Initiative's overreach, chilling effects, and the danger of conflating ethnicity with risk. Weiss (2014) and Breznitz (2007) are relevant here for situating innovation policy within state capacity and strategic choice rather than market spontaneity. NSF Science and Engineering Indicators provide the empirical backdrop for claims about collaboration volumes and talent flows. The perspective's weakness is that security logics can expand beyond evidence, converting manageable risks into broad exclusion. The UN perspective frames scientific collaboration as a global public good and a means of achieving SDG 9 on industry, innovation, and infrastructure. It emphasizes open science, capacity-building, and equitable participation, warning that decoupling may fragment knowledge production and weaken development prospects. It is less equipped to adjudicate security claims or great-power rivalry, and its normative commitments lack strong enforcement. Marginson (2022) can be read as highlighting the geopolitical turn that complicates the UN's cooperative assumptions. The perspective's optimism about openness may understate how structural inequality shapes who benefits from global science.

Explicit adjudication. On the evidence of policy instruments and institutional behavior, the Western research-security perspective best explains the proximate mechanics of the 2018-2024 decoupling: visa restrictions, institute closures, disclosure rules, and university compliance routines are directly traceable to security framing. However, it is insufficient as a full explanation because it treats the shift as a response to discrete risks rather than as part of a systemic move from engagement to competition; the systemic level explains timing and breadth. The Chinese perspective best explains reactive state mobilization and the acceleration of indigenous-innovation rhetoric, but it risks reducing all security measures to containment and thereby obscuring documented cases of undisclosed affiliations and intellectual-property concerns. The African perspective does not explain US or Chinese policy choices, yet it best identifies the distributional

externalities and the normative deficit of a security order that ignores capacity and equity. The UN perspective captures the loss of global public goods but lacks causal leverage over state behavior. A defensible adjudication is therefore layered: systemic competition supplied the permissive condition, Western security framing supplied the policy mechanism, Chinese sovereignty framing supplied the counter-mobilization, and African and UN framings supply the criteria by which the decoupling should be judged incomplete and inequitable. What the Western perspective misses is the extent to which its own security expansion may undermine the openness that historically underwrote US scientific leadership; what the African perspective misses is that some restrictions respond to real compliance failures rather than mere geopolitical anxiety.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Level-of-analysis sorting.** Take five claims about China's Thousand Talents Plan—(a) an individual scientist accepts a return package; (b) a ministry sets priority fields; (c) US universities tighten disclosure rules; (d) global citation networks reconfigure; (e) African universities lose a trained researcher—and assign each to the individual, state, systemic, or transnational level. Explain in two sentences why the same program looks different at each level.

2. **Analytical hygiene.** Write one sentence each that (i) describes, (ii) explains, (iii) predicts, and (iv) prescribes an effect of the Thousand Talents Plan on US–China research collaboration. Do not let the four sentences collapse into one another.

3. **Mechanism mapping.** Identify at least two mechanisms through which the program may reshape talent flows—such as funding leverage, network bridging, status competition, or securitization feedback—and state the scope condition under which each mechanism is strongest.

4. **Perspective reconstruction.** In two or three sentences each, steel-man the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN views of the program. Each reconstruction must include one contribution the perspective makes and one thing it tends to occlude.

5. **Historical analogue.** Compare the Thousand Talents Plan to one earlier state-led talent strategy (for example, postwar US scientific recruitment or Soviet catch-up programs). State one genuine similarity and one genuine difference, and explain which difference matters more for assessing long-term innovation.

6. **Falsifiers.** List two observations that would weaken the claim that the program has reshaped global scientific talent flows, and two observations that would strengthen it. Make at least one falsifier quantitative in spirit (for example, a pattern in return rates, re-emigration, or collaboration counts) and one institutional (for example, a change in laboratory autonomy or peer-review norms).

MODEL ANSWER

The Thousand Talents Plan, launched in 2008, is best understood not as a simple brain-drain instrument but as a state-led mechanism for converting diasporic scientific capital into domestic institutional capacity. At the individual level, it altered career calculations by bundling research funding, laboratory access, status, and sometimes relocation support; this changed the opportunity cost of returning or maintaining dual affiliations. At the state level, it functioned as a selective industrial policy for science, targeting fields deemed strategically consequential rather than distributing support uniformly. At the transnational level, it created bridging networks: returning scientists retained co-authorship, student supervision, and equipment ties with former

host institutions, so knowledge transfer occurred through relational channels as much as through physical relocation. This is the central mechanism: talent circulation, not one-way extraction.

The program's effects must be scoped. It likely mattered most for elite researchers in well-funded disciplines with clear state priorities, and least for fields where domestic infrastructure, peer communities, or academic freedom concerns remained weak. Breznitz's argument that latecomer states can innovate through organizational and institutional adaptation without first replicating frontier basic research is relevant: recruitment can accelerate absorptive capacity and applied development even when it does not immediately produce breakthrough basic science. Weiss's work on Chinese innovation statecraft similarly suggests that the state's role is to coordinate, fund, and legitimate strategic sectors, not merely to subsidize individual genius. Thus the program should be evaluated by its contribution to network density, laboratory capability, and problem-solving capacity, not only by citation counts of returnees.

The African perspective highlights an equity problem obscured by great-power framing: when wealthy states recruit from a global pool, the loss is not always from the United States or Europe; it can also be from African universities and research systems that invested in training but cannot match salaries, equipment, or political stability. The Chinese perspective frames recruitment as sovereign development and historical correction after decades of scientific dependence. The Russian perspective, with its catch-up vocabulary, treats talent policy as part of a broader attempt to avoid technological subordination, though it may overstate the transferability of foreign models. The Western perspective emphasizes research security and the risk that recruitment becomes a vector for undisclosed obligations or intellectual-property transfer; its self-critique acknowledges that over-securitization can damage the openness that made Western science attractive. The UN perspective, anchored in SDG 9, asks whether talent mobility expands global innovative capacity or merely reallocates it.

Historically, the program resembles postwar US and Soviet talent strategies in its use of state resources to concentrate expertise, but differs in its reliance on diasporic return rather than domestic training alone. A strong counterargument is that recruitment without complementary institutions—peer review norms, university autonomy, long-term funding stability—produces symbolic gains rather than durable innovation. The securitization backlash after 2018, including visa restrictions and research-security screening, also shows that talent policy is endogenous to geopolitical trust: programs that once operated in a relatively open environment now face higher transaction costs.

Evidence that would support the claim includes rising return rates among targeted cohorts, growth in co-authored publications linking Chinese and foreign institutions, expansion of domestic research infrastructure, and increased patenting in priority sectors. Evidence that would weaken it includes stagnant research quality, continued dependence on foreign equipment and software, high re-emigration rates, or a collapse in international collaboration without compensating domestic gains. On balance, the Thousand Talents Plan appears to have reshaped global talent flows by making return and dual affiliation more attractive and more politically salient, but its long-term effect on scientific leadership depends on whether recruitment is matched by institutional deepening and whether geopolitical decoupling turns circulation into closure.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do) — INSTRUCTIONS ONLY

(a) Case description: A mid-sized European research university with strong biomedical and artificial-intelligence partnerships in China, Nigeria, and the United States must decide whether to accept a new dual-use AI grant. The grant requires security vetting of all foreign collaborators, its African partners fear administrative delays and possible exclusion, its Chinese partners fear stigmatization and data-

access restrictions, and its US funders require compliance with export-control and disclosure rules. The university's leadership wants a decision memo that is analytically rigorous rather than merely compliant.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism or mechanisms through which the grant's security requirements would reshape collaboration, talent flows, and knowledge production, and state the scope conditions under which each mechanism operates.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on the university's dilemma in steel-man form, identifying what each perspective contributes and what it occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the case to one earlier episode of research securitization or scientific internationalism, stating one similarity, one difference, and which difference matters more for prediction.
- **Falsifiers:** Specify two observations that would falsify your central claim about the grant's likely effects, and two observations that would support it.

(c) Self-check: Before finalizing, ask whether you have distinguished description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and whether any sentence that sounds like evidence is actually a normative preference.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

A mid-sized European university is offered a dual-use AI grant that requires security vetting of all foreign collaborators. Its African partners fear delays, its Chinese partners fear stigmatization, and its US funders require export-control compliance. Which of the following is the most defensible analytical conclusion?

A. The grant should be rejected because security vetting necessarily destroys international scientific collaboration.
B. The grant's effects depend on whether vetting is implemented as a proportionate, transparent, and field-specific process or as a blanket, opaque, and politically driven barrier.
C. The grant will automatically strengthen the university's research security without harming its African or Chinese partnerships.
D. The grant is best understood only as a Western strategic-competition measure and has no implications for global scientific capacity.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnosis: Option A conflates a possible outcome with a necessity; it ignores scope conditions such as proportionality, reciprocity, and the possibility of tiered access. Option C assumes a free lunch, treating compliance benefits as costless and ignoring distributional effects on partners with weaker administrative capacity. Option D reduces a multi-level phenomenon to one perspective, occluding African equity concerns, Chinese sovereignty claims, Russian catch-up anxieties, and UN development goals.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

The tables below draw on the NSF *Science and Engineering Indicators* (2022, 2024 editions), UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) R&D expenditure series, and the OECD's *Education at a Glance* and bibliometric aggregates. Figures are rounded to two significant digits for pedagogical use; treat them as order-of-magnitude indicators, not as audited national accounts. All values are approximate and should be verified against the primary sources before use in research.

Table 1 — International student enrollment in leading destination countries (millions)

Destination	2010	2015	2019	2023	Trend note
United States	0.72	0.97	1.09	1.06	Plateau then slight decline post-2019
United Kingdom	0.39	0.44	0.55	0.68	Post-Brexit policy volatility, net growth
Australia	0.20	0.33	0.44	0.40	COVID shock, partial recovery
Germany	0.24	0.32	0.40	0.46	Steady growth, tuition-free model
China	0.26	0.40	0.49	0.49	Plateau after 2018; source-country shift
Canada	0.22	0.35	0.64	0.81	Sharp growth; policy-driven

Source: UNESCO UIS and OECD Education at a Glance, various years; rounded.

Table 2 — Gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) as % of GDP

Country	2010	2015	2020	2023	GERD (USD bn, 2023, approx.)
United States	2.7	2.7	3.4	3.5	~790
China	1.7	2.0	2.4	2.6	~480
Germany	2.8	2.9	3.1	3.1	~135
Japan	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	~175
South Korea	3.7	4.3	4.8	5.0	~95
Russia	1.0	1.1	1.0	0.9	~25
Brazil	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.1	~22
South Africa	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.6	~3

Source: NSF S&E Indicators; UIS; rounded.

Table 3 — US–China scientific collaboration and decoupling indicators

Indicator	2010	2015	2019	2022	2024
US–China co-authored S&E articles (thousands)	~15	~35	~55	~45	~38
Share of US total output co-authored with China (%)	~4	~8	~11	~9	~8
Chinese students in US (thousands)	~158	~304	~373	~290	~277
US visa denials for Chinese researchers (index, 2019=100)	—	—	100	140	125
Confucius Institutes in US (count)	~60	~100	~90	~15	~5

Sources: NSF S&E Indicators; US State Department visa statistics; National Association of Scholars Confucius Institute tracker; rounded/approximate.

Table 4 — Patent citations and technological dependence (illustrative)

Metric	US	China	EU-27	Japan
Triadic patent families (thousands, 2022)	~14	~4	~12	~8
Share of global AI patents (%, 2023)	~25	~40	~8	~5
Semiconductor equipment import dependence on single supplier (%)	~0 (domestic)	~85 (US/allied)	~60	~30
Citations to foreign patents in domestic patents (%)	~35	~45	~40	~30

Sources: WIPO IP Statistics; OECD; CSIS/industry estimates; rounded.

Numbered Analysis Questions

1. **Trend.** Describe the trajectory of US–China co-authored scientific articles between 2010 and 2024. Identify the inflection point, quantify the approximate peak-to-trough change, and state whether the decline is better characterized as a *level shift* (a new plateau) or a *trend break* (continued decline). Cite Table 3.

2. **Level of analysis.** The 2018–2024 research decoupling is driven by visa policy, university compliance offices, federal funding-agency rules, and individual researcher choices. At which level of analysis — individual, state, systemic, or transnational — does the most explanatory weight lie, and what evidence from Tables 1–4 would you need to adjudicate between a state-centric and a transnational explanation?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Read Table 2 (R&D intensity) through each of the five lenses: African (brain drain and equity), Chinese (sovereignty and catch-up), Russian (innovation statecraft), Western (research security and strategic competition), and UN (STI for development, SDG 9). For each, state (a) what the table *supports*, (b) what it *occludes*, and (c) the normative conclusion that perspective would draw.

4. **Interpretation.** China's R&D intensity rose from 1.7% to 2.6% of GDP between 2010 and 2023, and its share of global AI patents is the largest. Does this constitute *convergence* in innovative capacity with the United States? Distinguish between input metrics (spending, patents) and output metrics (frontier breakthroughs, citation impact, firm-level productivity). What would falsify the convergence claim?

5. **Limitation.** The data above omit classified research, corporate R&D not reported to UIS, the quality dimension of patents, and talent flows not captured by enrollment statistics (e.g., post-doctoral researchers, returnees, diaspora scientists). Which omission most distorts cross-country comparison, and how would you triangulate around it using the canonical sources (NSF Indicators; Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology reports)?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — The Decoupling Funnel (US–China Research Collaboration, 2010–2024)

What to draw: A funnel diagram oriented vertically, wide at the top and narrow at the bottom, drawn in black ink on white paper. The funnel has four horizontal bands, each labeled with a stage of the research-collaboration pipeline.

- Top band (widest): "Joint grant applications & co-authored proposals" — annotate with a 2010 baseline arrow showing high volume.
- Second band: "Funded collaborative projects (NSF/NIH + NSFC joint programs)" — annotate with a 2018 line marking the start of restrictions.
- Third band: "Active co-authored publications" — annotate with the 2019 peak and 2022–2024 decline (Table 3).

- Bottom band (narrowest): "Sustained bilateral research partnerships" — annotate with "Confucius Institutes closed; Thousand Talents scrutiny; visa denials."

Labels to place: Year markers on the left spine (2010, 2015, 2018, 2019, 2022, 2024); on the right spine, the policy levers (Export Control Reform Act 2018; DOJ "China Initiative" 2018–2022; Presidential Proclamation 10043, 2020; NSDD-189 lineage). At the base, a small box labeled "Residual collaboration: non-sensitive, non-military, non-AI domains."

Perspective overlay to annotate: In the margin, five colored sticky-note icons (or bracketed margin notes) labeled A (African), C (Chinese), R (Russian), W (Western), U (UN). The African note reads "capacity loss in third countries caught in the middle"; the Chinese note "sovereignty over research agenda"; the Russian note "opportunity for catch-up"; the Western note "research security vs. openness"; the UN note "SDG 9 and global public goods."

Visual 2 — Talent Circulation Map (Brain Drain, Brain Gain, and Brain Circulation)

What to draw: A world map in outline (hand-drawn, not to scale) with three thick arrows and two dotted arrows.

- Thick arrow 1: South/Southeast Asia and Africa → United States (labeled "Brain drain, 1990s–2010s; student visa pipeline").
- Thick arrow 2: United States/EU → China (labeled "Return migration, post-2008; Thousand Talents Plan").
- Thick arrow 3: Africa → Europe (labeled "Health-worker and STEM emigration").
- Dotted arrow 1: China → US/EU (labeled "Outbound students, still largest source").
- Dotted arrow 2: Africa → Gulf states (labeled "Skilled migration, 2010s–").

Labels to place: On each arrow, a small box with the mechanism (e.g., "wage differential," "research funding," "visa policy," "diaspora networks"). Place a legend in the corner: solid = net permanent flow; dotted = circular/temporary flow. Mark three nodes with stars: Beijing, Washington DC, and a third node labeled "Nairobi/Addis Ababa (hub of African research capacity)."

Perspective overlay to annotate: A sidebar titled "Who gains, who loses?" with five one-line entries: African — "net loss of PhDs; remittances partial offset"; Chinese — "net gain since 2008, but quality concerns"; Russian — "net loss post-1991, partial recovery"; Western — "net gain historically, now contested"; UN — "SDG 4/9 and the right to science."

Visual 3 — National Innovation System (NIS) Stack

What to draw: A layered "stack" diagram (like a geological cross-section or a technology stack), five horizontal layers from bottom to top, each a rectangle with a label and a small icon.

- Layer 1 (bottom, widest): "Basic research & talent pipeline" (universities, PhD programs, immigration policy) — icon: graduation cap.
- Layer 2: "Applied research & translational institutions" (DARPA, ONR, Fraunhofer, CAS institutes) — icon: gear.
- Layer 3: "Firm-level R&D & IP regime" (patents, trade secrets, standards) — icon: document.
- Layer 4: "Production & manufacturing capability" (supply chains, industrial policy) — icon: factory.
- Layer 5 (top, narrowest): "Strategic deployment" (defense, space, AI systems) — icon: satellite.

Labels to place: On the left, a vertical arrow labeled "Time to frontier (decades)"; on the right, a vertical arrow labeled "State capacity required (increasing upward)." Between layers, small arrows labeled "feedback loops" (e.g., from Layer 5 back to Layer 1 via DARPA-style mission pull).

Perspective overlay to annotate: A horizontal band across the middle labeled "The decoupling fault line" — indicating where US–China separation bites hardest (Layers 2–4: applied research, IP, manufacturing). Five margin notes: African — "absent from most layers; insertion via Layer 1 only"; Chinese — "state-led, full-stack ambition"; Russian — "Layer 2 strong, Layers 3–4 weak"; Western — "market-led Layers 3–4, state-led Layer 2"; UN — "Layer 1 as global public good."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (question / keyword)	Notes (with source log)
What is "scientific statecraft"?	The use of science, technology, and research policy as instruments of national power and foreign policy. Weiss (2014) frames it as the politicization of knowledge production; Breznitz (2007) ties it to innovation-based growth.
What is "innovation decoupling"?	The deliberate separation of national innovation systems — research, talent, IP, supply chains — between rival states. Distinct from trade decoupling; operates on knowledge, not goods.
DARPA / ONR role	US defense research agencies that fund basic research with mission orientation; model of "use-inspired basic research." Chinese counterparts: MOST, CAS, and defense-linked labs.
Talent circulation: brain drain vs. brain gain	Brain drain = net emigration of skilled workers; brain gain = net immigration; brain circulation = temporary, return, and diaspora flows. State strategies: scholarships, return grants, diaspora engagement.
Thousand Talents Plan	Chinese recruitment program launched 2008; targets overseas Chinese and foreign scientists; became focal point of US research-security concerns post-2018.
Securitization of academia	Framing of university research as a national-security domain: visa restrictions, disclosure rules, "China Initiative," Confucius Institute closures. Marginson (2022) critiques the erosion of academic freedom and openness.
Research security	Policies to protect IP, prevent unauthorized transfer, and screen foreign collaboration; includes NSDD-189 lineage and export controls.

Cue (question / keyword)	Notes (with source log)
IP transfer / forced technology transfer	Debate over whether China systematically coerces technology transfer via joint-venture requirements; contested empirically; central to US–China trade war framing.
National innovation system (NIS)	Institutional complex producing technological advantage: universities, firms, state agencies, IP regime, finance. Breznitz (2007) on "flexible innovation"; Weiss (2014) on state capacity.
African perspective keywords	Brain drain of PhDs; research-capacity gaps; equity in global science; "epistemic injustice"; dependency on Northern funding; SDG 9.
UN perspective keywords	Science and technology for development; STI roadmaps; SDG 9 (industry, innovation, infrastructure); right to science (ICESCR Art. 15).
Falsifiers for "decoupling is irreversible"	Resumption of joint programs; rise in co-authored papers; talent-flow normalization; sector-specific re-engagement (e.g., climate, health).

Source log: Weiss (2014); Breznitz (2007); Marginson (2022); NSF *Science and Engineering Indicators* (2022, 2024); Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology reports; UNESCO UIS; OECD *Education at a Glance*.

Summary (3–5 sentences): Scientific statecraft treats research, talent, and IP as instruments of national power, and innovation decoupling is the deliberate separation of rival national innovation systems across knowledge, not just goods. The 2018–2024 US–China case shows how visa policy, funding-agency rules, and university compliance combined to reduce co-authored output and close Confucius Institutes, while China's Thousand Talents Plan and rising R&D intensity reframed the competition as a sovereignty project. African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each read the same data through different normative lenses — equity, sovereignty, catch-up, security, and development — and no single lens captures the full mechanism. The national innovation system framework shows that advantage is institutional and layered, not merely a function of spending, and that decoupling bites hardest in applied research, IP, and manufacturing. Whether the decoupling is a durable level shift or a reversible trend break remains an open empirical question, falsifiable by the resumption of collaboration in non-sensitive domains.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** Imagine two countries that used to share scientists, patents, and lab equipment freely. One day they decide that sharing is dangerous, so they start checking visas, closing joint institutes, and telling their universities to be careful about who they work with. At the same time, each country tries to lure the other's best researchers home with money and prestige. The question is whether this separation makes both countries weaker or just changes who is strong. The answer depends on whether science is a pie that shrinks when shared, or a pie that grows when shared — and

on whether the rules are written by the state or by the scientists themselves.

2. **Mark gaps.** My first pass left three gaps: (a) I treated "decoupling" as a single event rather than a layered process operating at different speeds across basic research, applied research, and manufacturing; (b) I did not specify the mechanism by which visa restrictions translate into fewer co-authored papers — whether through deterrence, selection, or chilling effects on proposal writing; (c) I conflated China's R&D spending growth with convergence in innovative capacity, without distinguishing inputs from outputs.

3. **Reread verification.** Re-reading Weiss (2014) on the politicization of knowledge production confirms that scientific statecraft is not new but has intensified with dual-use technologies; Breznitz (2007) confirms that national innovation systems vary in their institutional "recipes," so spending alone does not predict outcomes; Marginson (2022) confirms that the securitization of academia carries real costs to openness and academic freedom. The data tables confirm the directional trend (rising Chinese R&D intensity, falling US–China co-authorship) but do not establish causation or quality convergence.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** The decoupling is like two research hospitals that stop sharing patient data and staff after a dispute: each may develop its own strengths, but both lose the gains from pooled trials, and patients in third countries lose access to the best treatments. *Limits of the analogy:* hospitals are single organizations with clear ownership; national innovation systems are distributed, multi-actor, and partially market-driven, so "separation" is never complete — residual collaboration persists in non-sensitive domains, and the state cannot fully control scientist-to-scientist ties.

5. **Rewrite.** Scientific statecraft is the strategic use of research, talent, and intellectual property as instruments of national power; innovation decoupling is the deliberate, layered separation of rival national innovation systems. The 2018–2024 US–China case demonstrates that decoupling operates through visa policy, funding-agency rules, and university compliance, producing measurable declines in co-authored output and institutional closures, while China's Thousand Talents Plan and rising R&D intensity reframe the competition as a sovereignty project. The five perspectives — African (equity and brain drain), Chinese (sovereignty and catch-up), Russian (innovation statecraft), Western (research security), and UN (STI for development) — each illuminate a different mechanism and occlude others, so adjudication requires evidence on inputs versus outputs, on talent flows versus enrollment, and on the persistence of residual collaboration. The national innovation system framework shows that advantage is institutional and cumulative, not merely a function of spending, and that the durability of decoupling is an empirical question falsifiable by the resumption of collaboration in non-sensitive domains.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L56	Definition	What is “scientific statecraft”?	The deliberate use of state power — funding, visas, export controls, research-security regimes, talent programs — to shape the production, circulation, and application of scientific knowledge for strategic ends. It treats science as an arena of competition rather than an autonomous republic.	African: often experienced as an external constraint on domestic capacity-building; Chinese: framed as sovereignty and catch-up; Western: framed as security; UN: framed as development.
L56	Mechanism	How does DARPA’s model militarize basic research?	DARPA funds high-risk, high-payoff basic research organized around mission problems rather than disciplinary curiosity; program managers rotate out, and results flow toward military applications. The mechanism is mission-pull, not just money: the state sets the problem, not the method.	Western: celebrated as innovation engine; African: shows how “basic” research is never neutral; Chinese: studied as a template for counterpart agencies.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L56	Application	What was the mechanism of China's Thousand Talents Plan (2008–)?	State-funded recruitment of overseas Chinese scientists and foreign experts through salary supplements, lab funding, and institutional appointments, designed to reverse brain drain and seed domestic research capacity. The mechanism is price-and-prestige competition for mobile human capital.	Chinese: sovereignty and catch-up; Western: initially welcomed, later securitized; African: a model some states wish they could afford.
L56	Comparison	How do states convert "brain drain" into "brain gain"?	Through diaspora networks, return incentives, remote collaboration, and co-investment in home-country labs; the conversion depends on whether the origin state can offer credible research infrastructure and career paths.	African: the hardest conversion, due to infrastructure gaps; Chinese: partially achieved via Thousand Talents; Western: rarely framed as a problem for itself.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L56	Source	What does Weiss (2014) argue about the national security state and innovation?	Weiss argues that the US national security state has been a persistent, not exceptional, driver of innovation — that "America Inc." is a hybrid of public mission and private enterprise, and that decoupling rhetoric understates how deeply militarized US research already is.	Western self-critique: undermines claims of a formerly pure academic commons; African: resonates with dependency critiques.
L56	Debate	Forced technology transfer: what is the Western claim and the Chinese rebuttal?	Western claim: market access is conditioned on IP disclosure, constituting coerced transfer. Chinese rebuttal: technology transfer occurs through voluntary joint ventures and licensing, and the charge conflates commercial bargaining with state coercion.	Western: core grievance; Chinese: sovereignty and development framing; African: echoes colonial-era IP debates.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L56	Reconstruction	How does the Chinese perspective frame talent recruitment?	As a legitimate exercise of sovereignty to correct historical brain drain and build indigenous capacity, not as theft; the frame treats human capital as a national resource subject to strategic management.	Chinese primary self-understanding; Western: read as security threat; African: partially sympathetic, partially wary of asymmetry.
L56	Occlusion	What does the Western "research security" framing occlude?	It occludes the pre-existing militarization of Western research (DARPA/ONR), the benefits Western institutions drew from Chinese students and scholars, and the chilling effect on legitimate collaboration and on researchers of Chinese descent.	Western self-critique; African: occludes global South capacity concerns; UN: occludes development goals.
L56	Adjudication	How would you adjudicate "decoupling harms science" vs. "decoupling protects security"?	Weigh the magnitude of lost collaboration (measurable in co-authored papers and citations) against the marginal security gain from restricting specific sensitive fields; the verdict is field- and actor-specific, not general.	All five perspectives converge on needing evidence; diverge on which harm counts.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L56	Visual	What do NSF Science and Engineering Indicators show about R&D spending?	They show a long-term shift in global R&D share toward East Asia, with China's share rising sharply since 2000, while the US share declines in relative terms even as absolute spending grows.	Western: relative decline anxiety; Chinese: catch-up validation; African: marginalization in global R&D.
L56	Definition	What is a "national innovation system"?	The network of institutions — universities, firms, state agencies, finance, standards bodies, and labor markets — that jointly produce, diffuse, and commercialize knowledge; advantage comes from systemic fit, not single inventions.	Breznitz (2007): states make political choices among models; African: institutional weakness is the binding constraint.
L56	Mechanism	How does securitization of academia erode collaboration?	Through visa denials and delays, disclosure and reporting requirements, funding restrictions, and reputational risk; the mechanism is anticipatory compliance — researchers self-censor and avoid sensitive topics before any formal prohibition.	Western: intended security gain; Chinese: sovereignty violation; African: collateral damage to South-South links.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L56	Source	What does Breznitz (2007) contribute to innovation statecraft?	Breznitz shows that states face political choices among innovation strategies (e.g., fast-follower vs. frontier) and that latecomers can prosper by specializing in stages of production rather than inventing everything.	Russian: catch-up framing; Chinese: validates specialization; African: suggests feasible latecomer paths.
L56	Comparison	How do African brain-drain dynamics differ from East Asian brain-gain strategies?	African drain is often permanent and driven by weak domestic research infrastructure and political instability; East Asian gain relied on targeted state investment, credible career paths, and diaspora engagement. The difference is institutional capacity, not talent.	African primary: equity and capacity; shows why copying East Asian programs fails without infrastructure.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Concept	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence Basis	Gap to Close
Definition of scientific statecraft	85	Lesson core + Weiss (2014)	Test against a non-US case
DARPA/ONR militarization mechanism	75	Weiss (2014); general knowledge	Primary budget data

Concept	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence Basis	Gap to Close
Thousand Talents Plan specifics	70	Public program descriptions	Chinese MOST primary reports
Brain drain vs. brain gain dynamics	80	General literature	African-specific longitudinal data
Forced technology transfer debate	65	Competing official narratives	WTO dispute records
National innovation systems theory	80	Breznitz (2007)	African institutional cases
African brain-drain equity framing	75	African scholarship	Country-level R&D data
Chinese sovereignty framing	70	Official discourse	Internal policy documents
Western research-security framing	80	Policy documents	Empirical effect studies
UN SDG 9 framing	60	SDG text	Implementation evidence

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to steel-man without caricature, and what specific evidence would make that steel-man stronger?
2. Identify one causal claim you made in the Problem Pair or Independent Memo that would be falsified if collaboration counts rose while security incidents also rose — how would you revise it?
3. Where did you conflate description (what happened to US–China research ties) with prescription (what should be done), and how does separating them change your conclusion?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Decoupling only hurts China."	Decoupling damages both sides' basic science; the US loses access to Chinese talent and data, and global public goods suffer.	Falling US–China co-authored papers; NSF Science and Engineering Indicators.
"The Thousand Talents Plan is primarily an espionage program."	It is predominantly a recruitment and return program; security cases are a minority of participants.	Chinese MOST reports; public program evaluations.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
"Brain drain is always net-negative for origin countries."	Diaspora networks can produce brain gain through remittances, collaboration, and return; outcome depends on origin-state capacity.	African and Asian diaspora studies.
"DARPA funds only applied, not basic, research."	DARPA funds basic research organized around mission problems; the basic/applied boundary is blurred by mission-pull.	Weiss (2014).
"Forced technology transfer is a proven, uniform Chinese state policy."	The charge is contested; much transfer occurs via voluntary joint ventures and market bargaining, though state pressure exists in some sectors.	WTO disputes; firm-level studies.
"National innovation systems can be designed top-down."	They are emergent and path-dependent; states choose strategies but cannot engineer the whole system.	Breznitz (2007).

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Scientific statecraft; militarization of basic research; talent circulation; securitization of academia; IP/forced transfer; national innovation systems	Mission-pull funding (DARPA/ONR); price-and-prestige recruitment (Thousand Talents); anticipatory compliance in academia; joint-venture bargaining; systemic institutional fit	Weiss (2014) national security state; Breznitz (2007) innovation and the state; Marginson (2022) global science; NSF Science and Engineering Indicators; Chinese MOST reports	2018–2024 US–China research decoupling; Confucius Institutes closure; visa restrictions; African brain drain; East Asian brain gain	Decoupling harms science vs. protects security; forced transfer as policy vs. market bargaining; brain drain as loss vs. diaspora gain; top-down design vs. emergence	Rising collaboration alongside rising security incidents; no change in patent citations after decoupling; African R&D share unchanged despite programs	L18 weaponized interdependence; L52–55 techno-geopolitics; L57 space/infrastructure; L58 forecasting; L61 grand strategy

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (within 24 hours):** Re-read all 14 flashcards aloud; cover the Back column and reconstruct each answer from the Front; log any card you cannot reproduce in the error-log.
- **R2 (day 3):** Redo the Problem Pair (China's Thousand Talents Plan) from scratch without consulting notes; compare against the model answer and note one divergence.
- **R3 (day 7):** Reconstruct the Worked Example (2018–2024 US–China research decoupling) at all four levels of analysis and all five perspectives; time yourself to 45 minutes.
- **R4 (day 14):** Draft the Independent Memo on a fresh case (e.g., EU research-security guidelines or African diaspora science policy) using the four required headings; run the self-check on description/explanation/prediction/prescription.
- **R5 (day 30):** Full review: re-read Section 2.7 comparison matrix, re-score the confidence audit, and write a 200-word adjudication of the lesson's central puzzle; archive in your error-log.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define scientific statecraft and distinguish it from ordinary science policy.
☐ I can explain the DARPA/ONR mission-pull mechanism and name a Chinese counterpart.
☐ I can describe the Thousand Talents Plan's mechanism and its reshaping of talent flows.
☐ I can distinguish brain drain from brain gain and state the conversion conditions.
☐ I can steel-man both sides of the forced technology transfer debate.
☐ I can explain how securitization of academia erodes collaboration via anticipatory compliance.
☐ I can define a national innovation system and cite Breznitz (2007) on political choice.

- ☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective on brain drain and equity as the primary lens.
- ☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives without caricature.
- ☐ I can apply all four levels of analysis to the US–China decoupling case.
- ☐ I can adjudicate between "decoupling harms science" and "decoupling protects security."
- ☐ I have completed the confidence audit and identified my largest gap.
- ☐ I have filled at least two rows of the error-log with my own misconceptions.
- ☐ I can name three falsifiers for claims made in this lesson.
- ☐ I can link this lesson to L18 (weaponized interdependence) and L52–55 (techno-geopolitics).
- ☐ I can explain what the African vantage point reveals that the other four miss.
- ☐ I have scheduled R1–R5 in my calendar.
- ☐ I can reproduce the comparison matrix from memory.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Militarization of basic research - Weiss, L. (2014). *America Inc.? Innovation and Enterprise in the National Security State*. Cornell University Press. - Mazzucato, M. (2013). *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths*. Anthem Press.

Talent circulation and brain drain/gain - Saxenian, A. (2006). *The New Argonauts: Regional Advantage in a Global Economy*. Harvard University Press. - Docquier, F., & Rapoport, H. (2012). Globalization, brain drain, and development. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50(3), 681–730.

Securitization of academia - Marginson, S. (2022). Global science and national comparisons: beyond bibliometrics. In *Handbook on Science and Public Policy*. Edward Elgar. - Lee, J. J., & Haupt, J. P. (2020). Winners and losers in US–China scientific research collaboration. *Higher Education*, 80, 57–74.

IP transfer and forced technology transfer - Maskus, K. E. (2000). *Intellectual Property Rights in the Global Economy*. Institute for International Economics. - US Trade Representative (2018). *Findings of the Investigation into China's Acts, Policies, and Practices Related to Technology Transfer, Intellectual Property, and Innovation (Section 301)*.

National innovation systems - Breznitz, D. (2007). *Innovation and the State: Political Choice and Strategies for Growth in Israel, Taiwan, and Ireland*. Yale University Press. - Lundvall, B.-Å. (ed.) (1992). *National Systems of Innovation: Towards a Theory of Innovation and Interactive Learning*. Pinter.

African perspectives on brain drain and capacity - Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture. - Grovogui, S. N. (2006). *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy: Memories of International Order and Institutions*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Data sources - National Science Foundation (biennial). *Science and Engineering Indicators*. NSF. - Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology (various years). *China Science and Technology Statistical Yearbook*.

End of Lesson 56. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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58. Space, Biosecurity, and Critical Infrastructure

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 57: Space, Biosecurity, and Critical Infrastructure
Module	Module 9: Techno-Geopolitics, AI, and Emerging Domains
Prerequisites	L25 (space, maritime), L24 (cyber), L19 (resources)
Interleaved links	Forward to L58 (forecasting), L61 (grand strategy)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data tables, visual anchors, flashcards, worked example, problem pair
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate

Estimated study time: 7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

The central puzzle of this lesson is why the international order has proven so much slower to govern outer space, biological research, and critical infrastructure than it has to govern traditional military domains, and what that lag reveals about the distribution of power in the contemporary system. Each of these three domains is defined by a structural feature that the post-1945 legal architecture was not built to handle: the technologies that generate civilian prosperity are inseparable from those that generate strategic coercion. A satellite that delivers precision navigation to a farmer's tractor is the same satellite that guides a cruise missile; a research platform that accelerates vaccine development is the same platform that can be repurposed to enhance a pathogen; a power grid that sustains a hospital is the same grid that, if disrupted, can paralyze a city. The lesson asks how states, international institutions, and non-state actors navigate governance when the civilian-military boundary has collapsed, and why the answers they produce differ so sharply depending on where one stands in the global hierarchy of capability and vulnerability.

This lesson sits at the capstone of Module 9, Techno-Geopolitics, AI, and Emerging Domains, and it presupposes the analytical machinery developed in three earlier lessons. From L25, on space and maritime domains, the student brings the distinction between global commons and sovereign territory, and the problem of freedom of navigation in environments where no single state can enforce order. From L24, on cyber, the student brings the insight that attribution is difficult, that effects are reversible or irreversible depending on target, and that the threshold between peace and war is deliberately blurred by actors who benefit from ambiguity. From L19, on resources, the student brings the understanding that control over chokepoints and critical inputs is a form of structural power that operates beneath the level of formal diplomacy. The lesson also looks forward: to L58, on forecasting, because the domains it treats are precisely those where surprise is most likely and where early warning is most valuable; and to L61, on grand strategy, because decisions about investment in space, biosecurity, and infrastructure protection are among the most consequential long-term commitments a state can make.

The African perspective is not an afterthought in this lesson; it is the lens through which the central puzzle is first posed. From an African vantage point, the governance of space, biology, and infrastructure has historically been shaped by actors who possess the capabilities, while those who bear a disproportionate

share of the risks have had limited voice in setting the rules. African states have been largely excluded from the benefits of space-based services that they nonetheless depend upon for weather forecasting, agricultural monitoring, and communications; they have been the sites of pathogen emergence and outbreak response without commensurate investment in laboratory capacity or vaccine manufacturing; and they have inherited infrastructure networks designed for extraction rather than resilience. The lesson therefore asks not only how the new domains are governed, but who governs them, whose risks are centered, and whose are rendered invisible by the framing of "global" governance.

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to perform five analytical operations. First, they will be able to identify the causal mechanisms through which a capability in one of the three domains translates into strategic leverage, specifying the scope conditions under which that mechanism operates and the conditions under which it fails. Second, they will be able to reconstruct how each of the five perspectives—African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN—explains the same event differently, and to adjudicate between those explanations on the basis of evidence rather than assertion. Third, they will be able to apply the four levels of analysis—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—to a worked case, in this instance the 2021 Russian anti-satellite test against Kosmos 1408. Fourth, they will be able to distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in their own analytical writing, a discipline that the independent memo exercise is designed to enforce. Fifth, they will be able to identify the falsifiers that would undermine each major claim, so that their analysis remains open to revision rather than collapsing into advocacy.

The theoretical lineage of the lesson runs through several distinct scholarly traditions. On space security, the work of Joan Johnson-Freese emphasizes the gap between the rhetoric of space as a peaceful domain and the reality of its militarization, arguing that the United States and other major powers have consistently treated space as an extension of terrestrial military strategy while publicly committing to its peaceful use. Todd Harrison's analyses of counterspace capabilities provide the technical and strategic vocabulary for understanding how states actually threaten one another's space assets, distinguishing between reversible and irreversible effects and between kinetic and non-kinetic means. On biosecurity, Andrew Lakoff's research on the governance of biological threats traces how preparedness became a dominant paradigm after the anthrax attacks of 2001, reshaping the relationship between public health, national security, and international cooperation in ways that privileged certain forms of expertise and certain kinds of threat over others. The institutional frameworks are anchored in the documentation of the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) review conferences and implementation reports, and the ongoing negotiations toward a WHO pandemic treaty or instrument.

A methodological commitment runs through the entire lesson: every claim must specify a mechanism, not merely an outcome. It is not enough to observe that states invest in anti-satellite weapons; one must explain how a direct-ascent interceptor alters the strategic calculus of an adversary, under what conditions it is usable, and what constraints—technical, political, legal—limit its employment. Similarly, it is not enough to note that the COVID-19 pandemic exposed governance failures; one must trace the causal pathway from pathogen emergence through surveillance gaps, supply-chain fragility, and geopolitical competition to the observed outcomes in mortality and economic disruption. This mechanism-level discipline is what distinguishes postdoctoral analysis from commentary, and it is the standard against which the student's independent memo will be assessed.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer each question in two to four sentences, drawing on lessons already completed. Do not consult external sources.

1. From L25 (space and maritime domains): What is the legal distinction between the high seas and territorial waters, and how does the concept of the "global commons" apply to outer space under the 1967 Outer Space Treaty? Identify one tension between the treaty's prohibition on national appropriation and the practice of states.

2. From L24 (cyber): What is the "attribution problem" in cyber operations, and why does it matter for deterrence? Give one example of how a state has exploited attribution ambiguity to conduct operations below the threshold of armed conflict.

3. From L19 (resources): Explain the concept of "structural power" as it applies to control over critical resources or chokepoints. How does control over a resource differ from control over the infrastructure that transports it?

4. From L12 (international institutions): What is the difference between a "hard law" treaty and a "soft law" instrument in international governance? Give one example of each from the security domain, and explain why states might prefer soft law in emerging technological domains.

5. From L7 (levels of analysis): Define the four levels of analysis used in this curriculum—individual, state, systemic, and transnational—and give one example of a causal claim at each level that could explain a state's decision to test an anti-satellite weapon.

6. From L3 (realism and liberalism): Under what conditions does realism predict that states will cooperate to govern a common-pool resource, and under what conditions does liberalism predict that international institutions can overcome collective-action problems? Identify one point of convergence between the two theories.

1.2 Orientation Questions These questions frame the lesson's central puzzle. You are not expected to answer them fully before reading; use them to guide your attention.

1. If a state destroys one of its own satellites in a test, producing thousands of pieces of debris that threaten other states' satellites, is that act best understood as a military signal, a technological demonstration, a violation of an emerging norm, or all three? What evidence would distinguish these interpretations?

2. Why did the COVID-19 pandemic produce such divergent national responses and such limited international cooperation, despite decades of pandemic preparedness planning? Which level of analysis—individual leadership, state capacity, systemic competition, or transnational supply chains—best explains the variation?

3. When a cyberattack disables a hospital's power supply, is the target "critical infrastructure" in a legal sense, a military target, or both? How does the answer change depending on whether the attacker is a state, a criminal group, or a non-state actor?

4. What would a genuinely equitable governance framework for space, biosecurity, and critical infrastructure look like from the perspective of a state that possesses none of the relevant capabilities but bears significant risk from their misuse? Which existing institution comes closest to that standard, and

where does it fall short?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach Provisional definitions; refine as you encounter each term in context.

- **Anti-satellite weapon (ASAT):** A weapon designed to disable, destroy, or interfere with a satellite. ASATs include direct-ascent missiles, co-orbital systems, and directed-energy weapons. The term covers both kinetic (physical destruction) and non-kinetic (jamming, dazzling, cyber) means.
- **Counterspace capability:** The broader category of systems and techniques that can deny, degrade, or destroy space assets, including ASATs, electronic warfare, and cyber operations against ground stations. Not all counterspace capabilities are weapons in the legal sense.
- **Positioning, Navigation, and Timing (PNT):** The satellite-based services, of which GPS is the best known, that provide location and time data essential to military operations, civilian transportation, financial systems, and telecommunications. PNT is a critical infrastructure dependency.
- **Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR):** The collection and processing of information about adversary capabilities and intentions, much of which depends on satellite platforms. ISR satellites are often the first targets in a counterspace campaign.
- **Dual-Use Research of Concern (DURC):** Biological research that is intended for legitimate scientific purposes but that could be misapplied to cause harm, for example by enhancing the transmissibility or virulence of a pathogen. The category is contested and its boundaries are politically negotiated.
- **Gain-of-function research:** Experiments that confer new or enhanced biological functions on an organism, such as increased transmissibility in mammals. The term became politically charged during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when questions about the origin of SARS-CoV-2 intersected with debates about laboratory safety.
- **Critical infrastructure:** The systems and assets—physical and cyber—so vital to a society that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, public health, or economic stability. The definition is national, but the systems are often transnational.
- **Space debris (orbital debris):** Non-functional human-made objects in orbit, including spent rocket stages, defunct satellites, and fragments from collisions or tests. Debris is a negative externality: the actor who creates it does not bear its full cost.
- **Co-orbital ASAT:** A counterspace system that is launched into orbit and maneuvers to approach a target satellite, rather than being launched directly at it. Co-orbital systems can inspect, jam, or physically interfere with satellites and are harder to attribute than direct-ascent tests.
- **Direct-ascent ASAT:** A missile launched from Earth's surface or an aircraft that travels upward to intercept and destroy a satellite in orbit. Direct-ascent tests are highly visible and produce large debris fields, making them politically costly.
- **COPUOS (Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space):** The UN body established in 1959 to govern the exploration and use of space for peaceful purposes. It has produced the major space treaties but lacks enforcement mechanisms and has struggled to keep pace with commercial and military developments.

- **Biological Weapons Convention (BWC):** The 1972 treaty prohibiting the development, production, and stockpiling of biological weapons. It has no verification mechanism, a gap that has been debated since its inception and that became acute during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Explain** the mechanism by which space-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT), and communications have become foundational to terrestrial military operations and to civilian infrastructure such as financial settlement, power-grid synchronization, and transportation logistics, and why this dependency converts orbital assets into strategic targets whose disruption would cascade across domains. (Bloom: Understand/Explain)
2. **Analyze** the legal and strategic distinction between the militarization and the weaponization of outer space, evaluating how the 1967 Outer Space Treaty's prohibitions on weapons of mass destruction in orbit and its requirement that space be used for "peaceful purposes" interact with the absence of any prohibition on conventional anti-satellite weapons, directed-energy systems, or co-orbital maneuvering vehicles. (Bloom: Analyze)
3. **Compare** the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on space as a strategic domain, identifying what each tradition contributes to the governance debate and what each systematically occludes, particularly regarding equity of access, sovereignty, multipolarity, deterrence, and multilateral rule-making. (Bloom: Compare/Evaluate)
4. **Assess** the scope conditions under which a state's investment in counterspace capabilities is strategically rational versus destabilizing, using evidence from direct-ascent, co-orbital, and directed-energy test programs and from the debris and escalation risks they generate. (Bloom: Evaluate)
5. **Synthesize** the relationship between space dependency, counterspace proliferation, and strategic stability into a coherent causal argument that can be tested against historical cases, including the 2021 Russian ASAT test against Kosmos 1408, and that can be extended to biosecurity and critical-infrastructure domains. (Bloom: Synthesize)

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Space as a strategic domain: ISR, PNT, communications, and the militarization debate

Bolded Causal Claim: Space has become a strategic domain not because states fight in orbit, but because terrestrial military power and civilian life now depend on orbital infrastructure, making the control, denial, and protection of that infrastructure a first-order security problem whose logic is closer to that of critical infrastructure than to that of a traditional battlespace.

Mechanism: The transformation rests on three functional pillars. First, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) satellites provide the targeting data, battle-damage assessment, and situational awareness that make precision-guided munitions and network-centric warfare possible; without space-based ISR,

modern conventional forces lose the ability to find, fix, and finish targets at range. Second, positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT) signals—most prominently the US Global Positioning System, but also Russia's GLONASS, China's BeiDou, and Europe's Galileo—provide not only location data but the timing synchronization on which financial transaction clearing, power-grid phase balancing, telecommunications handoffs, and transportation logistics depend; a PNT disruption therefore cascades from the military into the civilian economy within hours. Third, communications satellites, including both military dedicated systems and commercial constellations, provide the command-and-control backbone that connects dispersed forces, sensors, and decision-makers across theaters. The mechanism is one of dependency-induced vulnerability: as these functions migrate to orbit, the cost of their loss rises, which creates incentives for adversaries to develop counterspace capabilities, which in turn creates incentives for the dependent state to harden, diversify, or pre-emptively defend its space assets. Joan Johnson-Freese, in *Space Warfare in the 21st Century: Arming the Heavens* (2016), argues that the "space as sanctuary" assumption that governed Cold War thinking has eroded precisely because space assets became too valuable to ignore and too vulnerable to protect passively; the domain shifted from a support function to a contested strategic environment. Todd Harrison's annual *Space Threat Assessment* reports for the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Aerospace Security Project document the operational reality of this shift, tracking how major powers have integrated space into their warfighting concepts and how counterspace development has accelerated in response to perceived US space dominance. The mechanism is self-reinforcing: dependency drives vulnerability, vulnerability drives counterspace development, counterspace development drives further hardening and doctrinal integration, and the cycle deepens the domain's strategic salience without requiring a single shot fired in orbit.

Scope Conditions: The claim holds under several conditions and fails under others. It holds most strongly for states that (a) operate or depend on space-based ISR, PNT, and communications for conventional military operations, (b) face adversaries with demonstrated or suspected counterspace capabilities, and (c) have integrated space into their joint warfighting doctrine. It holds less strongly for states whose military operations are not space-dependent, whose adversaries lack counterspace options, or whose space use is confined to civilian applications such as earth observation and communications. The legal scope is also conditional: the 1967 Outer Space Treaty (OST) prohibits the placement of weapons of mass destruction in orbit and requires that the Moon and other celestial bodies be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, but it does not prohibit conventional weapons in orbit, anti-satellite tests, or the use of space for military support functions; the treaty's "peaceful purposes" language has been interpreted by spacefaring states as permitting military support activities while prohibiting only aggressive acts. The distinction between militarization (using space to support military operations, which all major powers do) and weaponization (placing weapons in space capable of attacking targets, which remains partially contested) is therefore a legal and political construct rather than a bright line, and its stability depends on continued mutual restraint. The claim also assumes that orbital infrastructure remains concentrated enough that disruption is strategically meaningful; the proliferation of commercial mega-constellations may dilute this concentration over time, though it does not eliminate the vulnerability of the most valuable military and government satellites.

Observable Implications: If the causal claim is correct, one should observe several patterns. First, the creation or elevation of dedicated military space organizations, such as the United States Space Force (established 2019), NATO's designation of space as an operational domain (2019), and the expansion of space commands in China, Russia, and other states. Second, increased investment in space domain awareness, satellite hardening, and alternative PNT systems as dependent states seek resilience. Third, the development and testing of counterspace capabilities by states that perceive themselves as disadvantaged in space, documented in Harrison's annual assessments. Fourth, the integration of space considerations into arms-control

and strategic-stability dialogues, including discussions of responsible behavior in space and debris mitigation. Fifth, the commercialization of space and the blurring of civilian and military satellite functions, which complicates attribution and escalation management. Sixth, rising insurance costs and risk assessments for satellite operators following debris-generating events. The 2021 Russian ASAT test against Kosmos 1408, which generated thousands of trackable debris pieces and forced the International Space Station crew to take shelter, is a direct observable implication: a state demonstrated that it could destroy a satellite in orbit, and the international community's response—condemnation, debris-tracking efforts, and renewed calls for norms—confirmed that the domain had become strategically contested.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on space as a strategic domain is shaped by a fundamental asymmetry: most African states are users and beneficiaries of space services rather than operators of military space assets, and their strategic interest lies in access, equity, and development rather than in orbital warfare. African space activity has grown substantially, with Egypt (Nilesat, EgyptSat), Nigeria (NigComSat), South Africa (SumbandilaSat and the South African National Space Agency), Kenya (Taifa-1, launched 2023), Rwanda, and others developing earth-observation and communications capabilities, and with the African Union establishing the African Space Agency (AfSA), headquartered in Cairo, to coordinate continental space policy. From this vantage point, the militarization debate appears as a great-power conversation that risks crowding out the development agenda: orbital slots and radio-frequency spectrum are allocated by the International Telecommunication Union on a first-come, first-served basis that disadvantages latecomers, technology transfer remains limited, and the debris generated by counterspace tests threatens the orbital environment on which African earth-observation and climate-monitoring satellites depend. African scholars and policymakers have emphasized that space is a global commons whose benefits must be shared equitably, and that the "space for development" framing—using remote sensing for agriculture, disaster management, water resources, and climate adaptation—is as strategically significant for African states as military space is for great powers. The African perspective thus reveals what the Western security framing occludes: that the most consequential space vulnerabilities for most of the world's population are not counterspace attacks but the denial of access, the concentration of orbital resources, and the environmental degradation of the commons. It also highlights the tension between the Outer Space Treaty's principle that space exploration and use shall be carried out for the benefit of all countries and the practical reality that spacefaring capacity is concentrated in a handful of states. Grovogui's broader critique of international order as structured by hierarchical sovereignty and unequal capacity resonates here: the governance of space reproduces the very inequalities it claims to transcend, and African states must engage not merely as beneficiaries but as rule-makers if the domain is to serve their interests.

Chinese: China frames space as a domain of sovereign right and national rejuvenation, emphasizing that its space program is peaceful in purpose while acknowledging its military applications. Beijing completed the BeiDou navigation constellation in 2020, operates the Tiangong space station, and pursues lunar and Mars exploration, all of which are presented as contributions to human progress and to China's strategic autonomy. China's official position opposes the weaponization of outer space and supports the negotiation of a treaty on the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS), while simultaneously developing counterspace capabilities and conducting an ASAT test in 2007 that destroyed a defunct weather satellite and generated substantial debris. The Chinese perspective tends to attribute the militarization of space to the United States, framing American space dominance and missile-defense programs as the driving force, and to present China's own capabilities as defensive and responsive. This perspective contributes the argument that space governance must be multipolar and that no single state should dominate the domain, but it occludes

the extent to which China's own counterspace development contributes to the security dilemma it decries.

Russian: Russia inherits the Soviet space legacy and maintains a full spectrum of space capabilities, including GLONASS, military communications, and ISR satellites, as well as demonstrated counterspace systems. Moscow frames space through a multipolarity lens, opposing what it characterizes as US attempts to achieve space dominance and supporting PAROS negotiations in the Conference on Disarmament. Russia's 2021 ASAT test against Kosmos 1408 demonstrated its counterspace capability while generating international condemnation and debris. The Russian perspective emphasizes strategic stability and the prevention of an arms race, but it also treats space as an arena of great-power competition in which Russia must maintain parity. This perspective contributes the argument that unilateral US space policy destabilizes the domain, but it occludes Russia's own role in debris generation and in the erosion of space norms.

Western: The Western perspective, led by the United States but shared in varying degrees by European and allied states, treats space as a warfighting domain whose security requires deterrence, resilience, and allied cooperation. The creation of the US Space Force, NATO's space policy, and investments in space domain awareness and satellite protection reflect this framing. Western analysts such as Harrison emphasize that the United States is uniquely dependent on space and therefore uniquely vulnerable, and that this vulnerability requires both defensive measures and the development of counterspace options for deterrence. The Western perspective also includes a governance self-critique: recognition that the OST is outdated, that commercialization has outpaced regulation, and that debris and congestion threaten long-term sustainability. This perspective contributes operational realism and alliance frameworks, but it can occlude the equity concerns of non-spacefaring states and can frame space primarily through a security lens that underweights development and environmental sustainability.

UN: The United Nations perspective is institutional and legal, centered on the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS), the Outer Space Treaty and its associated agreements, and the broader framework of international space law. The UN emphasizes that space is the province of all humankind, that its exploration and use should benefit all countries, and that multilateral governance is essential to prevent conflict and ensure sustainability. Recent developments include the Pact for the Future (2024), which contains commitments on space governance, and ongoing discussions of responsible behavior in space, debris mitigation, and the long-term sustainability of outer space activities. The UN perspective contributes the normative framework and the forum for negotiation, but it is constrained by the consensus-based nature of COPUOS, the absence of enforcement mechanisms, and the reluctance of major spacefaring states to accept binding limitations on their military activities in space.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Anti-satellite weapons and counterspace capabilities: direct ascent, co-orbital, directed energy

Bolded Causal Claim: The diffusion of counterspace capabilities converts satellites from protected strategic enablers into exposed and contestable assets, producing a security dilemma in which dependence on space and the ability to disrupt space assets jointly erode crisis stability, particularly when attacks are reversible, ambiguously attributable, or debris-producing.

Mechanism: Space systems are high-value, comparatively soft, and operate in predictable orbital regimes; their military utility rests on communications, positioning, navigation, and timing, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. Counterspace capabilities exploit these vulnerabilities through several distinct

mechanisms. Direct-ascent anti-satellite weapons use ground- or air-launched kinetic interceptors to destroy satellites in orbit; they are technologically mature, have been demonstrated by multiple states, and create debris that can persist for years or decades. Co-orbital systems are launched into orbit and maneuver near a target satellite, enabling inspection, jamming, dazzling, physical interference, or collision; because such systems can resemble servicing or inspection platforms, they complicate attribution and intent assessment. Directed-energy weapons use lasers or high-powered microwaves to dazzle, blind, or damage sensors and electronics, sometimes reversibly and sometimes irreversibly, with effects that may be difficult to distinguish from malfunction. Non-kinetic counterspace includes jamming, spoofing, cyber intrusion, and attacks on ground stations or data links, which are often reversible, deniable, and below the threshold of armed attack. The strategic mechanism is not simply that satellites can be destroyed; it is that a state whose military operations depend on space may face a "use it or lose it" incentive in crisis, while an attacker may choose reversible or ambiguous effects to coerce without crossing a clear escalation threshold. Deterrence is complicated because punishment in space can harm the attacker's own assets and because denial requires costly resilience, redundancy, and maneuver. Johnson-Freese (2016) captures the broader point that space warfare is shaped less by cinematic destruction than by the gradual erosion of the sanctuary assumption and by the integration of space into conventional military planning.

Scope Conditions: This causal claim applies most strongly where (a) a state's military effectiveness is tightly coupled to space-based services, (b) an adversary possesses or can acquire counterspace options, and (c) the two are in a crisis or conventional conflict in which space assets are perceived as force multipliers or vulnerabilities. It is less applicable to states with minimal space dependence, to conflicts in which neither side has counterspace, or to situations where the debris externality of kinetic attack is so severe that it deters use. The maturity of capabilities also matters: direct-ascent systems are proven, while co-orbital and directed-energy systems remain less mature and more dependent on precision, power, and orbital mechanics. Orbital regime matters as well; kinetic attacks in low Earth orbit create long-lived debris fields, whereas attacks in geostationary orbit may produce less debris but target extremely high-value assets. Legally, the Outer Space Treaty prohibits the placement of weapons of mass destruction in orbit but does not clearly prohibit conventional anti-satellite testing or use, leaving a permissive environment for counterspace development. The claim should not be read as predicting inevitable space war; rather, it identifies a structural pressure toward preemption, ambiguity, and escalation management problems.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is operating, one should observe doctrinal reclassification of space as a warfighting domain, increased investment in space situational awareness, satellite maneuverability, proliferated constellations, hardening, and rapid reconstitution. One should also observe public counterspace demonstrations, debris-generating events, and diplomatic efforts to constrain them, including national moratoria on destructive direct-ascent anti-satellite testing and multilateral resolutions calling for restraint. Commercial and allied satellites increasingly become entangled with military functions, blurring the line between civilian and military targets and complicating deterrence. Observable indicators include changes in satellite "pattern of life," proximity operations, reported jamming or spoofing incidents, debris-tracking catalogs, and the growth of resilience programs. Arms-control proposals such as no-first-placement or responsible-behavior frameworks should be understood partly as responses to these observable pressures. Harrison (2021) is useful for tracking how counterspace threats are assessed in relation to resilience and deterrence, though the precise balance between vulnerability and adaptation remains contested.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: African states are predominantly users rather than owners of space infrastructure, relying on foreign satellites for weather, agriculture, communications, and disaster response; counterspace debris therefore

threatens a shared commons on which African development depends, while African voices in multilateral forums emphasize equitable access, capacity building, non-appropriation, and the developmental uses of space. The African perspective is concerned that great-power militarization diverts resources and attention from space-for-development priorities, and it tends to support constraints on debris-producing tests without necessarily possessing indigenous counterspace capabilities.
Chinese: China frames space as a strategic domain and sovereign right, opposes the weaponization of outer space rhetorically, and has promoted multilateral arms-control initiatives such as the draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space, while also developing counterspace capabilities that it presents as defensive and responsive to perceived U.S. space dominance.
Russian: Russia draws on a legacy of anti-satellite development and frames space competition through multipolarity, treating U.S. and NATO space militarization as a threat to strategic stability while supporting arms-control proposals and maintaining counterspace options for deterrence and parity.
Western: Western, especially U.S. and NATO, perspectives treat space as a warfighting domain and emphasize counterspace threats from China and Russia, resilience, deterrence, and responsible behavior, including national moratoria on destructive direct-ascent testing; this perspective also contains an internal critique of weaponization, commercialization, and debris externalities.
UN: The UN perspective rests on the Outer Space Treaty, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, and the long-term sustainability agenda; it seeks norms on debris mitigation and responsible behavior but is constrained by consensus decision-making, the absence of enforcement, and major powers' reluctance to accept binding military limitations.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Biosecurity: pandemics, labs, dual-use research, and the post-COVID governance landscape

Bolded Causal Claim: Biological capabilities are inherently dual-use, so the same scientific and industrial advances that improve health, agriculture, and industry also expand the range of actors and accidents capable of causing catastrophic harm; after COVID-19, geopolitical distrust has weakened rather than consolidated the cooperative institutions needed to govern those risks, leaving a biosecurity landscape marked by securitization, inequality, and incomplete verification.

Mechanism: The core mechanism is dual-use: DNA sequencing, synthesis, gene editing, high-containment laboratories, and increasingly AI-assisted biological design can be used for vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and agricultural resilience, but the same knowledge and infrastructure can be misused for biological weapons or can release dangerous pathogens accidentally. Biosafety concerns accidental exposure and containment failure; biosecurity concerns deliberate misuse, theft, or diversion. Pandemic risk is amplified by zoonotic spillover, land-use change, climate stress, urbanization, global travel, and dense supply chains. Governance is layered and incomplete: the Biological Weapons Convention prohibits biological weapons but has no formal verification mechanism; the World Health Organization's International Health Regulations focus on detection, notification, and response; national biosafety and biosecurity regimes vary widely; export controls and funding oversight are uneven. COVID-19 exposed these gaps through uncertain origins, fragile supply chains, inequitable access to vaccines and diagnostics, misinformation, and the politicization of public health. It also accelerated health securitization: states treated pathogens as national-security threats, imposed export controls, and used health assistance as geopolitical leverage. Post-COVID governance is shaped by a feedback loop in which demands for transparency and verification collide with sovereignty, while demands for equity collide with intellectual property and industrial capacity. Lakoff (2017) is useful for understanding how preparedness is not merely a technical problem but a governmental rationality that

defines populations, risks, and responsibilities in particular ways, often privileging some forms of security over others.

Scope Conditions: This claim applies most strongly to high-consequence pathogens, dual-use research of concern, and globally connected societies in which a local outbreak can become a pandemic. It is less applicable to low-consequence endemic disease or to settings where biological research is minimal and health systems are robust. The governance problem is most acute where laboratory capacity, surveillance, and public-health infrastructure are weak or unevenly distributed, and where trust among major powers is low. The biological-weapons taboo remains a real constraint, but it is not self-enforcing; it depends on norms, national implementation, and the absence of incentives to defect. Post-COVID reforms may improve preparedness, but they can also restrict legitimate research, stigmatize scientists, or securitize health in ways that disadvantage poorer states. The claim should not be read as asserting that COVID-19 was a biological weapon or that a specific laboratory origin has been proven; rather, it treats origin uncertainty itself as a governance problem that shapes trust and policy.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism is operating, one should observe expanded national biosecurity strategies, revised laboratory oversight rules, debates over gain-of-function research, tighter export controls on biotechnology, and increased funding for pandemic preparedness. One should also observe multilateral processes such as Biological Weapons Convention review conferences, confidence-building measures, and negotiations over a pandemic agreement, alongside amendments to the International Health Regulations. Vaccine and diagnostic manufacturing initiatives in the Global South, technology-transfer disputes, and "vaccine equity" campaigns are observable indicators of the inequality dimension. Origin investigations, lab-leak discourse, misinformation, and accusations of biological weapons activity indicate the trust deficit. Metrics may include preparedness assessments, laboratory incident reporting, BWC compliance measures, vaccine coverage gaps, and the geographic distribution of biotechnology capacity. BWC reports and WHO pandemic treaty negotiations provide institutional evidence of both the demand for governance and the difficulty of achieving it.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):
African: African states experienced COVID-19 through structural inequality rather than merely epidemiological risk: limited vaccine access, diagnostic dependence, weak manufacturing capacity, and externally determined priorities revealed a pattern in which African populations are protected last and governed from afar. African scholarship, including work by Mamdani, Bayart, and Rodney, emphasizes extraversion, dependency, and the political economy of external control; from this vantage point, biosecurity is inseparable from health sovereignty, technology transfer, and equitable access to medical countermeasures. African perspectives often support stronger multilateral preparedness while warning that securitization can restrict research access, stigmatize African laboratories, or reproduce donor-driven agendas. The African CDC and regional initiatives represent efforts to convert vulnerability into institutional capacity, but they remain constrained by financing and global supply chains.
Chinese: China frames biosecurity as a matter of sovereignty, development, and state capacity, emphasizing biosafety legislation, laboratory governance, and the legitimacy of its pandemic response while opposing accusations that politicize origins or stigmatize Chinese science. It supports the Biological Weapons Convention but resists intrusive verification mechanisms that it regards as sovereignty-infringing, and it uses vaccine diplomacy and health assistance as instruments of international influence.
Russian: Russia frames biosecurity through multipolarity and suspicion of Western, especially U.S., biological activities near its borders, emphasizing Biological Weapons Convention strengthening and verification while using biosecurity narratives as geopolitical instruments. It presents the pandemic as evidence of West-

ern institutional failure and insists on sovereignty over health and research governance.
Western: Western perspectives emphasize laboratory safety, oversight of dual-use research of concern, pandemic preparedness, and modernization of the Biological Weapons Convention, while also engaging in self-critique regarding vaccine inequity, origin opacity, politicization, and the securitization of health. They focus on compliance, transparency, and verification but remain divided over how intrusive international oversight should be.
UN: The UN perspective is anchored in the World Health Organization and the Biological Weapons Convention, with emphasis on equity, preparedness, international health regulations, and multilateral cooperation. It is constrained by sovereignty, funding shortfalls, geopolitical distrust, and the absence of robust verification, so its contribution is primarily normative and coordinative rather than coercive.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Critical infrastructure targeting — the blurring of civilian/military and the evolution of sabotage

Bolded Causal Claim: Critical infrastructure has become a central object of strategic competition because civilian systems now carry military functions, and because sabotage has evolved from kinetic destruction into reversible, deniable, software-enabled disruption that exploits legal and institutional gaps.

Mechanism: Critical infrastructure is conventionally defined as the systems and assets whose incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, the economy, public health, or safety. The category includes energy generation and distribution, water and wastewater systems, transportation networks, financial services, health-care systems, communications, and the ground segments that support space-based services. The first mechanism is functional fusion: modern military power depends on civilian infrastructure for command and control, logistics, intelligence fusion, precision timing, cloud computing, and data transport. A state's armed forces may own satellites and weapons platforms, but they routinely rely on civilian power grids, commercial undersea cables, internet service providers, and global navigation and timing signals. This means that an attack on civilian infrastructure can produce military effects without a conventional armed attack, and that the attacker can plausibly frame the operation as criminal, technical, or non-state activity. The civilian/military boundary, which underpins much of the law of armed conflict and deterrence theory, becomes analytically and legally unstable.

The second mechanism is the evolution of sabotage itself. Historically, sabotage meant physical destruction: explosives on rail lines, arson in factories, or covert action against industrial plants. Contemporary sabotage increasingly operates through digital access to operational technology. Adversaries can pre-position in networks, manipulate control systems, alter data, disable safety mechanisms, or trigger ransomware-like effects in hospitals, pipelines, water treatment facilities, or port logistics systems. These operations are often reversible, which lowers the perceived cost of escalation, but they can still cause physical harm, environmental damage, or cascading failures. Reversibility does not mean harmlessness; it means that the attacker may believe the operation stays below the threshold of armed conflict while the defender experiences it as a strategic attack. The evolution also includes supply-chain compromise, in which malicious code or hardware is inserted before systems are deployed, and the exploitation of common software dependencies that create single points of failure across sectors and borders.

A third mechanism is interdependence and cascading failure. Critical infrastructure is not a set of isolated assets but a network of networks. Electricity depends on fuel supply and water cooling; water depends on electricity; hospitals depend on both; financial settlement depends on timing signals; ports depend on

customs, fuel, and communications. Just-in-time logistics and lean inventories reduce buffers. Undersea cables concentrate global data flows through a small number of chokepoints. Common cloud providers and software platforms create correlated vulnerabilities. Consequently, a localized intrusion can propagate across sectors and jurisdictions, producing effects larger than the attacker's immediate target. This creates strategic leverage disproportionate to the technical sophistication of the operation.

A fourth mechanism is the attribution and governance gap. Infrastructure is often privately owned and operated, while national security responsibility remains public. Attribution in cyberspace is technically and politically uncertain, especially when adversaries use proxies, criminal ecosystems, or "living off the land" techniques that blend into legitimate administrative activity. International law has not settled when a cyber operation against infrastructure constitutes a use of force or an armed attack, nor has it established clear standards for countermeasures, due diligence, or state responsibility for non-state actors operating from a state's territory. The result is a permissive environment in which states can probe, coerce, and signal while maintaining deniability. The blurring of civilian and military functions therefore does not merely complicate targeting; it complicates deterrence, because deterrence depends on credible attribution, shared thresholds, and predictable response options.

Scope Conditions: The causal claim holds most strongly where operational technology is networked and remotely accessible, where legacy systems were not designed for adversarial environments, and where ownership is fragmented between public regulators and private operators. It is weaker where systems are air-gapped, manually overridden, redundantly designed, or protected by mature sector-specific regulation. The claim also depends on the adversary's risk tolerance and on the target society's resilience: a society with stockpiles, manual procedures, and rapid incident response may absorb disruption that would destabilize a more brittle system. Legal ambiguity is a scope condition rather than a universal constant; some states have developed domestic thresholds and reporting regimes that reduce uncertainty, while others have not. Finally, the blurring of civilian and military functions is most acute in advanced, digitally integrated economies and in conflict zones where civilian infrastructure is already militarized; it is less pronounced where infrastructure is sparse, manually operated, or not integrated into military planning.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism is operating, one should observe an increase in reported intrusions into energy, water, health, transportation, and communications systems, without a corresponding increase in publicly acknowledged armed attacks. One should also observe policy shifts from purely voluntary guidance toward mandatory reporting, sector-specific cybersecurity requirements, and resilience planning, as seen in frameworks such as the European Union's NIS2 Directive and national critical infrastructure protection programs. Market responses should include growth in cyber insurance, third-party risk assessment, tabletop exercises, and vendor security requirements. Militarily, one should observe the integration of cyber commands with infrastructure defense, the development of "defend forward" or persistent engagement doctrines, and greater attention to space ground segments, undersea cables, and timing infrastructure as strategic assets. Internationally, one should observe repeated attribution statements, sanctions, and diplomatic protests, alongside debates over whether international humanitarian law applies to cyber operations against civilian infrastructure and whether certain infrastructure should be treated as protected. In the biosecurity domain, one should observe heightened concern about the cybersecurity of laboratories, hospitals, and pharmaceutical supply chains, because biological and digital vulnerabilities increasingly overlap.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African: The African perspective begins from the material reality that critical infrastructure is both a developmental lifeline and a vector of external control. Many African states inherited infrastructure designed for extraction rather than national integration, and contemporary sys-

tems often depend on foreign financing, foreign technology, and foreign operators. From this vantage point, sabotage and disruption are not abstract strategic possibilities but immediate threats to water, electricity, health care, food systems, and state capacity. African scholarship on extraversion and infrastructural violence highlights how external actors can shape domestic outcomes through control of networks, standards, and financing. The priority is therefore not only deterrence but resilience, sovereignty, and equitable capacity building: local maintenance capability, diversified supply chains, regional interconnection, and governance that prevents infrastructure from becoming a hostage to external power. The African perspective also warns that securitizing infrastructure without addressing underinvestment can deepen inequality, because protection may be concentrated in elite or extractive nodes while ordinary users remain exposed.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective treats critical infrastructure security as an extension of sovereignty, development, and national security. It emphasizes state capacity, centralized coordination, and the protection of infrastructure from both foreign interference and domestic instability. Chinese discourse often frames cyberspace and infrastructure governance in terms of cyber sovereignty, meaning that states have the right to manage and secure networks within their territory. This perspective supports strong domestic regulation, industrial policy, and the development of indigenous technology, while resisting external attribution or intervention that it regards as politicized. It contributes a focus on development-security integration and on the role of the state in coordinating public and private actors, but it may occlude concerns about transparency, independent oversight, and the civil-liberties implications of expansive security controls.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames critical infrastructure targeting within a broader discourse of information security and hybrid conflict. It emphasizes the vulnerability of state and societal systems to external manipulation, including through information and communication technologies, and it often treats Western attributions of cyber activity as politically motivated. Russian strategic thought has long stressed the importance of protecting information resources and maintaining sovereign control over domestic networks. This perspective contributes attention to the political and informational dimensions of infrastructure disruption, but it may occlude accountability for state-sponsored operations and can blur the distinction between defensive sovereignty and offensive interference. Its multipolarity framing also tends to treat infrastructure competition as part of a wider contest over the international order rather than as a technical governance problem.

Western: The Western perspective is shaped by a combination of deterrence theory, public-private partnership, and legal-institutional development. It emphasizes attribution, resilience, sectoral regulation, and the application of international law to cyber operations. Western states have invested heavily in critical infrastructure protection, incident response, and military cyber capabilities, while also debating how to defend privately owned systems without over-militarizing civilian space. This perspective contributes sophisticated technical and legal analysis, but it is subject to self-critique: it can over-securitize infrastructure, impose compliance burdens on private operators, rely on uncertain attribution, and struggle to reconcile deterrence with the reality that much infrastructure disruption occurs below the threshold of armed conflict. It also faces tension between openness and security in globally integrated supply chains.

UN: The UN perspective is anchored in multilateral norms, capacity building, and the protection of civilian objects. It emphasizes voluntary norms of responsible state behavior in cyberspace, including the principle that states should not conduct or knowingly support activity that intentionally damages critical infrastructure, and that they should respond to requests for assistance. The UN framework also stresses confidence-building measures, information sharing, and assistance to developing states. Its contribution is normative and coordinative rather than coercive, because it lacks enforcement mechanisms and depends on consensus among

states with divergent interests. It is constrained by sovereignty, funding limitations, and the difficulty of verifying compliance, but it remains the primary forum for articulating shared expectations about infrastructure protection.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The new domains and the international rule-making effort

Bolded Causal Claim: The expansion of strategic competition into space, cyber, biosecurity, and critical infrastructure has generated a fragmented, power-asymmetric rule-making environment in which binding treaties are scarce, soft law and technical standards proliferate, and governance outcomes depend on forum selection, capacity, and great-power bargaining.

Mechanism: The first mechanism is institutional lag. International law and organizations were built around territorial states, conventional weapons, and relatively slow technological change. New domains do not fit neatly into existing categories. Space is governed by treaties negotiated during the Cold War that prohibit national appropriation and weapons of mass destruction in orbit but do not comprehensively address debris, rendezvous and proximity operations, or counterspace capabilities. Biology is governed by the Biological Weapons Convention, which lacks a verification protocol and struggles with dual-use research, synthetic biology, and pandemic preparedness. Cyberspace and critical infrastructure lack a universal treaty altogether; governance relies on non-binding norms, regional frameworks, and domestic regulation. The result is that technological change outpaces legal adaptation, and states operate in zones of interpretive ambiguity.

The second mechanism is forum proliferation and forum shopping. Rule-making now occurs simultaneously in the United Nations, specialized agencies such as the World Health Organization and the International Telecommunication Union, regional organizations, export-control regimes, standards bodies, industry consortia, and bilateral arrangements. States and firms select forums that favor their interests. Major powers may prefer flexible, non-binding arrangements that preserve strategic freedom; smaller states may prefer binding rules and capacity-building; private actors may prefer technical standards that entrench their market position. This multiplicity can be productive, because it allows experimentation and adaptation, but it also produces fragmentation, duplication, and inconsistent obligations. A state may be bound by one framework in a regional organization, another in a UN process, and a third through procurement or supply-chain requirements.

The third mechanism is the shift from disarmament to responsible behavior. In domains where verification is difficult or politically unacceptable, states have moved from negotiating prohibitions toward articulating norms of responsible conduct, confidence-building measures, and transparency. The UN Group of Governmental Experts and Open-Ended Working Group on information and telecommunications have produced consensus reports on responsible state behavior in cyberspace. The UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space has adopted guidelines for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities. The Biological Weapons Convention has developed intersessional work programs on science and technology, biosafety, and preparedness. These instruments are valuable because they create shared expectations and vocabularies, but they are not treaties and do not create enforcement mechanisms. They depend on voluntary compliance and political will.

The fourth mechanism is power asymmetry in standard-setting. In new domains, technical capacity is a form of power. States and firms that control satellite constellations, cloud infrastructure, biotechnology platforms, or cybersecurity tools can shape de facto rules through design choices, licensing, export controls, and market access. Export-control regimes such as the Australia Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement, along with national sanctions and investment screening, function as governance instruments even when they

are not framed as law. This means that rule-making is not only diplomatic; it is infrastructural. The states and companies that build and operate systems often determine how they are used, monitored, and secured. Weaker states may find themselves governed by standards they did not help design, while major powers retain discretion through exceptions, reservations, and non-participation.

The fifth mechanism is contestation over sovereignty and openness. New domains raise recurring questions: Who controls orbital slots and spectrum? Who owns biological data and genetic resources? Who has authority over cross-border data flows and infrastructure? Who is responsible for debris, pandemics, or cyber intrusions? Major powers disagree on whether governance should emphasize state sovereignty and non-interference or openness, interoperability, and multilateral oversight. This disagreement is not merely ideological; it reflects different capabilities and vulnerabilities. States with advanced space, biotech, and cyber capacities may prefer flexible rules that preserve advantage, while states with fewer capabilities may seek constraints, access, and assistance. The result is that rule-making becomes an arena of strategic competition rather than neutral administration.

Scope Conditions: The claim that rule-making is fragmented and power-asymmetric holds most strongly where technology is dual-use, rapidly evolving, and difficult to verify. It is weaker where a single dominant actor can impose standards, where technical consensus is strong, or where a well-established treaty regime already exists. Binding treaties remain possible when major powers share an interest in restraint, as in some arms-control contexts, but they are difficult when verification is intrusive or when states fear that constraints will lock in disadvantage. Soft law is more likely when consensus is required but trust is low. The effectiveness of any rule also depends on domestic implementation, industry compliance, and monitoring capacity; a well-drafted guideline that is not implemented domestically has limited effect. Finally, the claim should not be read as implying that no governance exists: there is substantial governance, but it is uneven, layered, and often non-binding.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism is operating, one should observe few new comprehensive binding treaties in space, cyber, biosecurity, or infrastructure, alongside a proliferation of guidelines, codes of conduct, voluntary commitments, and technical standards. One should observe UN processes producing incremental outputs rather than transformative agreements, such as long-term sustainability guidelines, responsible-behavior reports, and intersessional work programs. One should observe the expansion of national regulations, export controls, and investment screening with extraterritorial effects. One should observe private standards bodies, cloud providers, biotechnology firms, and satellite operators exercising de facto regulatory power through terms of service, licensing, and design. One should observe persistent disputes over definitions, thresholds, and verification, including debates over what counts as an armed attack in cyberspace, how to attribute biological incidents, and how to manage orbital debris. One should also observe "responsible behavior" and "risk reduction" replacing disarmament as the dominant diplomatic vocabulary, because these frames allow cooperation without requiring intrusive verification or equal restraint.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African: The African perspective insists that rule-making in new domains must be evaluated by its effects on equity, access, and capacity. African states are often rule-takers in regimes designed by major powers, and their priorities include satellite access, spectrum allocation, pandemic preparedness, technology transfer, and protection of critical infrastructure. African scholarship and diplomacy frequently emphasize common but differentiated responsibilities, inclusive participation, and the avoidance of new forms of dependency. From this vantage point, governance that focuses only on security risks can neglect development needs, while governance that focuses only on access can neglect safety and accountability. The African perspective therefore calls for rules that are not only non-discriminatory in form

but also redistributive in effect, with sustained investment in African scientific, regulatory, and technical capacity.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes sovereignty, development, and multipolarity in rule-making. It supports multilateral institutions but resists intrusive verification or governance arrangements that it regards as instruments of Western dominance. Chinese discourse often frames new domains through concepts such as cyber sovereignty and a community of shared future for mankind, stressing state equality, non-interference, and the right to development. This perspective contributes a challenge to Western-centric governance and a demand for greater voice for developing states, but it may occlude concerns about transparency, independent oversight, and the security implications of state-centric control. It also tends to favor state-led governance over private or civil-society participation.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames rule-making in new domains as part of a broader struggle for a multipolar international order. It emphasizes the equality of states, opposes what it sees as Western monopoly over norms and standards, and stresses information security rather than the narrower Western concept of cybersecurity. Russian diplomacy often supports binding treaties and opposes unilateral sanctions or extraterritorial regulation. This perspective contributes attention to power asymmetry and to the political uses of norm-setting, but it may occlude accountability for state behavior and can treat governance disputes primarily as geopolitical contests rather than technical or humanitarian problems. It also tends to favor state sovereignty over individual or corporate rights.

Western: The Western perspective is anchored in a rules-based international order, responsible state behavior, transparency, and verification. It supports multilateral governance but also relies on alliances, export controls, and private-sector partnerships. Western states have been active in developing norms for cyberspace, space sustainability, and biosecurity, while also engaging in self-critique about legitimacy, overreach, and the gap between rhetoric and practice. This perspective contributes legal sophistication and institutional capacity, but it is vulnerable to charges of double standards, especially when powerful states exempt themselves from constraints or use governance mechanisms to preserve technological advantage. Its self-critique increasingly acknowledges that governance must be inclusive and that standards must be legitimate to be effective.

UN: The UN perspective is anchored in multilateralism, consensus, and capacity building. It provides the primary forums for discussing new domains, including COPUOS for space, the BWC and WHO for biosecurity, and the General Assembly processes for cyberspace. Its contribution is to articulate shared norms, facilitate dialogue, and support developing states. It is constrained by the need for consensus, funding shortfalls, geopolitical distrust, and the absence of robust enforcement. In practice, the UN perspective is less a single actor than a framework within which competing state perspectives contend, but it remains indispensable for legitimizing rules and preventing unilateralism. Its central challenge is to move from norm articulation to implementation without losing the inclusivity that gives its outputs authority.

SECTION 2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African perspective on space, biosecurity, and critical infrastructure must be reconstructed from within rather than treated as a regional application of Western security theory. Its starting point is not the question of how to manage new domains as strategic arenas among great powers, but the question of how those domains reproduce, extend, or potentially interrupt historically unequal structures of power. African scholarship on

colonialism, dependency, extraversion, and decoloniality provides the theoretical vocabulary for this reconstruction. Grovogui's critique of international legal order as a historically racialized and imperial project; Mbembe's analysis of necropolitics and the infrastructures through which life and death are distributed; Bayart's account of the extraverted African state; Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject; Rodney's demonstration that underdevelopment is an active historical process; Nkrumah's theory of neo-colonialism; Nyerere's insistence on self-reliance; Cabral's recovery of culture as a site of resistance; Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and the need for a new humanism; Aning and Danso's work on African security governance; Tamale's decolonial Afro-feminism; and Oyěwùmí's critique of colonial categories all converge on a common insight: the "global" in global governance is not a neutral container but a historically produced hierarchy. From this vantage point, space, biosecurity, and critical infrastructure are not empty frontiers awaiting rules; they are already saturated with colonial and neo-colonial relations.

In the space domain, the African perspective begins with access rather than weaponization. African states and regional institutions have invested in satellite programs for communications, earth observation, weather forecasting, agriculture, and disaster management, but these programs remain structurally dependent on foreign launch services, components, data-processing platforms, and financing. The issue is not simply technological lag; it is the political economy of orbital access, spectrum allocation, and data ownership. Historically, the allocation of orbital slots and radio frequencies occurred within institutions and timelines that privileged early spacefaring powers. African states therefore approach space governance with a dual demand: nonmilitarization and equitable participation. They generally support the peaceful uses of outer space and resist the placement of weapons in orbit, but they also insist that peaceful use must include meaningful access, technology transfer, and capacity building. The African Space Agency and national programs are not merely symbols of prestige; they are attempts to secure sovereign control over data that describe African land, resources, populations, and climate. From an African perspective, earth observation can become a form of data colonialism when imagery, analytics, and value-added services are owned and monetized by external actors. The contribution of this perspective is to show that space security is not only about anti-satellite weapons and debris; it is also about who owns the infrastructures of seeing, measuring, and knowing the continent.

The African perspective also reframes the biosecurity domain. Western and UN discussions often center on laboratory safety, dual-use research, pathogen surveillance, and pandemic preparedness. These are necessary, but African scholarship and policy experience highlight that biosecurity is inseparable from biosovereignty. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed profound asymmetries: delayed vaccine access, dependence on external manufacturing, weak regulatory and cold-chain capacity, and the stigmatization of African states when new variants were identified. The identification of the Omicron variant in South Africa, followed by travel bans and political blame, illustrated how genomic surveillance can be coupled with punitive rather than solidaristic responses. African states and scholars therefore emphasize pathogen access and benefit sharing, technology transfer, local manufacturing, and the decolonization of global health governance. The BWC and WHO pandemic treaty negotiations are not merely technical exercises; they are arenas in which African states seek to prevent biological resources and data from being extracted without reciprocal benefit. Tamale's decolonial Afro-feminism adds that biosecurity is gendered: women and marginalized communities often bear the care burdens of pandemics while being excluded from research governance and benefit-sharing. Oyěwùmí's critique of colonial categories reminds us that "global health" categories can obscure local epistemologies and community-based healing systems. The African perspective thus contributes a view of biosecurity as structural violence and equity, not only as laboratory risk.

Critical infrastructure is similarly reinterpreted. In much Western security discourse, critical infrastructure refers to systems whose disruption would harm national security, economic stability, or public safety. The

African perspective asks a prior question: critical for whom? Much infrastructure on the continent—ports, mines, pipelines, power plants, telecommunications, and transport corridors—has been financed, owned, or operated in ways that serve external extraction and global supply chains more than local development. Bayart's concept of extraversion helps explain how African states and elites have historically oriented infrastructure toward external patrons and markets. Rodney and Nkrumah provide the historical depth: underdevelopment and neo-colonialism were not accidents but structured processes that shaped infrastructure as an instrument of extraction. Consequently, sabotage, theft, and disruption in African contexts cannot be understood solely through the lens of hybrid warfare or great-power competition. They are also embedded in local political economies of resource plunder, state neglect, unemployment, and contested sovereignty. The African perspective therefore treats resilience not only as technical hardening, redundancy, and cyber defense, but also as social and political legitimacy. Informal networks, community coping mechanisms, and local knowledge often sustain populations when formal systems fail. Mbembe's necropolitics is relevant here: infrastructure can be a technology of abandonment as much as of development, determining whose lives are protected and whose are expendable.

The normative stance that follows from this analysis is not anti-technology or anti-cooperation. It is a demand for equity, sovereignty, and historical responsibility. African states generally support multilateral governance of new domains, but they are skeptical of frameworks that are formally inclusive yet substantively unequal. In space, this means support for non-weaponization combined with demands for capacity building and data sovereignty. In biosecurity, it means support for the BWC and WHO processes combined with demands for technology transfer, local manufacturing, and fair benefit sharing. In critical infrastructure, it means support for resilience and security combined with demands that infrastructure serve local populations and that external investment not reproduce extractive patterns. Nyerere's ujamaa and Cabral's insistence on returning to the source provide ethical anchors: development must be rooted in the people and their material conditions, not imposed by external models. Fanon's new humanism suggests that the goal is not merely inclusion in existing hierarchies but transformation of the terms of participation.

The African perspective also contributes a distinctive critique of the other four perspectives. Against the Chinese and Russian emphasis on sovereignty and multipolarity, it warns that state sovereignty without internal accountability can become a shield for elite extraversion and external dependency. Against the Western emphasis on rules and resilience, it exposes how "rules-based order" can universalize the priorities of powerful states and commercial actors. Against the UN emphasis on consensus and capacity building, it notes that capacity building without power redistribution risks perpetuating dependency. Its central claim is that new domains cannot be governed equitably unless the historical and structural inequalities that shape them are addressed. This is not a rejection of international law or multilateralism; Grovogui's work shows that African states have long engaged international law strategically, even while recognizing its imperial genealogies. It is a demand that governance be measured not only by the absence of weapons or the presence of treaties, but by the distribution of capabilities, benefits, and risks.

The perspective has scope conditions and occlusions that must be acknowledged. It is strongest when analyzing structural inequality, historical responsibility, and the political economy of technology. It is weaker when the immediate problem is a technical security dilemma requiring rapid coordination, such as debris-generating ASAT tests or fast-moving pandemics. In those moments, the African perspective may understate the urgency of great-power restraint and the need for universal compliance. It may also risk romanticizing informal resilience or state-led development, underestimating intra-African inequalities, non-state violence, and the agency of African elites in reproducing dependency. Mamdani's citizen/subject distinction is a reminder that African states are not unitary actors; they contain internal hierarchies that shape who bene-

fits from space programs, biosecurity investments, or infrastructure projects. Aning and Danso's work on African security architecture suggests that regional institutions have growing capacity but remain constrained by funding, political will, and external influence. The perspective therefore should not be read as a single voice; it is a field of debate among states, scholars, activists, and communities.

Nevertheless, the African vantage point reveals what the other four perspectives often miss: the coloniality of new domains. It shows that space is not merely a strategic high ground but a field of data extraction; that biosecurity is not merely laboratory safety but biosovereignty and equity; that critical infrastructure is not merely a target set but a political economy of extraction and abandonment. Its strongest counterargument is that historical grievance cannot override present technical risks, and that universal rules require universal compliance regardless of capacity. The African reply is that rules without equity are not universal; they are hegemonic. The value of the perspective lies in forcing the other four to confront the question of for whom new domains are governed, and at whose cost.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on space, biosecurity, and critical infrastructure is organized around sovereignty, development, and multipolarity. It treats new domains as extensions of national development and state security, while framing global governance as a process that must respect sovereign equality and non-interference. In space, China presents itself as a major spacefaring power committed to peaceful uses, but also as a state that will not accept permanent technological subordination. Its official position supports the prevention of an arms race in outer space and opposes the weaponization of space, while simultaneously developing counterspace capabilities that it frames as defensive, deterrent, or responsive to perceived US and allied militarization. The 2007 ASAT test and subsequent co-orbital and directed-energy research are interpreted within this perspective as necessary capabilities in a competitive environment, not as aggressive acts. China also emphasizes its contributions to space access for developing states, including satellite launches and cooperation, and supports multilateral institutions such as COPUOS. Its normative stance is that space governance must not become a vehicle for freezing existing hierarchies or legitimizing unilateral dominance.

In biosecurity, the Chinese perspective stresses state sovereignty, the BWC, and opposition to politicization. China supports strengthening the BWC, including verification mechanisms, and has criticized US biological activities and overseas laboratories, particularly in the context of former Soviet states. During COVID-19, China emphasized state-led containment, technological mobilization, and vaccine diplomacy, while rejecting origin-tracing investigations that it viewed as politically motivated. The perspective treats biosecurity as a matter of national capacity and international equity: developing states need technology transfer, manufacturing capacity, and fair access to medical countermeasures. It also frames biosafety and dual-use research within a sovereignty paradigm, resisting external inspection or conditionality that it perceives as infringing on domestic jurisdiction. This contributes a powerful challenge to Western claims of neutral scientific governance, highlighting how biosecurity can be used to stigmatize or constrain rival states.

On critical infrastructure, China's perspective is shaped by cyber sovereignty, infrastructure protection, and the Belt and Road Initiative. It views critical infrastructure as a domain of national jurisdiction and development, and it emphasizes the right of states to regulate data, networks, and physical systems within their territory. Chinese policy and corporate actors have invested heavily in ports, power, telecommunications, and transport infrastructure across the Global South, framing these projects as development partnerships. From Beijing's vantage point, Western criticism of such projects often reflects geopolitical competition rather than genuine security concern. The perspective contributes an alternative to Western public-private resilience

models by foregrounding state capacity, long-term planning, and South-South cooperation. It also insists that infrastructure security must not be used to justify exclusionary standards or technological decoupling.

The Chinese perspective's strength is its ability to articulate a non-Western vision of multipolar governance and to expose double standards in Western security discourse. It gives voice to states that reject the idea that the United States and its allies should define the norms of new domains. However, it has significant occlusions. Its sovereignty framing can obscure transparency, accountability, and human-rights concerns, particularly when state control is conflated with public interest. Its support for multilateral arms control coexists with opaque counterspace development, creating a credibility gap. In biosecurity, its emphasis on sovereignty can resist legitimate scrutiny of laboratory safety and outbreak reporting. In infrastructure, its development narrative can understate debt, dependency, and local political risks associated with large projects. The perspective is therefore best understood as a strategic and normative counterweight to Western dominance, but one that also reproduces state-centric blind spots and may use equity rhetoric to shield national capabilities.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on space, biosecurity, and critical infrastructure is rooted in a multipolar worldview and a sense of strategic encirclement. It treats new domains as arenas in which the United States seeks to preserve unipolar dominance, and it frames Russian capabilities as necessary responses to Western military-technological superiority. In space, Russia draws on its Soviet legacy as a pioneer space power and presents itself as a defender of the peaceful use of outer space against US militarization. It supports treaties such as the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space and has jointly proposed drafts with China. At the same time, Russia has conducted counterspace tests, including the 2021 destruction of Kosmos 1408, which it framed as a defensive demonstration of capability and a response to US space policy. The Russian perspective thus combines legal opposition to weaponization with practical development of counterspace tools, arguing that security requires credible deterrence.

In biosecurity, Russia emphasizes the BWC and accuses the United States and its allies of maintaining biological military programs and laboratories near Russian borders. It has used international forums to demand transparency and verification, while resisting Western accusations regarding its own activities. During COVID-19, Russia promoted state sovereignty, criticized Western politicization of health governance, and used vaccine diplomacy as a tool of influence. The perspective treats biosecurity as an extension of geopolitical competition, in which scientific and health institutions can be instruments of power. Its contribution is to highlight the security dimensions of biological research and to insist that arms-control regimes must apply equally to all states, including powerful Western ones. It also underscores the distrust that pervades great-power relations and the difficulty of building verification mechanisms in a polarized environment.

On critical infrastructure, Russia's perspective is shaped by its view of hybrid warfare and Western double standards. It sees new domains as interconnected: space-based ISR, cyber operations, and infrastructure sabotage can be combined in conflict. Russian strategic discourse often portrays Western states as using sanctions, information operations, and infrastructure targeting against Russia, while condemning similar Russian actions. The perspective therefore emphasizes resilience, redundancy, and strategic autonomy, but also treats offensive capabilities in new domains as legitimate tools of statecraft. This creates a tension between Russia's support for multilateral norms and its willingness to use disruptive capabilities when it perceives strategic necessity.

The Russian perspective's contribution lies in its insistence on equality of security and its exposure of West-

ern hypocrisy. It reminds other actors that arms-control and governance frameworks can be perceived as instruments of dominance if they are not applied symmetrically. However, its occlusions are substantial. It often justifies its own actions as reactive while attributing agency and aggression to adversaries. Its use of disinformation and its lack of transparency in biological and space activities undermine the credibility of its normative claims. In critical infrastructure, its perspective can blur the line between deterrence and coercion, making it difficult to distinguish defensive resilience from offensive preparation. The perspective is therefore most useful as a diagnostic of great-power distrust, but less reliable as a basis for cooperative governance.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on space, biosecurity, and critical infrastructure is shaped by strategic competition, technological leadership, and a self-conscious commitment to governance. It treats new domains as areas where rules, norms, and resilience must be strengthened to protect open societies and the global economy. In space, Western states—especially the United States and its allies—emphasize space security, situational awareness, commercial innovation, and deterrence. They oppose debris-generating ASAT tests and support voluntary norms, such as UNGA resolutions on destructive direct-ascent ASAT testing, while also developing military space capabilities and doctrines. The Western perspective values transparency, commercial participation, and alliance coordination, and it often frames space governance as a choice between a rules-based order and authoritarian or revisionist alternatives. Its self-critique acknowledges that commercialization, militarization, and inequitable access can undermine legitimacy, and that Western leadership can appear as dominance.

In biosecurity, the Western perspective centers on laboratory safety, dual-use research oversight, pandemic preparedness, and the governance of high-consequence pathogens. It includes debates over gain-of-function research, biosafety levels, and the balance between scientific openness and security. COVID-19 prompted extensive Western self-critique: failures of preparedness, fragmented public health systems, politicization of science, and inequitable vaccine distribution. Western states and institutions have supported the BWC, WHO processes, and initiatives to strengthen global health security, while also emphasizing national resilience and private-sector innovation. The perspective contributes technical expertise, funding, and institutional capacity, but it can also over-securitize health and prioritize the concerns of wealthy states.

On critical infrastructure, the Western perspective emphasizes public-private partnerships, resilience, cyber defense, and the protection of essential services. It recognizes that most critical infrastructure is privately owned, requiring collaboration between governments and industry. NATO and national frameworks stress continuity of government, supply-chain security, and deterrence against sabotage. The Western perspective also includes a governance-self-critique: it acknowledges that infrastructure protection can become a pretext for surveillance, that privatization can create vulnerabilities, and that resilience strategies may neglect marginalized communities. It is attentive to the blurring of civilian and military targets, particularly in cyber and hybrid conflict, and seeks to develop norms that limit escalation.

The Western perspective's strengths are its technical capacity, institutional depth, and willingness to debate its own failures. It has generated important norms on debris, biosafety, and infrastructure resilience, and it has mobilized significant resources for global health and space situational awareness. Its occlusions, however, are equally significant. It often universalizes Western security priorities, treating its own threat perceptions as global. Its commercial and military interests can conflict with equitable access, particularly for developing states. Its "rules-based order" rhetoric can be perceived as hegemonic, especially when rules are enforced

asymmetrically. The perspective is therefore most persuasive when it combines capability with humility, and least persuasive when it conflates Western leadership with universal legitimacy.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on space, biosecurity, and critical infrastructure is rooted in multilateralism, consensus, and capacity building. It provides the primary forums for discussing new domains, including COPUOS for space, the BWC and WHO for biosecurity, and General Assembly processes for cyberspace and infrastructure-related security. Its contribution is to articulate shared norms, facilitate dialogue, and support developing states. It is constrained by the need for consensus, funding shortfalls, geopolitical distrust, and the absence of robust enforcement. In practice, the UN perspective is less a single actor than a framework within which competing state perspectives contend, but it remains indispensable for legitimizing rules and preventing unilateralism. Its central challenge is to move from norm articulation to implementation without losing the inclusivity that gives its outputs authority.

In space, the UN system has developed guidelines on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities and has provided a forum for discussing debris, resource utilization, and the prevention of an arms race. The Pact for the Future, adopted in 2024, reaffirmed commitments to the peaceful uses of outer space and to strengthening multilateral governance, reflecting a renewed effort to address emerging technologies and strategic competition. COPUOS remains the central venue for technical and legal discussion, but its consensus-based procedures can slow responses to rapidly changing capabilities. The UN perspective emphasizes that space governance must be inclusive, particularly for states that lack independent access but are affected by debris, spectrum congestion, and data asymmetries.

In biosecurity, the UN perspective is expressed through the BWC, WHO, and related health-security frameworks. The BWC provides a normative foundation against biological weapons, but it lacks a verification mechanism and depends on voluntary confidence-building measures. WHO processes, including pandemic treaty negotiations, aim to strengthen preparedness, equity, and response, but they are shaped by geopolitical contestation and resource inequality. The UN perspective highlights the need for capacity building, technology transfer, and fair access to countermeasures, while also recognizing the tension between transparency and sovereignty. It is particularly attentive to the needs of developing states, which often lack laboratory capacity, surveillance systems, and manufacturing infrastructure.

On critical infrastructure, the UN perspective is less centralized but still important. General Assembly resolutions, specialized agencies, and development programs address infrastructure resilience, cyber norms, and the protection of essential services. The UN emphasizes that infrastructure is a development issue as well as a security issue, and that resilience must include social protection, equity, and sustainable development. Its contribution is to connect technical security concerns to broader human-security and development agendas. However, it lacks enforcement power and depends on member-state implementation.

The UN perspective's greatest strength is its legitimacy and inclusivity. It provides a forum where African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and other perspectives can interact, and it helps prevent the unilateral definition of norms by powerful states. Its occlusions stem from its structural constraints: consensus can produce lowest-common-denominator outcomes; funding shortfalls limit capacity building; and geopolitical distrust can paralyze action. The UN is therefore best understood not as an independent governor of new domains, but as the indispensable arena in which their governance must be negotiated. Its central challenge is to convert normative authority into practical implementation while preserving the inclusivity that makes its norms credible.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers equity, access, capacity, and the uneven distribution of risks and benefits in space, biosecurity, and infrastructure governance	Can underweight hard-security drivers, deterrence, and the immediate strategic motives of great-power testing	New-domain governance must be inclusive, capacity-building, and redistributive, not merely non-proliferative	African Union space and biosecurity capacity agendas; dependence on external satellite and health data	Western and Russian perspectives argue that security externalities and deterrence cannot wait for full equity
Chinese	Highlights sovereignty, peaceful development, multipolarity, and resistance to unilateral norm-setting	Can obscure China's own counterspace development and the dual-use ambiguity of its programs	Space and biosecurity should be governed by multilateral, legally binding, non-discriminatory rules	China's diplomatic positions on PAROS and its 2007 ASAT test legacy	Western perspective argues that China's sovereignty framing can shield hazardous or opaque capabilities
Russian	Explains multipolar resistance, strategic vulnerability, and the view that counterspace capabilities are defensive necessities	Occludes the indiscriminate, long-lived debris and escalation risks imposed on all users	Sovereign equality and resistance to Western-dominated norms in emerging domains	2021 Kosmos 1408 test and Russian diplomatic framing of Western militarization	UN and Western perspectives argue that debris and escalation risks are transnational, not merely bilateral

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Identifies strategic stability, escalation risk, deterrence, and governance gaps with precision	Can normalize Western military space programs and securitize domains in ways that privilege powerful states	Rules-based order, responsible behavior, and targeted constraints on the most destabilizing capabilities	US 2022 moratorium on destructive direct-ascent ASAT testing; allied condemnation of the 2021 test	Russian and Chinese perspectives argue that Western norms are hypocritical and non-binding
UN	Provides legitimacy, inclusivity, and a forum for converting crises into norms and voluntary commitments	Consensus procedures can produce lowest-common-denominator outcomes and implementation gaps	Multilateralism, peaceful uses, and incremental norm-building through COPUOS, BWC, and related forums	COPUOS work; UNGA resolutions on responsible behaviors in space; BWC review conferences	State perspectives argue that UN processes are too slow and too dependent on member-state will

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the 2021 Kosmos 1408 event reflects choices by Russian defense and political leaders to demonstrate a counterspace capability at a moment of heightened geopolitical tension, and choices by US, British, and other officials to frame that demonstration as a threat to strategic stability rather than as an ordinary test. At the state level, Russia sought to signal that it could hold adversary satellites at risk, while the United States and its partners sought to delegitimize that signal and to build support for constraints on destructive testing; other states, including those with their own ASAT histories, faced pressure to align or to remain silent. At the systemic level, the test occurred within a competitive multipolar order in which satellites underpin precision warfare, early warning, and command-and-control, and in which counterspace capabilities can create security dilemmas and first-strike incentives. At the transnational level, the debris cloud threatened a shared orbital environment used by the multinational International Space Station, commercial operators, scientific missions, and future users, while the diplomatic response moved through UN forums, allied statements, and voluntary national moratoria.

Mechanism section. The mechanism begins with a direct-ascent anti-satellite test: a missile launched from Earth intercepts a satellite in low Earth orbit, and kinetic impact shatters the target into fragments. Because orbital velocities are extremely high, even small fragments can damage or destroy spacecraft, and the resulting debris can remain in orbit for years or decades depending on altitude and atmospheric drag. Publicly reported accounts of the November 2021 destruction of Kosmos 1408 described more than 1,500 trackable fragments and many smaller pieces, with the debris cloud passing near the orbit of the International Space Station and forcing crew precautions. The strategic mechanism is equally important: satellites are critical infrastructure

for military and civilian life, so a demonstrated ability to destroy them can signal deterrence, coercion, or escalation dominance; yet the same debris imposes costs on the testing state and on all other users, making the capability simultaneously impressive and self-damaging. The political mechanism then converts the physical event into a governance problem: condemnation, UN discussion, and voluntary moratoria can raise the reputational cost of future tests, but without a binding prohibition the incentive to demonstrate capability remains.

Perspective reconstruction. From an African vantage point, the Kosmos 1408 test is not merely a Russo-American security episode but an event in a global commons whose costs are distributed unevenly. African states and institutions have limited indigenous space capacity and depend on external providers for Earth observation, communications, and weather data, so debris risk and great-power testing impose unchosen vulnerabilities. The African Space Policy and Strategy (2016) and related AU discussions frame space as a development resource, meaning governance must include capacity building, data access, and equitable participation, not only nonproliferation. The multilateral response's focus on debris and strategic stability is necessary but incomplete if it does not address who bears the costs of cleanup, insurance, and lost services. Thus the African perspective sees the test as evidence that new-domain governance must be inclusive and redistributive, otherwise norms will reflect the priorities of states that can afford to test and to insure. China frames space as a domain for peaceful development and sovereign equality, and it has condemned weaponization while building its own counterspace and space capabilities. In the Kosmos 1408 case, Beijing's likely reading emphasizes that the test demonstrates the dangers of an unregulated arms race and the need for multilateral, legally binding constraints rather than unilateral US-led norms. China's own 2007 ASAT test and subsequent debris creation complicate its moral authority, but its diplomatic position stresses that all major powers, including the United States, must accept reciprocal limits. The Chinese perspective therefore treats the Russian test as both a warning and an argument for a treaty-based, non-discriminatory regime that does not privilege Western military space dominance. Russia frames the test as a legitimate demonstration of defensive capability in a domain where the United States and NATO have militarized space and threatened Russian assets. Moscow's official position disputed that the debris endangered the International Space Station and treated Western condemnation as politicized, reflecting a broader multipolarity narrative that resists Western norm-setting. The Russian perspective sees counterspace capabilities as necessary for deterrence in an era of US precision-strike and space-enabled warfare. Yet this framing occludes the indiscriminate, long-lived debris hazard imposed on all users, including Russia's own future missions and partners. The Western perspective treats the test as a destabilizing demonstration of a direct-ascent ASAT capability that threatens the satellite infrastructure underpinning military and civilian life. It emphasizes strategic stability: because satellites are vulnerable and attribution can be ambiguous, counterspace weapons create incentives for preemption and escalation. The United States and allies responded with diplomatic condemnation and, in 2022, a unilateral moratorium on destructive direct-ascent ASAT testing, seeking to build a norm of responsible behavior. This perspective's strength is its attention to escalation risk; its weakness is that it can understate Western military space programs and the need for binding, inclusive rules. The UN perspective treats the test as an illustration of governance gaps in a domain where no binding prohibition on ASAT testing exists. Through COPUOS and UNGA resolutions on responsible behaviors, the UN provides a forum for converting outrage into norms, but consensus requirements slow action. The multilateral response—condemnation, working groups, and voluntary moratoria—shows both the UN's convening power and its dependence on member-state will. The UN perspective thus sees the case as requiring not just technical debris mitigation but a broader political settlement on space security.

Explicit adjudication. The Western perspective best explains the case's strategic logic and its immediate

stability implications: Russia demonstrated a capability that threatens satellite-dependent military and civilian systems, and the debris cloud created a shared, long-lived risk that made the test internationally costly. Its limitation is that it can treat Western military space programs as background rather than as part of the competitive dynamic that motivates Russian testing, and it may understate the distributional consequences for states with little space capacity. The Russian perspective best explains Moscow's stated motive—deterrence and resistance to perceived Western dominance—but it is weakest on the physical externality of debris and on the legitimacy of imposing that risk on non-consenting users. The Chinese perspective correctly identifies the need for reciprocal, treaty-based constraints, yet its credibility is weakened by China's own ASAT history. The African perspective is indispensable for showing who bears the unchosen costs of great-power testing, but it does not by itself explain why Russia chose to test in 2021. The UN perspective best explains the institutional response and its limits, but it cannot compel compliance. On balance, the case is best explained by a state-and-systemic account for causation—closest to the Western and Russian perspectives—combined with a transnational-governance account for consequences and response—closest to the UN and African perspectives. No single perspective is sufficient; the test is simultaneously a strategic signal, a debris-generating hazard, a multipolar grievance, and a governance failure.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. **Mechanism identification.** In the COVID-19 case, identify the principal causal mechanism through which geopolitics shaped pandemic outcomes: vaccine nationalism, origin politicization, export controls, institutional fragmentation, or structural inequality. State which mechanism you treat as primary and why.

2. **Level of analysis.** Analyze the pandemic response at the individual, state, systemic, and transnational levels. Which level best explains the delay in equitable vaccine distribution, and which best explains the failure to agree on a binding pandemic accord?

3. **Perspective reconstruction.** Reconstruct the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN interpretations of the pandemic response. For each, identify one contribution and one occlusion.

4. **Historical analogue.** Compare COVID-19 with either the 2003 SARS outbreak or the 2014 Ebola outbreak. What transfers from that analogue, and what is misleading if imported uncritically?

5. **Falsification.** State two pieces of evidence that would weaken the claim that geopolitical competition worsened pandemic outcomes, and one piece of evidence that would strengthen it.

6. **Prescription boundary.** Distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in your answer. Which of your claims are normative, and on what evidence do they rest?

Model answer. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrates how a biological event becomes a biosecurity crisis when geopolitical competition, institutional weakness, and structural inequality interact. The virus itself was a pathogen of natural or possibly laboratory origin; the response was shaped by power. Early in 2020, information politics and sovereignty claims slowed transparent data sharing, while travel bans and export controls turned health equipment into strategic commodities. Vaccine development was extraordinarily fast, but distribution followed purchasing power and alliance structures rather than epidemiological need. COVAX, the multilateral mechanism intended to ensure equitable access, was underfunded and outbid by wealthy states, producing what African leaders and scholars described as vaccine apartheid. This was not merely a moral

failure; it was a strategic failure because unvaccinated populations prolonged transmission and variant emergence, undermining global health security for all states.

The pandemic also transformed biosecurity governance. The Biological Weapons Convention lacks a verification protocol, and COVID-19 intensified debates over dual-use research, laboratory safety, and pathogen access. Origin investigations became proxies for US-China rivalry: demands for transparency were read in Beijing as sovereignty violations and political containment, while in Washington and allied capitals opacity fueled suspicion. The result was a chilling effect on scientific cooperation and a securitization of bioscience that risks treating researchers as intelligence assets. Russia and other states used vaccine diplomacy to project influence, while Western governments simultaneously promoted COVAX and restricted exports, revealing a tension between liberal internationalist rhetoric and nationalist practice.

From an African perspective, the central lesson is capacity and equity. African states faced delayed vaccine access, limited genomic sequencing capacity, and dependence on external manufacturing, yet also demonstrated regional coordination through the African Union and Africa CDC. The pandemic showed that biosecurity cannot be reduced to border control or great-power deterrence; it requires distributed laboratory capacity, local production, and fair intellectual-property rules. The blocked TRIPS waiver debate exposed how global health governance remains tethered to pharmaceutical monopolies and donor priorities. African scholarship on structural adjustment and dependency helps explain why emergency health financing often arrived as conditional loans rather than unconditional solidarity.

Other perspectives illuminate different mechanisms. China framed pandemic response through sovereignty and state capacity, emphasizing domestic containment and later vaccine exports, while resisting externally imposed origin investigations. Russia framed the pandemic within multipolarity, criticizing Western vaccine hoarding and promoting Sputnik V as an alternative. Western governments combined rapid biomedical innovation with export restrictions and later engaged in governance self-critique, acknowledging that COVAX shortfalls and intellectual-property rigidities damaged legitimacy. The UN system—WHO, the BWC, and ongoing pandemic accord negotiations—provided forums for coordination but lacked enforcement, funding, and political consensus.

Historically, the 2014 Ebola outbreak offers a partial analogue: it showed that multilateral response can be mobilized, but also that early delays and weak health systems amplify harm. COVID-19 differed in scale, politicization, and the centrality of vaccine technology. A plausible falsifier of the claim that geopolitics worsened outcomes would be evidence that states with the most competitive bilateral relationships achieved the fastest equitable global distribution; the record shows the opposite. Another falsifier would be proof that origin politicization had no effect on scientific cooperation; the documented chilling of research collaboration suggests otherwise.

The post-pandemic governance landscape is therefore contested. Negotiations over a pandemic accord, pathogen access and benefit sharing, and BWC strengthening continue, but sovereignty concerns, intellectual-property disputes, and great-power distrust constrain ambition. The most defensible conclusion is that COVID-19 was not simply a health emergency or a geopolitical weapon; it was a stress test revealing how biosecurity, equity, and power are intertwined. Effective governance will require not only better surveillance and laboratories but also credible commitments to equitable access and depoliticized science.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: A coastal state in the Global South experiences a simultaneous crisis: a suspected laboratory-acquired infection at a foreign-funded high-containment facility and a two-day disruption

of satellite navigation services affecting its main port. Domestic opposition demands immediate closure of all foreign labs; a regional bloc requests emergency vaccine and diagnostic support; one great power offers bilateral aid conditioned on access to pathogen samples; another great power blames the first for sabotage. The state has limited genomic sequencing capacity, depends on imported reagents, and is a party to the Biological Weapons Convention but not to any binding space security instrument. Its leaders must choose among unilateral emergency powers, multilateral inspection, or strategic ambiguity. The case is fictional but structurally analogous to real debates over biosecurity sovereignty, space dependence, and equitable access. The state's decision will be scrutinized by investors, diaspora communities, and neighboring states that share the same satellite-dependent infrastructure.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

- **Mechanism:** Explain the causal chain linking the laboratory incident, satellite disruption, and state response; specify whether the mechanism is coercion, contagion, institutional failure, or strategic signaling, and identify the level of analysis at which it operates.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN actors would interpret the crisis, what each would emphasize, and what each would occlude.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the case to one prior episode, such as the 2021 Russian ASAT test, COVID-19 origin disputes, or the 2014 Ebola response, and state what transfers and what does not.
- **Falsifiers:** List two or three observations that would weaken your explanation and one observation that would weaken your prediction.

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description of events, explanation of causes, prediction of consequences, and prescription of policy, and did you avoid presenting any single perspective as self-evidently correct?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Question: The 2021 Russian ASAT test against Kosmos 1408 is best interpreted as:

A. A purely defensive demonstration that improved strategic stability by proving Russia could protect its satellites.
B. A destabilizing counterspace action that created long-lived debris and weakened norms, though its strategic effects depend on attribution and response.
C. An isolated technical event with no implications for international law because space is already a warfighting domain.
D. A successful test of co-orbital inspection capabilities that established a new cooperative security regime.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnosis: - **A** conflates a capability demonstration with strategic stability; it ignores debris generation, escalation risk, and the absence of any stabilizing arms-control framework. - **C** treats the lack of a binding space security treaty as evidence that norms, diplomacy, and strategic restraint do not matter; it also overstates the claim that space is already an accepted warfighting domain. - **D** misidentifies a direct-ascent ASAT intercept as co-orbital inspection and invents a cooperative security regime that the test did not establish.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — State satellite portfolios (approximate, open-source estimates, 2023–2024)

State/actor	Operational satellites (approx.)	Share of global total (approx.)	Dominant functions	Analytical note
United States	5,000–6,500	~60–70%	Commercial broadband, ISR, PNT, military communications	Concentration reflects commercial mega-constellations plus defense demand
China	600–800	~8–10%	Remote sensing, communications, navigation (BeiDou)	Rapid growth; state-led industrial policy and military-civil fusion
Russia	150–200	~2%	Military communications, ISR, navigation (GLONASS)	Legacy capacity; slower replenishment and sanctions pressure
European states (ESA/EU plus national)	300–400	~4–5%	Earth observation, communications, science	Fragmented governance; Galileo as sovereignty project
India	50–100	~1%	Remote sensing, communications, navigation	Cost-efficient programs; regional security focus
Japan	80–120	~1%	ISR, communications, science	Alliance-integrated space posture
Rest of world	1,000–1,500	~12–18%	Mixed, including smallsats	High growth in numbers, low individual capacity
Total	**~8,000–9,500**	**100%**		Counts vary by database and by definition of "operational"

Table 2 — Counterspace tests and debris (selected, approximate)

Date	State	Test type	Target	Tracked debris (approx.)	Strategic reading
2007	China	Direct-ascent ASAT	Fengyun-1C weather satellite	Thousands	Demonstrated ability to hold LEO assets at risk; debris long-lived
2008	United States	Direct-ascent ASAT (Operation Burnt Frost)	USA-193	Hundreds	Framed as hazard mitigation; also read as counterspace signaling
2019	India	Direct-ascent ASAT (Mission Shakti)	Microsat-R	Hundreds	Regional deterrence and status signaling
2021	Russia	Direct-ascent ASAT	Kosmos 1408	1,500+	ISS crew sheltering; sharpened debris-governance debate
2020s (reported)	Multiple	Non-kinetic and proximity operations	Not applicable	None (reversible)	Lower immediate escalation but high attribution ambiguity

Table 3 — Selected pandemic and space-governance indicators (approximate/as of 2024)

Indicator / framework	Value or status	Interpretation
COVID-19 excess deaths, 2020–2021	~14.9 million (WHO estimate)	Pandemic as mass-casualty biosecurity event; data uncertainty remains high
Global GDP contraction, 2020	~3.1% (IMF estimate)	Economic shock with uneven recovery and fiscal scarring
Vaccine access gap	Low-income states received a small share of doses through 2021	Equity failure; trust erosion in global health governance
COPUOS membership	100+ states	Near-universal forum; consensus speed is slow

Indicator / framework	Value or status	Interpretation
PAROS (UNGA)	Annual resolution; no binding treaty	Norm against weaponization without verification
Artemis Accords	Dozens of signatories	Coalition governance; contested legitimacy outside the coalition
BWC	180+ states parties; review conferences stalled	Disarmament norm with weak verification and compliance mechanisms
WHO pandemic agreement negotiations	Ongoing as of 2024	Sovereignty-versus-solidarity tension in biosecurity governance

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend:** What do the satellite-portfolio and counterspace-test data suggest about the concentration of space power, the diffusion of counterspace capability, and the erosion of strategic stability in orbit?
2. **Level of analysis:** At which level—individual, state, systemic, or transnational—does each data series operate most directly, and how do satellite concentration, debris externalities, pandemic mortality, and treaty status interact across levels?
3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five):** How would African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN analysts read the same tables differently, especially on equity, sovereignty, multipolarity, security, and multilateral legitimacy?
4. **Interpretation:** What do pandemic mortality/economic data plus the stalled or partial status of space and biosecurity governance frameworks imply about whether biosecurity and orbital safety are being treated as global public goods?
5. **Limitation:** What do these data not capture—classified programs, dual-use ambiguity, underreporting, informal governance, commercial opacity, or the difference between reversible and destructive counterspace effects?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — Orbital Stack and Debris Cloud (hand-drawn)

- **What to draw:** Draw Earth as a filled circle in the center. Around it, draw three concentric rings labeled from inner to outer: **LEO (200–2,000 km)**, **MEO**, and **GEO**. In LEO, draw many small squares representing satellites, clustered in "shells"; in MEO, draw fewer squares; in GEO, draw a sparse arc of squares. Scatter small dots and short dashes throughout LEO to represent debris, with a denser cloud near one cluster labeled **"2021 Kosmos 1408 debris."** Draw arrows from selected satellites to Earth labeled **ISR**, **PNT**, and **Comms**.
- **Labels to place:** "LEO," "MEO," "GEO," "ISR," "PNT," "Comms," "Debris," "Kosmos 1408," "Commercial mega-constellation," "Military satellite."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Around the drawing, place five short marginal notes: **African:** "access, capacity, and equitable benefit-sharing"; **Chinese:** "sovereignty, development, and security"; **Russian:** "multipolarity and strategic parity"; **Western:** "security, resilience, and governance"; **UN:** "COPUOS norms and debris mitigation."

Visual 2 — Counterspace Escalation Ladder (hand-drawn)

- **What to draw:** Draw a vertical ladder with six rungs from bottom to top. Label the rungs, bottom to top: **1. Reversible jamming/spoofing**, **2. Cyber intrusion**, **3. Proximity/RPO**, **4. Non-destructive dazzling**, **5. Direct-ascent kinetic ASAT**, **6. Co-orbital weaponization**. Add a side arrow labeled **"Escalation and attribution difficulty"** increasing upward. At the top, draw a warning symbol labeled **"Debris / Kessler risk."** At the bottom, draw a small box labeled **"Reversible effects."**
- **Labels to place:** "Reversible," "Cyber," "Proximity," "Dazzling," "Kinetic ASAT," "Co-orbital," "Debris," "Attribution," "Escalation."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Place marginal notes: **African:** "collateral harm to shared orbital commons"; **Chinese:** "defensive sovereignty and anti-hegemony"; **Russian:** "strategic parity and multipolar deterrence"; **Western:** "deterrence, resilience, and escalation control"; **UN:** "norms, transparency, and verification."

Visual 3 — Biosecurity Governance Gap (hand-drawn)

- **What to draw:** Draw three overlapping circles in a Venn diagram. Label them **Pandemic Response**, **Lab Biosafety/Biosecurity**, and **Critical Infrastructure**. In the central overlap, write **"Governance gap."** Around the circles, draw small boxes labeled **WHO IHR**, **BWC**, **National lab oversight**, **Health systems**, and **Infrastructure protection**. Draw arrows from the central gap to a box labeled **"Equity, attribution, and resilience."**
- **Labels to place:** "Pandemic response," "Lab governance," "Infrastructure," "Governance gap," "WHO IHR," "BWC," "National oversight," "Health systems," "Resilience."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Place marginal notes: **African:** "capacity, access, and equity"; **Chinese:** "sovereignty, development, and biosecurity governance"; **Russian:** "multipolarity and non-discrimination"; **Western:** "security, preparedness, and governance self-critique"; **UN:** "BWC, WHO negotiations, and Pact for the Future."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue	Notes (with source log)
Space as strategic domain	ISR, PNT, and communications make satellites military-relevant; militarization debate concerns whether space is a sanctuary or warfighting domain. Source log: Johnson-Freese (2016); Harrison (2021).
Counterspace categories	Direct-ascent, co-orbital, and directed-energy systems differ in reversibility, attribution, and debris creation. Source log: Harrison (2021); UN COPUOS documentation.
Debris as strategic externality	Kinetic ASAT tests create long-lived debris; the 2021 Kosmos 1408 test raised ISS safety concerns. Source log: UN COPUOS documentation; Harrison (2021).

Cue	Notes (with source log)
Biosecurity governance	Pandemics, labs, and dual-use research require governance across health, security, and science; post-COVID debates center on preparedness and equity. Source log: Lakoff (2017); BWC reports; WHO pandemic treaty negotiations.
Pandemic as geopolitical event	COVID-19 shaped vaccine diplomacy, supply-chain politics, and trust in global institutions. Source log: WHO pandemic treaty negotiations; Lakoff (2017).
Critical infrastructure targeting	Civilian and military systems overlap; sabotage and cyber-physical disruption blur war and peace. Source log: Harrison (2021); UN COPUOS documentation (by analogy for cross-domain governance).
Rule-making efforts	COPUOS, PAROS, Artemis Accords, BWC, and WHO negotiations represent competing governance models. Source log: UN COPUOS documentation; BWC reports; WHO pandemic treaty negotiations.
African perspective	Emphasizes space access, biosecurity capacity, and equity; warns against governance that preserves asymmetry. Source log: African scholarship tradition (Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, Oyěwùmí).
Chinese perspective	Emphasizes space leadership, biosecurity governance, and sovereignty; frames rules as potentially hegemonic. Source log: UN COPUOS documentation; BWC reports.
Russian perspective	Emphasizes space capabilities and multipolarity; resists unilateral governance. Source log: UN COPUOS documentation; BWC reports.
Western perspective	Emphasizes space security, biosecurity, and governance self-critique; acknowledges gaps in preparedness and equity. Source log: Johnson-Freese (2016); Lakoff (2017); Harrison (2021).
UN perspective	Emphasizes COPUOS, BWC, and Pact for the Future commitments; seeks multilateral legitimacy. Source log: UN COPUOS documentation; BWC reports; WHO pandemic treaty negotiations.

Summary: Space, biosecurity, and critical infrastructure are emerging domains where technological capability has outpaced governance. Kinetic and non-kinetic counterspace tools create debris and escalation risks, while pandemics expose gaps in preparedness, equity, and verification. The five perspectives disagree on

whether the central problem is access, sovereignty, multipolarity, security, or multilateral legitimacy. The data show concentration of space power and uneven biosecurity capacity, but they do not fully capture classified activity, dual-use ambiguity, or informal governance.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon:** Satellites, pathogens, and infrastructure are now tools and targets in global politics. The rules for using and protecting them are weaker than the technologies themselves, so harm can spread faster than governance can respond.
2. **Mark gaps:** I need to distinguish reversible from destructive effects, separate state from commercial actors, and avoid treating incomplete data as proof of intent. I also need to keep description, explanation, prediction, and prescription separate.
3. **Reread verification:** Recheck the approximate satellite counts, debris estimates, pandemic mortality figures, and treaty statuses against the named sources before using them in an argument. Confirm that no exact number is presented as certain.
4. **Analogy with explicit limits:** These domains resemble a shared commons with dangerous tools, but the analogy has limits: orbital debris persists for decades, pathogens can self-replicate, and infrastructure failures cascade across civilian and military systems.
5. **Rewrite:** Space, biosecurity, and critical infrastructure are high-consequence domains where capability, vulnerability, and governance gaps intersect; any analysis must specify mechanism, level of analysis, perspective, and evidence limits.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L57	Definition	What functions make space a strategic domain?	Space provides ISR, PNT, and communications services that underpin modern military operations, economic activity, and civilian infrastructure. Disruption of these services cascades across domains, which is why states treat orbital assets as critical national infrastructure.	Western and UN framings treat these as global public goods; African and other Global South framings stress unequal access to them.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L57	Mechanism	What is the Kessler syndrome and why does it matter for strategic stability?	The Kessler syndrome describes a cascading collision process in which debris from one destroyed satellite strikes others, generating more debris and potentially rendering certain orbital regimes unusable. It matters because ASAT tests that create debris impose costs on all space users, including non-combatants.	African and UN perspectives emphasize that debris burdens fall disproportionately on states with no ASAT capability.
L57	Application	What happened in the 2021 Russian ASAT test (Kosmos 1408)?	Russia destroyed its defunct Kosmos 1408 satellite with a direct-ascent ASAT, generating thousands of trackable debris pieces and drawing multilateral condemnation. The test illustrated how a single counterspace action can threaten the orbital commons and strategic stability simultaneously.	The UN and Western perspectives led condemnation; Russia framed it as a sovereign capability demonstration.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L57	Comparison	How do direct-ascent, co-orbital, and directed-energy ASATs differ?	Direct-ascent ASATs launch from Earth to intercept a satellite; co-orbital ASATs maneuver in orbit to approach or interfere with a target; directed-energy systems use lasers or microwaves to dazzle or damage sensors. They differ in attribution difficulty, escalation signaling, and debris generation.	Chinese and Russian perspectives stress that all three categories are proliferating, undermining Western claims of exclusive space dominance.
L57	Source	What is Johnson-Freese's (2016) core argument about space security?	Johnson-Freese argues that space security is undermined by the gap between the rhetoric of peaceful use and the reality of military dependence on space assets, and that governance lags behind technological change. The argument stresses that stabilizing space requires acknowledging its military dimension rather than denying it.	This Western scholarly framing is often contrasted with Chinese and Russian sovereignty-centered narratives.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L57	Debate	What is the distinction between militarization and weaponization of space?	Militarization refers to the use of space for military support functions such as ISR and communications; weaponization refers to placing or using weapons in space. The distinction matters because treaties ban weapons of mass destruction in orbit but not conventional military use.	African and UN perspectives often argue the distinction is eroding and that both trends threaten equitable access.
L57	Reconstruction	How does the African perspective frame space access and biosecurity?	The African perspective centers on equitable access to space-derived services, technology transfer, and the asymmetry of biosecurity capacity, arguing that governance frameworks designed by major powers often exclude African priorities. It treats space and biosecurity as development and sovereignty issues, not only security ones.	This is the primary perspective of the lesson; it reveals equity gaps the other four perspectives tend to background.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L57	Occlusion	What does the Western space-security framing tend to occlude?	Western framing often foregrounds great-power competition and deterrence while backgrounding the dependence of developing states on space services they do not control, and the unequal distribution of biosecurity capacity. It can treat governance gaps as technical rather than political problems.	The African perspective identifies this occlusion; the UN perspective partially addresses it through COPUOS and capacity-building agendas.
L57	Adjudication	How should one adjudicate between condemnation of ASAT tests and claims of sovereign right to test?	Adjudication requires weighing the security rationale of the testing state against the collective harm of debris and escalation risk, using evidence on debris counts, orbital regimes affected, and prior commitments. Neither pure sovereignty nor pure prohibition fully captures the trade-off; the stronger position is conditional restraint tied to verifiable debris limits.	Russian and Chinese perspectives stress sovereignty; Western and UN perspectives stress collective harm; African perspectives stress disproportionate impact.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L57	Visual	How do the four levels of analysis apply to the Kosmos 1408 case?	Individual level: decision-makers and scientists; state level: Russian strategic calculus; systemic level: great-power competition and arms-race dynamics; transnational level: debris affecting all space users and multilateral institutions. Each level explains a different causal channel.	The African perspective adds a transnational equity channel: which states bear debris risk without having caused it.
L57	Definition	What is dual-use research of concern in biosecurity?	Dual-use research of concern refers to life-sciences research that can be misapplied to cause harm, such as enhancing pathogen transmissibility or virulence. The governance challenge is to preserve scientific benefit while reducing misuse risk.	Western and UN perspectives dominate the DURC agenda; African perspectives stress capacity and benefit-sharing gaps.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L57	Mechanism	How did geopolitics shape the COVID-19 pandemic response?	Geopolitics shaped the response through vaccine nationalism, export restrictions, competing origin narratives, and fragmented multilateral coordination, which delayed equitable access and eroded trust in global health institutions. The mechanism is that sovereignty-first crisis behavior overrides collective-action commitments.	African perspectives highlight COVAX shortfalls and patent barriers; Chinese perspectives highlight sovereignty and solidarity rhetoric.
L57	Application	What is the status of the WHO pandemic treaty negotiations?	The WHO pandemic treaty negotiations aim to strengthen preparedness, equity, and accountability, but have faced disputes over pathogen sharing, technology transfer, and sovereignty over health measures. Progress has been uneven and contested.	African and Global South states push for equity and technology transfer; Western states emphasize surveillance and rapid response.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L57	Source	What does Lakoff (2017) contribute to biosecurity governance analysis?	Lakoff analyzes how biosecurity is governed through preparedness frameworks that reorganize state capacity around anticipated biological threats, highlighting the tension between security logics and public health logics. The work shows how governance categories shape what counts as a threat and a response.	This Western scholarly framing is usefully read against African critiques of capacity asymmetry and Chinese sovereignty framings.
L57	Comparison	How do the BWC and the proposed pandemic treaty differ in scope?	The Biological Weapons Convention prohibits biological weapons and addresses disarmament, while the pandemic treaty addresses preparedness, response, and equity in health emergencies. They overlap on dual-use governance but differ in primary purpose and enforcement mechanisms.	UN perspective centers both; African perspective stresses that neither has closed the capacity gap.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit

Skill or Concept	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of Mastery	Gap Action
Define space as a strategic domain (ISR, PNT, comms)			
Explain direct-ascent, co-orbital, and directed-energy ASAT mechanisms			
Reconstruct the African perspective on space access and biosecurity			
Reconstruct the Chinese perspective on space leadership and sovereignty			
Reconstruct the Russian perspective on multipolarity and space capabilities			
Reconstruct the Western perspective on space security and governance self-critique			
Reconstruct the UN perspective on COPUOS, BWC, and Pact for the Future			
Apply the four levels of analysis to a space or biosecurity case			
Identify falsifiers for claims about ASAT restraint or pandemic governance			
Adjudicate between competing explanations of the same case			

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives was hardest to reconstruct from within, and what specific assumption in that perspective did you find most difficult to grant?
2. In the Kosmos 1408 worked example, which level of analysis carried the most explanatory weight, and does that change if you shift from a Western to an African vantage point?
3. If you had to teach one concept from this lesson to a peer in three minutes, which would it be, and what would you deliberately leave out?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Space is already fully weaponized.	Space is heavily militarized for support functions, but explicit weaponization remains limited and contested; treaties ban WMD in orbit while conventional military use is permitted.	Johnson-Freese (2016); UN COPUOS documentation
ASAT tests only affect the testing state.	ASAT tests generate debris that threatens all orbital users, including states with no counterspace capability, creating collective-action problems.	Harrison (2021); 2021 Kosmos 1408 test record
The BWC and pandemic treaty are interchangeable.	The BWC addresses biological weapons disarmament; the pandemic treaty addresses preparedness, response, and equity in health emergencies; their scopes and enforcement differ.	BWC reports; WHO pandemic treaty negotiations
COVID-19 governance failed only because of technical unpreparedness.	Geopolitical factors—vaccine nationalism, export controls, origin disputes—shaped outcomes as much as technical capacity.	Lakoff (2017); pandemic mortality and economic impact data
African states are merely recipients of space and biosecurity governance.	African states and scholars articulate distinct equity and sovereignty claims that reshape how these domains should be governed.	African scholarship (Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, Oyěwùmí)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Space as strategic domain (ISR, PNT, comms); militarization vs weaponization	Debris cascade (Kessler); ASAT signaling; sovereignty-first crisis behavior	Johnson-Freese (2016) on space security gaps; Lakoff (2017) on biosecurity preparedness	2021 Kosmos 1408 ASAT test; COVID-19 pandemic response; COVAX shortfalls	Militarization vs weaponization; sovereignty vs collective harm; equity vs security	ASAT restraint without debris reduction; pandemic treaty without capacity transfer; governance without African participation	L25 (space, maritime); L24 (cyber); L19 (resources); L58 (forecasting); L61 (grand strategy)
Counterspace capabilities (direct-ascent, co-orbital, directed energy)	Attribution difficulty; escalation signaling; orbital commons degradation	Harrison (2021) on counterspace trends	Counterspace tests by state; satellite launches by state	Deterrence stability vs arms racing; transparency vs secrecy	Verified debris limits; reciprocal restraint agreements	L25; L24
Biosecurity (DURC, pandemics, labs)	Dual-use misuse risk; preparedness frameworks; vaccine nationalism	Lakoff (2017) on preparedness; BWC reports	Pandemic mortality/economic impact data; WHO treaty negotiations	Security logic vs public health logic; equity vs rapid response	Treaty without enforcement; capacity without benefit-sharing	L19; L58
Critical infrastructure targeting (civilian/military blur, sabotage)	Blurring of civilian and military; evolution of sabotage; transnational vulnerability	(General IR scholarship on infrastructure and hybrid threats)	Infrastructure attacks; cyber-physical incidents	Military necessity vs civilian protection; attribution vs ambiguity	Clear civilian/military distinction restored; attribution resolved	L24; L61

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
International rule-making (COPUOS, BWC, Pact for the Future)	Norm-building; capacity-building; sovereignty carve-outs	UN COPUOS documentation; BWC reports; WHO pandemic treaty negotiations	UN space governance framework status; Pact for the Future space commitments	Universal norms vs great-power exemptions; equity vs efficiency	Framework adopted without Global South buy-in; commitments without verification	L58; L61

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 20 minutes):** Re-read the five key ideas and recite the African perspective's central equity claim aloud without notes; check against the lesson.
- **R2 (Day 3, 30 minutes):** Redraw the four-levels-of-analysis diagram for the Kosmos 1408 case from memory; compare with the worked example.
- **R3 (Day 7, 45 minutes):** Write a one-paragraph reconstruction of each of the five perspectives on space and biosecurity; verify against Section 2.7.
- **R4 (Day 14, 60 minutes):** Complete the independent memo prompt using a new case (e.g., a recent ASAT test or pandemic preparedness dispute); apply the four required headings.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 minutes):** Full review: flashcards, cheatsheet, and a timed hinge-question drill; log remaining gaps in the error-log.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define space as a strategic domain and distinguish militarization from weaponization.
☐ I can explain the three ASAT mechanisms and their differing debris and escalation profiles.
☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective on space access and biosecurity from within.
☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese perspective on space leadership and sovereignty.
☐ I can reconstruct the Russian perspective on multipolarity and space capabilities.
☐ I can reconstruct the Western perspective on space security and governance self-critique.
☐ I can reconstruct the UN perspective on COPUOS, BWC, and the Pact for the Future.
☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis to a space or biosecurity case.
☐ I can identify falsifiers for claims about ASAT restraint.
☐ I can identify falsifiers for claims about pandemic governance.
☐ I can adjudicate between competing explanations of the same case.
☐ I can explain how geopolitics shaped the COVID-19 response.
☐ I can distinguish the BWC from the proposed pandemic treaty.
☐ I can explain the critical infrastructure civilian/military blur.
☐ I can use the comparison matrix to contrast all five perspectives.
☐ I have completed the confidence audit with honest scores.
☐ I have logged at least two errors in the error-log.
☐ I can state the lesson's central puzzle in one sentence.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Space security and counterspace - Johnson-Freese, Joan. *Space Warfare in the 21st Century*. Routledge, 2016. - Harrison, Todd. *Space Threat Assessment*. CSIS, 2021.

Biosecurity and pandemic governance - Lakoff, Andrew. *Unprepared: Global Health in a Time of Emergency*. University of California Press, 2017.

UN and multilateral frameworks - UN COPUOS documentation on space governance and long-term sustainability. - BWC reports and review conference documents. - WHO pandemic treaty negotiation documents and the Pact for the Future space commitments.

African and Global South perspectives - Grovogui, Siba. *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996. - Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press, 2001. - Bayart, Jean-François. *The State in Africa*. Polity, 2009. - Mamdani, Mahmood. *Citizen and Subject*. Princeton University Press, 1996. - Rodney, Walter. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture, 1972.

End of Lesson 57. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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59. Methodologies in Geopolitical Forecasting

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	58 — Methodologies in Geopolitical Forecasting
Module	Module 10: Forecasting, Diplomacy, and Capstones
Prerequisites	L3 (causal inference), L4 (epistemology), L14 (contemporary transition)
Interleaved links	Forward to L59 (negotiation), L60–61 (capstones)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, worked example, problem pair, flashcards
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Geopolitical forecasting occupies an uncomfortable position in the study and practice of international relations: it is indispensable to decision-making yet systematically unreliable in its record. States, international organizations, and analysts are repeatedly asked to anticipate wars, regime changes, alliance shifts, and economic shocks, and they are repeatedly surprised. The puzzle this lesson addresses is not merely that forecasting fails, but that failure is unevenly distributed across methods, domains, and forecasters, and that the institutions producing forecasts often reward rhetorical confidence over demonstrated accuracy. The lesson therefore asks why some approaches to anticipating geopolitical futures outperform others, what "outperform" can mean when the future is singular and non-repeatable, and how the authority to predict is itself

a political resource rather than a neutral technical credential. It treats forecasting as an epistemic practice embedded in power, one that must be evaluated simultaneously on methodological, political, and ethical grounds.

The lesson is positioned deliberately within the curriculum. It builds on L3's causal inference, which supplies the tools for attributing causes to events and for distinguishing correlation from mechanism; on L4's epistemology, which supplies the standards by which knowledge claims are justified; and on L14's account of the contemporary transition, which supplies the substantive context of a post-Cold War system whose volatility has outpaced many of the models inherited from the bipolar era. It also prepares the ground for L59 on negotiation and for the L60–61 capstones, because any serious account of diplomacy or strategic choice presupposes some account of how the environment into which diplomacy is inserted is anticipated. Without a disciplined treatment of how futures are constructed, negotiation strategy and capstone analysis risk projecting present assumptions onto tomorrow and mistaking the familiar for the probable. Forecasting is thus treated here as a methodological capstone rather than a peripheral skill.

The lesson develops five methodologies, each of which answers a different question and carries distinct scope conditions. Scenario planning, associated with Schwartz (1991) and the Royal Dutch Shell tradition, addresses deep structural uncertainty by constructing multiple plausible futures rather than point predictions, forcing decision-makers to test strategies against worlds they do not expect. Delphi methods elicit and refine expert judgment through structured anonymity and iterative feedback, attempting to extract collective wisdom while suppressing the pathologies of group deliberation. Bayesian updating imposes a formal discipline of belief revision, requiring analysts to state priors explicitly and to update them in light of evidence through Bayes' theorem, thereby making the reasoning behind a forecast auditable. Quantitative conflict modeling—exemplified by ICEWS, ACLED, and GDELT—detects patterns in large event datasets that unaided human analysts cannot process, trading narrative richness for statistical coverage. Calibration and scoring, rooted in Brier (1950) and developed through the Good Judgment Project and the work of Tetlock and Gardner (2015), introduce accountability by measuring whether stated probabilities match observed frequencies. The lesson's central analytical move is to refuse the temptation to rank these methods on a single axis; instead it maps each to the conditions under which it is appropriate and to the failures it is prone to.

The African perspective is primary in this lesson because it reveals something the other four perspectives systematically obscure: that forecasting is not only about accuracy but about who gets to define the problem space. African early warning systems—continental (the African Union's Continental Early Warning System), regional (ECOWAS's Early Warning and Response Network, IGAD's CEWARN), and national—were built not merely to predict conflict but to claim epistemic authority over African security dynamics that external actors routinely misread. African scholars such as Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, and Mamdani have long argued that knowledge about Africa produced in Western centers carries structural biases: an overemphasis on state collapse, an underrecognition of informal and hybrid governance, and a tendency to treat African conflicts as exceptional rather than as instances of broader systemic dynamics. From this vantage point, when external models predict "state failure" in contexts where hybrid political orders persist and adapt, the prediction is not simply inaccurate; it is performative, shaping intervention priorities, resource flows, and the very categories through which African politics is legible to the international system. The African framing thus reframes the lesson's central question from "who predicts well?" to "well for whom, by what criteria, and with what consequences for the predicted?" It insists that a forecast's accuracy cannot be separated from its distributional effects and from the hierarchy of credibility that determines whose knowledge counts as expertise.

By the end of the lesson, the student should be able to perform six operations. First, distinguish the five methodologies by their epistemic commitments, mechanisms, and scope conditions rather than by disciplinary fashion. Second, design a forecasting protocol suited to a specific decision context, including the choice between qualitative and quantitative approaches and the specification of falsifiers. Third, score probabilistic predictions using Brier scores and calibration curves, and interpret the difference between calibration and resolution. Fourth, reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives frame the same predictive task differently, identifying what each contributes and what each occludes. Fifth, adjudicate between competing forecasts on the basis of evidence and stated assumptions rather than on the authority of the forecaster. Sixth, recognize the strongest counterarguments to forecasting as an enterprise—particularly the claim that geopolitical events are unique, path-dependent, and shaped by strategic interaction that defeats statistical regularity—and respond to them without either dismissing or overstating them. The worked example on the Good Judgment Project (2011–2015) and the problem pair on forecasting the 2022 Russian invasion provide concrete cases for practicing these operations, while the data lab exposes students to ICEWS, GDELT, and ACLED extracts alongside tournament outcome data.

The lesson closes with a methodological humility that is not resignation. It does not promise a method that eliminates uncertainty, because no such method exists; even the best-calibrated superforecasters are wrong substantial fractions of the time, and the future is not a sample from a stable population. What the lesson does promise is the discipline of making uncertainty explicit, measurable, and revisable: stating what one believes, with what confidence, on what grounds, and what evidence would change one's mind. The strongest critique of forecasting—that geopolitical events are unique and strategically interactive—must be taken seriously, and it is taken seriously in the Russian strategic-culture and Chinese "scientific decision-making" discourses examined in Section 2.7. But the critique does not license a retreat to unexamined intuition, which the record shows to be worse than structured methods on average. The capstone implication is that the goal of geopolitical forecasting is not prophecy but better-calibrated judgment under uncertainty, produced by methods whose limitations are as visible as their outputs.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. (L3) What is the difference between a necessary and a sufficient cause, and why does conflating them lead to mistaken attributions of responsibility for wars?
2. (L3) In causal inference, what is a confounder, and how does randomization or careful research design address it?
3. (L4) What is the difference between justification and truth in epistemology, and can a belief be well justified yet false?
4. (L4) How does standpoint epistemology challenge the ideal of a "view from nowhere," and what does this imply for whose knowledge counts as expertise?
5. (L14) What changed in the international system after 1989 that makes forecasting harder than during the Cold War bipolar structure?
6. (L14) How did the "unipolar moment" shape assumptions about state behavior, and what forecasting errors did those assumptions produce?

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Under what conditions does scenario planning outperform point prediction, and when is it merely an

expensive way of avoiding a decision?
2. What does a Brier score measure, what is a "good" score, and why is it a proper scoring rule?
3. Why might African early warning systems detect conflicts that global quantitative models miss, and what does this imply about the data on which models are trained?
4. What did the Good Judgment Project (2011–2015) reveal about who forecasts well, and which of those findings are most contested?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **Scenario planning**: a method that constructs multiple plausible futures to explore strategic options under deep uncertainty rather than producing a single point prediction.
- **Delphi method**: structured expert elicitation through anonymous rounds of questioning with aggregated feedback, aiming at convergence while suppressing groupthink.
- **Bayesian updating**: revising a prior probability in light of new evidence via Bayes' theorem to produce a posterior probability.
- **Prior probability**: the initial degree of belief in a hypothesis before new evidence is considered.
- **Likelihood**: the probability of observing the evidence if the hypothesis is true.
- **Posterior probability**: the updated degree of belief after incorporating evidence.
- **Brier score**: a proper scoring rule measuring the accuracy of probabilistic forecasts; lower scores indicate better accuracy.
- **Calibration**: the degree to which stated probabilities match observed frequencies over many forecasts.
- **Superforecaster**: a forecaster who consistently achieves high accuracy and calibration in tournament settings (Tetlock and Gardner 2015).
- **ICEWS**: Integrated Crisis Early Warning System, a US-funded quantitative conflict forecasting program.
- **ACLED**: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, a dataset of political violence events.
- **GDELT**: Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone, a large-scale event dataset derived from news media.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Analyze** the epistemic foundations of scenario planning, distinguishing it sharply from forecasting proper, and identify the causal mechanism by which structured narrative exploration of alternative futures improves decision-making under deep uncertainty rather than merely decorating a predetermined conclusion (Bloom: Analyze).
2. **Evaluate** the Royal Dutch Shell method as codified by Pierre Wack and Peter Schwartz, specifying its scope conditions, its characteristic failure modes (including narrative capture and groupthink), and the institutional conditions under which scenario exercises produce actionable strategic insight rather than performative theater (Bloom: Evaluate).
3. **Construct** a defensible scenario set for a geopolitical case using the 2×2 matrix method, articulating the predetermined elements, the driving forces, and the critical uncertainties, and justify the choice of

axes against plausible alternatives (Bloom: Create).

4. **Compare** scenario planning with Delphi elicitation, Bayesian belief revision, and quantitative conflict modeling, adjudicating which method fits which decision environment on the basis of uncertainty type, time horizon, data availability, and the cost of error (Bloom: Evaluate/Compare).
5. **Critique** the politics of prediction from an African vantage point, identifying whose futures get scenarioed, whose get ignored, how scenario exercises can reproduce or challenge epistemic hierarchies, and what African early-warning traditions contribute to the global forecasting repertoire (Bloom: Critique).

These objectives are cumulative: the first two establish the method's internal logic; the third requires its operationalization; the fourth situates it within the broader methodological ecology of geopolitical forecasting; and the fifth subjects the entire enterprise to the critical scrutiny that the African perspective, reconstructed on its own terms, demands. A student who masters all five will be able to design a forecasting exercise, defend its methodological choices, and recognize the political stakes embedded in the act of predicting the future.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Scenario planning: Schwartz, the Royal Dutch Shell method, and its application to geopolitics

Bolded Causal Claim: Scenario planning does not predict the future; it restructures the mental models of decision-makers so that they recognize discontinuities earlier and adapt faster than competitors who rely on single-point forecasts, and its value is therefore measured not by predictive accuracy but by the speed and quality of organizational response when the world diverges from baseline expectations.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three linked channels. First, *cognitive reframing*: by forcing decision-makers to inhabit multiple plausible futures rather than one expected future, scenario planning disrupts the "official future" — the unexamined consensus about what will happen — that organizations otherwise treat as reality. Pierre Wack, who built Shell's scenario practice in the early 1970s, argued that the purpose of a scenario is not to describe what will happen but to change how managers think, so that when a discontinuity arrives they have already rehearsed it mentally and are not paralyzed by surprise. Second, *organizational learning and shared language*: a well-run scenario exercise produces a common vocabulary and a set of "memories of the future" (Wack's phrase) that allow distributed actors across an organization to coordinate without central direction when events unfold. Third, *optionality and hedging*: by mapping which strategies perform well across multiple scenarios versus which are scenario-dependent, the exercise identifies robust options and exposes fragile ones, permitting investment in flexibility rather than in a single bet. The canonical operationalization is the 2×2 matrix method associated with Peter Schwartz's *The Art of the Long View* (1991): identify the predetermined elements (trends and constraints that will shape the future regardless of scenario), identify the driving forces (social, technological, economic, environmental, political), isolate the two most important and most uncertain of these as critical uncertainties, and construct four scenarios from their intersection. Each scenario must be internally consistent, challenging, and plausible — not probable — and must be populated with narratives, indicators, and "early warning signs" that would signal its emergence. The mechanism fails when scenarios are treated as predictions (collapsing the plurality into a ranked list), when the axes are chosen to confirm prior beliefs, or when the exercise produces documents that no one reads.

Scope Conditions: Scenario planning is appropriate under conditions of *deep uncertainty* — situations where the probability distribution of outcomes is itself unknown or unstable, where the relevant variables

are non-stationary, and where the time horizon is long enough that structural change is plausible. It is poorly suited to short-term tactical decisions where base rates are stable and data are abundant; there, Bayesian updating or statistical forecasting dominates. It requires institutional capacity: a sponsor with authority, a diverse group of participants (to avoid monoculture), and a feedback loop connecting scenarios to decisions. It also requires a tolerance for ambiguity; organizations that demand a single "most likely" outcome will misuse the method. Scope conditions further include the nature of the decision: scenario planning pays off when decisions are costly to reverse, when the cost of being wrong is high, and when flexibility can be purchased in advance. It is less useful when decisions are easily reversible or when the environment is genuinely random. A further scope condition, often neglected, is epistemic diversity: the method's value depends on whose uncertainties are treated as critical. If the participant pool is homogeneous, the "critical uncertainties" will reflect that homogeneity, and the scenario set will be narrower than the world.

Observable Implications: Where scenario planning is working, one observes (a) faster organizational recognition of discontinuities, measured by the lag between an event and a strategic response; (b) investment in options and hedges that would not have been justified under a single-point forecast; (c) a shared vocabulary that surfaces in internal documents and decisions; and (d) "scenario triggers" or early-warning indicators that are monitored. Historical cases include Shell's early recognition of the 1973 oil price shock and its subsequent strategic positioning; the National Intelligence Council's *Global Trends* series, which has used scenario methods since the 1990s; and military wargaming traditions that construct alternative futures for force planning. Where it is failing, one observes scenario documents that are produced and filed, decisions that track the baseline regardless, and post-hoc rationalization that treats whichever scenario "came true" as the one that was "predicted." A key observable implication for evaluation is that scenario planning cannot be scored by Brier-type accuracy metrics, because it deliberately refuses to assign probabilities; its evaluation must instead be counterfactual and process-based, asking whether the organization was better prepared than it would have been under a point forecast. This creates a methodological tension with the scoring traditions discussed in Key Idea 5.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African perspective on scenario planning must be reconstructed from within, not as a regional application of a Western method. African scholarship on forecasting and early warning — from the African Union's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) to the work of scholars such as Kwesi Aning and the traditions of community-based conflict prediction in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa — reveals that scenario planning's Western codification (Schwartz, Wack) is one instantiation of a broader human practice of preparing for multiple futures, and that African contexts expose scope conditions the Western literature under-theorizes. Three contributions stand out. First, African early-warning systems operate in environments of *epistemic scarcity*: data are thin, state capacity is uneven, and the relevant actors include non-state and informal authorities whose behavior is not captured in quantitative datasets. In such environments, the Shell method's assumption that critical uncertainties can be identified through structured expert elicitation is itself a scope condition that may fail; African practitioners have developed hybrid methods combining community sentinel networks, radio monitoring, and elder councils with formal analysis. Second, the politics of prediction in Africa is acute: forecasting who will win an election, where violence will erupt, or which state will collapse is never politically neutral, and scenario exercises have historically been captured by incumbent regimes or external donors whose "scenarios" legitimate predetermined interventions. African scholarship — including work on the "politics of prediction" and the critique of external forecasting as a form of epistemic dependency — insists that the question "whose futures are being scenarioed?" is prior to the question "are the scenarios accurate?" Third, African traditions of *proverbial and narrative forecasting* (the use of oral

traditions, proverbs, and historical analogy to anticipate change) represent an indigenous scenario practice that Western methodological literature has largely ignored; these practices are not primitive versions of Shell scenarios but alternative epistemologies with their own validity claims, particularly in contexts where formal data are unreliable. The African vantage point thus reveals that scenario planning's greatest blind spot is not methodological but political: it tends to treat the future as a space to be managed by those with institutional power, and to render invisible the futures imagined by those without it.

Chinese. Chinese strategic forecasting is framed through the discourse of "scientific decision-making" (□□□□), which treats scenario planning not as a corporate tool but as an element of state rationality and Party-led governance. Chinese academic and policy literature on strategic foresight emphasizes the integration of scenario methods with long-term planning cycles (the five-year plans, the 2035 and 2049 horizons) and with the concept of "comprehensive national security." The Chinese perspective contributes the insistence that scenarios must be tethered to a coherent strategic vision and to the state's capacity to act on them; a scenario that cannot be operationalized through state planning is, on this view, intellectually interesting but strategically useless. It occludes, however, the question of whose scenarios get heard within a centralized system, and it tends to treat political uncertainty as a technical problem of information gathering rather than as a feature of contested politics.

Russian. Russian strategic culture approaches forecasting through the lens of *strategicheskoe prognozirovanie* and the Soviet-era tradition of long-term prognostication, which treated the future as an object of scientific management. The Russian perspective emphasizes the role of the state in constructing scenarios and is skeptical of market- or civil-society-driven foresight. It contributes an awareness that scenario exercises are themselves instruments of power and that the choice of critical uncertainties reflects the strategic priorities of the sponsoring state. It occludes pluralism: the Russian tradition has historically privileged a single state-sanctioned narrative of the future, which is the antithesis of the Shell method's insistence on genuine plurality. The Russian critique of Western forecasting — that it projects liberal assumptions onto non-liberal contexts — is a legitimate scope-condition warning, even when deployed polemically.

Western. The Western perspective is the home of the Shell method and of the academic literature on scenario planning (Schwartz 1991; Wack 1985; van der Heijden 1996; Wilkinson 2009). It contributes the most developed methodological apparatus: the 2×2 matrix, the distinction between predetermined elements and critical uncertainties, the concept of scenario triggers, and the integration with decision analysis. Its self-critique, increasingly prominent since the 2000s, acknowledges that scenario planning has often been oversold, that its impact on decisions is hard to demonstrate, and that it risks becoming a ritual. The Western perspective occludes its own cultural specificity: it presents a method developed in a particular corporate and Anglophone context as universal, and it has been slow to incorporate non-Western epistemologies of the future.

UN. The UN perspective treats scenario planning as a tool for prevention and early warning, embedded in frameworks such as the Secretary-General's prevention agenda and the work of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. It contributes the normative insistence that forecasting should serve prevention rather than prediction, and that scenarios should be constructed with the participation of affected communities. It occludes, in practice, the power asymmetries of the UN system: scenarios produced in New York or Geneva often reflect the priorities of member states and donors rather than those of the communities whose futures are being scenarioed, and the UN's institutional incentives favor consensus scenarios over genuinely challenging ones.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — DELPHI METHODS: EXPERT ELICITATION, CONSENSUS BUILDING, AND THEIR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Bolded Causal Claim: Delphi methods improve geopolitical judgment under radical uncertainty by converting dispersed, often tacit expert knowledge into an iterated and anonymized consensus estimate, but they can also manufacture apparent agreement, suppress informative dissent, and legitimate decisions that remain politically contested.

Mechanism: The Delphi technique, developed at the RAND Corporation by Norman Dalkey and Olaf Helmer in the 1950s and 1960s, is a structured communication process among a panel of experts. Participants respond to a questionnaire, receive an anonymized summary of the group's responses and the reasoning behind them, and then revise their judgments in subsequent rounds. The mechanism works through three channels. First, anonymity reduces the social dominance effects that distort face-to-face committee deliberation: junior experts, dissenters, and specialists from marginal institutional positions can register judgments without immediate reputational penalty. Second, iteration allows experts to learn from one another's rationales rather than merely from their conclusions, which can surface assumptions, missing variables, and alternative causal pathways. Third, aggregation—often through medians, interquartile ranges, or consensus statements—produces a single estimate or scenario set that decision-makers can use. In geopolitical forecasting, this mechanism is attractive because many strategically important questions—long-term regime stability, alliance cohesion, the probability of interstate war, or the diffusion of a technology—are characterized by sparse data, non-stationary causal structures, and high stakes. Delphi panels can draw on historical analogy, regional expertise, military assessment, economic modeling, and diplomatic experience in ways that purely quantitative models cannot. Yet the same mechanism contains failure modes. Anonymity can reduce accountability and encourage vague or extreme responses; iteration can produce herding as participants converge toward a perceived center; and the facilitator's question framing, expert selection, and aggregation rule can predetermine the apparent consensus. The technique is therefore not merely a neutral information-aggregation device. It is an institutional practice that constructs a particular kind of expert knowledge, and its outputs must be audited for selection bias, common information, and the exclusion of non-expert but affected publics.

Scope Conditions: Delphi methods are most useful when the forecasting problem is complex, long-horizon, and data-poor; when the relevant knowledge is distributed across disciplines and regions; and when the goal is to structure disagreement rather than to eliminate it. They are less useful for rapidly evolving crises, where the delay of multiple rounds is costly; for questions with well-defined base rates and high-frequency data, where statistical methods dominate; and for problems in which expert pools share the same institutional incentives or cultural assumptions. The method also requires careful facilitation: question wording, response scales, and stopping rules shape outcomes. A Delphi exercise on "the likelihood of state collapse" may produce a different consensus than one on "the probability of a constitutional crisis," even when both refer to the same political trajectory. Scope conditions therefore include not only the external environment but also the internal design of the exercise. In geopolitical settings, Delphi is best treated as an input to structured analytic techniques—such as Analysis of Competing Hypotheses, key assumptions checks, or scenario construction—rather than as a standalone forecasting engine. It can identify plausible drivers and challenge dominant narratives, but it cannot by itself resolve causal identification problems or generate calibrated probabilities unless its outputs are scored against outcomes.

Observable Implications: If Delphi methods are working as intended, one should observe narrowing interquartile ranges across rounds, explicit articulation of dissenting rationales, and improved coverage of alternative hypotheses. If they are failing, one should observe premature convergence, vague consensus language, and the disappearance of minority views without substantive rebuttal. A further observable implication concerns accountability: because Delphi outputs are often presented as "expert consensus," they can acquire political authority disproportionate to their epistemic basis. In intelligence and policy settings, this can produce the illusion that a contested judgment has been validated by process. The method's value should therefore be assessed not only by internal convergence but by external calibration: do Delphi-derived estimates outperform simple base rates, individual experts, or market-based indicators when scored with proper metrics such as Brier scores? The available evidence suggests that structured expert elicitation can reduce some biases, especially when it forces explicit reasoning, but that its advantage is contingent and often modest. Delphi is better understood as a discipline for organizing expert disagreement than as a machine for producing truth.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African perspective treats Delphi methods with particular suspicion because the "expert" is often defined through institutions, credentials, and networks located in Western capitals, donor agencies, or international organizations rather than in the societies whose futures are being assessed. African scholarship on the politics of knowledge—Grovogui's critique of international order, Mbembe's analysis of power and subjectivity, Bayart's work on extraversion, Mamdani's critique of colonial categories, and Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment—suggests that consensus among experts can reproduce epistemic hierarchy rather than overcome it. African early warning systems, including the African Union's Continental Early Warning System and regional mechanisms such as ECOWAS and IGAD, have increasingly emphasized local monitors, community-level indicators, and participatory assessment precisely because distant expert panels often miss the social dynamics that precede violence. From this vantage point, Delphi can be useful only if the expert pool is radically diversified, if local knowledge is treated as expertise rather than as anecdote, and if the process is transparent about whose future is being forecast and for whose decision. The African perspective reveals that prediction is not merely a technical exercise; it is a political act that can justify intervention, resource allocation, or neglect. A Delphi consensus that excludes African scholars, civil society actors, and affected communities may be internally coherent yet externally illegitimate.

Chinese. The Chinese perspective frames expert elicitation within a model of "scientific decision-making" in which technical specialists inform Party-state priorities. Delphi-like methods can be used in planning, risk assessment, and policy consultation, but they operate within a political structure that values consensus, stability, and alignment with strategic objectives. The contribution is scale, data integration, and the capacity to mobilize expertise across sectors; the occlusion is the limited space for independent dissent and the tendency to treat politically inconvenient expert disagreement as noise rather than signal.

Russian. The Russian perspective is shaped by a strategic culture that privileges historical analogy, state interest, and qualitative judgment over formalized expert consensus. Delphi methods may be viewed as technocratic and potentially misleading when applied to adversarial geopolitical competition, where deception, secrecy, and non-linear escalation dominate. Russian expert councils and analytic centers do aggregate judgment, but often through hierarchical and politically embedded channels. The contribution is a reminder that expert consensus can be gamed by adversaries; the occlusion is a tendency to discount structured methods that might challenge entrenched strategic narratives.

Western. The Western perspective, especially in intelligence and defense communities, treats Delphi and

related structured analytic techniques as tools for reducing cognitive bias, groupthink, and overconfidence. It contributes methodological self-awareness, facilitation standards, and scoring practices. It occludes, however, the institutional incentives that reward consensus, the dominance of Anglophone expert networks, and the risk that process legitimacy will be mistaken for predictive accuracy.

UN. The UN perspective treats expert elicitation as part of prevention and early warning, emphasizing inclusivity, legitimacy, and the participation of affected communities. It contributes normative standards for whose knowledge counts and insists that forecasting should serve prevention rather than prediction alone. It occludes, in practice, the power asymmetries of the UN system: expert panels convened in New York or Geneva often reflect donor priorities and member-state politics, and institutional incentives favor consensus statements over genuinely challenging assessments.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — BAYESIAN UPDATING: PRIORS, LIKELIHOODS, POSTERIORS, AND THE DISCIPLINE OF BELIEF REVISION

Bolded Causal Claim: Bayesian updating improves geopolitical forecasting when analysts make their priors and likelihoods explicit and revise beliefs in proportion to evidence, but its value collapses when the underlying causal model is misspecified, the evidence is endogenous to the event, or rare-event base rates are treated as precise.

Mechanism: Bayesian reasoning is the formal rule that posterior belief is proportional to prior belief multiplied by the likelihood of the observed evidence under competing hypotheses. In its modern subjective form—associated with de Finetti, Savage, and the broader Bayesian tradition—it does not require objective frequencies; it requires coherence: beliefs must be updated according to Bayes's theorem if the analyst wishes to avoid Dutch-book vulnerabilities. The mechanism operates through three practical channels in geopolitical forecasting. First, it forces explicitness: an analyst must state a prior probability, specify what evidence would raise or lower it, and quantify, however roughly, the diagnostic value of that evidence. Second, it disciplines overreaction and underreaction by tying belief revision to likelihood ratios rather than to narrative salience. Third, it makes disagreement tractable: two analysts with different priors or different likelihood assessments can identify exactly where they diverge and what evidence would adjudicate the difference. In the Good Judgment Project and related forecasting tournaments, successful "superforecasters" often used base-rate anchoring, incremental updating, and the distinction between the inside view (the specifics of the case) and the outside view (the reference class). The mechanism is not merely mathematical; it is cognitive. It converts vague intuition into revisable quantities and creates a record of belief change that can be scored. Yet Bayesian updating also has characteristic failure modes. If the prior is drawn from an inappropriate reference class, the posterior remains distorted. If the likelihoods are invented rather than estimated, the formalism can launder subjective judgment into apparent precision. If the event is rare, adversarial, or structurally unprecedented, the likelihood function may be unstable. And if evidence is generated by actors who anticipate the analyst's model, the updating process can be manipulated.

Scope Conditions: Bayesian updating is most useful when evidence accumulates incrementally, when the event class has a meaningful base rate, and when the analyst can distinguish signal from noise. It is less useful when the causal structure itself is unknown, when the event is a one-off structural break, or when the available evidence is strategically produced by adversaries. Scope conditions also include the analyst's capacity for calibration: a Bayesian who is systematically overconfident in likelihoods will update too sharply and too often. In geopolitical forecasting, where deception, secrecy, and non-stationarity are endemic, Bayesian methods should be used as a discipline of revision rather than as a claim to precision. They are particularly

valuable for questions such as "Will a sanctions package be renewed?" or "Will a ceasefire hold for six months?" where historical reference classes exist and evidence arrives in stages. They are less valuable for questions such as "Will a particular leader be assassinated?" or "Will a novel technology transform the balance of power?" where base rates are unstable and causal mechanisms are poorly understood. The method's scope is therefore defined by the availability of a defensible reference class and the analyst's willingness to treat probabilities as subjective and revisable rather than as objective properties of the world.

Observable Implications: If Bayesian updating is being practiced well, one should observe explicit priors, small and frequent revisions in response to evidence, documented likelihood reasoning, and improved calibration over time. If it is being practiced poorly, one should observe abrupt jumps after salient news, false precision in posterior estimates, and the use of Bayes's theorem as rhetorical authority. A key observable implication is the relationship between confidence and accuracy: well-calibrated Bayesian forecasters should be neither systematically overconfident nor underconfident, and their Brier scores should improve relative to unstructured judgment. Another implication concerns disagreement: Bayesian frameworks should make expert disagreement more transparent by locating it in priors or likelihoods rather than in opaque intuition. However, the formalism can also obscure political judgment by presenting contested assumptions as technical parameters. The method's success should therefore be evaluated not only by internal coherence but by out-of-sample predictive performance and by whether its probability statements are interpretable and actionable for decision-makers.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African perspective highlights that Bayesian updating is only as good as the priors and likelihoods fed into it, and that these are often imported from Western datasets, Western base rates, and Western causal assumptions. African conflict dynamics—shaped by colonial borders, extraversion, informal economies, and local political orders—may not fit reference classes built from European interstate wars or generic "civil war" datasets. African scholarship, from Mamdani's critique of the "native" as political subject to Bayart's analysis of extraversion and Rodney's work on structural underdevelopment, suggests that apparently neutral statistical priors can encode historically produced inequalities. At the same time, African early warning systems can benefit from Bayesian discipline if priors are grounded in local data, community reporting, and regional expertise rather than in externally imposed models. The African perspective reveals that Bayesianism's greatest risk is not mathematical error but epistemic displacement: the replacement of situated, politically informed judgment with a technocratic probability that appears objective while concealing its assumptions. It also reveals an opportunity: explicit priors can make hidden assumptions visible and contestable, which is valuable in contexts where forecasting has historically served external intervention.

Chinese. The Chinese perspective frames Bayesian updating within "scientific decision-making" and the broader aspiration to make governance data-driven and technologically sophisticated. The contribution is the integration of large-scale data, computational methods, and state capacity; the occlusion is that priors may be shaped by political objectives, strategic narratives, or regime-security concerns, and that probabilistic dissent may be treated as instability rather than as information. Bayesian methods can strengthen planning and risk assessment, but their outputs are likely to be filtered through political hierarchies.

Russian. The Russian perspective, rooted in a strategic culture skeptical of Western probabilistic and technocratic methods, tends to view Bayesian updating as potentially misleading in adversarial environments where deception, secrecy, and strategic surprise dominate. The contribution is a reminder that likelihoods are not independent of the adversary's intentions and that formal updating can create false confidence. The occlusion is a tendency to underutilize structured methods that could discipline qualitative judgment and to

privilege historical analogy over evidence-based revision.

Western. The Western perspective, particularly in intelligence and academic forecasting, treats Bayesian updating as a core tool for reducing cognitive bias and improving calibration. It contributes formal methods, scoring practices, and the superforecaster research program. It occludes, however, the difficulty of specifying likelihoods in politically complex environments, the risk of false precision, and the institutional incentives that favor decisive point estimates over uncertain probability ranges.

UN. The UN perspective treats Bayesian and probabilistic methods as components of risk assessment and prevention, emphasizing early warning, scenario planning, and the avoidance of both alarmism and complacency. It contributes normative frameworks for acting under uncertainty and insists that probabilities should inform prevention rather than justify inaction. It occludes, in practice, the political constraints on UN action, the uneven quality of data across regions, and the tendency to convert uncertain estimates into bureaucratic thresholds that may not reflect local realities.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Quantitative conflict modeling: ICEWS, ACLED, GDELT, and their uses and limits

Bolded Causal Claim: Large-scale, machine-coded event data and statistical conflict models can detect macro-patterns and generate short-horizon forecasts that exceed unaided human judgment in data-rich, high-frequency environments, but their predictive power is bounded by data quality, coding assumptions, and the structural non-stationarity of political conflict.

Mechanism: The mechanism proceeds through a pipeline that converts raw information into probabilistic forecasts. First, event extraction: systems such as ICEWS (Integrated Crisis Early Warning System), GDELT (Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone), and ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) ingest news reports, government statements, and other textual sources. ICEWS and GDELT rely on automated coding using the CAMEO (Conflict and Mediation Event Observations) taxonomy, which classifies events into categories such as "protest," "assault," "coerce," or "yield," and identifies actors, targets, locations, and dates. ACLED, by contrast, employs trained human coders who manually verify events, assign precise geographic coordinates, and record fatalities, producing higher-fidelity but lower-volume data. Second, aggregation: raw events are binned into spatial units (grid cells, administrative districts, countries) and temporal windows (days, weeks, months), yielding feature vectors that include event counts, actor types, tone scores, and historical conflict incidence. Third, model training: statistical and machine-learning algorithms—logistic regression, random forests, gradient-boosted trees, and in some implementations neural networks—learn associations between these features and subsequent conflict outcomes, such as the onset of civil war, escalation of violence, or occurrence of protests. Fourth, out-of-sample validation: models are tested on held-out data to estimate predictive accuracy, typically measured by area under the ROC curve, precision-recall trade-offs, or Brier scores. Fifth, forecast generation: the trained model is applied to current feature vectors to produce probability estimates for specified future windows. The underlying causal logic is correlational rather than structural: the model does not know why a protest in a given district predicts violence next month; it has learned that, historically, such patterns co-occurred. This is the mechanism's strength and its vulnerability. It can process millions of events across decades and detect regularities invisible to human analysts, but it cannot distinguish genuine causal mechanisms from spurious correlations, and it cannot anticipate structural breaks—regime changes, technological shocks, novel ideologies—that have no precedent in the training data.

Scope Conditions: Quantitative conflict modeling performs best under five conditions. First, the outcome must be relatively frequent: battle events, protests, and riots occur often enough to support statistical learning, whereas coups, genocides, and interstate wars are too rare for reliable model training without severe class-imbalance problems. Second, the time horizon must be short: most operational models forecast one to six months ahead, where structural conditions are relatively stable; accuracy degrades sharply beyond twelve months. Third, the region must be data-rich: models trained on well-covered areas (Europe, the Middle East, parts of South Asia) outperform those applied to data-poor regions, though ACLED's expansion has improved African coverage considerably. Fourth, the structural environment must be stationary: models assume that the data-generating process remains stable, so they perform poorly during regime transitions, state collapse, or rapid technological change. Fifth, the question must be well-specified: "probability of armed conflict in district X in the next 30 days" is modelable; "will the international order fragment?" is not. The models fail when events are unprecedented, when actors strategically conceal intentions, when news coverage is biased or absent, and when the coding taxonomy misclassifies local political phenomena into ill-fitting categories.

Observable Implications: If quantitative conflict models work as claimed, several testable implications follow. Forecast accuracy should be highest for high-frequency outcomes (protests, battles) in well-covered regions and lowest for rare events (coups, genocides) everywhere. Accuracy should degrade measurably after structural breaks such as regime changes or major policy shifts. Human-machine ensembles—combining model outputs with analyst judgment—should outperform either alone, because models capture base rates and patterns while humans capture context and novel information. Model performance should correlate with data density: regions with more news sources and better coding coverage should yield higher accuracy. Finally, if models are genuinely predictive rather than merely descriptive, their out-of-sample performance should exceed in-sample performance by a margin that reflects true generalization rather than overfitting.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African perspective on quantitative conflict modeling is shaped by a dual inheritance: the continent has been both the most intensively studied object of conflict forecasting and the site of some of the most sophisticated indigenous early-warning architectures. ACLED itself originated in African research (Raleigh, Hegre, and Gleditsch), and the continent's data coverage has improved dramatically since the 2000s. Yet African scholars and practitioners have been among the most trenchant critics of external modeling. The critique operates on several levels. First, data colonialism: the extraction of African event data by Northern institutions, its processing in Western universities, and its return as "intelligence" to African governments and international organizations reproduces asymmetric knowledge relations. Second, categorical violence: CAMEO and similar taxonomies were designed for interstate and civil conflict in other regions and often misclassify African political phenomena—communal violence, land disputes, electoral mobilization, pastoral conflicts—into categories that distort their logic. Mamdani's analysis of the "bifurcated state" and the political construction of "tribal" identity suggests that models treating ethnicity as a fixed predictor of conflict reify colonial categories. Third, the politics of prediction: forecasts are not neutral; they shape resource allocation, intervention decisions, and threat perceptions. A model predicting violence in a region can trigger security responses that themselves produce violence, creating self-fulfilling or self-negating dynamics. Fourth, African early-warning systems—CEWARN (Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism of IGAD), the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), and the AU Continental Early Warning System (CEWS)—integrate quantitative indicators with qualitative, participatory, and community-based intelligence that external models typically ignore. African scholars such as Aning and Danso have argued that these systems, despite resource constraints, capture local political dynamics that machine-coded

news data miss. The African vantage point thus reveals that quantitative modeling is not merely a technical exercise but a political practice embedded in global knowledge hierarchies, and that its "accuracy" must be evaluated against whose security it serves.

Chinese. The Chinese perspective treats quantitative conflict modeling as an instrument of "scientific decision-making" (kexue juece), a governance ideal that combines data-driven analysis with political judgment under party leadership. Chinese strategic forecasting has invested heavily in big-data platforms, social-media monitoring, and AI-assisted intelligence analysis, particularly for domestic stability and border security. The perspective values scale and state capacity: the ability to collect, integrate, and analyze vast datasets across a large territory. It is skeptical of Western models' applicability to Chinese strategic environments, both because Western coding schemes reflect different political ontologies and because Western data infrastructures are seen as potentially compromised or adversarial. The occlusion is that "scientific decision-making" can become a legitimating rhetoric for decisions already made politically, and that the fusion of quantitative analysis with party control may suppress dissenting forecasts.

Russian. The Russian perspective is deeply skeptical of quantitative conflict modeling as a standalone methodology. Rooted in a strategic culture that values historical analogy, intuition, and the "art" of statecraft, Russian analysts tend to view statistical models as reductive, culturally blind, and vulnerable to manipulation. The Soviet tradition of forecasting (prognozirovanie) combined economic modeling with ideological analysis, and post-Soviet Russian scholarship has often emphasized the limits of formal methods in capturing the "spirit" of political situations. The perspective contributes an insistence that models cannot capture intentions, resolve, and political will—factors that Russian strategic culture treats as decisive. It occludes, however, its own tendency to substitute assertion for evidence and to dismiss inconvenient data.

Western. The Western perspective is the primary producer and consumer of quantitative conflict models, treating them as tools of evidence-based policy and intelligence. It has generated extensive self-critique: the failures to predict the Arab Spring, the rapid collapse of the Afghan government, and the 2022 Russian invasion have prompted institutional reforms, including the IARPA programs and the integration of machine learning into intelligence workflows. The perspective's strength is methodological rigor and transparency; its occlusion is a persistent overconfidence in data and models, and a tendency to treat coding schemes as neutral when they embed theoretical commitments.

UN. The UN perspective treats quantitative conflict modeling as a component of early warning and prevention, emphasizing its role in the Secretary-General's prevention agenda and the work of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. It values models for their ability to flag emerging risks and allocate attention across many crises. It occludes the uneven quality of data across regions, the political constraints on UN action even when warnings are issued, and the risk that model outputs become bureaucratic thresholds that displace local judgment.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Calibration and scoring: Brier scores, the Good Judgment Project, and superforecasters

Bolded Causal Claim: Forecasting accuracy is not merely a matter of being right or wrong; it requires calibrated probability estimates, and the Good Judgment Project demonstrated that ordinary people trained in specific cognitive habits can systematically outperform intelligence professionals with classified access.

Mechanism: The mechanism has three components: measurement, selection, and training. First, measure-

ment: the Brier score, introduced by Glenn Brier in 1950 as a verification measure for weather forecasts, provides a proper scoring rule for probabilistic predictions. For a binary event, the Brier score is the mean squared difference between the forecast probability and the actual outcome (0 or 1). A perfect forecast scores 0; a maximally wrong forecast scores 1; a forecast of 0.5 on a coin-flip event scores 0.25. The Brier score decomposes into three components: calibration (do events occur at the rate predicted?), resolution (does the forecast distinguish events from non-events?), and uncertainty (the base rate of the event). This decomposition is crucial because it separates two distinct skills: knowing the right probability (calibration) and knowing when to deviate from the base rate (resolution). A forecaster who always predicts the base rate is perfectly calibrated but has zero resolution; a forecaster who makes extreme predictions is highly resolving but may be poorly calibrated. Second, selection: the IARPA Aggregative Contingent Estimation (ACE) tournament (2011-2015) recruited thousands of volunteers to forecast geopolitical events, creating a large-N dataset of individual forecasting performance. Tetlock and Gardner's Good Judgment Project identified a small subset—"superforecasters"—who consistently outperformed both the crowd and intelligence analysts with access to classified information. Superforecasters were not distinguished by domain expertise or credentials but by cognitive style: active open-mindedness, a "fox" rather than "hedgehog" cognitive style (drawing on Isaiah Berlin's distinction, popularized by Tetlock), comfort with numerical probability, willingness to update beliefs frequently, and skill at decomposing questions into sub-questions. Third, training: the Good Judgment Project tested interventions including probabilistic reasoning training, bias mitigation (considering the opposite, outside view), and team collaboration. Training improved performance, and teaming superforecasters together produced further gains through information sharing and error correction. Aggregation—combining individual forecasts, often with extremizing (pushing aggregated probabilities toward 0 or 1)—outperformed individual forecasters. The mechanism thus runs: define a clear question with resolution criteria → elicit numerical probabilities → score with a proper scoring rule → identify top performers → train and team them → aggregate with extremizing → feed back performance data to drive further improvement.

Scope Conditions: Calibration and scoring methods work best under four conditions. First, questions must be specific and resolvable: "Will North Korea conduct a nuclear test by December 31, 2024?" is scoreable; "Will the Middle East stabilize?" is not. Second, time horizons must be defined and not too long: accuracy degrades as horizons extend, and very long-horizon questions (five to ten years) are difficult to score and learn from. Third, forecasters must receive feedback: without knowing outcomes, calibration cannot improve. Fourth, incentives must align: in the IARPA tournament, forecasters were motivated by competition and recognition; in intelligence agencies, career incentives may favor decisive point estimates over uncertain ranges. The methods fail when questions are ambiguous, when outcomes are never resolved (e.g., "was the invasion justified?"), when feedback loops are absent, and when institutional culture punishes uncertainty. They also struggle with unprecedented events where base rates are unknown and with questions where the act of forecasting changes the outcome (self-fulfilling or self-negating prophecies).

Observable Implications: If calibration and scoring work as claimed, several implications follow. Brier scores should improve with training interventions, particularly probabilistic reasoning and bias mitigation. Superforecasters identified in one tournament should maintain superior performance in subsequent tournaments (they did, in the Good Judgment Project's follow-up studies). Aggregated forecasts should outperform individual forecasts, and extremized aggregates should outperform simple averages. Forecast accuracy should be higher for questions with clear resolution criteria and shorter horizons. Intelligence analysts, when trained in these methods and given appropriate incentives, should improve their calibration. Finally, if forecasting skill is trainable rather than innate, training programs should produce measurable improvements in Brier scores across diverse populations.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary). The African perspective on calibration and scoring is shaped by the politics of who gets to forecast, whose questions are asked, and whose outcomes are scored. The Good Judgment Project and the IARPA tournament were overwhelmingly Western in participant base, question selection, and institutional framing; African experts were underrepresented, and African political questions were often framed through Western analytical categories. African scholars and practitioners have raised several critiques. First, question selection bias: the tournament questions reflected Western intelligence priorities—nuclear tests, regime stability, terrorist attacks—rather than African concerns such as land tenure conflicts, electoral violence, or climate-induced displacement. A forecasting ecosystem that scores performance on Western-priority questions will systematically undervalue expertise on African-priority questions. Second, the epistemic politics of probability: in many African political contexts, expressing uncertainty numerically can be read as weakness, evasion, or lack of commitment, while in Western intelligence culture, probabilistic language is increasingly valorized. The cultural framing of "superforecasting" as a cognitive virtue may not translate. Third, African early-warning systems already practice forms of calibrated judgment—CEWARN, ECOWARN, and CEWS produce risk assessments that are scored against outcomes, though often informally and without the methodological infrastructure of Brier scoring. African scholars such as Aning and Danso have argued that these systems deserve the same analytical attention as Western tournaments, and that their "accuracy" should be evaluated on their own terms. Fourth, the superforecaster profile—fox-like, numerate, detached—may select for cognitive styles that are culturally specific and may undervalue forms of knowledge embedded in community relationships, oral tradition, and situated experience. The African vantage point thus reveals that calibration and scoring, while methodologically powerful, are not culturally neutral: they embed assumptions about what counts as a good question, a good forecast, and a good forecaster, and these assumptions reflect the institutional and cultural context of their origin.

Chinese. The Chinese perspective on calibration and scoring is ambivalent. On one hand, "scientific decision-making" embraces quantitative evaluation and performance metrics; on the other, the political system does not reward public probabilistic hedging. Chinese strategic forecasting operates within a framework where forecasts are expected to be decisive and aligned with party priorities, and where public scoring of individual forecasters against outcomes could be politically destabilizing. The perspective contributes an emphasis on collective deliberation and hierarchical review as alternatives to individual scoring. It occludes the risk that suppressing uncertainty in forecasts leads to overconfidence and surprise.

Russian. The Russian perspective is skeptical of the superforecaster enterprise, viewing it as a manifestation of Western technocratic hubris. Russian strategic culture emphasizes the irreducibility of political judgment to numerical scores, and the IARPA tournament's framing of forecasting as a measurable skill is seen as missing the role of will, resolve, and historical consciousness. The perspective contributes a reminder that scoring rules measure only what is scoreable, and that many of the most consequential geopolitical outcomes are not. It occludes its own resistance to accountability and feedback.

Western. The Western perspective is the primary champion of calibration and scoring, treating the Good Judgment Project as a landmark demonstration that forecasting can be improved through measurement and training. It has influenced intelligence reform, including the creation of prediction markets and structured analytic techniques in agencies. The perspective's strength is its empirical orientation and willingness to test claims; its occlusion is a tendency to overgeneralize from tournament settings to high-stakes policy environments where questions are messier, incentives are different, and the cost of being wrong is asymmetric.

UN. The UN perspective values calibration and scoring as tools for improving early warning and prevention,

but emphasizes that UN forecasting must serve collective decision-making rather than individual performance. It contributes an insistence that scoring should be tied to actionable prevention, not just accuracy. It occludes the difficulty of scoring forecasts in a multilateral context where questions are politically negotiated and outcomes are jointly determined.

I have now produced 2.5 and 2.6. Let me verify word counts roughly. Each section is substantial, well over 1,400 words. Good.

Let me double check I didn't repeat content from previous chunk. I started fresh with 2.5. Good.

I should ensure headings exactly as specified. The user said "full five-sub-header structure" with sub-headers: Bolded Causal Claim, Mechanism, Scope Conditions, Observable Implications, Perspective Note. I used those. Good.

I'll output now.## 2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Quantitative conflict modeling: ICEWS, ACLED, GDELT, and their uses and limits

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Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

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Chinese. The Chinese perspective on calibration and scoring is ambivalent. On one hand, "scientific decision-making" embraces quantitative evaluation and performance metrics; on the other, the political system does not reward public probabilistic hedging. Chinese strategic forecasting operates within a framework where forecasts are expected to be decisive and aligned with party priorities, and where public scoring of individual forecasters against outcomes could be politically destabilizing. The perspective contributes an emphasis on collective deliberation and hierarchical review as alternatives to individual scoring. It occludes the risk that suppressing uncertainty in forecasts leads to overconfidence and surprise.

Russian. The Russian perspective is skeptical of the superforecaster enterprise, viewing it as a manifestation of Western technocratic hubris. Russian strategic culture emphasizes the irreducibility of political judgment to numerical scores, and the IARPA tournament's framing of forecasting as a measurable skill is seen as missing the role of will, resolve, and historical consciousness. The perspective contributes a reminder that scoring rules measure only what is scoreable, and that many of the most consequential geopolitical outcomes are not. It occludes its own resistance to accountability and feedback.

Western. The Western perspective is the primary champion of calibration and scoring, treating the Good Judgment Project as a landmark demonstration that forecasting can be improved through measurement and training. It has influenced intelligence reform, including the creation of prediction markets and structured analytic techniques in agencies. The perspective's strength is its empirical orientation and willingness to test claims; its occlusion is a tendency to overgeneralize from tournament settings to high-stakes policy environments where questions are messier, incentives are different, and the cost of being wrong is asymmetric.

UN. The UN perspective values calibration and scoring as tools for improving early warning and prevention, but emphasizes that UN forecasting must serve collective decision-making rather than individual perfor-

mance. It contributes an insistence that scoring should be tied to actionable prevention, not just accuracy. It occludes the difficulty of scoring forecasts in a multilateral context where questions are politically negotiated and outcomes are jointly determined.

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on geopolitical forecasting begins not with method but with the politics of knowledge production. Forecasting is never a neutral technical exercise; it is an exercise of power that determines whose futures count, whose suffering is anticipated, and whose agency is recognized. From this standpoint, the five methodologies examined in this lesson—scenario planning, Delphi elicitation, Bayesian updating, quantitative conflict modeling, and calibration/scoring—are not simply tools for reducing uncertainty. They are technologies of governance that have historically been deployed to manage African populations, justify intervention, and discipline African states into compliance with externally defined risk categories. Reconstructing the African perspective therefore requires reading each method against its colonial and post-colonial genealogies, and asking not only "does this forecast work?" but "for whom does it work, and at whose expense?"

The most concrete institutional expression of an African-owned forecasting agenda is the network of early warning systems that emerged from the 1990s onward: the African Union's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN), the IGAD Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), and the SADC Regional Early Warning Centre. These systems were not merely technical imports. They represented a post-colonial insistence, articulated by leaders such as Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah in earlier decades, that Africans must forecast and manage their own futures rather than receive them as intelligence products from former colonial powers. Emmanuel Kwesi Aning and Kwaku Danso have documented how these systems were designed to shift the locus of predictive authority from Western capitals to African institutions, embedding forecasting within regional political communities rather than external security architectures. Yet the same scholarship reveals a persistent tension: early warning systems often reproduce state-centric biases, privileging regime stability and territorial integrity over human security, and frequently generating alerts that are ignored by the very political leaders they are meant to serve. The African perspective thus contributes an insistence that forecasting must be accountable to affected populations, not only to decision-makers, and that the value of a forecast lies in whether it enables preventive action by those most at risk.

The deeper theoretical grounding for this position comes from African scholarship on the politics of knowledge. Achille Mbembe's analysis of necropolitics and the "postcolony" demonstrates how African subjects have historically been constructed as objects of external management rather than agents of their own futures. In the forecasting context, this means that predictions about African conflict, state failure, or humanitarian crisis often function not as descriptions of reality but as performative constructions that bring into being the very conditions they claim to anticipate. The "fragile state" label, the "arc of crisis" framing, and the routine classification of African regions as high-risk zones are not innocent analytic categories; they are interventions that shape capital flows, aid allocations, military deployments, and diplomatic attention. Jean-François Bayart's concept of extraversion—the tendency of African political systems to orient themselves toward external patrons—extends to forecasting: African states often consume and reproduce Western risk assessments rather than generating autonomous ones, because the institutional and epistemic resources for independent prediction have been systematically underdeveloped. The African perspective therefore reveals

what Western methodological discussions typically occlude: that forecasts have constitutive effects, that they can become self-fulfilling prophecies, and that the accuracy of a prediction about African instability may tell us more about the intervention it triggers than about the underlying social reality.

The epistemic dimension is developed further by African feminist and decolonial scholars. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's critique of Western epistemological categories—particularly the imposition of gender and racial taxonomies that do not map onto African social realities—has direct implications for quantitative conflict modeling. ACLED, GDELT, and ICEWS all rely on coding schemes that classify actors, events, and locations according to categories developed in Western academic and policy contexts. Mamdani's analysis of "define and rule" demonstrates how colonial administrative categories, particularly the ethnic and tribal classifications invented under indirect rule, persist in contemporary conflict data and continue to shape how violence is understood and predicted. When a model predicts "ethnic conflict" in a region, it may be reproducing a colonial taxonomy rather than identifying a causal mechanism. Sylvia Tamale's work on decolonization and knowledge production insists that African scholars must be central to the design of categories, not merely sources of data for models built elsewhere. The African perspective thus contributes a methodological demand: that the ontological categories embedded in forecasting tools be subjected to critical scrutiny, and that African intellectual traditions be treated as generative frameworks rather than as case material for Western theory.

The structural critique, rooted in Walter Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment and Nkrumah's theory of neo-colonialism, adds another layer. Rodney demonstrated that African underdevelopment was not a natural condition but a product of global capitalist structures; Nkrumah showed how formal political independence masked continued economic and epistemic dependence. Applied to forecasting, this means that predictions attributing African instability to local factors—governance failures, ethnic tensions, resource curses—systematically misattribute causation by ignoring the global structures that shape African political economies. Amílcar Cabral's insistence that the colonized must theorize their own liberation, and Frantz Fanon's analysis of the psychological and political dimensions of colonial domination, extend to forecasting: the capacity to imagine alternative futures is itself a form of political power, and its monopolization by external actors constitutes a form of domination. The African perspective therefore demands that forecasting be oriented toward emancipatory rather than merely predictive ends, and that it serve African planning and self-determination rather than external risk management.

Each of the five methodologies takes on a different character when viewed from this vantage point. Scenario planning, as developed by Peter Schwartz and the Royal Dutch Shell method, assumes a global corporate actor navigating uncertainty; when applied to Africa, scenarios are often constructed by donors, investors, and security agencies whose interests are not aligned with African populations. The African perspective does not reject scenario planning but insists on African ownership of the scenario process, with scenarios generated from within African political and social contexts rather than imposed from outside. The Delphi method raises acute questions about whose expertise counts: Western academic and policy experts have historically dominated expert panels on African affairs, while African scholars, practitioners, and community leaders are underrepresented. Consensus-building in this context can silence dissenting African voices and produce a false unanimity that masks power asymmetries. Bayesian updating, with its emphasis on explicit priors and disciplined belief revision, offers genuine value: making priors explicit allows them to be contested, and the discipline of updating can counteract the tendency to cling to colonial stereotypes. But the method also depends on data that is often absent or unreliable for African contexts, and priors shaped by colonial knowledge may be difficult to dislodge. Quantitative conflict modeling faces the most direct critique: ACLED's reliance on media reports systematically overrepresents Anglophone, urban, and elite

perspectives; GDELT's machine coding struggles with African languages and local media; ICEWS's event data is built on Western news sources that underreport rural violence and overreport events involving Western actors. This is not merely a bias to be corrected through better data collection; it is a structural feature of a global information order that centers Western observers. Calibration and scoring, as developed in the Good Judgment Project and measured by Brier scores, raise the question of whose accuracy matters. In African contexts, outcomes are often determined by external intervention—French military operations, UN peacekeeping, donor conditionality—making "accuracy" a measure of intervention success as much as forecast quality. The superforecaster traits identified by Tetlock and Gardner—cognitive flexibility, open-mindedness, numeracy—may be less relevant where structural constraints dominate and where the cost of being wrong is borne by populations who had no voice in the forecast.

What the African perspective reveals that the other four miss is threefold. First, it exposes the constitutive and performative dimensions of forecasting: predictions do not merely describe futures but help create them, and this is especially consequential in contexts where external actors have the power to act on their predictions. Second, it identifies the epistemic violence embedded in methodological choices—the categories, data sources, and expert panels that silently privilege certain ways of knowing over others. Third, it reframes the purpose of forecasting from accuracy to accountability, insisting that the ultimate test of a forecast is not whether it matches an outcome but whether it serves the interests of those whose lives it predicts. What the African perspective risks occluding is the genuine value of systematic data and rigorous method: local knowledge, while indispensable, is not always sufficient for anticipating large-scale dynamics, and romanticizing it can obscure the need for institutional capacity-building in African research and data systems. The perspective also faces the challenge of scaling: African-owned forecasting institutions remain underfunded and politically vulnerable, and the gap between early warning and early action persists. Nevertheless, the African vantage point is indispensable because it asks the question that the other perspectives too rarely pose: not "how can we predict better?" but "who has the right to predict, and to what end?"

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on geopolitical forecasting is organized around the concept of "scientific decision-making" (kexue juece), a framing that treats forecasting not as an academic exercise but as an integral component of statecraft and national planning. In this view, the purpose of forecasting is to reduce the arbitrariness of political decisions by grounding them in systematic analysis, and the legitimacy of a forecast derives from its service to the collective goals of the state rather than from its individual accuracy. This orientation shapes how each of the five methodologies is received and adapted.

Scenario planning has a long history in Chinese strategic practice, though it is rarely labeled as such. The Five-Year Plans, the Belt and Road Initiative's risk assessments, and the strategic planning documents produced by the Central Party School and the Academy of Military Sciences all involve scenario-based thinking about alternative futures. Chinese scenario planning tends to be more state-centric and longer-horizon than its Western corporate counterpart, reflecting a political system that can sustain multi-decade planning horizons without electoral interruption. The contribution here is an insistence that forecasting must be integrated into planning rather than treated as a standalone intelligence product; the occlusion is a tendency to conflate desired futures with predicted ones, and to treat scenario construction as an exercise in political legitimation rather than genuine uncertainty reduction.

The Delphi method is widely used in Chinese policy research, particularly through expert consultation mechanisms (zhuanjia zixun) embedded in bureaucratic processes. Think tanks such as CICIR, SIIS, and CIIS

regularly convene expert panels to assess international developments, and the National Development and Reform Commission relies on expert elicitation for major policy decisions. The Chinese adaptation of Delphi tends to emphasize consensus and hierarchy: junior experts defer to senior ones, and the goal is often to produce a unified assessment that can be presented to leadership rather than to surface genuine disagreement. This contributes a model of forecasting as collective deliberation, but it occludes the value of dissent and the cognitive benefits of aggregating independent judgments, which Tetlock's research has shown to be central to accuracy.

Bayesian updating and quantitative modeling are growing rapidly in Chinese strategic studies, driven by investments in big data, artificial intelligence, and computational social science. Chinese universities and military research institutes have developed conflict forecasting models, and there is significant interest in applying machine learning to event prediction. The "scientific decision-making" framing provides political support for quantification, but it also creates pressure for models to produce actionable, authoritative outputs rather than probabilistic assessments with explicit uncertainty. The contribution is a willingness to invest in data infrastructure and computational capacity at scale; the occlusion is a tendency to treat model outputs as more certain than they are, and to subordinate methodological transparency to state security.

Calibration and scoring are the least developed of the five methodologies in the Chinese context. Individual forecasters are rarely scored against outcomes, and the cultural and institutional emphasis on collective responsibility and hierarchical authority makes individual-level accountability difficult. The Good Judgment Project's findings about superforecasters—cognitive flexibility, active open-mindedness, numeracy—are not directly transferable to a system where forecasting is a bureaucratic function rather than an individual performance. The Chinese perspective contributes an insistence that forecasting must be evaluated by its contribution to collective decision-making, not by individual accuracy metrics; it occludes the possibility that individual-level cognitive traits and incentives matter independently of institutional context.

Overall, the Chinese perspective's strength is its integration of forecasting into long-term state planning and its willingness to invest in data and computational infrastructure. Its weakness is the subordination of methodological rigor to political imperatives, the suppression of dissenting assessments, and the difficulty of distinguishing genuine prediction from the legitimation of predetermined strategies.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on geopolitical forecasting is shaped by a strategic culture that treats international politics as an arena of great-power competition in which deception, surprise, and the manipulation of uncertainty are legitimate instruments of statecraft. This orientation produces a distinctive skepticism toward Western forecasting methodologies, which are often viewed not as neutral tools but as components of an information warfare apparatus designed to shape Russian perceptions and constrain Russian options.

Russian strategic culture places a high value on qualitative, historically informed analysis over quantitative modeling. The Russian academic and intelligence traditions emphasize deep historical knowledge, civilizational analysis, and the study of Western intentions and capabilities. Forecasting in this tradition is less about assigning probabilities to discrete events and more about understanding the underlying logic of adversary behavior. This contributes an insistence that geopolitical forecasting must be grounded in historical and cultural knowledge, and that models which strip away context in pursuit of quantification risk missing the strategic logic that drives state behavior. The occlusion is a tendency toward conspiratorial thinking: the assumption that Western actions are more coordinated and intentional than they are, and that apparent chaos or incompetence in Western policy is actually strategic deception.

Scenario planning is used in Russian strategic studies, but with different underlying assumptions. Russian scenarios tend to be more zero-sum and more attentive to Western intentions than to structural or domestic factors. The contribution is an emphasis on the adversary's perspective and the possibility of strategic surprise; the occlusion is a tendency to overestimate Western coherence and to underestimate the role of domestic politics and contingency in shaping Western policy. The Russian perspective also contributes a long memory: Russian analysts frequently draw on historical analogies—Napoleon, Hitler, the Cold War—that Western forecasters, with their shorter institutional memories, may neglect.

The Delphi method and expert elicitation are practiced in Russian research institutes and intelligence analysis, but with a different epistemic culture. Russian expert panels tend to be more hierarchical and more politically constrained than their Western counterparts, and the range of acceptable dissent is narrower. The contribution is a recognition that expert judgment is always situated in a political context; the occlusion is the difficulty of producing genuinely independent assessments when the expert community is closely tied to the state.

Bayesian updating and quantitative conflict modeling are viewed with particular skepticism. Russian analysts often regard Western quantitative models—ACLED, GDELT, ICEWS—as instruments of Western information dominance, and there is a widespread belief that such models encode Western biases and serve Western interests. This skepticism is not entirely unfounded: the data biases identified in the African perspective—reliance on Western media, underreporting of non-Western contexts—apply with equal force to Russian concerns. The Russian perspective contributes a valuable critical stance toward the apparent objectivity of quantitative methods; it occludes the possibility that such methods, despite their biases, can still improve on unaided human judgment.

Calibration and scoring are largely absent from Russian forecasting practice. The Good Judgment Project's emphasis on individual cognitive traits and probabilistic reasoning sits uneasily with a strategic culture that values decisiveness, historical intuition, and the willingness to act under uncertainty. The Russian perspective contributes an insistence that forecasting must ultimately serve action, and that excessive refinement of probability estimates can become a form of paralysis; it occludes the possibility that better calibration could improve the quality of Russian strategic decisions.

Overall, the Russian perspective's strength is its attention to adversary intentions, historical depth, and the political dimensions of forecasting. Its weakness is the tendency toward conspiratorial overinterpretation, the suppression of dissent within expert communities, and the rejection of methodological innovations that could improve accuracy.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on geopolitical forecasting is the most methodologically self-conscious and empirically oriented of the five. It is defined by a sustained engagement with the problem of intelligence failure and a willingness to subject forecasting practices to systematic testing and reform. The canonical reference points are the Good Judgment Project, the IARPA forecasting tournaments, and the broader literature on cognitive biases and debiasing, culminating in Tetlock and Gardner's work on superforecasting.

Scenario planning, as developed by Peter Schwartz and the Royal Dutch Shell method, originated in Western corporate and strategic planning contexts and has been widely adopted by Western governments and think tanks. The Western contribution is a well-developed methodology for structuring uncertainty, identifying driving forces, and constructing coherent alternative futures. The occlusion is a tendency to treat scenario planning as a self-contained exercise rather than integrating it with other methods, and to assume that the

scenarios constructed by Western analysts correspond to the futures that matter to non-Western actors.

The Delphi method has deep roots in Western policy research, particularly in the RAND Corporation's Cold War-era work on technological forecasting. The Western adaptation emphasizes anonymity, iteration, and the aggregation of independent judgments. The contribution is a rigorous methodology for eliciting and combining expert opinion; the occlusion is a tendency to treat expert consensus as truth, and to underweight the possibility that experts share systematic biases rooted in their common training and institutional affiliations.

Bayesian updating is the methodological backbone of the Western approach to belief revision. The emphasis on explicit priors, likelihoods, and posteriors reflects a commitment to transparency and to the discipline of changing one's mind in response to evidence. The contribution is a powerful framework for structuring reasoning and avoiding common cognitive errors; the occlusion is the difficulty of specifying priors and likelihoods in complex geopolitical contexts, and the risk that formal Bayesianism becomes a ritual rather than a genuine aid to judgment.

Quantitative conflict modeling—ICEWS, ACLED, GDELT—represents the Western commitment to data-driven, replicable analysis. These tools have transformed the study of conflict by making large-scale event data available to researchers and policymakers. The contribution is an empirical orientation and a willingness to test claims against data; the occlusion is a tendency to overgeneralize from tournament settings and historical data to high-stakes policy environments where questions are messier, incentives are different, and the cost of being wrong is asymmetric. The Western perspective also struggles with the data biases identified by African and Russian critics: reliance on Western media, underrepresentation of non-Western contexts, and the encoding of Western categories.

Calibration and scoring are the distinctive contribution of the Western perspective. The Brier score, the Good Judgment Project, and the superforecaster research program have demonstrated that individual forecasting accuracy can be measured, improved, and predicted. The contribution is an empirical demonstration that some people are consistently better forecasters than others, and that training and feedback can improve performance. The occlusion is a tendency to overgeneralize from tournament settings to policy environments, and to treat individual cognitive traits as more important than structural and institutional factors.

The Western perspective's strength is its empirical orientation, methodological transparency, and willingness to learn from failure. Its weakness is a universalism that assumes Western methods are applicable everywhere, an individualism that underweights structural constraints, and a tendency to treat forecasting as a technical problem rather than a political one.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on geopolitical forecasting is organized around the mandate of early warning and prevention. Unlike national intelligence agencies or corporate strategic planners, the UN must forecast in a multilateral context where questions are politically negotiated, outcomes are jointly determined, and the legitimacy of any prediction depends on its acceptance by member states. This shapes how each methodology is adapted and what is demanded of it.

Scenario planning is used in UN contexts for peacekeeping planning, humanitarian preparedness, and mediation support. The UN contribution is an insistence that scenarios must be developed through inclusive processes that involve affected states and communities, not imposed by external experts. The occlusion is the difficulty of achieving genuine inclusivity in a hierarchical organization where power is unevenly distributed among member states, and the tendency for scenarios to be shaped by the political interests of the

most powerful members.

The Delphi method and expert elicitation are widely used in UN early warning, particularly through expert groups convened by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, and the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes. The UN contribution is a commitment to multilateral legitimacy: forecasts must be credible to the international community, not just to a single government. The occlusion is the difficulty of achieving genuine consensus among experts from diverse national and institutional backgrounds, and the risk that expert panels become arenas for political negotiation rather than analytic deliberation.

Bayesian updating and quantitative modeling are increasingly used in UN contexts, particularly through initiatives such as UN Global Pulse and the use of satellite imagery and social media data for humanitarian monitoring. The UN contribution is a recognition that data-driven methods can improve the timeliness and granularity of early warning. The occlusion is the difficulty of applying methods designed for individual decision-makers to collective decision-making processes, and the risk that quantitative outputs are treated as more authoritative than they are in politically contested environments.

Calibration and scoring are valued by the UN as tools for improving early warning and prevention, but with an insistence that scoring must be tied to actionable prevention rather than to individual accuracy. The UN contribution is a demand that forecasting serve collective decision-making and that its success be measured by whether it enables preventive action. The occlusion is the difficulty of scoring forecasts in a multilateral context where questions are politically negotiated and outcomes are jointly determined, and the risk that scoring becomes a bureaucratic exercise disconnected from the political will to act.

Overall, the UN perspective's strength is its commitment to legitimacy, inclusivity, and prevention. Its weakness is the political constraints imposed by member state sovereignty, the difficulty of acting on early warning, and the tendency for forecasting to become an end in itself rather than a means to prevention.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Reframes forecasting as political practice embedded in who defines questions and whose crises count; centers local early warning and community-based indicators	May underweight the genuine predictive gains from probabilistic aggregation and large-N event data	Forecasting must serve African agency and prevention, not external security agendas	AU Continental Early Warning System; ECOWAS early warning; Aning and Danso's critiques of external prediction	Western: probabilistic methods demonstrably improve accuracy; refusing them risks worse decisions
Chinese	Treats forecasting as state capacity integrated with long-term planning and "scientific decision-making"	Tends to conflate prediction with control; underestimates irreducible uncertainty and black-swan events	Forecasting should strengthen sovereign decision-making and comprehensive national power	Five-Year Plans' scenario exercises; strategic research institutes (CICIR, SIIS)	Russian/Western: state-centric forecasting can become self-confirming and suppress dissenting signals
Russian	Emphasizes strategic culture, historical pattern, and civilizational cycles; skepticism of universalist probabilistic models	May overfit to historical analogy and underweight base rates and structural change	Forecasting should reflect great-power realities and resist Anglo-American methodological hegemony	Russian strategic studies traditions; emphasis on "correlation of forces"	Western: historical analogy without base rates produced systematic errors (e.g., overestimating Soviet stability)

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Developed probabilistic forecasting, calibration, scoring (Brier), and institution-alized self-critique after intelligence failures	Question selection reflects US/ally security priorities; treats accuracy as individual trait rather than collective capacity	Forecasting should be accountable, transparent, and evidence-based	Good Judgment Project; Tetlock and Gardner (2015); ICEWS/ACLED/GDELT	African: accuracy on externally defined questions is not the same as legitimate or useful prediction
UN	Frames forecasting as early warning for prevention; demands legitimacy, inclusivity, and actionability	Difficulty scoring forecasts in multilateral contexts; risk of bureaucratic ritual without political will	Forecasting must enable collective preventive action and be judged by lives saved, not Brier scores	UN early warning frameworks; R2P; AU-UN partnerships	Western: without scoring, there is no feedback loop to improve accuracy

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: The Good Judgment Project (2011–2015) — what did the IARPA forecasting tournament teach us about predicting geopolitical events?

Levels of analysis. The GJP can be read at four levels. At the individual level, the tournament isolated cognitive and dispositional traits—openness to experience, need for cognition, active open-mindedness, numeracy, and "perpetual beta" updating—that distinguished superforecasters (the top 2% of participants) from the median forecaster and from intelligence analysts with access to classified information. At the state level, the project was an instrument of the US intelligence community's post-Iraq-WMD reform agenda: IARPA funded it to test whether open-source, crowd-based methods could outperform classified analysis, and the CIA and other agencies absorbed its lessons into training and analytic tradecraft. At the systemic level, the tournament unfolded during a unipolar-to-multipolar transition in which the United States sought to maintain decision advantage amid Arab Spring upheavals, Syrian civil war, Russian assertiveness, and Chinese rise; the questions asked reflected that strategic agenda. At the transnational level, the events forecast—elections, coups, ceasefires, disease outbreaks, economic indicators—were produced by cross-border processes, and the forecaster pool itself was international, meaning that local knowledge from participants in target countries was one input among many, though the scoring and question-framing remained US-centered.

Mechanism section. The GJP's core mechanism was a feedback loop between probabilistic elicitation, rapid scoring, and belief revision. Forecasters assigned probabilities to precisely worded, time-bound questions; outcomes were resolved by independent judges; Brier scores (Brier 1950) provided a proper scoring rule

that rewarded both calibration (probabilities matching observed frequencies) and resolution (discriminating between events that occurred and did not). Three mechanisms drove superior performance. First, aggregation: averaging many independent forecasts, then "extremizing" toward 0 or 1, outperformed individual experts, consistent with the wisdom-of-crowds logic. Second, cognitive style: superforecasters updated frequently in small increments, sought disconfirming evidence, and decomposed questions into components with base rates. Third, institutional design: training in probabilistic reasoning and bias mitigation, team structures with devil's-advocate roles, and a tournament rhythm that created accountability. Tetlock and Gardner (2015) report that superforecasters beat intelligence analysts by roughly 30% in Brier score terms and that the top team's performance was sustained across years, suggesting the gains were not luck. The mechanism is therefore not "better information" but better processing of available information: the GJP demonstrated that open-source, structured cognition can outperform classified, unstructured expertise under conditions of moderate uncertainty.

Perspective reconstruction.

African (primary). The GJP is best read from an African vantage point as a case study in the politics of prediction: the tournament's questions were overwhelmingly framed by US national-security priorities, so African conflicts, elections, and crises appeared as objects of external monitoring rather than as problems defined by African actors. African early warning systems—such as the AU Continental Early Warning System and ECOWAS's early warning mechanism—operate on different epistemologies, combining quantitative indicators with community-based reporting, traditional authority networks, and political mediation; they are judged by whether they enable prevention, not by Brier scores on externally posed questions. African scholars such as Aning and Danso have argued that forecasting which treats African states as targets of prediction reproduces asymmetries of knowledge and power, and that the "accuracy" celebrated by the GJP may be accuracy on questions that matter to Washington rather than to Abuja or Addis Ababa. At the same time, the African perspective does not dismiss the GJP's findings: the demonstration that structured, probabilistic reasoning outperforms unstructured expert judgment is relevant to African intelligence and early warning institutions, provided the questions, indicators, and scoring are locally owned. The occlusion in the African reading is that it can understate the genuine methodological advance the GJP represents—superforecasting is a real improvement over both punditry and unexamined expert intuition—and that rejecting probabilistic methods outright risks leaving African decision-makers with worse tools. What the African vantage point reveals that the others miss is that the GJP's central metric, individual accuracy on resolved questions, silently encodes a particular distribution of power: who asks, who answers, and who benefits from being right.

Chinese. From a Chinese perspective, the GJP exemplifies a Western, specifically American, approach to forecasting as competitive advantage: open-source crowd wisdom harnessed to state power through IARPA, with results fed into intelligence reform. Chinese strategic forecasting, framed as "scientific decision-making" (kexue juece), emphasizes integration of prediction into long-term planning, comprehensive national power assessments, and party-state coordination; the GJP's individualist, tournament-based model appears both methodologically interesting and politically naive, since it separates forecasting from decision authority and from the planning apparatus that gives predictions consequence. Chinese scholars and strategists would likely credit the GJP's demonstration of aggregation and calibration while questioning whether its findings transfer to a system where forecasting is embedded in hierarchical, long-horizon planning rather than in short-cycle tournament questions. The occlusion is a tendency to treat state-integrated forecasting as inherently superior, which can suppress dissenting signals and overfit to official narratives.

Russian. The Russian perspective reads the GJP through the lens of strategic culture and great-power compe-

tition: a US-funded project to systematize prediction for hegemonic purposes, producing "superforecasters" whose cognitive style—open-mindedness, frequent updating, willingness to abandon prior views—reflects liberal, individualist epistemology rather than the historical-pattern and civilizational-cycle reasoning valued in Russian strategic thought. Russian forecasting traditions emphasize the "correlation of forces," long-term historical trajectories, and the role of will and leadership; the GJP's reduction of geopolitics to resolvable, time-bound questions with Brier scores appears to strip away the tragic, non-linear dimensions of international politics. The contribution of this perspective is its insistence that some geopolitical outcomes are not merely uncertain but structurally underdetermined, and that treating them as probabilistic bets can induce overconfidence. Its occlusion is a risk of overfitting to historical analogy and underweighting base rates, which Tetlock's earlier work (Expert Political Judgment, 2005) showed to be a systematic source of expert error.

Western. The Western perspective is the GJP's home turf: it treats the tournament as a landmark in the intelligence-failure self-critique that followed Iraq WMD, demonstrating that open-source, structured, scored forecasting can outperform classified, unstructured expertise. The mechanism—calibration, aggregation, extremizing, cognitive-style selection, training—is presented as a generalizable improvement in analytic tradecraft, and the project's findings have been absorbed into intelligence community practice and into commercial forecasting. The strength is empirical rigor and institutional accountability; the occlusion is that the questions, the scoring, and the "accuracy" metric are all defined within a US security frame, so the apparent universality of the method masks a particular geopolitical standpoint. The Western perspective also tends to individualize success (the superforecaster) rather than treating forecasting as a collective, political capacity.

UN. The UN perspective values the GJP's methodological advances but judges them by a different standard: whether they enable prevention. From this vantage point, the tournament's focus on individual accuracy on resolved questions is a narrow metric; what matters is whether forecasting produces actionable early warning that mobilizes collective response, as in the UN's early warning and R2P frameworks. The GJP's questions were rarely about slow-burn crises or structural violence in ways that would trigger preventive diplomacy; its scoring system cannot capture the value of a forecast that, by prompting action, prevents the event it predicted. The UN contribution is a demand that forecasting serve collective decision-making and that success be measured by lives saved and crises averted, not only by Brier scores. The occlusion is the difficulty of scoring forecasts in a multilateral context where questions are politically negotiated and outcomes are jointly determined.

Explicit adjudication. The Western perspective best explains the GJP as an institution and as a methodological achievement: the project was funded by a US intelligence agency, designed by Western scholars, and evaluated by Western metrics, and its findings about calibration, aggregation, and cognitive style are robust within that frame. However, the Western perspective misses what the African and UN perspectives reveal: that "accuracy" on externally defined questions is not equivalent to legitimate or useful prediction, and that the tournament's success metric cannot register prevention. The Chinese and Russian perspectives add a further caution: forecasting embedded in state planning or in historical-civilizational reasoning may capture dimensions of geopolitics—long-horizon structural change, the role of will and leadership—that probabilistic tournament questions flatten. The best explanation of what the GJP "taught" is therefore a hybrid: individual-level cognitive traits and institutional design genuinely improve short-horizon, well-specified predictions, but the tournament's lessons are bounded by question selection, by a US security frame, and by a metric that rewards being right over making a difference. The GJP taught us how to forecast better; it did not teach us what to forecast, or for whom.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. Classify the main forecasting communities that assessed a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine in late 2021 and early 2022, and state what each community treated as decisive evidence.

2. Separate the four levels of analysis for the case: what was observed, why it might have been occurring, what was predicted, and what policy response was prescribed.

3. Construct a simple Bayesian update for invasion by late February 2022: state a prior, identify at least two pieces of evidence, assign rough likelihoods under "invasion" and "coercive diplomacy," and state a posterior range.

4. Compare what quantitative conflict datasets and event-data systems could and could not detect in this case, and identify one false positive and one false negative risk.

5. Reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would each frame whether the invasion was "predictable," and identify what each perspective occludes.

6. Adjudicate the main source of forecasting failure—epistemic, institutional, or ontological—and specify two observations that would falsify your adjudication.

Model answer. The forecasting record around the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is best read as a case of structured disagreement under radical uncertainty rather than as a simple story of experts failing and open-source analysts succeeding. In late 2021 and early 2022, several communities were looking at overlapping evidence but weighting it through different models of Russian decision-making. Intelligence agencies with privileged collection emphasized order-of-battle indicators, logistics, and command-and-control signatures; their warnings became more specific as winter approached. Open-source analysts and journalists documented the physical buildup with satellite imagery, railway movements, and equipment transfers, producing a strong descriptive record of militarization. Prediction-market participants and superforecasters, where they were engaged, had to translate those signals into probabilities, and their performance depended heavily on whether they treated the buildup as a standing coercive threat or as preparation for an irreversible attack. Many European political leaders and some Ukrainian officials discounted the highest-probability invasion scenarios, partly because they weighted diplomatic incentives, economic costs, and the apparent irrationality of a full-scale war more heavily than military indicators. Russian strategic communication, including denials and demands for security guarantees, was itself a source of ambiguity because it was consistent with both bargaining and concealment.

The first analytical discipline is to keep description, explanation, prediction, and prescription separate. Description includes troop concentrations, exercises, diplomatic notes, and economic measures. Explanation asks why those actions might be occurring: coercive diplomacy, preparation for limited escalation, domestic political consolidation, or genuine intent to conquer. Prediction assigns probabilities and timing to possible outcomes. Prescription concerns what third parties should do, such as deterrence, reassurance, sanctions, or evacuation. A common error in public debate was to move from description to prescription while treating one explanation as established. A large buildup was visible; the inference that it would necessarily produce

a full-scale invasion was not equally visible.

A Bayesian treatment clarifies why. A reasonable prior for a full-scale invasion of a large European state by a nuclear power in early 2022 was low, because the base rate of such wars is low and the expected costs were enormous. Evidence such as sustained force concentration, Belarusian staging areas, and ultimatum-like diplomatic demands raised the likelihood of invasion, but the same evidence also raised the likelihood of coercive bargaining. The posterior therefore depended on the relative likelihoods assigned to each hypothesis. If one assumed that mobilization is cheap talk, the posterior remained moderate; if one assumed that mobilization plus ultimatum language is a strong predictor of attack, the posterior rose sharply. The decisive update for many observers came not from a single new fact but from the accumulation of logistics indicators, the failure of diplomatic off-ramps, and the recognition that Russian force posture was optimized for offensive operations rather than for indefinite coercion. Even then, uncertainty about Putin's private decision, the possibility of last-minute bargaining, and the risk of mirror-imaging meant that a high probability was warranted but certainty was not.

Quantitative conflict modeling adds a different kind of value and a different kind of limit. Systems such as ICEWS, ACLED, and GDELT are useful for detecting patterns in reported events, mobilization, violence, and media tone, and they can surface escalation trends that human analysts miss. In this case, event data could have captured rising military activity, border incidents, and diplomatic friction. But these systems do not directly observe leader intent, elite bargaining, or classified planning. They are also vulnerable to reporting bias, definitional drift, and the temptation to treat correlation as prediction. A model may predict elevated conflict probability without specifying whether the conflict will be a limited incursion, a full-scale invasion, or a prolonged standoff. The false-positive risk is that mobilization is read as imminent war; the false-negative risk is that a decision made in a small circle produces little open-source signal until execution.

The five perspectives reconstruct the case differently. An African perspective would stress that early warning is often technically available but politically ignored, and that great-power crises expose the selectivity of international attention; it would also highlight sovereignty, non-intervention norms, and the unequal distribution of preventive capacity. A Chinese perspective would emphasize strategic patience, the possibility that Washington was overreading Moscow's signals, and the value of reading military posture within a longer geopolitical competition. A Russian perspective, especially from within Russian strategic culture, would treat deception, ambiguity, and the concentration of decision-making as normal features of statecraft, making external prediction inherently difficult. A Western perspective would focus on intelligence collection, alliance coordination, and the post-Iraq need to avoid overstating certainty, while also acknowledging mirror-imaging and political incentives to avoid alarm. A UN perspective would frame the case through early warning, preventive diplomacy, and the gap between information and collective action, noting that even accurate forecasts do not automatically generate consensus or enforcement.

The most defensible adjudication is that the miss, where it occurred, was overdetermined by all three sources of failure. Epistemically, the evidence was genuinely ambiguous because the same mobilization supported multiple hypotheses. Institutionally, intelligence communities had incentives to hedge, political leaders had incentives to avoid panic, and public discourse often rewarded false confidence in either direction. Ontologically, the final decision appears to have been concentrated and possibly late, meaning that even a perfect model of observable indicators could not fully determine the outcome. This adjudication would be falsified if declassified records showed that the invasion decision was fixed months earlier and clearly signaled in observable indicators, which would strengthen the epistemic-failure account; or if records showed that decision-makers genuinely changed course at the last moment in response to diplomacy, which would

strengthen the ontological account. The lesson is not that forecasting failed, but that good forecasting must make ambiguity explicit, update as evidence accumulates, and separate the probability of an event from the wisdom of a policy response.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: In early 2025, a regional early-warning cell must assess whether a sustained border militarization episode in a fragile region will escalate to interstate war within ninety days. The cell has satellite imagery showing troop concentrations, ACLED records of cross-border incidents, diplomatic cables suggesting coercive bargaining, and a Delphi panel of regional experts split between "bluff" and "imminent attack." It must produce a probability estimate, update it as new evidence arrives, and recommend preventive diplomacy without either crying wolf or missing an attack. The cell's audience includes governments with competing interests, a regional organization with limited enforcement capacity, and humanitarian agencies that need lead time for contingency planning.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:
Mechanism: Identify the causal pathway by which border militarization could become war, and distinguish necessary conditions, sufficient conditions, and triggering events.
Perspective reconstruction: Reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN actors would interpret the same evidence, and state what each reading occludes.
Historical analogue: Select one prior case of coercive mobilization and explain what is structurally similar, what differs, and why the analogy may mislead.
Falsifiers: State two observations that would weaken your probability estimate and two that would strengthen it, and specify what evidence would change your policy recommendation.

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and did you avoid converting a probability estimate into a policy conclusion without an explicit decision rule?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

A forecasting team has strong Brier scores on routine political questions. In February 2022 it assigned only a 30 percent probability to a full-scale Russian invasion despite visible troop buildups. Which conclusion is most warranted?

A. The team's low score on this question proves that quantitative and expert forecasting methods are useless in geopolitics.
B. The team should have treated the troop buildup as sufficient evidence and assigned near-certainty to invasion.
C. The miss reflects the difficulty of inferring a leader's private decision from public signals; even well-calibrated forecasters face base-rate and evidence-ambiguity problems, so the appropriate response is disciplined updating and explicit uncertainty rather than abandonment of method.
D. Because experts disagreed, the correct probability was necessarily 50 percent.

Distractor diagnoses: Option A conflates a single high-stakes miss with overall methodological invalidity and ignores that calibration is assessed across many questions, not one. Option B commits a deterministic fallacy by treating mobilization as sufficient evidence, when the same observable indicators were consistent with coercive diplomacy as well as invasion. Option D treats expert disagreement as a reason to default to equiprobability, rather than as information to be aggregated, weighted, and updated.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Dataset comparison: ICEWS, ACLED, GDELT

Dataset	Temporal coverage	Geographic scope	Event granularity	Primary source base	Known bias / limitation
ICEWS (Integrated Crisis Early Warning System)	1995–present	Global	Country-day political events (CAMEO-coded)	Automated coding of multiple news sources	Over-representation of English-language and Western media; under-coding of non-violent contention and local-language reporting
ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data)	1997–present (Africa origin; now global)	Africa originally; expanded globally	Sub-national, actor-disaggregated events	Human coders + media + NGO/IGO reports	Under-reporting in remote or inaccessible conflict zones; definitional drift across coding revisions; lag in real-time updates
GDELT (Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone)	1979–present	Global	15-minute updates, CAMEO-coded, tone scores	Automated global media monitoring	High false-positive rate; machine-coding ambiguity; "noise" in trend series; tone scores not validated as sentiment measures

Table 2 — Good Judgment Project tournament outcomes (illustrative ranges, drawn from Mellers et al. 2014 and Tetlock & Gardner 2015)

Group	Approx. participants	Forecasting questions	Mean Brier score (lower = better)	Notes
Crowd (all forecasters)	~2,800 (Year 1)	100+ per year	~0.35–0.40	Wisdom-of-crowds baseline; untrained volunteers
Top 2% ("super-forecasters")	~50–60	Same set	~0.19–0.22	Selected by prior-year performance; teaming + training + feedback
Intelligence analysts (control)	Hundreds	Subset	~0.28–0.32	Classified access; professional training; no feedback loop
Prediction markets	Variable	Subset	~0.22–0.26	Incentive-compatible prices; aggregate of self-selected traders

Note: figures are approximate ranges reported in the GJP literature; exact point estimates vary by question set and year.

Table 3 — ACLED-based prediction vs. outcome, Sahel 2021–2023 (illustrative)

Region	Predicted risk (ACLED trend + model)	Actual major conflict events	Hit?	Miss type
Mali (central)	High	High (JNIM expansion)	Yes	—
Burkina Faso (north)	Medium	High (coup + insurgency surge)	Under-predicted	Political shock (coup) not captured by conflict trend
Niger (Tillabéri)	High	High	Yes	—
Chad (Lake Chad basin)	Medium	Medium	Yes	—
Senegal (Casamance)	Low	Low	Yes	—

Numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Looking at Table 2, how do Brier scores vary across groups, and what does the narrowing

gap between superforecasters and prediction markets suggest about the *source* of forecasting skill — individual cognition, aggregation, or incentives?

2. **Level of analysis.** Table 1 shows ICEWS operating at country-day resolution and ACLED at sub-national actor level. At which level of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational) does each dataset primarily operate, and what causal claims can each legitimately support? Which level is systematically under-represented in all three?

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** How would each of the five perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN — read the GJP result that trained amateurs outperformed intelligence analysts? What does each perspective credit, and what does each occlude?

4. **Interpretation.** Table 3 shows an under-prediction in Burkina Faso driven by a coup. What does this imply about the limits of trend-extrapolation models, the role of political shocks, and the difference between forecasting conflict *levels* and forecasting conflict *transitions*?

5. **Limitation.** What are the most serious limitations of using GDELT and ICEWS for African conflict early warning, and how do these limitations connect to the *politics of prediction* — who gets to define what counts as an "event," whose media counts as data, and whose suffering becomes visible?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Bayesian Belief-Revision Funnel"

What to draw: A left-to-right flow diagram on a single page. On the far left, draw a wide, low bell curve labeled "Prior" with a vertical dashed line at its mean and a shaded band for the 90% credible interval. An arrow labeled "Bayes' rule: P(H|D) □ P(D|H)·P(H)" points rightward to a middle panel showing three data points (dots) labeled "Likelihood (new evidence)" with a small likelihood curve beneath them. A second arrow points to the far right, where a narrower, taller bell curve labeled "Posterior" sits, its mean shifted toward the data and its credible interval visibly tighter. Below the posterior, draw a small feedback loop arrow returning to "Prior for next round," labeled "iterative updating."

How to label it: Title at top: "Bayesian Updating as Discipline of Belief Revision." Label each curve's mean (μ□, μ□) and standard deviation (σ□, σ□). Add a small box: "Brier score penalizes overconfidence: a 90% claim that fails scores 0.81."

Perspective overlay to annotate: Along the bottom, five small flags/icons with one-line annotations: African — "priors often come from local, non-quantified knowledge that the formal model cannot ingest"; Chinese — "state intelligence supplies the prior; updating is politically gated"; Russian — "strategic-culture priors are treated as fixed, not revisable"; Western — "base-rate priors from historical frequency; the default in GJP training"; UN — "consensus priors from multilateral assessments; slow to revise."

Visual 2 — "Forecasting Pipeline with Perspective Lenses"

What to draw: A horizontal pipeline of five connected boxes, left to right: (1) "Data ingestion (ICEWS/ACLED/GDELT)," (2) "Model / algorithm," (3) "Expert elicitation (Delphi)," (4) "Scenario planning (Schwartz)," (5) "Decision / policy." Above the pipeline, draw a "lens" icon (a magnifying glass) over each box with a perspective label: Box 1 lens "Western media bias"; Box 2 lens "quantitative reductionism"; Box 3 lens "who counts as expert?"; Box 4 lens "whose futures are imaginable?"; Box 5 lens

"whose interests decide?" Below the pipeline, draw a feedback arrow from Box 5 back to Box 1 labeled "outcome data → model retraining."

How to label it: Title: "Where Perspective Enters the Forecasting Pipeline." Label each box with its key method (e.g., Box 3 "Delphi: anonymous rounds, controlled feedback"). Add a legend: solid arrow = information flow; dashed arrow = feedback.

Perspective overlay to annotate: To the right of the pipeline, a vertical column of five perspective tags, each with a one-line verdict on the whole pipeline: African — "the pipeline predicts African futures using African data filtered through non-African frames"; Chinese — "the pipeline is a tool; the state decides which outputs matter"; Russian — "the pipeline is Western epistemology wearing technical clothing"; Western — "the pipeline is self-correcting through scoring"; UN — "the pipeline feeds prevention frameworks but rarely triggers action."

Visual 3 — "Calibration Plot: Superforecasters vs. Novices"

What to draw: A standard square plot. X-axis: "Predicted probability" (0.0 to 1.0). Y-axis: "Observed frequency" (0.0 to 1.0). Draw the 45-degree diagonal line labeled "Perfect calibration." Draw two curves: (a) a solid line hugging the diagonal, labeled "Superforecasters (GJP top 2%)"; (b) an S-shaped dashed line that is below the diagonal at low probabilities and above at high probabilities, labeled "Novices (overconfident extremes)." Shade the area between the novice curve and the diagonal in light red, labeled "calibration error (Brier-relevant)." Add horizontal gridlines at 0.25, 0.5, 0.75.

How to label it: Title: "Calibration as the Core Skill." Annotate two points: at predicted 0.9, novice observed ~0.65 ("overconfidence"); at predicted 0.1, novice observed ~0.25 ("underconfidence at low end"). Add a small inset box: "Brier score = mean squared error of probability forecasts; 0 = perfect, 1 = worst."

Perspective overlay to annotate: Below the plot, five short annotations: African — "calibration to whose base rates?"; Chinese — "calibration is technical; strategic judgment is separate"; Russian — "calibration assumes stable referents; geopolitics is not stationary"; Western — "calibration is the measurable core of forecasting skill"; UN — "calibration of early-warning thresholds determines when prevention triggers."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is a Brier score and why does it matter?	Mean squared error of probability forecasts; ranges 0 (perfect) to 1 (worst); Brier (1950). Rewards both accuracy and calibration; used in GJP scoring.
How does the Delphi method work?	Anonymous expert rounds with controlled feedback; Dalkey & Helmer (1963). Strengths: reduces groupthink, surfaces dissent. Weaknesses: slow, expert selection bias, false consensus.
What is scenario planning (Schwartz)?	Royal Dutch Shell method; Schwartz (1991). Builds 2–4 plausible futures from key uncertainties; not prediction but preparation. Strength: handles deep uncertainty.

Cue (question / prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What did the GJP teach us?	Tetlock & Gardner (2015); Mellers et al. (2014). Trained amateurs + teaming + feedback outperformed intelligence analysts; superforecasters ~top 2%; skill is partly trainable.
What are ICEWS/ACLED/GDELT?	ICEWS documentation; Raleigh et al. (2010) ACLED; Leetaru & Schrodt (2013) GDELT. Automated/semi-automated event data; different resolutions and biases.
What is Bayesian updating in forecasting?	Bayes' rule; priors + likelihoods → posteriors. Discipline of belief revision; combats confirmation bias. Requires quantified priors, often unavailable.
What is calibration?	Alignment of stated probabilities with observed frequencies. Core skill in GJP; measured by Brier score and calibration plots.
What is the African perspective on forecasting?	Early warning systems (CEWARN, AU CEWS, ECOWARN); politics of prediction; African scholarship (Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Fanon, Aning, Tamale, Oyěwùmí).
What is the Chinese "scientific decision-making" framing?	Forecasting as state capacity; strategic forecasting (zhanlue yuce); data-driven governance; occludes dissenting scenarios.
What is the Russian strategic-culture critique?	Forecasting as Western epistemology; emphasis on will, deception, non-stationarity; skepticism of probabilistic claims.
What is the Western intelligence-failure self-critique?	Post-Iraq WMD; Tetlock (2005) expert overconfidence; GJP as reform; calibration and scoring as accountability.
What is the UN early-warning/prevention framework?	Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes; CEWS; "never again" gap between warning and action; political constraints on response.

Source log: Tetlock & Gardner (2015); Schwartz (1991); Brier (1950); Dalkey & Helmer (1963); Mellers et al. (2014); Tetlock (2005); ICEWS documentation; Raleigh et al. (2010); Leetaru & Schrodt (2013); Kuhn (2020); Grovogui (2006); Mbembe (2001); Bayart (2009); Mamdani (1996); Rodney (1972); Fanon (1961); Tamale (2020); Oyěwùmí (1997).

Summary: Geopolitical forecasting is not a single method but a family of approaches — scenario planning, Delphi elicitation, Bayesian updating, quantitative event modeling, and scored calibration — each with distinct scope conditions and failure modes. The Good Judgment Project demonstrated that disciplined, feedback-driven amateurs can outperform intelligence professionals, but this result is bounded by question selection, base-rate availability, and the politics of whose data counts. From an African vantage point, the deeper issue is not method but the politics of prediction: early-warning systems exist, but warning rarely converts to prevention, and the data infrastructures that feed global models systematically under-represent

African realities. Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each add a lens — state capacity, strategic-culture skepticism, self-correcting empiricism, and prevention frameworks — while each also occludes something the others see.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Geopolitical forecasting is the attempt to say what is likely to happen in world politics before it happens. People do this in several ways: by imagining a few different futures and preparing for each (scenario planning); by asking experts privately and combining their answers (Delphi); by starting with a guess and changing it when new evidence arrives (Bayesian updating); by feeding news into computer models that count events (ICEWS, ACLED, GDELT); and by keeping score on predictions so that overconfident people are exposed (Brier scores, superforecasters). The big lesson from the Good Judgment Project is that ordinary people who are trained to think in probabilities, who update their beliefs, and who work in teams can beat intelligence professionals — but only on questions where good data exists and where the future resembles the past enough to learn from.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. I am unsure how much of the superforecaster advantage comes from selection (they were already good) versus training (they became good). I am unsure whether Bayesian updating works when priors cannot be quantified, which is common in geopolitics. I am unsure whether ACLED's expansion from Africa to global coverage preserved its original coding reliability. I am unsure how to weigh the Russian claim that probabilistic forecasting is epistemologically inappropriate for strategic interaction. I am unsure whether the UN's early-warning frameworks have ever actually prevented a conflict, or only documented failures.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Rechecking against Tetlock & Gardner (2015): the superforecaster advantage is attributed to both selection and training, with teaming and feedback as key mechanisms — so my gap on selection-vs-training is partially closed: it is both. Rechecking Brier (1950): the score is mean squared error of probability forecasts — confirmed. Rechecking Schwartz (1991): scenario planning is explicitly not prediction but preparation for multiple futures — confirmed. Rechecking ICEWS documentation: country-day resolution with automated coding — confirmed. Rechecking Mellers et al. (2014): psychological strategies (growth mindset, fox-like thinking) identified — confirmed. The gap on ACLED global expansion reliability remains open; I flag it as unresolved.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. Forecasting is like weather forecasting: you use models, update with new data, and score your predictions. The analogy helps because both involve probability, base rates, and calibration. The analogy breaks down because weather systems are governed by known physics and stationary distributions, whereas geopolitical events involve strategic actors who react to forecasts, non-stationary institutions, and data generated by media systems with their own biases. A weather model does not change the weather; a published geopolitical forecast can change the politics.

Step 5 — Rewrite. Geopolitical forecasting is a set of disciplined methods for reasoning under uncertainty — scenario planning for deep uncertainty, Delphi for expert aggregation, Bayesian updating for belief revision, quantitative event data for pattern detection, and scoring for accountability. The Good Judgment Project showed that skill is partly trainable and that amateurs can outperform professionals on well-structured questions, but the result does not generalize to all geopolitical questions, especially those involving strategic interaction, data-poor regions, or non-stationary institutions. From an African perspective, the central problem

is not the absence of methods but the politics of prediction: early-warning systems exist, yet warning rarely triggers prevention, and the data that feeds global models systematically under-represents African realities. Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each illuminate a different failure mode — state capture of forecasts, epistemological skepticism, overconfidence in quantification, and the gap between warning and action — and no single perspective is sufficient.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L58	definition	What is scenario planning?	Scenario planning constructs several plausible futures to stress-test decisions rather than betting on one prediction; Schwartz's Shell method distinguishes predetermined elements from critical uncertainties and builds 2x2 scenario matrices. It is a tool for robustness, not accuracy.	African early-warning practice often prefers scenario pluralism because single-point forecasts have historically served external actors' interests.
L58	mechanism	How does the Royal Dutch Shell scenario method work?	Analysts map driving forces, identify two critical uncertainties, cross them into four scenarios, and test strategic options against each; the value lies in revealing vulnerabilities, not in picking the "right" future.	Chinese strategic-planning documents similarly use scenario matrices but embed them in five-year plan contingencies.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L58	definition	What is the Delphi method?	The Delphi method elicits expert judgments through anonymous, iterated rounds with controlled feedback, aiming to reduce groupthink and converge on a consensus estimate without face-to-face dominance.	Russian expert councils (e.g., Valdai) use Delphi-like elicitation but with less anonymity and more state framing.
L58	mechanism	What are the strengths and weaknesses of Delphi?	Strengths: anonymity reduces conformity, iteration refines estimates, and aggregation beats individual experts; weaknesses: convergence can be false consensus, experts share blind spots, and the method cannot generate information not already in the panel.	Western intelligence has used Delphi variants for long-range estimates; African panels note the exclusion of local knowledge holders.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L58	definition	What is Bayesian updating?	Bayesian updating revises a prior probability with new evidence via Bayes' theorem to produce a posterior; the discipline is to make priors explicit and to update by the likelihood, not by narrative.	UN early-warning frameworks increasingly require explicit priors in risk assessments.
L58	mechanism	State Bayes' theorem in words.	Posterior odds equal prior odds times the likelihood ratio; a forecast changes only as much as the evidence warrants, and strong priors require strong evidence to move.	African conflict analysts stress that priors built on colonial data distort posteriors.
L58	definition	What is a Brier score?	The Brier score measures the mean squared difference between a probabilistic forecast and the binary outcome; lower is better, and it decomposes into calibration, resolution, and uncertainty.	Scoring rules discipline overconfident Western analysts; African forecasters argue scores ignore distributional harm.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L58	application	What is ICEWS?	ICEWS (Integrated Crisis Early Warning System) is a US-funded quantitative conflict-forecasting system using event data and machine learning to predict political instability and conflict onset.	ICEWS has been criticized for weak performance on African conflicts and for opacity to local users.
L58	application	What is ACLED?	ACLED (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data) records political violence events with location, actors, and fatalities; it is a foundational input for both research and operational forecasting.	ACLED's African origins and local coder networks make it a model of situated data collection.
L58	application	What is GDELT?	GDELT monitors global news in near real time and codes events, actors, and tone; it enables high-frequency conflict indicators but carries media-bias and coverage gaps.	GDELT underrepresents African-language and rural events, skewing forecasts.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L58	comparison	Superforecasters vs. domain experts: who wins?	Tetlock's Good Judgment Project found that trained generalists with high cognitive reflection and active open-mindedness outperformed experts and intelligence analysts on geopolitical questions.	African scholars caution that "superforecaster" traits may reflect Western educational norms.
L58	source	What did Tetlock and Gardner (2015) establish?	Tetlock and Gardner (2015) showed that forecasting is a skill improvable through training, feedback, and aggregation, and that expert political judgment is often no better than chance.	The book's tournament setting was US-centric; its lessons need adaptation to African contexts.
L58	debate	Calibration vs. resolution: which matters more?	Calibration (matching stated probabilities to outcomes) and resolution (discriminating events from non-events) trade off; a good forecaster needs both, and scoring rules reward the combination.	UN prevention frameworks weight calibration for accountability; African communities weight resolution for early action.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L58	reconstruction	How do African early-warning systems frame prediction?	African early-warning systems (CEWARN, ECOWARN, MARAC) frame prediction as a political process tied to response capacity, not as a technical exercise; the bottleneck is often political will, not information.	This perspective reveals that forecasting without response architecture is performative.
L58	occlusion	What do quantitative models typically occlude?	Quantitative models occlude local causal mechanisms, informal institutions, and the agency of non-state actors; they excel at pattern detection but struggle with structural breaks and novel events.	This occlusion is most severe in African contexts where informal governance dominates.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Concept / Claim	My confidence (0–100)	Evidence I can cite	Key gap
I can explain Bayes' theorem in words			
I can compute a Brier score from a forecast-outcome pair			
I know the difference between calibration and resolution			

Concept / Claim	My confidence (0–100)	Evidence I can cite	Key gap
I can describe the Shell scenario method's two uncertainties			
I can state what ICEWS predicts and its known limits			
I can reconstruct the African early-warning critique			
I can explain why superforecasters outperform experts			
I can identify three failure modes of Delphi			
I can apply Bayesian updating to a geopolitical case			
I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, prescription			

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which forecasting method did I most overestimate in confidence, and what evidence would lower it?
2. Where did my prior on the 2022 Russian invasion sit, and did I update fast enough when evidence accumulated?
3. What would have to be true for quantitative conflict models to outperform human judgment in African contexts?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Forecasting means predicting a single outcome.	Forecasting produces probability distributions over scenarios; single-point predictions are a misuse.	Tetlock and Gardner (2015); Schwartz (1991)
Experts are always better than generalists.	Trained generalists with feedback often outperform domain experts on geopolitical questions.	Good Judgment Project results

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
More data always improves forecasts.	Data without causal structure or local validity can amplify bias; GDELT/ICEWS have known coverage gaps.	ICEWS documentation; ACLED critiques
Bayesian updating is just "changing your mind."	It requires explicit priors and likelihoods; informal updating often double-counts evidence.	Standard Bayesian pedagogy
High Brier score means good forecasting.	Lower Brier score is better; and scores must be decomposed into calibration and resolution.	Brier (1950)
Quantitative models are objective.	Models encode training-data biases and designer choices; objectivity claims occlude politics.	African critical scholarship
Delphi always reaches true consensus.	Delphi can produce false consensus when experts share blind spots or anchoring.	Delphi method literature
Early warning equals prevention.	Warning without response capacity is performative; the bottleneck is political will.	African early-warning scholarship

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Scenario planning; Delphi; Bayesian updating; quantitative conflict modeling; calibration/scoring	Driving-force mapping; iterated anonymous elicitation; prior→likelihood→posterior; event-data ML; Brier decomposition	Schwartz (1991); Dalkey & Helmer (Delphi); Bayes; ICEWS; Tetlock and Gardner (2015); Brier (1950)	Shell scenarios; GJP 2011–2015; ICEWS/ACLED/GDELT; 2022 invasion forecasts	Experts vs. generalists; calibration vs. resolution; objectivity of models; early warning vs. prevention	A model that cannot be scored; a forecast with no prior; a scenario with no response plan	L3 causal inference; L4 epistemology; L14 transition; L59 negotiation; L60–61 capstones

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 30 min):** Re-read Section 2.2–2.6 bolded causal claims; recite Bayes' theorem in words; compute one Brier score by hand.

- **R2 (Day 3, 45 min):** Reconstruct the five perspectives on forecasting from memory; check against Section 2.7; note one gap in the error log.
- **R3 (Day 7, 60 min):** Re-work the Problem Pair (2022 invasion) without notes; compare to model answer; identify where your prior sat.
- **R4 (Day 14, 45 min):** Re-attempt the Hinge Question and two flashcards of each type; score yourself; update confidence audit.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 min):** Write a one-page memo applying one method to a new case; include falsifiers and perspective reconstruction; self-check description/explanation/prediction/prescription.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define scenario planning and the Shell method.
☐ I can run a Delphi round mentally (anonymous, iterated, feedback).
☐ I can state and apply Bayes' theorem in words.
☐ I can compute and interpret a Brier score.
☐ I can distinguish calibration from resolution.
☐ I can describe ICEWS, ACLED, and GDELT and their limits.
☐ I can explain why superforecasters outperform experts.
☐ I can reconstruct the African early-warning critique.
☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives.
☐ I can complete the comparison matrix from memory.
☐ I can work the Good Judgment Project case at four levels of analysis.
☐ I can analyze the 2022 invasion forecasting problem pair.
☐ I can draft an independent memo with the four required headings.
☐ I can answer the hinge question and diagnose distractors.
☐ I can read ICEWS/GDELT/ACLED extracts and note limitations.
☐ I have filled in the confidence audit honestly.
☐ I have logged at least three errors in the error log.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Scenario planning - Schwartz, P. (1991). *The Art of the Long View*. Doubleday. - van der Heijden, K. (1996). *Scenarios: The Art of Strategic Conversation*. Wiley.

Delphi and expert elicitation - Dalkey, N. and Helmer, O. (1963). An experimental application of the Delphi method to the use of experts. *Management Science*.

Bayesian reasoning - Tetlock, P. E. and Gardner, D. (2015). *Superforecasting*. Crown. - Good Judgment Project papers on training and aggregation.

Quantitative conflict modeling - ICEWS documentation and evaluation reports. - Raleigh, C. et al. (2010). Introducing ACLED. *Journal of Peace Research*. - GDELT project documentation.

Calibration and scoring - Brier, G. W. (1950). Verification of forecasts expressed in terms of probability. *Monthly Weather Review*. - Kuhn, T. (2020). (as cited in canonical list).

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End of Lesson 58. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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60. Diplomatic Statecraft and Negotiation Theory

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 59 — Diplomatic Statecraft and Negotiation Theory
Module	Module 10: Forecasting, Diplomacy, and Capstones
Prerequisites	L20 (strategic thought), L3 (causal inference), L58 (forecasting)
Interleaved links	Forward to L60–L61 (capstones)
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, worked example, problem pair, independent memo, data lab, visuals, Cornell notes, flashcards, cheatsheet, review schedule
Bloom ceiling	Create — design and defend a negotiation strategy and falsifiable assessment
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Diplomacy is often mistaken for the art of saying agreeable things in formal rooms. The central puzzle of this lesson is more demanding: why do some negotiations produce durable settlements while others collapse even when the parties appear to share a zone of possible agreement, and how can theory specify the difference without pretending that human conflict is merely a math problem? Negotiation is not communication layered on top of power; it is a structured process through which actors convert latent power, information, domestic constraints, and normative claims into commitments that may or may not survive contact with implementation. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the 2023 China-brokered Saudi-Iran rapprochement illustrate the puzzle from opposite directions. The JCPOA was a highly technical, multilateral bargain that temporarily constrained Iran's nuclear program but remained fragile because its survival depended on domestic ratification politics, verification credibility, and the willingness of a later U.S. administration to remain bound. The Saudi-Iran rapprochement was a narrower, externally brokered de-escalation whose durability depends on whether Riyadh and Tehran can convert a diplomatic announcement into reciprocal restraint across Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq, and maritime security. Both cases show that agreement signatures are not endpoints; they are hypotheses about future behavior under uncertainty.

This lesson sits at the point in the curriculum where strategic thought, causal inference, and forecasting must be combined rather than treated separately. Lesson 20 supplied the logic of commitment, deterrence, compellence, and focal points; Lesson 3 supplied the discipline of distinguishing correlation from causation, identifying mechanisms, and specifying falsifiers; Lesson 58 supplied the humility of probabilistic judgment and the recognition that forecasts are only as good as their calibration and their treatment of un-

certainty. Diplomatic statecraft requires all three. A negotiator must think strategically about what the other side can credibly promise, infer causally whether a concession caused a response or merely coincided with it, and forecast whether an agreement will hold under shocks that have not yet occurred. The lesson therefore trains the student to move among levels of analysis—individual negotiators, state institutions, systemic power distributions, and transnational networks—without losing the thread of mechanism. It also prepares the capstone lessons by requiring the student to integrate theory, evidence, and perspective into a single defensible judgment.

The theoretical lineage is deliberately plural. Fisher and Ury's (1981) interest-based negotiation and Raiffa's (1982) analytic bargaining tradition teach the student to separate positions from interests and to search for joint gains, but they also risk overestimating the availability of integrative solutions when power is highly asymmetric. Nash equilibrium and Rubinstein bargaining formalize the intuition that agreement terms depend on discount rates, patience, and outside options, yet their elegance can obscure the fact that real diplomats bargain under incomplete information, shifting mandates, and domestic audiences. Zartman's (2001) ripeness theory explains why mediation often succeeds only when parties perceive a mutually hurting stalemate and a way out, but it can be misread as a license to wait for pain rather than to create conditions for settlement. Putnam's (1988) two-level game shows that international agreement is constrained by domestic ratification, while audience-cost theory explains why public commitments can strengthen credibility and also trap leaders. The UN mediation guidance and Lakhdar Brahimi's reports add a practitioner's emphasis on legitimacy, sequencing, and the political management of spoilers. The student must learn not only the theories but their scope conditions: bargaining models work best when preferences are stable and enforcement is credible; ripeness works best when parties are rational and mutually aware; two-level games work best when domestic institutions are transparent enough to generate observable constraints.

A central claim of the lesson is that negotiation theory is most useful when it is treated as a set of conditional mechanisms rather than as a universal recipe. Bargaining theory explains how value is divided when the parties know their alternatives; it does not by itself explain why actors sometimes prefer no agreement to a materially superior deal because of identity, historical grievance, or domestic symbolism. Integrative bargaining explains value creation but cannot assume that parties trust each other enough to reveal private information. Mediation explains third-party facilitation but cannot assume that mediators are neutral, powerful, or welcome. Track II and Track III diplomacy explains how informal channels can prepare official negotiations, but it cannot assume that civil-society actors represent states or that unofficial ideas survive bureaucratic translation. Two-level games explain ratification constraints but cannot assume that domestic audiences are informed, coherent, or decisive. The lesson's African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives are therefore not decorative additions; they are alternative ways of specifying which mechanisms matter most in a given case. The African vantage point is primary because it foregrounds legitimacy, hybrid authority, and the limits of externally imposed templates; it asks whether an agreement is owned by those who must live with it, not merely signed by those who can sign it.

By the end of the lesson, the student should be able to perform several distinct intellectual operations. First, reconstruct a negotiation as a causal argument with independent variables, mechanisms, scope conditions, and observable implications. Second, identify the BATNA, ZOPA, and commitment problems in a case without confusing analytical convenience with empirical reality. Third, compare mediator strategies—facilitation, formulation, manipulation, and coercion—according to the mediator's resources and the parties' ripeness. Fourth, analyze two-level games by mapping international proposals onto domestic veto players, audience costs, and ratification thresholds. Fifth, produce a short memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription, and that includes explicit falsifiers. The data lab will require the student to

interpret negotiation-outcome and mediator-success data while recognizing selection effects: we observe negotiations that occurred, not all conflicts that might have been negotiated, and mediator success is often endogenous to the ripeness that made mediation possible in the first place. The worked example and problem pair will force the student to apply these tools to cases with incomplete information, competing narratives, and no clean experimental counterfactual.

The lesson also insists on methodological humility. Negotiation datasets can show patterns—mediated conflicts sometimes settle more often than unmediated ones, or two-level constraints sometimes predict ratification failure—but such patterns do not automatically identify causal effects. Parties choose whether to negotiate, mediators choose whether to intervene, and outcomes are shaped by unobserved resolve. Case studies can recover mechanisms but risk hindsight bias; formal models can clarify logic but risk assuming away politics. The strongest student work will therefore pair theoretical claims with explicit falsifiers: if a proposed mechanism is correct, what evidence would contradict it? If a mediator's credibility mattered, what would we expect to see in the parties' private communications, public statements, and subsequent compliance? If audience costs drove a leader's rigidity, what would we expect under low-salience versus high-salience domestic conditions? This discipline is what separates diplomatic analysis from diplomatic storytelling. The lesson's final message is that statecraft is neither pure art nor pure science; it is the disciplined use of theory to make better judgments under uncertainty, while remaining accountable to evidence, perspective, and the possibility of being wrong.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval warm-up

1. From Lesson 20, distinguish deterrence from compellence and identify one scope condition under which each is more likely to fail.
2. From Lesson 3, what is the difference between an identification strategy and a robustness check, and why does the distinction matter in case-study research?
3. From Lesson 58, define a proper scoring rule and explain why the Brier score rewards both calibration and resolution.
4. From Lesson 20, how does a Schelling focal point solve a coordination problem without requiring communication or enforcement?
5. From Lesson 3, why does selection bias threaten causal inference when researchers study only negotiations that actually occurred?
6. From Lesson 58, distinguish aleatory uncertainty from epistemic uncertainty and give one implication for how a forecaster should update beliefs.

1.2 Orientation questions

1. Under what conditions can a zone of possible agreement exist while no agreement is reached, and which mechanism—information asymmetry, commitment problems, or domestic veto players—best explains the failure?
2. How can a mediator without coercive power alter the bargaining outcome, and what evidence would distinguish facilitation from manipulation?
3. What does Putnam's two-level game imply about the relationship between an international proposal's substantive content and its domestic ratification prospects?

4. How would an African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN analyst each explain the fragility of the JCPOA, and which explanation is most falsifiable?

1.3 Vocabulary pre-teach

- **BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement):** The most advantageous course of action a party can take if negotiations fail; it sets the reservation value below which agreement is irrational, though in practice BATNAs may be uncertain, politically constructed, or endogenous to the negotiation itself.
- **ZOPA (Zone of Possible Agreement):** The range of outcomes that both parties prefer to their respective BATNAs; its existence is necessary but not sufficient for agreement because information, trust, and commitment problems may prevent discovery or exploitation.
- **Distributive bargaining:** Negotiation over the division of a fixed or perceived fixed value, where one party's gain is another's loss; it emphasizes claiming tactics, reservation points, and power asymmetries.
- **Integrative bargaining:** Negotiation that seeks to expand the total value available by identifying compatible interests, trade-offs across issues, and creative options; it depends on information sharing and some minimum of trust.
- **Ripeness:** Zartman's concept that mediation is more likely to succeed when parties perceive a mutually hurting stalemate and a viable way out; ripeness is a condition, not a guarantee, and may be constructed by mediators rather than merely observed.
- **Mediator credibility:** The parties' belief that a third party can deliver benefits, impose costs, protect confidentiality, and remain sufficiently neutral or predictable; credibility is relational and may rest on resources, reputation, or institutional backing.
- **Track II diplomacy:** Unofficial dialogue among non-governmental actors, experts, or former officials that can generate ideas, build trust, and prepare official negotiations without binding governments.
- **Track III diplomacy:** Grassroots or civil-society engagement that addresses societal reconciliation, identity, and local grievances; it operates below elite politics and may shape the legitimacy of any eventual settlement.
- **Two-level game:** Putnam's framework in which leaders negotiate internationally while simultaneously managing domestic ratification; international agreements must survive both tables, and domestic constraints can be used strategically as bargaining leverage.
- **Audience costs:** The domestic political penalties a leader may incur for making and then retreating from public international commitments; they can enhance credibility but may also reduce flexibility and encourage brinkmanship.
- **Credible commitment:** A promise or arrangement that a party has both the incentive and the capacity to honor over time; credibility problems arise when future incentives diverge from present promises.
- **Good offices:** A mediator's provision of communication channels, procedural support, or legitimacy without necessarily proposing substantive terms; it is often the lightest form of third-party involvement and depends on consent.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

After mastering this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Define** and **explain** the core formal concepts of bargaining theory — Nash equilibrium, Rubinstein's alternating-offers model, BATNA, and ZOPA — and derive the relationship between a party's outside option and its reservation value in a two-party negotiation under complete information, including the role of time preference and discounting. (Bloom: Remember/Understand)
2. **Analyze** a real-world negotiation by decomposing it into its distributive and integrative components, identifying the surplus to be divided, the parties' reservation values, the zone of possible agreement, and the structural features — information asymmetry, issue linkage, and commitment problems — that determine whether value is created or merely claimed. (Bloom: Analyze)
3. **Evaluate** the applicability of ripeness theory, mediation theory, and two-level game theory to a given negotiation, specifying the scope conditions under which each theory generates accurate predictions and the observable evidence that would falsify its claims. (Bloom: Evaluate)
4. **Compare** the five major perspectives on diplomatic statecraft — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — by identifying what each contributes to the understanding of a negotiation and what each systematically occludes, using the JCPOA and the Saudi-Iran rapprochement as test cases. (Bloom: Compare/Analyze)
5. **Construct** an original, evidence-based assessment of a negotiation's fragility and durability that distinguishes description from explanation, prediction from prescription, and specifies the falsifiers that would cause the assessment to be revised. (Bloom: Create/Evaluate)

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Bargaining Theory: Nash Equilibrium, Rubinstein Bargaining, BATNA, ZOPA, and the Negotiation Framework

Bolded Causal Claim: The outcome of a bilateral negotiation is determined not by the parties' preferences alone but by the interaction of their reservation values, their bargaining power as shaped by outside options, and the strategic structure of offers and counteroffers; under complete information and rationality, the Rubinstein alternating-offers model predicts a unique subgame-perfect equilibrium whose division of surplus reflects the parties' relative patience, while the Nash bargaining solution provides the axiomatic benchmark against which any negotiated outcome can be evaluated for efficiency and fairness.

Mechanism: Bargaining theory treats negotiation as a strategic interaction in which two or more parties with conflicting interests must reach a mutually acceptable agreement or face the consequences of disagreement. The foundational contribution is John Nash's 1950 axiomatic solution: given a set of feasible utility pairs and a disagreement point, the Nash bargaining solution selects the outcome that maximizes the product of the parties' gains over their disagreement payoffs, subject to four axioms — Pareto efficiency, symmetry, invariance to affine transformations, and independence of irrelevant alternatives. The disagreement point is the payoff each party receives if no agreement is reached; in practice this is operationalized as the BATNA, the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement, a concept popularized by Fisher and Ury (1981). The BATNA is not merely a fallback; it is the anchor that sets the reservation value, the minimum acceptable deal. A party with a strong BATNA can credibly threaten to walk away, shifting the ZOPA — the Zone of

Possible Agreement, the set of deals that both parties prefer to their reservation values — in its favor. The Rubinstein (1982) alternating-offers model supplies the strategic micro-foundation. Two players take turns making offers; the first to accept wins. With common knowledge of rationality, complete information, and time preferences captured by discount factors, there is a unique subgame-perfect equilibrium: the first mover proposes a split, and the second accepts if the offer meets or exceeds their discounted continuation value. The equilibrium split depends on the ratio of discount factors, so that a more patient party captures a larger share. This is the mechanism by which time preference translates into bargaining power. Raiffa (1982) extended this to prescriptive analysis, emphasizing that negotiators should compute their reservation price, estimate the opponent's, and search for trades that expand the pie. The negotiation framework synthesizes these elements: identify interests rather than positions; determine BATNAs; map the ZOPA; explore integrative potential; and decide on commitment tactics. The framework is simultaneously descriptive of how rational actors bargain and prescriptive of how practitioners should prepare.

Scope Conditions: The formal models assume complete information, rationality, no commitment problems, and a single issue or well-defined issue space. They perform best when parties have clear, stable preferences, when agreements are enforceable, and when the negotiation is bilateral. They perform poorly when information is asymmetric, when there are multiple issues with complex linkages, when domestic audiences constrain negotiators (as in Putnam's two-level games), when emotions and identity are salient, and when the "agreement" is not a contract but a political understanding. The Rubinstein model's prediction of a unique equilibrium depends on common knowledge of rationality; in practice, negotiators may not know each other's discount rates or may misestimate BATNAs. The Nash solution's independence-of-irrelevant-alternatives axiom is particularly fragile: adding or removing options can change the predicted outcome in ways that seem counterintuitive. Moreover, the models treat the disagreement point as exogenous, whereas in many real negotiations the outside option is itself constructed or manipulated during the bargaining process.

Observable Implications: If bargaining theory holds, we should observe: (a) parties with stronger BATNAs achieving better outcomes; (b) more patient parties capturing larger shares; (c) negotiations failing when ZOPAs are empty, that is, when reservation values do not overlap; (d) the first-mover advantage in Rubinstein settings being modest and declining with patience asymmetry. Falsifiers include cases where a party with a weaker BATNA achieves a better outcome, suggesting non-material factors such as legitimacy or framing; cases where negotiations succeed despite apparent empty ZOPAs, suggesting hidden issue linkage or changed preferences; and cases where the division of surplus bears no relationship to relative patience, suggesting that other sources of power dominate.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): African diplomatic practice has long recognized the centrality of the disagreement point but locates it not in individual utility but in communal welfare and the restoration of social harmony. Traditional conflict-resolution mechanisms — such as the Gacaca in Rwanda, the Mato Oput in Acholi, or the palaver in West Africa — operate with implicit reservation values defined by communal obligations rather than individual BATNAs. The African perspective, as articulated by scholars such as Grovogui and Mbembe, treats bargaining theory's individualistic rationality as a culturally specific ontology that misreads negotiations where the "party" is a lineage, a chiefdom, or a nation whose internal consensus must be forged before external bargaining. The ZOPA, on this view, is not a fixed interval but a socially constructed space that expands or contracts with ritual, elder mediation, and the redefinition of what counts as a legitimate claim. African scholars such as Aning and Danso have noted that AU mediation often succeeds precisely where formal bargaining models predict failure, because the mediator redefines the disagreement point by reframe-

ing the conflict as a shared problem rather than a zero-sum division. The African vantage thus reveals that BATNA-based power is not the only source of leverage; legitimacy, moral authority, and the capacity to reconstitute the community can be equally decisive. This perspective is the longest and most developed here because it challenges the ontological foundations of the entire bargaining-theoretic enterprise, not merely its empirical predictions.

Chinese: Chinese diplomatic thought, drawing on Qin Yaqing's relational theory, treats bargaining not as a transaction between atomistic actors but as a process of relationship-building in which the outcome is inseparable from the ongoing relationship. The Nash solution's assumption of a fixed disagreement point is problematic because in relational diplomacy the disagreement point itself is negotiable and evolves. Chinese mediators often prioritize the establishment of trust and the creation of a community of shared future over the immediate division of surplus, implying that the ZOPA is endogenous to the relationship rather than exogenous. This perspective contributes the insight that patience is not merely a time preference but a strategic posture that signals commitment to the relationship; it occludes, however, the coercive dimensions of power that formal bargaining theory captures well.

Russian: Russian diplomatic practice, rooted in a realist tradition that emphasizes state sovereignty and great-power prerogatives, treats bargaining theory as a useful but subordinate tool. The Russian perspective stresses that the disagreement point in interstate negotiations is often determined by military capability and geopolitical position rather than by economic utility. Moscow's approach to negotiations reflects a view that the ZOPA is shaped by the balance of power and that the stronger party's BATNA includes the option of unilateral action. Russian practitioners tend to be skeptical of the integrative-bargaining optimism of Fisher and Ury, viewing it as a Western ideological construct that masks power asymmetries. This perspective contributes the insight that formal equality in negotiation often conceals substantive inequality; it occludes the possibility of genuine mutual gain and the role of non-state actors.

Western: The Western perspective is the home of bargaining theory itself. From Nash through Rubinstein to Fisher and Ury, the Western tradition has produced the most formally rigorous and prescriptively influential negotiation scholarship. Its strengths include analytical clarity, testable predictions, and a rich toolkit for practitioners. Its self-critique, articulated by scholars such as Zartman and by practitioners in the Harvard Negotiation Project, acknowledges that formal models assume too much rationality and too little culture, emotion, and power. The Western perspective's occlusion is its tendency to universalize a particular liberal, individualist, contractarian ontology of negotiation, treating interests as pre-given and preferences as stable, when in many contexts they are constructed through the negotiation itself.

UN: The UN perspective treats bargaining theory as an input to mediation practice rather than as a governing framework. The UN's mediation support apparatus draws on bargaining concepts but embeds them in a normative framework that prioritizes inclusivity, national ownership, and the sustainability of agreements. The UN view is that a negotiation's success cannot be measured solely by the efficiency of the deal but by its legitimacy and durability. The UN perspective contributes the institutional and normative scaffolding that formal theory lacks; it occludes the hard power realities that determine whether a ZOPA exists at all, sometimes leading to mediation efforts that are well-designed but structurally infeasible.

SECTION 2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Integrative vs Distributive Bargaining: Value Creation and Value Claiming

Bolded Causal Claim: The distinction between integrative and distributive bargaining is not merely a tactical choice but a structural feature of the negotiation problem itself: when negotiators frame issues as fixed-pie distributive contests, they foreclose value-creating trades that would make both parties better off, and the failure to recognize integrative potential is the single most common and costly error in diplomatic negotiation.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three channels. First, cognitive framing: negotiators who approach a negotiation as a zero-sum contest over a single issue (typically territory, resources, or status) activate competitive schemas that suppress creative problem-solving. Walton and McKersie's (1965) foundational distinction between distributive and integrative bargaining identified this as the difference between "claiming value" and "creating value." In distributive bargaining, the parties' interests are directly opposed on a single dimension; one party's gain is the other's loss. The mechanism is positional: each side anchors on an extreme demand, makes concessions, and the outcome settles somewhere in the middle. In integrative bargaining, by contrast, the parties' interests are not perfectly opposed; they differ in priority, risk tolerance, or time preference, creating the possibility of trades that improve both sides' outcomes. The mechanism here is interest-based: negotiators identify underlying interests rather than stated positions, generate options for mutual gain, and use objective criteria to evaluate them (Fisher and Ury, 1981).

Second, the mechanism operates through information asymmetry and trust. Integrative bargaining requires parties to reveal information about their priorities and constraints—information that, in a distributive frame, would be exploited. The mechanism is a trust dilemma: revealing information enables value creation but also value claiming by the other side. Raiffa (1982) formalized this in his analysis of negotiation under uncertainty, showing that the optimal strategy depends on the probability that the other side will reciprocate with information rather than exploit it. Where trust is low, the rational strategy is to conceal, which forecloses integrative potential even when it exists.

Third, the mechanism operates through the structure of the negotiation agenda. Single-issue negotiations are inherently distributive; multi-issue negotiations create the possibility of logrolling—trading concessions on low-priority issues for gains on high-priority ones. The mechanism is combinatorial: the number of possible agreements grows exponentially with the number of issues, and the Pareto frontier—the set of agreements where neither side can be made better off without making the other worse off—expands. Lax and Sebenius (1986) emphasized that the "negotiator's dilemma" is that the very moves that create value (information sharing, joint problem-solving) are the same moves that expose the negotiator to value claiming. The resolution of this dilemma is not a single strategy but a sequential one: build trust through small integrative moves, then expand the scope of cooperation.

Scope Conditions: Integrative bargaining is possible when (a) the negotiation involves multiple issues or dimensions, (b) the parties have different priorities or risk preferences, (c) there is sufficient trust or institutional scaffolding to enable information sharing, and (d) the parties are not in a purely competitive relationship where one side's gain is necessarily the other's loss. It is most likely in negotiations over trade, environment, and regulatory issues where the parties have complex, multi-dimensional interests. It is least likely in negotiations over indivisible goods (territory, sovereignty, status) where the parties' interests are directly opposed and the issue cannot be divided or traded. Even in these cases, however, integrative potential may exist through side payments, timing arrangements, or linked issues—provided the parties can identify them. The scope condition is not the absence of conflict but the presence of differential valuation: the parties must value the issues differently enough that trades are possible.

Observable Implications: If integrative bargaining theory is correct, we should observe that (a) multi-issue negotiations produce more efficient (Pareto-superior) outcomes than single-issue negotiations; (b) negotiators who use interest-based framing achieve better joint outcomes than those who use positional framing; (c) the presence of a skilled mediator or facilitator increases the likelihood of integrative agreements; and (d) agreements reached through integrative bargaining are more durable because both parties perceive them as gains rather than concessions. Conversely, if distributive dynamics dominate, we should observe (a) outcomes clustering around the midpoint of initial positions, (b) high rates of impasse in single-issue negotiations, and (c) agreements that are technically efficient but politically fragile because one or both parties feel they conceded too much. The empirical record supports both patterns: Pruitt (1981) found that integrative agreements are more common when negotiators are instructed to seek mutual gain, while Raiffa (1982) documented cases where even sophisticated negotiators failed to identify integrative potential.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: The African perspective on integrative bargaining is deeply rooted in indigenous conflict resolution traditions that predate Western negotiation theory. The concept of ubuntu—"I am because we are"—embeds a relational ontology in which the negotiator's identity is constituted through relationship rather than asserted against the other. Traditional African dispute resolution, as practiced in mechanisms such as the Gacaca courts in Rwanda, the Mato Oput process in northern Uganda, and various palaver traditions across West Africa, does not distinguish sharply between "creating value" and "claiming value" because the goal is not to maximize individual utility but to restore social harmony. The African vantage point reveals that Western integrative bargaining theory, for all its sophistication, remains individualist in its foundations: it assumes rational actors maximizing utility, whereas African traditions assume relational actors seeking reconciliation. This is not merely a cultural difference but an epistemological one: the African perspective asks whether the very concept of "value" as something to be created and claimed is appropriate in contexts where the goal is the restoration of relationship. The African perspective contributes the insight that the most durable agreements are those that repair social fabric, not just those that optimize joint gains. It occludes, however, the reality that in many African conflicts, the parties are not seeking reconciliation but survival, and that power asymmetries may make integrative bargaining a luxury that weaker parties cannot afford. African scholars such as Mamdani (1996) and Mbembe (2001) have emphasized that the post-colonial state's legitimacy crisis means that negotiation often occurs not between equals but between a state and its citizens, or between factions within a fractured polity, making the integrative/distributive distinction less applicable than in interstate bargaining. The African perspective thus contributes both a corrective to Western individualism and a reminder that the conditions for integrative bargaining—trust, multi-issue agendas, differential valuation—are not universally present.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective on integrative bargaining is shaped by the Confucian tradition of relational harmony and the concept of guanxi—networks of reciprocal obligation that create the trust necessary for information sharing. Chinese negotiation theory, as articulated by scholars such as Qin Yaqing (2018), emphasizes that integrative bargaining is not a technique but a relational achievement: value creation emerges from the cultivation of long-term relationships rather than from the application of analytical methods. The Chinese vantage point reveals that Western bargaining theory's focus on the single negotiation episode misses the temporal dimension: Chinese negotiators often sacrifice short-term gains to build relationships that yield integrative outcomes over time. The Chinese perspective contributes the insight that trust is not a precondition for integrative bargaining but its product, built through repeated interaction. It occludes, however, the coercive dimensions of Chinese negotiation practice, particularly in contexts where China's economic leverage creates asymmetries that make "integrative" outcomes functionally distributive.

Russian: The Russian perspective on integrative bargaining is skeptical, viewing the integrative/distributive distinction as a Western ideological construct that obscures the reality of power competition. Russian negotiation theory, rooted in the realist tradition of international relations, treats bargaining as a form of strategic interaction in which the goal is not mutual gain but relative advantage. The Russian vantage point reveals that integrative bargaining can be a mechanism for locking in asymmetric outcomes: the party with greater resources can afford to "create value" in ways that disproportionately benefit itself, while the weaker party's "gains" are illusory. The Russian perspective contributes the insight that the language of "mutual gain" can legitimate unequal outcomes. It occludes, however, the genuine possibility of Pareto-improving agreements in complex negotiations, particularly in arms control and environmental regimes where Russian diplomats have historically engaged in integrative bargaining.

Western: The Western perspective is the origin of integrative bargaining theory, from Walton and McKersie (1965) through Fisher and Ury (1981) to Lax and Sebenius (1986). The Western vantage point treats integrative bargaining as a universal technique applicable across cultures and contexts, emphasizing analytical methods (interest identification, option generation, objective criteria) over relational or cultural factors. The Western perspective contributes the most developed theoretical and pedagogical framework for integrative bargaining, including the "Getting to Yes" methodology that has been widely adopted in diplomatic training. It occludes, however, the cultural specificity of its assumptions: the emphasis on direct communication, explicit interest articulation, and individual utility maximization reflects Western liberal norms that may not translate to contexts where indirect communication, face-saving, and collective identity are paramount. The Western self-critique, articulated by scholars such as Avruch (1998) and Cohen (1997), acknowledges that integrative bargaining theory has been over-applied and that its universalist claims are not supported by cross-cultural evidence.

UN: The UN perspective treats integrative bargaining as a tool for sustainable peacebuilding, emphasizing that agreements must address root causes rather than symptoms. The UN's mediation guidance documents draw on integrative bargaining concepts but embed them in a framework that prioritizes inclusivity, gender sensitivity, and national ownership. The UN vantage point reveals that integrative bargaining at the elite level may exclude marginalized groups whose interests are not represented at the table, producing agreements that are technically efficient but socially illegitimate. The UN perspective contributes the normative commitment to inclusive, multi-stakeholder negotiation processes. It occludes, however, the practical reality that inclusive processes are often slower and more complex, and that the pursuit of inclusivity may conflict with the urgency of reaching agreement in acute crises.

SECTION 2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Mediation: Ripeness Theory, Mediator Strategies, and Third-Party Credibility

Bolded Causal Claim: Mediation succeeds not when the mediator is powerful or skilled, but when the conflict has reached a "ripe" moment—defined by a mutually hurting stalemate and the perception of a way out—and the mediator's primary contribution is to recognize, cultivate, and exploit that ripeness rather than to impose a solution.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three channels. First, the ripeness mechanism: Zartman (2000, 2001) argued that conflicts become ripe for resolution when two conditions coincide: a Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS), in which both parties perceive that they cannot win and that the costs of continuing are unacceptable, and a Way Out (WO), in which both parties perceive that a negotiated settlement is possible and preferable to continued conflict. The mechanism is perceptual: ripeness is not an objective condition

but a subjective one, residing in the parties' beliefs about their prospects. A conflict may be objectively stalemated without being ripe if one or both parties believe they can still win. Conversely, a conflict may be ripe even without a clear stalemate if both parties perceive a window of opportunity. The mechanism operates through the parties' cost-benefit calculations: when the expected utility of continued conflict falls below the expected utility of negotiation, the parties become willing to engage. The mediator's role is to accelerate this perception, not to create it ex nihilo.

Second, the mediator strategy mechanism: once ripeness exists, the mediator must choose among strategies that range from facilitation (providing a venue and process) to formulation (proposing specific terms) to manipulation (using leverage to pressure parties into agreement). Touval and Zartman (1985) identified these as three distinct mediator roles, each with different requirements and risks. Facilitation requires neutrality and process skills; formulation requires substantive expertise and creativity; manipulation requires leverage and the willingness to use it. The mechanism is strategic: the mediator must match the strategy to the conflict's characteristics and the parties' needs. A mediator who formulates too early, before the parties are ready, risks rejection and loss of credibility. A mediator who facilitates too long, without proposing terms, risks allowing the parties to talk past each other. The optimal strategy is contingent on the parties' relationship, the issue structure, and the mediator's resources.

Third, the credibility mechanism: the mediator's effectiveness depends on the parties' perception that the mediator is impartial, competent, and capable of delivering on commitments. Bercovitch (1996) identified mediator credibility as a function of three factors: the mediator's resources (material and reputational), the parties' dependence on the mediator, and the mediator's perceived impartiality. The mechanism is relational: credibility is not an attribute of the mediator but a property of the mediator-party relationship. A mediator may be credible to one party but not the other, or credible on process issues but not on substance. The mechanism operates through the parties' trust in the mediator's ability to (a) understand their interests, (b) propose viable solutions, and (c) ensure implementation. Where credibility is low, the mediator cannot facilitate information sharing or propose terms; where credibility is high, the mediator can shape the parties' perceptions and expand the zone of possible agreement.

Scope Conditions: Mediation is most effective when (a) the conflict has reached or is approaching a ripe moment, (b) the mediator has sufficient credibility with both parties, (c) the parties are willing to engage in negotiation (even if reluctantly), and (d) there is a viable path to implementation. It is least effective when (a) one or both parties believe they can achieve their goals through force, (b) the mediator lacks credibility or leverage, (c) the conflict is not ripe (no MHS or no WO), or (d) the parties' positions are so far apart that no ZOPA exists. The scope condition is not the absence of power asymmetry—mediation can work in asymmetric conflicts—but the presence of a shared perception that continued conflict is costly and that negotiation offers a better alternative. Mediation is also more effective in conflicts where the issues are divisible and the parties have multiple interests, and less effective in conflicts over indivisible goods (sovereignty, identity, existential security) where compromise is perceived as betrayal.

Observable Implications: If ripeness theory is correct, we should observe that (a) mediation efforts initiated during periods of high battlefield intensity (when one side believes it can win) fail more often than those initiated after a stalemate; (b) the presence of a credible mediator increases the likelihood of agreement but not the likelihood of implementation; and (c) agreements reached during ripe moments are more durable than those imposed by external pressure. Conversely, if mediation is primarily a function of mediator power rather than ripeness, we should observe that (a) powerful mediators succeed regardless of ripeness, and (b) weak mediators fail even when conflicts are ripe. The empirical record is mixed: Bercovitch (1996) found that

mediator characteristics (resources, strategy) are stronger predictors of success than conflict characteristics, while Zartman (2001) and others have documented cases where ripe conflicts were resolved by relatively weak mediators and unripe conflicts resisted even powerful ones. Crocker, Hampson, and Aall (1999) found that successful mediation typically requires both ripeness and a skilled mediator, suggesting that the two factors interact rather than compete.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African: The African perspective on mediation is rooted in a tradition of communal dispute resolution that predates the modern state and that treats mediation not as a technique but as a social practice embedded in community life. The African vantage point reveals that Western mediation theory, with its emphasis on the mediator as a neutral third party, mischaracterizes the African mediator's role: in traditional African mediation, the mediator is not neutral but is a respected elder or chief whose authority derives from their embeddedness in the community and their knowledge of customary law. The African mediator's legitimacy comes not from impartiality but from wisdom, seniority, and the trust of the community. This is not a deficiency but a different model: the African mediator is a "wise counselor" rather than a "neutral facilitator," and their interventions are guided by the goal of restoring social harmony rather than achieving a technically optimal agreement. The African perspective contributes the insight that mediation effectiveness depends on the mediator's social embeddedness, not just their procedural skills. It also contributes the concept of "African solutions to African problems," articulated by leaders such as Thabo Mbeki and institutionalized in the African Union's mediation architecture, which asserts that African conflicts should be mediated by African actors who understand the cultural and political context. The African perspective occludes, however, the reality that "African solutions" can be invoked to exclude international actors who might bring resources or leverage, and that traditional mediation may not be adequate for conflicts involving modern state structures, internationalized conflicts, or non-state armed groups. African scholars such as Aning and Danso (2012) have noted that the AU's mediation capacity is often constrained by resource limitations, political divisions among member states, and the tension between the principle of non-interference and the responsibility to protect. The African perspective thus contributes both a rich indigenous model of mediation and a set of institutional challenges that limit its application in contemporary conflicts.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective on mediation is shaped by the Confucian tradition of the "middle way" (zhongyong) and the concept of he (harmony), which treats mediation not as a last resort but as the preferred mode of dispute resolution. The Chinese vantage point reveals that Western mediation theory's emphasis on ripeness—the idea that mediation requires a mutually hurting stalemate—reflects a Western bias toward adversarial conflict resolution: in the Chinese view, mediation should be attempted early, before positions harden, and the goal is not to resolve a stalemate but to prevent one. The Chinese perspective contributes the insight that mediation can be preventive as well as curative, and that the mediator's role is to maintain harmony rather than to broker a deal. The Chinese concept of "mediation plus" (tiaojie jia), which combines mediation with education and moral suasion, reflects a holistic approach that Western theory lacks. The Chinese perspective occludes, however, the reality that early mediation may be ineffective when parties are not yet ready to compromise, and that the emphasis on harmony can suppress legitimate grievances, particularly in conflicts involving ethnic minorities or political dissent. Qin Yaqing's (2018) relational theory of world politics provides a framework for understanding Chinese mediation as an expression of relationality rather than as an instrumental technique.

Russian: The Russian perspective on mediation is instrumental and strategic, treating mediation as a tool of statecraft rather than as a neutral service. The Russian vantage point reveals that Western mediation theory's

emphasis on impartiality is a normative preference, not a universal standard: in the Russian view, mediators are always partial, and the question is not whether they are neutral but whose interests they serve. Russian mediation practice, particularly in the post-Soviet space (e.g., the Minsk process for Ukraine, the Astana process for Syria), reflects a preference for "mediation with leverage"—the mediator uses its own power and relationships to shape outcomes rather than to facilitate party-driven solutions. The Russian perspective contributes the insight that mediation is always political and that the mediator's interests are a legitimate part of the process. It occludes, however, the risk that instrumental mediation undermines the mediator's credibility and the sustainability of agreements, as parties may perceive the mediator as serving its own interests rather than theirs. The Russian perspective also tends to understate the importance of ripeness, assuming that a sufficiently powerful mediator can create ripeness through pressure rather than waiting for it to emerge.

Western: The Western perspective is the origin of modern mediation theory, from Zartman's (2001) ripeness theory to Bercovitch's (1996) empirical research on mediator effectiveness. The Western vantage point treats mediation as a professionalized practice governed by norms of neutrality, impartiality, and party self-determination. The Western perspective contributes the most developed theoretical and empirical literature on mediation, including systematic studies of mediator strategies, success rates, and the conditions under which mediation works. It also contributes the "mediation support" infrastructure—training, guidelines, and institutional capacity—that has been adopted by the UN and regional organizations. The Western self-critique, articulated by scholars such as Kleiboer (1996) and Crocker, Hampson, and Aall (1999), acknowledges that Western mediation theory has been over-focused on the mediator's role and under-focused on the parties' agency, and that the emphasis on neutrality may be inappropriate in contexts where the mediator has a stake in the outcome. The Western perspective occludes, however, the cultural specificity of its norms: the emphasis on neutrality, confidentiality, and party autonomy reflects Western liberal values that may not be shared in contexts where community involvement, public accountability, and relational obligations are paramount.

UN: The UN perspective treats mediation as a core function of the Secretary-General's good offices, governed by principles of impartiality, consent, and national ownership. The UN vantage point reveals that mediation is not just a technique but an institutional practice embedded in a normative framework that includes the UN Charter, international humanitarian law, and human rights norms. The UN perspective contributes the institutional capacity for mediation support—including the Mediation Support Unit, the Standby Team of Mediation Experts, and the UN Peacemaker database—that provides mediators with analytical, logistical, and substantive support. The UN perspective also contributes the principle that mediation should be inclusive, involving not just armed parties but civil society, women, and marginalized groups. The UN perspective occludes, however, the tension between its normative commitments and the practical requirements of effective mediation: inclusivity can slow the process, and the emphasis on consent can give spoilers a veto. The UN's experience in Syria, Yemen, and Libya illustrates the limits of mediation when the parties lack ripeness or when external powers undermine the process.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Track II and Track III diplomacy: the role of informal and civil-society channels

Bolded Causal Claim: Informal diplomatic channels can unlock negotiations that official channels cannot, but only when their outputs are deliberately transferred into Track I authority; without that transfer, they produce dialogue without decision.

Mechanism: Track I diplomacy is the official, state-to-state negotiation conducted by accredited representatives with binding authority. Track II diplomacy, in Joseph Montville's (1987) formulation, is unofficial dialogue among non-governmental elites—former officials, academics, religious leaders, business figures, and policy entrepreneurs—who retain access to decision-makers but do not negotiate on behalf of the state. Track III diplomacy extends further into civil society: grassroots organizations, women's associations, youth groups, local leaders, trade unions, and community mediators who shape the social environment in which official bargaining occurs. The causal mechanism is not that unofficial actors replace the state; it is that they alter the information, trust, and cognitive frames available to state actors. Official channels are often blocked by audience costs, domestic political constraints, identity-based hostility, and the need for face-saving. Unofficial channels lower the political cost of exploration because participants can test ideas without committing the state. They reduce dehumanization by creating repeated personal contact across conflict lines. They generate policy options that officials cannot propose first without appearing weak. They also prepare public opinion by socializing constituencies into the possibility of compromise. The critical causal link is transfer: Track II and Track III outputs must be carried into Track I through trusted intermediaries, policy entrepreneurs, or "backchannel" officials who can translate unofficial ideas into formal proposals. Without transfer, informal dialogue becomes a parallel conversation with no causal path to agreement. The mechanism therefore has two stages: first, unofficial channels create relational and cognitive preconditions; second, a linkage mechanism converts those preconditions into official bargaining positions. Track III adds a further mechanism: it changes the domestic cost of peace by building constituencies that reward compromise and punish spoilers, thereby enlarging the win-sets available to leaders at Level II of Putnam's two-level game.

Scope Conditions: Track II and Track III diplomacy is most effective when official channels are frozen but not violently inaccessible; when the conflict involves identity, historical grievance, or relational distrust rather than purely divisible material interests; when there exists a stratum of elites with credibility across conflict lines; and when civil society has sufficient autonomy to organize without state capture. It is less effective when the state monopolizes civil society, when violence prevents safe contact, when power asymmetry is so extreme that unofficial dialogue becomes a substitute for accountability, or when spoilers can punish participants for engagement. It is also weaker when there is no credible transfer channel to Track I, because unofficial dialogue then lacks institutional uptake. Track III in particular requires time, funding, and security; it is not a substitute for protection of civilians or for official ceasefires. Its effects are often indirect and delayed, making them difficult to attribute in short time horizons.

Observable Implications: If Track II and Track III channels are causally important, one should observe unofficial proposals reappearing in official texts with minimal modification; reduced inflammatory rhetoric following sustained dialogue; increased cross-community contact and joint problem-solving; civil-society actors gaining access to official delegations; and peace agreements that include provisions on reconciliation, local governance, or women's participation that originated in grassroots processes. Conversely, if informal channels are epiphenomenal, one should observe dialogue continuing without any change in official positions, or official agreements that ignore unofficial recommendations. A further implication is that Track III peacebuilding should correlate with more durable peace only where it is linked to institutional reform; where it is isolated, it may produce "islands of peace" without systemic change.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): In many African conflicts, what Western taxonomies label Track II or Track III is not an auxiliary channel but a constitutive part of political order. Traditional authorities, elders, religious leaders, women's councils, lineage networks, and community mediators have long performed conflict resolution

functions that predate and often outlast the post-colonial state. The African perspective therefore treats informal diplomacy not as a supplement to official negotiation but as a parallel and sometimes more legitimate source of authority. Concepts such as Ubuntu emphasize relational repair, restoration, and the reintegration of persons into community, which shapes how Track III actors frame peace. The African Union's Panel of the Wise and similar mechanisms reflect an institutionalization of elder mediation, while "African solutions to African problems" often implies that legitimacy derives from proximity to affected communities rather than from international accreditation. African scholarship, including Mamdani's (1996) analysis of colonial indirect rule, reminds us that the boundary between state and society in Africa was historically constructed through colonial categories; informal channels may therefore be more politically central than Western models assume. At the same time, the African perspective is alert to co-optation: externally funded civil-society initiatives can be captured by donors, and traditional authorities can reproduce patriarchal or ethnic hierarchies. The strongest African contribution is to show that Track III is not merely "local implementation" of a Track I deal; it is often where the social contract is renegotiated. Its occlusion is the risk of romanticizing tradition and underestimating how informal power can be exclusionary.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective emphasizes relationality, harmony, and incremental trust-building. Track II and Track III channels are valued as mechanisms for cultivating guanxi and reducing hostility, but they are usually framed within a state-led diplomatic architecture. Civil society is less autonomous than in Western models, and unofficial dialogue is often encouraged when it supports state objectives such as regional stability or economic cooperation. The Chinese contribution is to highlight that informal channels can be effective when embedded in long-term relationship management rather than episodic problem-solving. Its occlusion is the tendency to subordinate grassroots agency to state priorities and to treat civil society as an instrument of public diplomacy.

Russian: The Russian perspective is more skeptical of Western-funded civil-society peacebuilding and tends to view Track II and Track III channels through the lens of strategic competition. Informal channels may be used for intelligence gathering, influence operations, or the cultivation of friendly elites, while independent NGOs are often treated as potential vectors of foreign interference. The Russian contribution is to insist that unofficial diplomacy is never politically neutral and that funding sources shape outcomes. Its occlusion is the risk of conflating all civil-society peacebuilding with regime change and of underestimating genuine local agency.

Western: The Western perspective, drawing on Montville (1987) and Lederach (1997), has been the primary source of Track II and Track III theory. It emphasizes problem-solving workshops, dialogue, peacebuilding, and the "local turn" in conflict resolution. Its contribution is a rich toolkit for unofficial engagement and a normative commitment to inclusion. Its self-critique, developed in the local-turn literature, acknowledges that Western models can be technocratic, externally driven, and insufficiently attentive to power. The Western perspective occludes its own tendency to assume that civil society is naturally peace-oriented and that dialogue automatically produces convergence.

UN: The UN perspective treats Track II and Track III engagement as part of inclusive mediation and peacebuilding. The UN Guidance for Effective Mediation and related frameworks emphasize participation by women, youth, and marginalized groups, and UN missions often support civil-society dialogue. The UN contribution is institutional capacity: mediation support units, standby experts, and databases that can connect unofficial actors to official processes. Its occlusion is the tension between inclusivity and efficiency; broad participation can slow negotiations, and the UN's emphasis on consent can give spoilers a veto over civil-society engagement.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The politics of negotiation: two-level games (Putnam), audience costs, and credible commitments

Bolded Causal Claim: International negotiation outcomes are shaped as much by domestic ratification politics as by interstate bargaining; leaders who can credibly tie their hands domestically gain bargaining leverage, but the same constraints can make agreement impossible.

Mechanism: Robert Putnam's (1988) two-level game theory posits that international negotiation is not a single interaction but two simultaneous games. At Level I, state representatives bargain with one another over the terms of agreement. At Level II, each state's constituents—legislatures, parties, interest groups, public opinion, or selectorates—decide whether to ratify the agreement. The chief negotiator occupies the critical position between the two levels: she must secure an international agreement that can survive domestic ratification. The central concept is the win-set: the set of all possible Level I agreements that would be ratified at Level II. A larger win-set gives the negotiator more flexibility and increases the probability of agreement, but it may also signal weakness because the negotiator can accept less favorable terms. A smaller win-set can be a source of bargaining power: if the negotiator can credibly claim that domestic constraints prevent concession, the other side may move toward her position. This is the logic of "tying hands." Audience costs, theorized by James Fearon (1994), add a mechanism for credibility: leaders who make public commitments and then back down suffer domestic political punishment, which makes threats and promises more credible to foreign adversaries. Credible commitments also depend on institutional lock-in: constitutional rules, legislative ratification requirements, independent courts, and international institutions raise the cost of reversal and reassure counterparts that today's promise will survive tomorrow's leadership change. The causal chain runs from domestic institutions to win-set size, from win-set size to bargaining leverage, from audience costs to credibility, and from credibility to the feasibility and durability of agreement. The mechanism is therefore not merely that domestic politics "matters"; it is that domestic politics structures the feasible set of international outcomes and the credibility of the commitments within them.

Scope Conditions: The two-level game mechanism operates most clearly in polities with transparent ratification procedures, strong legislatures or veto players, and attentive publics. It is weaker where executive authority is unconstrained, where ratification is opaque, or where audiences are inattentive. Audience costs are theorized to be higher in democracies, but they can also operate in authoritarian systems through elite factions, nationalist publics, or regime legitimacy. The mechanism is strongest on high-salience issues where domestic groups are mobilized; on low-salience technical issues, leaders have larger win-sets and more autonomy. Time horizons matter: leaders facing imminent elections may have smaller win-sets, while those with secure tenure may make longer-term commitments. The theory also assumes that domestic actors have coherent preferences; where preferences are fragmented or endogenous to the negotiation, win-sets are harder to define. Finally, credible commitments require not only domestic institutions but also international verification and enforcement; without the latter, even strong domestic lock-in may not reassure adversaries.

Observable Implications: If two-level game dynamics are operative, one should observe leaders using domestic constraints as bargaining leverage—claiming that parliament, party, or public opinion prevents concession. One should also observe that agreements are more likely when at least one party has a large win-set, and that impasses occur when both have small win-sets. High audience costs should correlate with more credible threats but also with higher risk of escalation or breakdown. Agreements ratified by legislatures or embedded in institutions should be more durable than executive agreements. One should also observe "ratification politics" after signature: domestic opposition attempting to shrink the win-set retroactively, or leaders renegotiating to secure ratification. Conversely, if international outcomes are driven purely by power

or interests, domestic ratification should be a formality rather than a constraint.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective reveals that Putnam's model, developed in the context of industrial democracies, must be adapted to post-colonial states where executive power is often dominant, legislatures are weak, and ratification is less institutionalized. In many African cases, the relevant "Level II" is not a legislature but a constellation of ethnic elites, military actors, party barons, traditional authorities, and external donors. Audience costs may be ethnic or regional rather than electoral, and leaders may face "multiple principals" whose demands are not easily aggregated into a win-set. The African perspective also highlights that external conditionality—by the IMF, World Bank, or bilateral donors—can create an additional level of negotiation, constraining the state's win-set from outside. "African solutions" framing therefore requires not only international agreement but domestic legitimacy among constituencies that may not be formally represented. African scholarship on neopatrimonialism and the "politics of the belly" suggests that credible commitments are often personal rather than institutional, making agreements fragile when leadership changes. The African contribution is to show that two-level game theory must account for informal power and external conditionality; its occlusion is the risk of treating African states as if they had the same institutional architecture as Western democracies.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective internalizes the two-level game within a party-state structure. The domestic audience is not primarily an electorate but the Chinese Communist Party, the military, and a nationalist public whose expectations are shaped by narratives of national rejuvenation. Leaders can generate audience costs through nationalist mobilization, but ratification is opaque and concentrated in party institutions. The Chinese contribution is to show that credible commitments can be made without Western-style legislative ratification, through party discipline and long-term strategic signaling. Its occlusion is the difficulty of verifying domestic constraints from outside and the risk that opacity reduces credibility with adversaries.

Russian: The Russian perspective emphasizes personalist rule and the concentration of foreign-policy authority in the executive. Audience costs exist but are often nationalist and media-driven rather than institutional; the Duma may ratify agreements but rarely constrains the president. The Russian contribution is to highlight that leaders can use nationalist audiences to make commitments credible while retaining flexibility, and that "tying hands" can be performative rather than institutional. Its occlusion is the fragility of personalist credibility: commitments may not survive leadership transitions or elite splits, and adversaries may discount them.

Western: The Western perspective is the origin of two-level game theory and audience-costs research. Putnam (1988) and Fearon (1994) provide the canonical mechanisms, and subsequent work has tested them in democratic crises, trade negotiations, and security bargaining. The Western contribution is a rigorous, formalized account of how domestic politics enters international bargaining. Its self-critique, developed in later literature, questions whether audience costs are as strong as theory predicts, whether win-sets are observable, and whether the model overstates the autonomy of the chief negotiator. The Western perspective occludes its own tendency to universalize democratic institutional forms and to understate how authoritarian and post-colonial states generate credibility through different mechanisms.

UN: The UN perspective treats two-level game dynamics as a practical challenge for mediation. Mediators must map not only the parties at the table but their domestic constituencies, ratification requirements, and spoilers. The UN Guidance for Effective Mediation emphasizes inclusivity partly because agreements that exclude domestic actors are less likely to be ratified or implemented. The UN contribution is to insti-

tutionalize attention to domestic politics through mediation support, political analysis, and post-agreement implementation mechanisms. Its occlusion is the tension between inclusivity and decisiveness: broadening participation can enlarge win-sets but also introduce new veto players, and the UN's emphasis on consent can allow domestic spoilers to block agreement.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY)

The African vantage point on diplomatic statecraft begins not with a theory of bargaining but with a theory of the social. Where the dominant Western frameworks treat negotiation as an exchange between pre-formed, self-interested actors with fixed preferences, African intellectual traditions have long insisted that persons, interests, and even the boundaries of the "parties" are constituted through relationship. This is not a romantic gloss on "traditional" practice; it is an epistemological claim about what a negotiation is. Oyěwùmí's (1997) demonstration that the category "woman" was invented through colonial epistemology rather than discovered in African social life extends, by implication, to the category "negotiator": the figure who sits at the table with a mandate, a best alternative to a negotiated agreement, and a reservation price is a historically specific construction, not a universal agent. From this vantage, bargaining theory's formal elegance — Nash's (1950) axioms, Rubinstein's (1982) alternating-offers model — describes a particular cultural formation of agency rather than the human condition. The African perspective does not reject formal analysis; it insists that the formalization itself carries assumptions about personhood, time, and obligation that must be made explicit before they are exported.

Traditional African conflict-resolution mechanisms — the palaver in West and Central Africa, the gacaca in Rwanda, the mato oput among the Acholi, the kgotla in Botswana, the shimglina among the Amhara — are not Track II or Track III channels in the Western typology. They are primary sites of social ordering, and their logic differs structurally from Track I diplomacy. The palaver, as described in the ethnographic and political literature, is not a negotiation between representatives but a process of communal truth-telling in which the goal is not the division of a surplus but the restoration of relationship. Time is not a cost to be minimized, as in Rubinstein's model where delay erodes the pie; it is the medium through which trust is rebuilt. The outcome is not a contract but a reweaving of social fabric. This matters for negotiation theory because it suggests that the integrative-versus-distributive distinction presupposes a prior question: integrative of what? If the parties do not share a pre-existing social bond, value creation may be impossible; if they do, value claiming may be a category error. Mamdani's (1996) analysis of the bifurcated state — the colonial creation of "citizens" in urban areas and "subjects" in rural areas, governed by different legal regimes — shows that in many African contexts the very identification of parties to a negotiation is politically constructed and historically violent. A negotiation between "the government" and "the rebels" may reproduce the colonial distinction between those who have rights and those who have customs, with the latter's claims translated into the former's idiom only at the cost of their substance.

The concept of ubuntu — often rendered as "I am because we are" — is frequently invoked in African peace discourse, but its theoretical content is often flattened in translation. Ubuntu is not merely a communitarian ethic; it is an ontological claim that personhood is relational and that harm to one diminishes all. In negotiation terms, this implies that the zone of possible agreement is not a static interval between reservation prices but a dynamic space that expands or contracts with the quality of the relationship. A negotiation conducted in the ubuntu frame cannot be "won" by one party, because the parties are not separable; the agreement

is a modification of a shared field. This has direct implications for mediation: a mediator who imposes a settlement without restoring relationship has not mediated but adjudicated. The African critique of Western mediation's emphasis on closure and final-status agreements is that these freeze a moment of power rather than transform the relationship that produced the conflict. Cabral's (1973) insistence on "return to the source" — that liberation must be rooted in the lived culture and experience of the people — extends to negotiation: an agreement that is not intelligible within the parties' own cultural grammar will not be implemented, however elegant its terms.

The African Union's mediation architecture — the Panel of the Wise, the AU Mediation Support Unit, the Continental Early Warning System, and the doctrine of "African solutions to African problems" — represents an institutionalization of this perspective. The Panel of the Wise, established under the 2002 Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council, comprises eminent persons who deploy not as neutral technocrats but as elders with moral authority rooted in continental standing. This is not a lesser version of UN mediation; it is a different model, one that draws on the legitimacy of seniority and relational obligation rather than on procedural impartiality. The AU's mediation in Kenya in 2008, where Kofi Annan led a panel that included Graça Machel and Benjamin Mkapa, succeeded partly because the mediators were perceived as having a stake in the continent's stability and a relational claim on the parties, not merely a mandate from an international organization. The "African solutions" framing, however, carries its own politics. It has been invoked by states to resist international accountability, as in Sudan's rejection of International Criminal Court jurisdiction, and it can obscure the fact that many African conflicts are fueled by external actors — arms flows, extractive industries, proxy interventions — that "African solutions" alone cannot address. Rodney's (1972) analysis of how Europe underdeveloped Africa is directly relevant: the structural position of African states in the global economy means that their bargaining power in any negotiation, including peace negotiations, is constrained before the parties sit down. Nkrumah's (1965) concept of neo-colonialism — formal sovereignty masking continued dependence — implies that "African solutions" may be solutions to problems whose causes lie outside Africa.

Bayart's (2000) concept of extraversion — the orientation of African political systems toward external patrons and resources — adds a further dimension. African diplomacy and negotiation are not simply domestic or regional; they are shaped by the continuous need to secure external resources, recognition, and security guarantees. This means that the two-level game is, in the African context, often a multi-level game in which external patrons are not merely audiences but co-parties. A government negotiating with rebels may be simultaneously negotiating with donors, regional powers, and international financial institutions, each with its own conditions. The win-set is not determined by domestic ratification alone but by the intersection of multiple external constraints. This is not a deviation from the two-level game model; it is a specification of it that the original formulation, focused on Western democracies with stable institutional channels, did not capture. Fanon's (1961) analysis of the colonial psychological structure — the "native" as a subject of colonial violence, not a rational bargainer — suggests that in post-colonial contexts, negotiation may be shaped by trauma, humiliation, and the desire for recognition that formal bargaining theory cannot register. The demand for an apology, for historical acknowledgment, for symbolic equality may be non-negotiable in ways that a zone-of-possible-agreement analysis cannot capture.

The question of who negotiates is not peripheral to negotiation theory; it is constitutive. Tamale's (2020) decolonial Afro-feminism and Oyěwùmí's (1997) critique of the gendered epistemology of Yoruba society together imply that the "negotiator" is a gendered and culturally specific figure. In many African contexts, women have been the primary mediators in community conflicts — as mothers, elders, and market women — but have been excluded from Track I processes. The AU's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and

Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol, 2003) and the increasing inclusion of women in mediation teams, as in the Kenya 2008 process, represent a partial correction, but structural exclusion persists. Mbembe's (2001) analysis of the postcolony — where power is exercised through the commandement, the arbitrary authority of the state — suggests that in such contexts, negotiation is not between equals but between the state and its subjects, and the "agreement" may be an instrument of domination rather than cooperation. Grovogui's (2006) critique of Eurocentrism in international relations argues that the very categories of "state," "negotiation," and "agreement" are Western constructions that, when applied to Africa, produce misrecognition. The African perspective thus contributes a fundamental challenge: not merely to improve negotiation theory but to ask whether the theory's categories are adequate to the phenomena they claim to describe.

The African vantage point also offers a specific critique of Zartman's (2000, 2001) ripeness theory. Ripeness assumes that parties negotiate when they perceive a hurting stalemate and a way out. But in contexts where conflict is about identity, belonging, or historical injustice — as in many African conflicts — the stalemate may not "hurt" in the cost-benefit sense; it may be constitutive of identity. Parties may prefer continued conflict to a settlement that requires them to abandon claims to land, recognition, or historical redress. The "way out" may be perceived as capitulation. Ripeness theory's rationalist assumptions may thus systematically misread African conflicts as "not yet ripe" when in fact the parties' preferences are structured by non-instrumental values. However, the African perspective also has occlusions. Its emphasis on relationality and tradition can romanticize "African" practices, obscuring internal power asymmetries — gender, age, class, ethnicity — within communities. The "African solutions" framing can be co-opted by authoritarian states to resist accountability. And the critique of Western epistemology, while necessary, can become a blanket dismissal that prevents engagement with useful analytical tools. The African perspective is strongest when it is specific — when it identifies which Western assumptions fail in which contexts — rather than when it asserts a civilizational alternative.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective

The Chinese perspective on diplomatic statecraft is anchored in a relational ontology of world politics most fully articulated in Qin Yaqing's (2018) relational theory. Qin argues that the Western international relations tradition — including bargaining theory — is built on a "substantialist" ontology: it treats actors as pre-existing, self-contained entities with fixed attributes and interests, and then asks how they interact. The Chinese tradition, rooted in Confucian philosophy, treats relations as primary and entities as derivative. In this view, a negotiation is not an exchange between two pre-formed parties but a process of relational construction: the parties become who they are through the negotiation itself. This has direct implications for bargaining theory. Nash's axioms assume that preferences are defined prior to negotiation and that the outcome is a point in a pre-existing utility space. Qin's relationality suggests that preferences are endogenous to the relationship and that the space of agreement is co-created. The Chinese concept of he (harmony) is not the absence of conflict but the dynamic balance of complementary opposites; a negotiation that achieves he has not eliminated difference but has woven it into a sustainable relationship. This is closer to the African ubuntu than to Western integrative bargaining, though the two traditions arrived at similar insights independently.

Chinese mediation practice reflects this philosophy. China's role in brokering the Saudi-Iran rapprochement in 2023 was not framed as neutral facilitation but as "promotion of talks" (cu tan) — a relational act that drew on China's standing with both parties and its interest in regional stability. The Chinese approach emphasizes "win-win" (shuangying) outcomes, non-interference in internal affairs, and the avoidance of conditionality. Unlike Western mediation, which often attaches governance, human rights, or reform conditions to agree-

ments, Chinese mediation treats the parties' sovereignty as non-negotiable and focuses on mutual benefit. This reflects a deeper normative commitment: the Chinese perspective holds that external imposition of terms undermines the relational foundation of any agreement. The mediator's credibility derives not from impartiality in the Western sense but from relational standing — guanxi — and from the perception that the mediator has a long-term stake in the relationship.

The Chinese perspective contributes a critique of the "mediation industry" and its assumption that third-party neutrality is both possible and desirable. Qin's relationality suggests that a mediator who has no relationship with the parties cannot mediate effectively; mediation is a relational act, not a technical service. This challenges the UN model of the impartial mediator and the Western emphasis on best-alternative-to-a-negotiated-agreement-based power analysis. However, the Chinese perspective also occludes. Its emphasis on harmony can suppress legitimate dissent and conflict; he can become a tool for enforcing conformity. The non-interference principle, while protecting sovereignty, can shield authoritarian practices and human rights abuses from international scrutiny. And the "win-win" framing can obscure asymmetries of power: a negotiation between a great power and a small state may be "win-win" in the sense that both gain something, but the distribution of gains may be profoundly unequal. The Chinese perspective is strongest when it identifies the relational dimensions that Western bargaining theory neglects; it is weakest when it treats relationality as a substitute for accountability.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective

The Russian perspective on negotiation and mediation is shaped by a tradition of great-power statecraft that treats diplomacy as an instrument of strategic competition rather than a neutral problem-solving process. Russian mediation practice — from the Astana process on Syria to the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire — reflects a view that the mediator is not a neutral facilitator but a stakeholder with interests, and that the goal of mediation is not merely to end conflict but to shape the post-conflict order in ways that serve the mediator's strategic position. This is not a deviation from "proper" mediation; it is an alternative theory of what mediation is for. Where the Western tradition distinguishes "pure" mediation (facilitation) from "power" mediation (leverage), the Russian perspective treats all mediation as power mediation and regards the distinction as a Western conceit that masks the power interests of "neutral" mediators.

The Russian strategic tradition, from Primakov's "multi-vector" foreign policy to contemporary practice, emphasizes the use of negotiation and mediation to create facts on the ground that constrain adversaries' options. In Syria, Russia's military intervention created a battlefield reality that made its mediation indispensable; the Astana process was not a neutral forum but a mechanism for consolidating Russian and Iranian gains and marginalizing Western influence. In Nagorno-Karabakh, Russian mediation produced a ceasefire that deployed Russian peacekeepers and excluded Western and Turkish actors. The Russian perspective thus treats mediation as a form of strategic positioning: the mediator's credibility derives not from impartiality but from the capacity to deliver outcomes, and the "agreement" is a snapshot of the balance of power at a given moment.

This perspective contributes a necessary corrective to the Western idealization of mediation. It reminds us that mediators have interests, that "neutrality" is often a rhetorical claim rather than a reality, and that the distribution of power shapes not only the outcome but the process. The Russian critique of Western mediation as hegemonic — as a tool for imposing liberal norms and extending Western influence — has force in contexts where Western mediators have indeed used mediation to advance regime-change or democratization agendas. However, the Russian perspective also occludes. Its instrumentalization of mediation undermines the trust that makes durable agreements possible; parties who believe the mediator is pursuing its own interests will

hedge, conceal information, and build in escape clauses. The Russian emphasis on "facts on the ground" can produce ceasefires that freeze conflicts rather than resolve them, as in Nagorno-Karabakh, where the 2020 agreement left underlying grievances unaddressed and collapsed in 2023. And the Russian perspective's dismissal of normative constraints — human rights, inclusivity, accountability — can legitimate agreements that are durable in the short term but unjust and therefore unstable in the long term. The Russian vantage point is strongest as a diagnostic of mediator self-interest; it is weakest as a theory of durable peace.

2.7.4 Western Perspective

The Western perspective on diplomatic statecraft is the dominant academic and policy framework, and it is the one that most readers will encounter first. It is built on rational-choice foundations: Nash's (1950) bargaining solution, Rubinstein's (1982) alternating-offers model, and the concepts of best alternative to a negotiated agreement and zone of possible agreement that Fisher and Ury (1981) popularized. The core claim is that negotiation is a strategic interaction between rational actors with defined preferences, and that outcomes can be predicted and improved through formal analysis of interests, alternatives, and leverage. Putnam's (1988) two-level game theory extends this to the domestic-international interface: leaders negotiate simultaneously with foreign counterparts and domestic constituencies, and the win-set — the set of agreements that can be ratified domestically — determines what is possible at the international table.

The Western framework also includes the institutionalization of mediation and the Track I/II/III typology. Track I refers to official, government-to-government diplomacy; Track II to unofficial, facilitated dialogues between non-governmental actors; Track III to grassroots, people-to-people engagement. Lederach's (1997) "Building Peace" framework argues that sustainable peace requires engagement at all three levels, with Track II and III processes building the relational foundation that Track I agreements require. Zartman's (2000, 2001) ripeness theory adds a temporal dimension: mediation succeeds when parties perceive a hurting stalemate and a way out. The Western perspective has generated an extensive "mediation industry" — training programs, best-practice guides, and professional mediators — and has been institutionalized in the UN Guidance for Effective Mediation (2012) and similar documents.

The Western perspective's contribution is substantial: it provides analytical tools for understanding negotiation dynamics, a vocabulary for comparing cases, and a basis for training practitioners. Its self-critique, however, is also well developed. Scholars within the tradition have identified its cultural bias toward individualism and rationality, its neglect of emotion, identity, and historical injustice, and its tendency to treat power asymmetries as background conditions rather than as objects of analysis. The mediation self-critique acknowledges that Western mediators often impose liberal frameworks — democracy, human rights, market economics — that may not fit local contexts, and that the emphasis on "neutrality" can obscure the mediator's own interests and cultural assumptions. The Western perspective's occlusion is most visible in its treatment of ripeness: by assuming that parties are rational cost-benefit calculators, it may misread conflicts driven by identity, dignity, or historical grievance as "not yet ripe," and it may prescribe patience when the problem is not timing but justice.

2.7.5 UN Perspective

The UN perspective on diplomatic statecraft centers on the Secretary-General's good offices and the institutional framework for mediation support. The good offices tradition — the Secretary-General's role as an impartial facilitator, derived from Article 99 of the UN Charter and developed through practice — represents a distinct model: the mediator is not a state with interests but an international civil servant with a mandate from the international community. The Brahimi Report (2000) on UN peace operations emphasized the

need for the UN to be more effective in conflict prevention and mediation, and the 2012 UN Guidance for Effective Mediation codified principles: preparedness, consent, impartiality, inclusivity, national ownership, international law and normative frameworks, coherence, coordination, and complementarity. These principles reflect a normative commitment to process legitimacy: an agreement is more likely to be implemented if the process that produced it was inclusive, consensual, and aligned with international law.

The UN perspective contributes institutional capacity: mediation support units, standby teams of mediators, political analysis, and post-agreement implementation mechanisms. The UN's emphasis on inclusivity — bringing women, civil society, and marginalized groups into negotiations — addresses a genuine gap in traditional diplomacy, where agreements are often struck between elites and fail to address the grievances of broader populations. The UN's focus on "national ownership" responds to the critique that externally imposed agreements lack legitimacy. And the UN's attention to implementation — monitoring, verification, and post-conflict peacebuilding — recognizes that the signing of an agreement is not the end of negotiation but the beginning of a longer process.

The UN perspective's occlusion lies in the tension between its normative ambitions and its institutional constraints. The UN depends on member state consent; it cannot mediate where parties refuse its involvement, and it cannot enforce agreements without Security Council authorization. The emphasis on inclusivity can enlarge win-sets but also introduce new veto players, making agreement harder to reach. The principle of impartiality can become a straitjacket: a mediator who must be acceptable to all parties may be unable to take the risks necessary to push for breakthrough. And the UN's bureaucratic procedures — reporting requirements, coordination with multiple agencies, the need for consensus among member states — can slow mediation to the point where opportunities are lost. The UN perspective is strongest as a normative framework and an institutional support system; it is weakest as an agile, decisive actor in fast-moving crises. The Brahimi Report's call for the UN to be "more effective" in prevention remains, in many respects, unfulfilled.

2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Traditional conflict resolution (ubuntu, consensus); AU mediation architecture (Panel of the Wise, Mediation Support Unit); "African solutions" framing; Grovogui's critique of international legal hierarchy; Mamdani on decolonizing conflict resolution	May underweight formal power asymmetries and enforcement; "African solutions" can be invoked to resist accountability	Mediation must be owned by parties, culturally grounded, prioritize justice and legitimacy over efficiency	AU mediation in Kenya 2007-08; Sudan CPA; Burundi Arusha process	Western: traditional methods lack enforcement and can shield authoritarian regimes
Chinese	Relationality (Qin Yaqing); guanxi; win-win framing; harmony (he); mediation as moral practice; non-interference; economic statecraft	Underweights coercion and power asymmetry; "harmony" can mask hierarchy	Negotiation should build long-term relationships, avoid zero-sum framing, respect sovereignty	China-brokered Saudi-Iran rapprochement (2023); China's role in Iran nuclear talks	Western: relational framing obscures material interests and power

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Russian	Mediation as strategic instrument; multipolarity; great-power brokerage; balance-of-power logic	Treats mediation as extension of power politics; underweights normative constraints and sustainability	Mediation serves state interests and regional order; legitimacy derives from power	Russia's role in Syria; Iran nuclear talks; Minsk process	UN: instrumental mediation undermines impartiality and sustainability
Western	Bargaining theory (Nash, Rubinstein); ZOPA/BATNA; two-level games (Putnam); integrative/distributive; Track I/II; ripeness (Zartman); mediation self-critique	Over-formalizes; assumes rationality; underweights culture, legitimacy, emotion	Negotiation is problem-solving; efficiency and Pareto improvement	Camp David; Dayton; Oslo	African: imposes Eurocentric rationality and ignores ownership
UN	Good offices; mediation support; normative frameworks (impartiality, inclusivity, consent); Brahimi Report; UN Mediation Support Unit	Bureaucratic slowness; dependence on member-state consensus; impartiality as straitjacket	Principled, inclusive, legitimate process; peace as public good	UN Guidance for Effective Mediation (2012); Brahimi reports	Russian/Chinese: UN mediation is Western-dominated and lacks enforcement

2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

The 2015 Iran Nuclear Negotiations (JCPOA)

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, the negotiation turned on the personal chemistry and risk-taking of Secretary of State John Kerry and Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who logged more

hours together than any US-Iranian officials in decades, and on the political capital invested by President Barack Obama and President Hassan Rouhani, each of whom staked significant domestic credibility on a deal. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's grudging authorization—delivered through carefully calibrated public statements that preserved his revolutionary credentials while permitting Zarif to negotiate—was itself an individual-level decision with systemic consequences. At the state level, the United States faced a Congress that had enacted sanctions legislation requiring presidential certification for relief, meaning Obama's negotiating space was legally constrained; Iran's state apparatus included the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and hardline factions in the Majlis that could veto or sabotage implementation; France, under Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, adopted a notably harder line than other P5+1 members on enrichment caps and the Arak reactor, demonstrating that "the West" was not a unitary actor. The European Union, through High Representative Catherine Ashton and later Federica Mogherini, provided the institutional scaffolding for the talks. At the systemic level, the P5+1 framework itself—a concert of great powers with divergent interests in Iran—created both the pressure (unified sanctions) and the complexity (six parties with six agendas) of the negotiation; the UN Security Council's sanctions resolutions provided the legal architecture that made relief a multilateral bargaining chip; and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty regime supplied the normative backdrop against which Iran's "right to peaceful nuclear energy" was asserted and contested. At the transnational level, the International Atomic Energy Agency's verification role was not merely technical but constitutive of the deal's credibility; global financial networks and secondary sanctions extended US coercive reach far beyond its borders; and transnational advocacy—pro-Israel lobbying in Washington, Iranian diaspora networks, and the global nonproliferation community—shaped the political environment in which negotiators operated.

Mechanism. The JCPOA negotiation is best understood through Putnam's two-level game: each chief negotiator faced a domestic ratification game that constrained the international agreement he could sign. Obama's win-set was narrowed by congressional Republicans and by the need to preserve sanctions relief as a reversible, snapback-eligible concession; Rouhani's win-set was narrowed by Khamenei's red lines on enrichment and by the IRGC's institutional interests. The zone of possible agreement existed because each side's BATNA had deteriorated: Iran's economy was contracting under sanctions, and the United States' alternative to diplomacy—a military strike—carried unacceptable risks of regional escalation and uncertain efficacy. The negotiation combined distributive and integrative elements. Distributive bargaining dominated the core nuclear constraints: enrichment levels (3.67 percent), centrifuge numbers (5,060 IR-1s), breakout time (one year), and the duration of restrictions (10-15 years). These were zero-sum or near-zero-sum allocations of nuclear capability. Integrative elements, however, expanded the pie: the redesign of the Arak heavy-water reactor to prevent plutonium production, the conversion of Fordow to a research facility, the establishment of a procurement channel for nuclear-related imports, and the civil nuclear cooperation that gave Iran a legitimate stake in the agreement. Audience costs operated on both sides: Obama had publicly committed to preventing an Iranian nuclear weapon, making retreat costly; Khamenei had declared that Iran would not be humiliated, making visible concessions politically dangerous. Credible commitments were engineered through the IAEA's verification regime, the snapback mechanism for sanctions, and the staged implementation that allowed each side to verify the other's compliance before delivering its own concessions.

Perspective reconstruction. From the African vantage point, the JCPOA illustrates both the promise and the peril of externally brokered nuclear diplomacy. African scholarship—particularly Grovogui's critique of the international legal order and Mamdani's analysis of how global power structures reproduce inequality—would read the NPT regime as a hierarchical arrangement in which nuclear-armed states (including three P5 members) retain their arsenals while demanding that non-nuclear states forgo the technology. South Africa's

voluntary dismantlement of its nuclear weapons in the early 1990s, undertaken as part of its democratic transition, stands as the only case of a state relinquishing nuclear capability, and African diplomats have consistently argued that nonproliferation must be paired with disarmament. The sanctions regime against Iran, from this perspective, exemplifies how economic coercion—often experienced by African states as well—can be deployed by powerful states with limited accountability, and the JCPOA's fragility after US withdrawal in 2018 demonstrates the vulnerability of agreements that lack genuine multilateral ownership. The African emphasis on legitimacy and ownership would suggest that the JCPOA's durability was compromised from the outset by its dependence on a single powerful state's continued commitment rather than on a broader coalition of stakeholders with shared interests. Traditional African conflict resolution, with its emphasis on consensus and the restoration of relationships rather than the extraction of concessions, would view the JCPOA's transactional, time-limited structure as inherently unstable.

The Chinese perspective would emphasize the relational and long-term dimensions of the negotiation. Qin Yaqing's relational theory of world politics would frame the P5+1 process not as a one-shot bargaining game but as an ongoing relationship-building exercise in which trust accumulates through repeated interaction. China's own role in the talks—consistently advocating for Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy while supporting nonproliferation—reflects a win-win framing that seeks to avoid zero-sum outcomes. The Chinese vantage would highlight the economic interdependence that the JCPOA was meant to restore: the reintegration of Iran into global markets as a stabilizing force. It would also note that the agreement's collapse following US withdrawal validates the Chinese emphasis on building durable, multipolar frameworks rather than relying on the commitments of a single hegemon.

The Russian perspective would read the JCPOA through the lens of great-power bargaining and strategic balance. Russia's participation in the P5+1 reflected its interest in preventing a US military strike on Iran, which would have destabilized the region and potentially brought US forces closer to Russian borders, while also preserving its own relationship with Tehran. Russian analysts would emphasize that the negotiation was as much about managing the US-Iran relationship as about nuclear nonproliferation, and that Russia's role as a co-guarantor gave it leverage in broader regional diplomacy. The Russian vantage would be skeptical of the Western framing of the deal as a triumph of multilateralism, noting instead that the agreement served Russian interests in constraining US unilateralism and in maintaining Iran as a counterweight to US-aligned Gulf states.

The Western perspective would treat the JCPOA as a case study in bargaining theory and diplomatic statecraft. The negotiation exemplifies Putnam's two-level game, Zartman's ripeness theory (the mutually hurting stalemate of sanctions and isolation), and the integrative/distributive distinction. Western analysts would emphasize the role of Track I diplomacy—the formal, state-to-state channel—and the importance of credible commitments and verification. The self-critique within the Western tradition would acknowledge that the deal's fragility stemmed partly from the failure to address Iran's regional behavior and missile program, which were excluded from the agreement, and from the inability to build domestic consensus in the United States, which left the deal vulnerable to partisan reversal.

The UN perspective would focus on the institutional and normative framework. The IAEA's verification role was central to the agreement's credibility; the UN Security Council's endorsement of the JCPOA through Resolution 2231 gave it international legal weight. The UN vantage would emphasize the Secretary-General's good offices and the broader nonproliferation regime. It would also note the limitations: the UN could not prevent US withdrawal, and the Security Council's snapback mechanism, while designed to preserve the agreement, became a tool of escalation. The UN perspective would stress that sustainable nonproliferation

requires not just technical agreements but political buy-in from all major stakeholders, including those not at the table.

Adjudication. The Western bargaining-theory perspective provides the most analytically powerful account of why the JCPOA was possible: the two-level game framework explains how negotiators found a ZOPA, and the integrative/distributive distinction explains how the deal expanded beyond a simple exchange of sanctions for nuclear rollback. However, this perspective systematically underweights the fragility that the African and Chinese perspectives identify. The Western framework treats the agreement as a rational equilibrium and struggles to explain why it collapsed so quickly after a change in US administration; the African emphasis on ownership and legitimacy, and the Chinese emphasis on relational durability and multipolar frameworks, better account for the deal's vulnerability to unilateral withdrawal. The Russian perspective correctly identifies the strategic dimension but overstates the degree to which the negotiation was about great-power management rather than about Iran's nuclear program per se. The UN perspective accurately describes the institutional architecture but cannot explain the political dynamics that drove both the agreement and its collapse. The most complete explanation combines the Western mechanism (two-level games, ZOPA, credible commitments) with the African and Chinese insights about ownership, legitimacy, and relational durability: the JCPOA was a well-designed bargaining outcome that lacked the political foundations—domestic consensus in the United States, regional buy-in, and multilateral ownership—necessary to survive a change in administration.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. Map the bargaining structure of the 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement: identify each side's BATNA, reservation point, and the issues that could be linked (diplomatic normalization, Yemen de-escalation, economic cooperation, security assurances, status). Determine whether a ZOPA existed before 2023 and what changed.
2. Reconstruct China's mediator strategy: assess its credibility, leverage, and neutrality; compare it with Zartman's ripeness theory; and identify what China could offer that US-led or regional mediation could not.
3. Apply Putnam's two-level game: identify domestic, regional, and alliance audiences for Riyadh, Tehran, and Beijing; assess audience costs and ratification constraints; explain how leaders used ambiguity to manage commitments.
4. Distinguish value creation from value claiming: classify outcomes as integrative (risk reduction, commercial prospects, diplomatic channels) or distributive (status, legitimacy, regional order, US role).
5. Assess informal channels: evaluate whether Track II or Track III actors mattered, and identify the limits of state-led brokerage without civil-society embedding or verification mechanisms.
6. Specify falsifiers: list observable indicators over 12–24 months that would confirm or refute durability, and distinguish a diplomatic announcement from structural reconciliation.

MODEL ANSWER

The 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement is best understood as a mediated bargain in which a latent zone of possible agreement became actionable once both parties' best alternatives to a negotiated agreement deteriorated

and a credible broker supplied a face-saving procedure. For Riyadh, the BATNA of indefinite confrontation had become costly: the Yemen stalemate drained resources, oil infrastructure remained vulnerable, and uncertainty about the reliability of US security guarantees increased after years of perceived American retrenchment. For Tehran, the BATNA of regional escalation and sanctions isolation had also eroded amid domestic unrest, economic pressure, and the strategic risk of overextension through proxy networks. Neither side needed to concede core interests for an agreement to occur; the March 2023 Beijing-brokered deal restored diplomatic relations, provided for embassy reopening, and revived the 2001 security cooperation and 1998 economic and trade frameworks. Because much of this was procedural and reversible, the bargain was low-cost and high-symbolism rather than evidence of deep reconciliation. China's mediator strategy combined relational credibility with material leverage: it was not a direct party to the regional rivalry, could offer economic incentives and energy-market stability, and had a stake in protecting Belt and Road corridors and Gulf oil flows. This fits Zartman's ripeness logic only partially. There was no single, unmistakable mutually hurting stalemate producing an obvious way out; instead, ripeness was constructed through brokerage, economic interdependence, and timing. The mediator's credibility depended less on neutrality in the Western sense than on being a non-threatening great power with incentives to preserve the process. The case also illustrates two-level game dynamics. Saudi and Iranian leaders had to signal resolve to domestic, regional, and alliance audiences while avoiding ratification crises at home. The agreement's deliberate ambiguity allowed each side to claim victory: Riyadh could present itself as a stabilizing regional power, while Tehran could claim recognition as a legitimate great power. Contentious issues—Yemen's settlement, proxy networks, maritime security, and Iran's nuclear program—were deferred rather than resolved. Value creation was modest but real: reduced risk of direct escalation, improved commercial prospects, and a functioning diplomatic channel. Value claiming was central: status, legitimacy, and the demonstration that a non-Western broker could deliver an outcome Western diplomacy had not. The limits of external brokerage are equally important. China could convene, guarantee process, and provide economic incentives, but it could not resolve underlying security dilemmas or enforce compliance. The agreement lacked robust verification mechanisms, third-party monitoring, and civil-society embedding. Track II and Track III channels appear to have been marginal, which means reconciliation remained elite-driven and vulnerable to shocks. Falsifiers of durability include renewed proxy attacks, stalled embassy operations, failure to implement economic frameworks, public recrimination, or a return to competitive escalation. Thus the case shows that mediation can unlock a bargain when parties' BATNAs weaken and a broker offers face-saving procedure, but without institutionalized verification and domestic buy-in, the settlement remains a diplomatic equilibrium rather than a transformed relationship.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: In 2024, a regional economic community proposes to mediate a maritime boundary dispute between two member states after a naval incident. State A controls the disputed waters de facto and has invested in offshore energy infrastructure; State B has a weaker navy but stronger legal claims and domestic nationalist mobilization. A third member state with commercial interests in both economies offers to broker talks. The proposed agenda includes boundary delimitation, joint development zones, naval incident-prevention protocols, and compensation. Domestic opposition in State B frames any compromise as surrender; State A's energy firms resist revenue sharing. The mediator has no enforcement capacity but can offer trade facilitation and infrastructure financing. The case resembles other maritime disputes in which legal claims, resource rents, and nationalist audiences constrain bargaining space. Students are asked to assess whether a durable agreement is possible and what would make it fragile.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

Mechanism: Identify the bargaining structure, BATNAs, ZOPA, and causal mechanism linking mediator strategy to outcome.

Perspective reconstruction: Reconstruct African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN interpretations; state what each reveals and occludes.

Historical analogue: Compare to a prior case and specify what transfers and what does not.

Falsifiers: List observable evidence that would refute your explanation or prediction.

(c) Self-check: Did you distinguish description of events from explanation of causes, prediction of outcomes, and prescription for policy?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

Which factor most directly converted a latent bargaining space into an actual agreement in the 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement?

A. A mutually hurting stalemate that made continued confrontation irrational for both sides. B. China's ability to combine non-threatening brokerage with economic incentives and a face-saving procedure. C. Track II civil-society pressure that forced elites toward compromise. D. The absence of domestic audience costs in either Riyadh or Tehran.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnosis for A: It conflates constructed ripeness with classic Zartman stalemate theory; deteriorating BATNAs mattered, but the timing and form of agreement depended on brokerage rather than an unmistakable mutually hurting stalemate alone.

Distractor diagnosis for C: It overstates the role of informal channels; the process was elite-driven, and civil-society or Track II pressure was at most marginal, so it cannot explain the breakthrough.

Distractor diagnosis for D: It ignores two-level game dynamics; audience costs were present and managed through ambiguity, not absent, and their management was part of the agreement's design.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

The data lab treats negotiation outcomes as **structured observations** rather than anecdotes. The tables below combine documented agreements, mediator roles, and domestic-ratification constraints. They are not a full statistical sample; they are a **curated set of high-salience cases** that make bargaining mechanisms, mediation strategies, and two-level constraints visible. The analytic task is to move from case description to mechanism, then to perspective-sensitive interpretation.

Table 1. Selected negotiation outcomes (documented cases)

Case (year)	Parties	Issue	Documented outcome	Durability signal	Dominant level of analysis
Camp David (1978)	Egypt–Israel	Territorial peace, Sinai	Treaty signed	Durable bilateral peace	State + systemic
Oslo Accords (1993)	Israel–PLO	Interim self-governance	Agreement signed	Process collapsed	State + transnational
Arusha (1993)	Rwandan parties	Power-sharing	Agreement signed	Failed to prevent genocide	State + systemic
Dayton (1995)	Bosnia parties	War termination	Agreement signed	State survived; ethnic partition persisted	Systemic + state
Good Friday (1998)	Northern Ireland parties	Power-sharing	Agreement signed	Durable with periodic crises	State + transnational
Lusaka (1999)	DRC and regional actors	Ceasefire	Agreement signed	Partial implementation	Systemic + transnational
JCPOA (2015)	Iran–P5+1	Nuclear limits and sanctions relief	Agreement signed	Fragile after U.S. withdrawal (2018)	Systemic + state
Ethiopia–Eritrea (2018)	Ethiopia–Eritrea	Normalization	Agreement signed	Implementation mixed	State
Saudi–Iran rapprochement (2023)	Saudi Arabia–Iran	Diplomatic normalization	Agreement signed	Implementation ongoing	Systemic + state

Table 2. Mediator strategies and credibility (selected cases)

Mediator	Case	Strategy type	Source of leverage	Documented result	Perspective-sensitive reading
United States	Camp David (1978)	Manipulator/formulator	Aid, security guarantees, alliance ties	Durable treaty	Western: leverage converts ripeness into agreement
Norway	Oslo (1993)	Facilitator	Low material leverage; trust and secrecy	Signed but collapsed	Western self-critique: facilitation without enforcement

Mediator	Case	Strategy type	Source of leverage	Documented result	Perspective-sensitive reading
China	Saudi–Iran (2023)	Broker/relational intermediary	Economic ties, non-alignment posture, regional credibility	Signed; implementation ongoing	Chinese: relationality and non-interference as credibility
African Union / regional elders	Multiple African conflicts	Consensus-oriented facilitation	Moral authority, proximity, traditional legitimacy	Mixed	African: legitimacy and social repair, not only deal-making
United Nations (Brahimi process)	Afghanistan (2001–02)	Formulator with good offices	International legitimacy, donor coordination	Bonn Agreement	UN: procedural inclusivity and post-agreement support
Algeria	U.S.–Iran (1981 Algiers Accords)	Intermediary	Custody of assets, channel control	Hostage crisis resolved	Realist: intermediary leverage matters more than neutrality

Table 3. Two-level game constraints (selected agreements)

Agreement	Level I parties	Level II ratifiers	Win-set constraint	Documented outcome
NAFTA (1993)	United States, Canada, Mexico	U.S. Congress under fast-track	Labor and environmental side conditions	Ratified
Maastricht (1992)	EU member states	National parliaments and referenda	Narrow domestic tolerance for sovereignty transfer	Ratified with crises
Kyoto Protocol (1997)	Global climate parties	U.S. Senate and other legislatures	Byrd–Hagel-type resistance to asymmetric obligations	U.S. non-ratification
JCPOA (2015)	Iran and P5+1	U.S. Congress under INARA review; Iranian Supreme Leader/parliament	Narrow win-sets on sanctions relief and verification	Signed; later U.S. withdrawal

Agreement	Level I parties	Level II ratifiers	Win-set constraint	Documented outcome
Paris Agreement (2015)	Global climate parties	Diverse domestic ratification processes	Variable national commitments	Ratified; later U.S. withdrawal and reentry
Saudi–Iran rapprochement (2023)	Saudi Arabia and Iran	Domestic elites, regional proxies, security establishments	Spoiler risk from proxy actors and hardliners	Signed; implementation uncertain

Five numbered analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Across Table 1, which agreements show durable implementation, and which show signature without durable change? Identify at least two shared features among the durable cases and two shared features among the fragile cases. Do not treat signature as success.
2. **Level of analysis.** Table 1 and Table 3 include individual leaders, state institutions, systemic power shifts, and transnational actors. Which level best explains variation in durability? Construct one hypothesis at each level and state what evidence would distinguish them.
3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Read Table 2 from each perspective in turn: African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN. For each perspective, identify one case that it explains well and one case that exposes its blind spot. Keep the African perspective first and most developed in your answer.
4. **Interpretation.** Compare Camp David (1978) with Arusha (1993). Both produced signed agreements. Why did one become a durable peace and the other fail to prevent catastrophe? Separate description (what happened), explanation (why), prediction (what would have changed the outcome), and prescription (what should be done in similar cases).
5. **Limitation.** The tables mix documented outcomes with interpretive classifications. What are the main inferential problems—selection on the dependent variable, mediator self-selection, coding ambiguity, missing counterfactuals, and perspective bias—that prevent a causal claim such as "mediation causes peace"?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — Bargaining space, BATNA, and ZOPA

- **What to draw:** Draw a horizontal number line representing value on one issue (for example, sanctions relief or territorial withdrawal). Mark Party A's BATNA and reservation point on the left; mark Party B's reservation point and BATNA on the right. Shade the overlapping interval between the two reservation points as the **ZOPA**. Above the line, draw a second, larger shaded band showing an **expanded ZOPA** created by issue linkage (for example, adding security guarantees or economic cooperation). Draw a dashed vertical line at the midpoint labeled "possible agreement," and small arrows showing movement from BATNA toward the agreement point.

- **Labels to place:** BATNA (A), reservation point (A), ZOPA, reservation point (B), BATNA (B), expanded ZOPA, issue linkage, aspiration range, Pareto frontier.
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:**
  - **African (primary):** "Agreement is also social repair; reservation points include communal legitimacy, not only material payoff."
  - **Chinese:** "Relational trust can enlarge the feasible set before formal concessions."
  - **Russian:** "Coercive leverage shifts reservation points; ZOPA may be manufactured by power."
  - **Western:** "ZOPA defines the rational bargaining range; no overlap means no deal."
  - **UN:** "Fairness and procedural legitimacy determine whether an agreement inside the ZOPA is acceptable."

Visual 2 — Two-level game and win-sets

- **What to draw:** Draw two nested ovals. The outer oval is **Level I: international negotiation**; the inner oval is **Level II: domestic ratification**. The intersection is shaded and labeled **win-set**. Draw arrows from domestic groups (legislature, military, public opinion, spoilers) into Level II, and arrows from international partners into Level I. Draw a small "audience cost" gauge next to Level II and a "credible commitment" lock icon on the agreement arrow crossing from Level I to Level II.
- **Labels to place:** Level I, Level II, win-set, domestic constraints, international partners, audience costs, credible commitment, ratification, spoilers.
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:**
  - **African (primary):** "Domestic legitimacy includes traditional authority and community consent, not only parliamentary ratification."
  - **Chinese:** "Domestic harmony and elite consensus are part of the win-set."
  - **Russian:** "State capacity and executive control can compress or expand the win-set."
  - **Western:** "Audience costs make threats credible and agreements durable."
  - **UN:** "Inclusive participation widens the win-set but may slow agreement."

Visual 3 — Ripeness, mediation strategy, and spoilers

- **What to draw:** Draw a time-series curve of conflict intensity. Mark a high peak, then a downward trough labeled **hurting stalemate**. Place a mediator icon entering at the trough. Branch three arrows from the mediator: **facilitation**, **formulation**, and **manipulation**. Draw a small "spoiler" figure pulling the curve upward after the trough. Add a horizontal line labeled "third-party credibility threshold."
- **Labels to place:** conflict intensity, hurting stalemate, ripeness, mediator entry, facilitation, formulation, manipulation, spoilers, credibility threshold, agreement point.
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:**

- **African (primary):** "Ripeness may be signaled by communal exhaustion and elder mediation, not only battlefield stalemate."
- **Chinese:** "Mediation succeeds when it preserves relational continuity and face."
- **Russian:** "Mediation is strategic leverage; ripeness can be shaped, not merely observed."
- **Western:** "Ripeness is a structural condition; mediator strategy should match it."
- **UN:** "Good offices require consent, impartiality, and post-agreement support."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is the ZOPA?	The zone of possible agreement: the overlap between parties' reservation points. If no overlap, no rational deal exists unless the bargaining space is redefined. Source log: Raiffa (1982); Fisher and Ury (1981).
What is BATNA?	Best alternative to a negotiated agreement. It anchors reservation points and determines bargaining power. Source log: Fisher and Ury (1981).
Nash equilibrium in bargaining?	A stable outcome where no party can improve by unilaterally changing strategy; in bargaining, often modeled as a fair or efficient split under idealized conditions. Source log: Nash bargaining tradition (general game theory).
Rubinstein bargaining?	Alternating-offers bargaining; time preference and patience shape who captures surplus. Source log: Rubinstein bargaining tradition (general game theory).
Integrative vs. distributive bargaining?	Distributive bargaining divides a fixed pie; integrative bargaining expands the pie through issue linkage, trade-offs, and joint problem-solving. Source log: Fisher and Ury (1981); Raiffa (1982).
What makes mediation credible?	Consent, impartiality, leverage, and the ability to deliver side payments or guarantees. Credibility is relational and contextual. Source log: Zartman (2001); UN (2012) Guidance for Effective Mediation.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is ripeness theory?	Parties negotiate seriously when they perceive a hurting stalemate and a way out. Ripeness is perceptual, not purely objective. Source log: Zartman (2001).
What are mediator strategies?	Facilitation (process), formulation (proposals), manipulation (leverage and pressure). Strategy must match ripeness and power asymmetry. Source log: Zartman (2001); UN (2012).
What is a two-level game?	International agreements must survive domestic ratification; the overlap between international and domestic acceptability is the win-set. Source log: Putnam (1988).
What are audience costs?	Domestic punishment for backing down; they can make international threats credible but may also trap leaders. Source log: Putnam (1988); audience-costs literature (general IR).
What are Track II and Track III channels?	Informal, unofficial, and civil-society channels that prepare, support, or pressure official diplomacy. They can build trust but lack authority. Source log: Track II diplomacy literature (general IR).
How do perspectives differ?	African: legitimacy and social repair; Chinese: relationality and harmony; Russian: strategic leverage; Western: bargaining rationality; UN: procedure and inclusivity. Source log: Grovogui, Mbembe, Bayart, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon, Aning, Danso, Tamale, Oyěwùmí; Qin (relationality framing); Putnam (1988); Zartman (2001); UN (2012).

Summary (3–5 sentences):
Negotiation theory explains agreement through bargaining structure, value creation, ripeness, mediation credibility, informal channels, and domestic ratification constraints. The African perspective treats negotiation as a legitimacy-building and social-repair process, not merely a division of material surplus. Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each highlight relationality, leverage, rational bargaining, and procedural inclusivity respectively. Durable outcomes require not only a signed agreement but also a viable win-set at both international and domestic levels. The data lab shows that signature is a weak proxy for success unless implementation and legitimacy are tracked.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.**
   Negotiation is the process by which parties with conflicting interests try to reach a deal. A deal is

possible only if each side prefers it to walking away. Good negotiators do not just fight over a fixed pie; they try to enlarge the pie by trading things each side values differently. Mediators help when both sides are stuck but not hopeless, and their help works best when they have credibility and some leverage. Even a good international deal can fail if domestic audiences reject it.

2. **Mark gaps.**
   - I am not yet precise about when Nash-style fairness predictions fail in real diplomacy.
   - I need to distinguish ripeness as a structural condition from ripeness as a leader's perception.
   - I have not fully specified how Track II actors gain access without undermining official negotiators.
   - I need to test whether audience costs operate similarly in authoritarian and democratic systems.
   - I am unsure how to measure "social repair" in African mediation traditions without reducing it to Western outcome metrics.
3. **Reread verification.**
   Recheck the core claims against Fisher and Ury (1981) on interests versus positions; Raiffa (1982) on analytic negotiation; Zartman (2001) on ripeness and mediator strategy; Putnam (1988) on two-level games; Brahimi reports on inclusive mediation practice; and UN (2012) Guidance for Effective Mediation. Verify that every mechanism has a scope condition and that no case is treated as proof of a universal law.
4. **Analogy with explicit limits.**
   Negotiation resembles a market exchange in which each side has a walk-away price, but the analogy breaks down because political agreements create rules, identities, and obligations that markets do not. A mediator is like a broker, but unlike a market broker, a diplomatic mediator must preserve legitimacy and cannot simply maximize transaction volume. The analogy helps with ZOPA and BATNA; it fails with audience costs, spoilers, and social repair.
5. **Rewrite.**
   Diplomatic negotiation is a constrained bargaining process in which agreement depends on overlapping reservation points, value-creating trade-offs, perceived ripeness, credible mediation, and domestic ratification. No single theory explains all cases: bargaining theory explains feasible deals, mediation theory explains third-party effects, and two-level game theory explains why signed agreements may still fail. The African perspective adds that legitimacy and social repair are not side effects but conditions of durable agreement.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L59	Definition	What is BATNA in negotiation theory?	BATNA is the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement — the course of action a party will take if talks fail. It sets the reservation point below which a deal is worse than walking away, and it is the single most important source of bargaining power in Fisher and Ury's framework.	Western bargaining theory treats BATNA as an individual rational-actor construct; African mediation traditions often reframe the "alternative" as community-level harm, shifting the reservation point.
L59	Definition	What is the ZOPA?	The Zone of Possible Agreement is the overlap between the parties' reservation points — the set of deals both prefer to their BATNAs. If no overlap exists, no agreement is possible without changing reservation points or BATNAs.	ZOPA is a static, two-party construct; UN mediation guidance stresses that in multi-party conflicts the "zone" must be expanded through issue-linkage and side-payments.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L59	Mechanism	How does Rubinstein's alternating-offers model determine the split?	In Rubinstein's model, two players alternate offers over an infinite horizon with common discount factors; the unique subgame-perfect equilibrium splits the surplus in proportion to each party's patience (discount factor), with the first mover gaining a slight edge.	The model assumes complete information and rationality; African and Chinese perspectives critique this as ignoring relational trust and face, which alter effective discount rates.
L59	Application	What made the 2015 JCPOA negotiation possible?	A convergence of a credible US military threat, Iranian economic pain from sanctions, a reformist Iranian president, and a back-channel Omani mediation track created a ZOPA; the deal traded enrichment limits for sanctions relief.	Western accounts stress coercion and bargaining; Iranian and Russian accounts stress sovereignty and resistance, while African observers note the precedent for great-power nuclear coercion.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L59	Comparison	Distinguish integrative from distributive bargaining.	Distributive bargaining is zero-sum value-claiming over a fixed pie; integrative bargaining is positive-sum value-creation through issue trade-offs, logrolling, and bridging interests. Fisher and Ury's "principled negotiation" is the canonical integrative prescription.	Western theory formalizes the distinction; African traditional resolution often begins integrative (restoring relationships) before any distributive claim is entertained.
L59	Source	What is Fisher and Ury's core prescription?	Separate people from the problem, focus on interests not positions, invent options for mutual gain, and insist on objective criteria — the four pillars of principled negotiation in *Getting to Yes* (1981).	The framework is Western and individualist; critics note it underweights power asymmetry and collective identity, central to African and Russian diplomatic traditions.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L59	Debate	What is Zartman's ripeness theory?	A conflict becomes "ripe" for mediation when parties perceive a mutually hurting stalemate (MHS) and a way out; ripeness is a necessary but not sufficient condition for settlement.	Ripeness is an observer's construct; African mediators argue ripeness is often manufactured by mediators through shuttle diplomacy, not merely discovered.
L59	Reconstruction	How does the African perspective frame mediation?	AU-led mediation and traditional conflict resolution emphasize legitimacy, inclusivity, and "African solutions to African problems," treating mediation as relationship repair rather than contract enforcement.	This is the primary perspective of the lesson: it reveals that Western bargaining theory's contract-focus occludes the social fabric that makes agreements durable.
L59	Occlusion	What does Western bargaining theory occlude?	It occludes power asymmetry, historical grievance, and the role of non-state actors; by modeling parties as unitary rational actors, it misses audience costs and domestic ratification politics.	The occlusion is most visible in Track I failures where signed agreements collapse during domestic ratification, as in the JCPOA's US withdrawal.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L59	Adjudication	What explains the 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement?	Chinese brokerage combined a security guarantee, economic incentives, and a face-saving formula; the deal was possible because both sides faced a mutually hurting stalemate in Yemen and needed regional de-escalation.	Western accounts credit Chinese power; African observers stress the deal's fragility without inclusive regional architecture, echoing AU concerns about externally imposed pacts.
L59	Mechanism	What is a two-level game?	Putnam's model: leaders negotiate simultaneously at the international table and the domestic ratification table; the "win-set" is the set of agreements ratifiable at home, and its size determines bargaining power.	Two-level games explain why agreements fail post-signature; African cases show win-sets are often shaped by ethnic coalitions and traditional authorities, not just parliaments.
L59	Definition	What are audience costs?	Audience costs are the domestic political penalties a leader pays for backing down from a public commitment; they make threats credible but can also lock leaders into escalation.	Audience costs assume democratic accountability; in authoritarian and hybrid regimes (common in African and Middle Eastern cases), the mechanism operates through elite coalitions rather than public opinion.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L59	Visual	What does the negotiation framework diagram show?	It maps BATNA, reservation point, target point, and ZOPA on a single axis, with integrative moves expanding the pie and distributive moves claiming slices.	The diagram is Western and static; annotating it with African, Chinese, and Russian overlays reveals how relational and strategic factors shift the axis itself.
L59	Source	What do Lakhdar Brahimi's reports contribute?	Brahimi's reports on UN peace operations emphasize that mediation must be accompanied by political strategy, clear mandates, and adequate resources; mediation without leverage is "just talk."	Brahimi's field experience in Africa and the Middle East grounds the UN perspective in practitioner realism, bridging Western theory and African operational realities.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score 0–100)

Competency	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of mastery
Bargaining theory: Nash, Rubinstein, BATNA, ZOPA		
Integrative vs distributive bargaining		
Mediation and ripeness theory (Zartman)		
Track II and Track III diplomacy		
Two-level games and audience costs		
Perspective reconstruction (all five)		
Worked example: JCPOA		
Problem pair: Saudi-Iran rapprochement		
Data lab interpretation		
Visual anchor reconstruction		

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to reconstruct from within, and what specific assumption of that perspective did you initially resist?
2. In the worked example, did your explanation of JCPOA fragility rely more on bargaining theory or on two-level games — and what evidence would change your weighting?
3. What is one falsifier that would cause you to abandon your current view of mediation effectiveness?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Mediation succeeds when the mediator is neutral.	Neutrality is neither necessary nor sufficient; leverage and credibility matter more, and "neutral" mediators often lack the power to enforce deals.	Zartman's ripeness theory; Brahimi reports on UN operations.
A larger ZOPA guarantees agreement.	ZOPA existence is necessary but not sufficient; domestic ratification, audience costs, and framing can still block deals.	Putnam (1988) two-level games; JCPOA US withdrawal.
Integrative bargaining always dominates distributive bargaining.	Integrative gains require trust and information sharing that power-asymmetric or hostile parties often lack; distributive tactics may be rational under uncertainty.	Fisher and Ury (1981) scope conditions; Raiffa (1982) on mixed-motive games.
Audience costs operate identically across regime types.	The mechanism shifts from public opinion in democracies to elite coalitions in authoritarian and hybrid regimes.	Putnam (1988); African and Middle Eastern case evidence.
Track II diplomacy is a substitute for Track I.	Track II complements but cannot replace official negotiation; it prepares the ground and tests ideas without commitment.	Track II literature; UN mediation guidance.
Ripeness is an objective condition discoverable by observers.	Ripeness is partly constructed by mediators through shuttle diplomacy and framing; parties may not perceive MHS until a mediator reframes it.	Zartman (2001); African mediator practice.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
BATNA, ZOPA, reservation point, target point	Alternating offers, discounting, patience determines split	Nash equilibrium; Rubinstein bargaining	JCPOA 2015; Saudi-Iran 2023	Whether rational-actor models fit real diplomacy	No agreement despite large ZOPA	L20 strategic thought; L3 causal inference
Integrative vs distributive bargaining	Value creation via logrolling, bridging, issue linkage	Fisher and Ury (1981); Raiffa (1982)	Principled negotiation cases	Power asymmetry undermines integrative gains	Integrative moves fail to expand pie	L58 forecasting
Mediation, ripeness, MHS, way out	Shuttle diplomacy, reframing, leverage	Zartman (2001); Brahimi reports	AU mediation; UN good offices	Neutrality vs leverage	Mediation succeeds without MHS	L60 capstone
Track II/III diplomacy	Informal channels, civil society, idea testing	Track II literature; UN mediation guidance	Back-channel Omani track in JCPOA	Substitute vs complement to Track I	Track II produces binding agreement alone	L61 capstone
Two-level games, win-sets, audience costs	Domestic ratification constrains international bargaining	Putnam (1988)	JCPOA US withdrawal; Brexit	Regime-type variation in audience costs	No domestic constraint on leader	L3 causal inference
African perspective: legitimacy, inclusivity, relationship repair	Traditional resolution, AU mediation, "African solutions"	Grovogui, Mbembe, Mamdani, Nyerere, Cabral	AU mediation in Kenya 2008, Sudan	Universalism vs particular-ism	Externally imposed pact durable without local ownership	L20 strategic thought
Chinese perspective: relationality, mediation plus	Guanxi, face, harmony, non-interference	Qin (relational theory)	Saudi-Iran 2023 brokerage	Mediation as power projection vs harmony	Brokered deal collapses without enforcement	L58 forecasting
Russian perspective: mediation as strategic instrument	Leverage, great-power positioning, spoiler management	Russian diplomatic practice	Syria, Libya mediation roles	Mediation as neutrality vs instrument	Mediator's interests override settlement	L60 capstone

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
UN perspective: good offices, mediation support	Mandate, resources, political strategy	Brahimi reports; UN mediation guidance	UN mediation in Yemen, Syria	Talk vs leverage	Mediation without leverage succeeds	L61 capstone

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1):** Re-read Section 2.2 (bargaining theory) and Section 2.5 (two-level games); redraw the negotiation framework diagram from memory; check against Section 3.
- **R2 (Day 3):** Reconstruct all five perspectives on the JCPOA from memory in 200 words each; compare to Section 2.8; log gaps in the error-log.
- **R3 (Day 7):** Re-derive Rubinstein's equilibrium split and Putnam's win-set logic without notes; attempt one Data Lab question cold.
- **R4 (Day 14):** Re-read Section 2.7 (five perspectives in depth); write a one-paragraph adjudication of the Saudi-Iran rapprochement; check falsifiers.
- **R5 (Day 30):** Full capstone-style memo on a new negotiation case using the four required headings; time-box to 90 minutes; score against the completion checklist.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

☐ I can define BATNA, ZOPA, reservation point, and target point and locate them on the negotiation framework diagram.
☐ I can derive the Rubinstein split and explain what patience (discounting) does to it.
☐ I can distinguish integrative from distributive bargaining and give a concrete example of each.
☐ I can state Fisher and Ury's four pillars and their main critique.
☐ I can explain Zartman's ripeness theory and why ripeness is necessary but not sufficient.
☐ I can describe three mediator strategies and when each is appropriate.
☐ I can distinguish Track I, Track II, and Track III diplomacy and their complementarity.
☐ I can explain Putnam's two-level game and define the win-set.
☐ I can define audience costs and explain regime-type variation.
☐ I can reconstruct the African perspective on mediation from within, in its own terms.
☐ I can reconstruct the Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives from within.
☐ I can apply all five perspectives to the JCPOA worked example.
☐ I can adjudicate between competing explanations of the Saudi-Iran rapprochement.
☐ I can interpret the International Negotiation dataset and mediator success rates.
☐ I can identify at least two falsifiers for each key claim.
☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in a memo.
☐ I can redraw the visual anchor from memory.
☐ I have logged at least three errors in the error-log and corrected them.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Bargaining theory - Fisher, R. and Ury, W. (1981). *Getting to Yes*. New York: Penguin. - Raiffa, H. (1982). *The Art and Science of Negotiation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. - Rubinstein, A. (1982). "Perfect Equilibrium in a Bargaining Model." *Econometrica* 50(1): 97–109.

Mediation and ripeness - Zartman, I.W. (2001). "The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments." *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 1(1): 8–18. - Lakhdar Brahimi. Reports on United Nations peace operations (Brahimi Report, 2000). - UN (2012). *United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation*. New York: United Nations.

Two-level games - Putnam, R.D. (1988). "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games." *International Organization* 42(3): 427–460.

African perspectives - Grovogui, S.N. (2006). *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. - Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. - Nyerere, J. (1968). *Freedom and Unity*. London: Oxford University Press.

Chinese and relational perspectives - Qin, Y. (2018). *A Relational Theory of World Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

End of Lesson 59. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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61. Capstone I: Comparative Conflict Analysis

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 60 — Capstone I: Comparative Conflict Analysis
Module	Module 10: Forecasting, Diplomacy, and Capstones
Prerequisites	Modules 4–7 (warfare; Africa; Eastern Europe; West Asia)
Interleaved links	Forward to L61 (grand strategy); backward to all previous modules
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text; data lab; visuals; flashcards; worked example; problem pair; memo
Bloom ceiling	Evaluate / Create
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

Between 2011 and 2014 three regional systems entered acute crisis within a single half-decade. In the Sahel, the collapse of the Libyan state in 2011, the Malian coup of 2012, and the subsequent jihadist advance toward Bamako shattered a security order that had been managed, however unevenly, by French and regional forces since independence. In West Asia, the Arab uprisings of 2011 transformed Syria from a brittle but functioning authoritarian state into the epicentre of a multi-actor war that drew in Iran, Russia, Turkey, the United States, and a constellation of non-state armed groups. In Eastern Europe, the Maidan revolution of 2013–2014, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the outbreak of war in the Donbas ruptured the post-Cold War settlement and set in motion the largest interstate conflict on the continent since 1945. A decade on, the trajectories have diverged sharply: the Sahel has experienced serial coups, the expansion of jihadist insurgencies, the withdrawal of French forces, and the entry of Russian private military actors; Ukraine has become a high-intensity interstate war of attrition with global economic spillovers; West Asia has settled into a frozen, multi-layered proxy stalemate in which no actor can impose a decisive outcome. The central puzzle of this capstone is not that conflicts differ — that is trivially true — but that the divergence is *structured*: it follows identifiable mechanisms that sort cases into trajectories, and those mechanisms can be isolated only through disciplined comparative analysis rather than through the idiographic exceptionalism that single-case narrative invites.

The methodological stakes are high. The temptation in International Relations and in policy analysis is to treat each conflict as sui generis — "Syria is complicated," "the Sahel is unique," "Ukraine is about NATO" — which produces rich description and poor explanation. Comparative methodology, in the tradition of Tilly's (1990) comparative historical sociology and the most-similar/most-different designs codified in the comparative politics literature, forces the analyst to hold variables constant across cases and to ask which differences in initial conditions, state capacity, regional security complex, or external intervention type account for divergent outcomes. Kalyvas's (2006) micro-dynamic analysis of civil war violence demonstrates that even within a single conflict, outcomes vary systematically with local conditions rather than with aggregate grievance, and that the same theoretical lens must be tested against variation rather than asserted from a single case. Buzan and Wæver's (2003) regional security complex theory supplies the crucial insight that security dynamics are regionally clustered: the Sahel, West Asia, and Eastern Europe are not interchangeable theatres but distinct complexes with different patterns of amity and enmity, different densities of great-power penetration, and different institutional architectures. The lesson trains the student to move from "what happened in this case" to "why this trajectory rather than another, and under what conditions would the trajectory change."

The theoretical challenge is synthetic. No single theory commands all three cases. Structural realism explains the great-power competition that frames each conflict — NATO expansion and Russian reaction in Eastern Europe, US-Iranian rivalry in West Asia, French and Russian competition in the Sahel — but it struggles to explain why state collapse occurred in Mali and Syria while Ukraine, despite comparable external pressure, retained sufficient state capacity to resist. Political economy explains the resource and rentier dynamics that fund armed groups and shape state incentives — hydrocarbons in Syria and the Gulf, minerals and trafficking rents in the Sahel, grain and energy in Ukraine — but it under-theorises the ideational and identity dimensions that mobilise fighters and legitimate violence. Post-colonial critique explains the coloniality of the state, the externalisation of security, and the limits of liberal peacebuilding in the Sahel and West Asia, but it risks under-specifying the agency of local actors and the genuine variation in state capacity across post-colonial cases. The capstone does not ask the student to choose one theory; it asks the student to adjudicate among them on the basis of evidence, to specify the scope conditions under which each travels, and to identify the

mechanisms that each theory illuminates and occludes. This is the intellectual move from theory-application to theory-evaluation, and it is the defining competence of post-doctoral-level analysis.

The African perspective is not one case among five; it is the vantage point from which the lesson's central puzzle is reframed. From within African scholarship — Grovogui on the international as a colonial project, Mbembe on necropolitics and the postcolony, Mamdani on the bifurcated state and the citizen-subject distinction, Rodney on underdevelopment as a historical process, Nkrumah on neo-colonialism, Nyerere on ujamaa and self-reliance, Cabral on the weapon of theory, Fanon on the wretched of the earth and the pitfalls of national consciousness, Bayart on the politics of the belly and extraversion, Aning and Danso on African agency in security governance, Tamale on decolonisation and feminist ethics, Oyěwùmí on the coloniality of gender and knowledge — the Sahel conflict is not a security problem to be managed by external powers but a symptom of a deeper structure: the colonial state form, the externalisation of security to former metropoles, the extraction of resources under the guise of counter-terrorism, and the systematic discounting of African institutional capacity. This vantage point reveals what the Western and UN frameworks occlude: that "state failure" is often a misnomer for state forms that were never designed to serve their populations; that "terrorism" is a category that legitimises external intervention; and that the withdrawal of French forces and the entry of Russian actors is not a change of patron but a reproduction of the same externalised security logic under a different flag. The African perspective thus reframes the comparative question: not "why did the Sahel collapse while Ukraine resisted?" but "why is external security provision treated as normal in Africa and as exceptional in Europe, and what does that asymmetry reveal about the international order?"

The lesson also carries forecasting and policy implications that the student must derive rather than receive. Comparative analysis yields conditional, mechanism-based forecasts: if external intervention takes the form of kinetic counter-terrorism without state-building, as in the Sahel, the trajectory is fragmentation and coup cycles; if it takes the form of great-power proxy support to a functioning state, as in Ukraine, the trajectory is prolonged interstate attrition; if it takes the form of multi-actor proxy competition over a collapsed state, as in Syria, the trajectory is frozen stalemate with periodic escalation. These are not predictions but conditional expectations, and each must be accompanied by falsifiers — observable developments that would invalidate the forecast. Policy implications diverge systematically by perspective: Western liberal institutionalism recommends security-sector reform, democratic governance, and multilateral peacekeeping; Russian realism recommends sphere-of-influence recognition and state-to-state deals; Chinese developmentalism recommends infrastructure, non-interference, and economic integration; UN multilateralism recommends ceasefire, humanitarian access, and inclusive political processes; African ownership recommends African-led mediation, Agenda 2063 alignment, and the restructuring of external security partnerships. The student must not only enumerate these recommendations but adjudicate among them, identifying which are supported by the comparative evidence and which rest on normative commitments that the evidence does not settle.

By the end of this lesson the student will be able to design a comparative study of armed conflict using most-similar and most-different logics; to reconstruct the five perspectives on each of the three cases with fidelity to their internal logic; to produce a mechanism-based, conditional forecast with explicit falsifiers; and to write a policy memo that distinguishes description, explanation, prediction, and prescription. The lesson is the first of two capstones: it consolidates Modules 4 through 7 into a single analytical exercise, and it prepares the ground for Lesson 61 on grand strategy, where the comparative findings are translated into long-term strategic design. The student who masters this lesson will have demonstrated the capacity to hold multiple theoretical frameworks and multiple normative vantage points in suspension while rendering a reasoned, evidence-based judgement — the defining skill of the advanced International Relations analyst.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up

Answer the following from memory before reading the lesson core. Each question draws on Modules 4–7.

1. **Warfare module (Module 4):** Distinguish interstate war, intrastate war, and extra-state war as categories in the Correlates of War typology. Which category has dominated the post-1945 period, and what does that imply for how "war" is conventionally defined in Western strategic studies?
2. **Africa module (Module 5):** What is the "bifurcated state" in Mamdani's (1996) account, and how does the citizen/subject distinction explain the differential application of civil and customary law? Apply this to the Sahel: how does the colonial state form shape contemporary security governance?
3. **Eastern Europe module (Module 6):** Explain the security dilemma as it operates in the NATO–Russia context. Under what conditions does defensive arming become perceived as offensive threat, and how does this mechanism interact with alliance expansion?
4. **West Asia module (Module 7):** Define "regional security complex" in Buzan and Wæver's (2003) sense. How does the density of great-power penetration and the pattern of amity/enmity in West Asia differ from that in the Sahel?
5. **Civil war micro-dynamics:** State Kalyvas's (2006) core argument about the relationship between aggregate grievances and local violence. What does his framework imply for the unit of analysis in comparative conflict research?
6. **Comparative method:** Distinguish most-similar systems design (MSSD) from most-different systems design (MDSD). For a comparison of the Sahel, Ukraine, and Syria, which design is more appropriate, and what must the analyst hold constant?

1.2 Orientation Questions

1. The Sahel, Ukraine, and Syria all experienced acute crisis between 2011 and 2014. Why might their trajectories have diverged so sharply a decade later, and which variables — state capacity, regional security complex, intervention type, resource endowment — best explain the divergence?
2. Which theoretical framework — structural realism, political economy, or post-colonial critique — best explains the pattern of external intervention across the three cases, and what does each framework fail to explain?
3. What does the African vantage point reveal about the Sahel conflict that Western security studies and UN peacebuilding frameworks systematically occlude, and how does that reframe the comparative question?
4. A forecast that "the Sahel will continue to fragment" is only useful if it is falsifiable. What observable developments over the next five years would invalidate this forecast, and what would confirm it?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach

The following terms are used throughout the lesson. Definitions are provisional and will be refined in the core.

- **Most-similar systems design (MSSD):** A comparative strategy that selects cases similar on many variables but differing on the outcome, in order to isolate the causal variable that accounts for the difference.
- **Most-different systems design (MDSD):** A comparative strategy that selects cases differing on many variables but sharing the same outcome, in order to identify the common causal factor.
- **Regional security complex:** A set of states whose security concerns are so interlinked that they cannot be analysed or resolved apart from one another (Buzan and Wæver, 2003).
- **Proxy war:** An armed conflict in which external powers support local belligerents rather than engaging directly, typically to avoid escalation while pursuing strategic interests.
- **State fragmentation:** The process by which central authority erodes and territory, populations, and coercive capacity are divided among competing actors, including non-state armed groups.
- **Rentier state:** A state whose revenues derive primarily from external rents (hydrocarbons, minerals, aid, trafficking) rather than from domestic taxation, weakening accountability and state-society bargaining.
- **Coloniality:** The enduring patterns of power, knowledge, and being established by colonialism that persist after formal independence, structuring states, economies, and epistemologies.
- **Security dilemma:** A situation in which measures taken by one state to increase its security are perceived as threatening by others, prompting countermeasures that leave all less secure.
- **Civil-military relations:** The institutional and political relationship between armed forces and civilian authority, including coup propensity, military autonomy, and the militarisation of politics.
- **Intervention fatigue:** The erosion of domestic political support for sustained external military engagement, often leading to withdrawal or mission contraction.
- **Trajectory:** The path-dependent sequence of conflict phases and outcomes over time, shaped by initial conditions, feedback loops, and external shocks.
- **Falsifier:** An observable condition or event that, if it occurred, would invalidate a given hypothesis or forecast, distinguishing scientific claims from unfalsifiable assertions.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Define** the most-similar systems design (MSSD) and the most-different systems design (MDSD) as articulated by Przeworski and Teune (1970) and Lijphart (1971), distinguishing each from Mill's (1843) methods of agreement and difference, and specifying the logical structure, inferential gains, and inferential losses that follow from holding context constant versus varying it.

2. **Explain** the mechanism through which comparative design choice shapes causal visibility: MSSD isolates the independent variable by suppressing contextual variance, thereby privileging agency-level and policy-level explanations, whereas MDSD suppresses independent-variable variance by selecting

on the outcome, thereby privileging structural and systemic explanations, and demonstrate how this mechanism operates across the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia triad.

3. **Apply** both designs to the three cases, producing a structured comparison that identifies which variables are held constant and which are allowed to vary under each design, and derive at least two competing causal accounts of conflict trajectory that survive the comparison.

4. **Evaluate** the scope conditions under which each design yields valid inference in conflict studies, including the small-N problem, selection on the dependent variable, endogeneity between intervention and outcome, and the temporal non-stationarity of conflict processes, and identify the strongest counterargument to each design's validity.

5. **Synthesize** the comparative findings with realism, political economy, and post-colonial critique, and with the five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN), to produce an adjudicated judgment about which mechanisms dominate in which cases and why, and to state the falsifiers that would overturn that judgment.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Comparative methodology: most-similar and most-different designs applied to conflict

Bolded Causal Claim: The choice between a most-similar systems design and a most-different systems design is not a neutral methodological preference but a causal act: it determines which mechanisms become visible, which are rendered invisible, and therefore which policy prescriptions can even be formulated, so that two analysts studying the same three conflicts with different designs will produce incompatible but internally coherent explanations.

Mechanism: In MSSD, the analyst selects cases that are similar on a large set of background variables — regime type, level of development, colonial history, regional security environment — but differ on the outcome of interest and on one or a few hypothesized causal variables. The logic, derived from Mill's method of difference, is that if two otherwise similar cases diverge in outcome, the divergence must be attributable to the variable on which they differ. In conflict studies this means comparing, say, two Sahelian states with similar ethnic composition and poverty levels but different rebel group structures, or two post-Soviet states with similar institutional inheritances but different conflict trajectories. The design holds context constant, which has the effect of suppressing structural and systemic variance and amplifying the variance attributable to agency, policy choice, and local institutional configuration. The mechanism is one of variance suppression: by construction, MSSD makes structural factors appear constant and therefore causally inert, while making the residual variance — often policy, leadership, or organizational — appear as the active cause. In MDSD, by contrast, the analyst selects cases that differ on nearly every background variable — geography, regime, economy, culture, colonial history — but share the outcome of interest. The logic, derived from Mill's method of agreement, is that if dissimilar cases converge on the same outcome, the cause must be a variable common to all of them, which is typically a structural or systemic feature: great-power intervention, global commodity prices, the architecture of the international state system, or the diffusion of military technology. MDSD holds the outcome constant and lets context vary, which suppresses the variance of the outcome and amplifies the variance of structural conditions, making systemic and transnational mechanisms visible while rendering local agency and policy choice comparatively invisible. The mechanism is again variance suppression, but in the opposite direction: MDSD makes the local appear epiphenomenal and the global appear causal. The critical point for conflict analysis is that these two designs do not merely

produce different emphases; they produce different ontologies of causation. An MSSD comparison of the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia would require finding a subset of cases similar enough to sustain the design — perhaps comparing Mali and Burkina Faso within the Sahel, or comparing Ukraine with Georgia — and would tend to highlight differences in state capacity, rebel organization, or external patronage as the decisive variables. An MDSD comparison of the same three regions would treat their radical dissimilarity as a feature, not a bug, and would tend to highlight common structural drivers: the post-Cold War reconfiguration of great-power competition, the diffusion of light weapons, the global war on terror's institutional legacy, or the financialization of resource extraction. Neither design is wrong; each makes a different slice of reality legible. The analyst's choice is therefore a theoretical commitment disguised as a methodological one, and the capstone's task is to make that commitment explicit and to triangulate across both designs rather than treating either as sufficient.

Scope Conditions: MSSD yields valid inference only when the cases are genuinely similar on the variables held constant — a condition that is rarely satisfied in cross-regional conflict comparison and that is especially fragile when colonial history, state formation trajectories, and security architectures differ as radically as they do across the Sahel, Eastern Europe, and West Asia. The design also assumes that the outcome is caused by a single variable or a small set of variables, which is implausible for civil wars and interstate conflicts where multiple causal pathways typically operate. MDSD yields valid inference only when the common outcome is produced by a genuinely common cause rather than by equifinality — the possibility that different causal pathways lead to the same outcome — which is a persistent threat in conflict studies because rebel victory, state collapse, and protracted stalemate can each arise from distinct mechanisms. Both designs are vulnerable to selection on the dependent variable: if cases are selected because they experienced conflict, the analyst cannot estimate the probability of conflict given the hypothesized causes, and the design cannot distinguish causes of conflict from causes of peace. Both are also vulnerable to endogeneity: external intervention is both a cause and a consequence of conflict intensity, so comparing intervened and non-intervened cases confounds the effect of intervention with the severity of the conflict that triggered it. Temporal non-stationarity compounds these problems: the causal structure of conflict in the Sahel in 2012 differs from that in 2024, and a design that treats the conflict as a single case may obscure regime changes in causation. The strongest counterargument to MSSD is that in conflict studies the most interesting variation is often cross-regional, which MSSD by construction suppresses; the strongest counterargument to MDSD is that its cases are so dissimilar that any common cause identified is likely to be so abstract — "state weakness," "great-power competition" — as to be unfalsifiable and therefore theoretically empty.

Observable Implications: If MSSD is the appropriate design, then we should observe that conflicts with similar structural profiles but different rebel organizational forms produce different trajectories — for instance, that Mali's fragmented insurgency produces different dynamics than a more centralized rebel movement in a structurally similar neighbor. If MDSD is appropriate, we should observe that conflicts with radically different local profiles but common great-power involvement produce convergent trajectories — for instance, that French intervention in the Sahel, Russian intervention in Syria, and NATO support for Ukraine all produce similar patterns of escalation and stalemate despite vastly different local conditions. A further implication is that the two designs should yield different rankings of causal importance: MSSD should elevate variables like rebel cohesion and state capacity, while MDSD should elevate variables like external military support and global arms flows. The analyst can test these implications by running both designs on the same data and checking whether the resulting causal accounts are genuinely incompatible or merely differently emphasized. If they are incompatible, the conflict process is likely characterized by causal heterogeneity — different mechanisms in different cases — which itself is a substantive finding. If they are compatible, the

mechanisms identified are robust across design choices, which strengthens confidence in them. A final implication concerns prediction: MSSD-based predictions should perform better within regions and worse across regions, while MDSD-based predictions should perform better at identifying global risk factors and worse at predicting specific conflict trajectories.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective, drawing on the tradition from Rodney through Mamdani, Aning, and Danso, treats comparative methodology itself as a site of epistemic politics. The claim is not that MSSD and MDSD are technically flawed but that they are embedded in a knowledge-production regime that has historically positioned African conflicts as cases to be explained by Western theory rather than as sources of theory. From this vantage, the most-similar design is particularly suspect because it typically selects African cases as the "similar" background against which non-African cases are compared, implicitly treating African statehood as the default or deficient form. The most-different design, while apparently more respectful of African specificity, often reduces African conflicts to instances of global structural forces — resource extraction, great-power competition — thereby erasing the agency of African actors and the specificity of African political forms. The African perspective therefore demands a comparative methodology that is not merely applied to Africa but generated from African experience: a design that takes seriously the distinctiveness of African state formation, the legacy of colonial borders, the role of informal and customary authority, and the agency of non-state actors including women and youth. This is not a rejection of comparison but a demand that the terms of comparison be set, at least in part, by African scholars and African political actors rather than by the methodological conventions of Western political science. The African vantage point reveals that the very choice between MSSD and MDSD presupposes a particular ontology of the state and of causation that is not universally shared, and that comparative conflict analysis that does not interrogate this presupposition risks reproducing the epistemic hierarchies it claims to transcend.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective approaches comparative methodology through the lens of developmental state theory and the principle of non-interference, emphasizing that valid comparison must account for the diversity of development paths and political systems. Chinese scholarship tends to be skeptical of designs that treat regime type as a background variable to be held constant, arguing that the developmental trajectory of the state — its capacity, its relationship to society, its integration into global production networks — is itself the primary causal variable and cannot be bracketed. From this view, MDSD is more promising than MSSD because it allows the comparison of different development models, but it must be supplemented with attention to the specific institutional mechanisms through which states manage conflict. The Chinese perspective contributes the insight that comparative design should be historically specific rather than abstractly formal, and that the category of "conflict" itself may be defined differently across political systems.

Russian: The Russian perspective, shaped by the Soviet and post-Soviet experience of comparative analysis, tends to view methodological debates as themselves ideological, arguing that Western comparative frameworks embed liberal assumptions about statehood, democracy, and conflict that are not neutral. Russian scholarship often favors MDSD on the grounds that it can reveal the common structural drivers of conflict — great-power competition, NATO expansion, the collapse of multipolar order — that MSSD obscures by focusing on local variation. The Russian perspective contributes the insistence that comparative methodology must be explicit about its geopolitical premises and that the selection of cases is never innocent of power politics. It also emphasizes the importance of historical depth: comparisons that do not account for the longue durée of imperial and Soviet legacies are methodologically deficient.

Western: The Western perspective, rooted in the positivist and analytic traditions of political science, treats

MSSD and MDSD as well-established tools with known strengths and limitations, and emphasizes the importance of research design, causal identification, and falsifiability. Western scholarship has produced the most extensive methodological literature on comparative conflict analysis, including the large-N statistical tradition that extends Mill's methods to probabilistic inference. The Western perspective contributes rigor in design, transparency in case selection, and a commitment to evidence-based adjudication, but it is also the perspective most likely to treat methodological choices as technically rather than politically consequential, and to understate the epistemic politics that the African perspective highlights.

UN: The UN perspective approaches comparative methodology from the standpoint of policy relevance and operational utility, emphasizing that designs must produce actionable findings for peacebuilding, mediation, and humanitarian response. The UN view tends to favor pragmatic comparison over methodological purity, and to value designs that can identify common intervention points across diverse conflicts. The UN perspective contributes the insistence that comparative analysis must be accountable to the populations affected by conflict and must not treat cases as mere data points, but it also risks subordinating analytical rigor to operational convenience and to the institutional interests of the organization.

2.3 KEY IDEA 2 — Sahel vs Eastern Europe vs West Asia: Comparing Conflict Trajectories

Bolded Causal Claim: The divergent trajectories of the Sahel (2012–present), Ukraine (2014–present), and West Asia (2011–present) are not explained by the presence or absence of violence per se but by the interaction of state capacity at conflict onset, the type of external intervention, and the degree to which conflict is embedded in transnational political economies, producing three distinct conflict ecologies that comparative analysis must treat as structurally different rather than as variants of a single "civil war" template.

Mechanism: The mechanism operates through three channels that interact rather than simply add. First, state capacity at conflict onset determines the *form* violence takes. In the Sahel, the Malian state's inability to project authority into the north after the 2012 Tuareg rebellion and the subsequent jihadist takeover created a vacuum that external actors could not fill; state collapse preceded and enabled armed group proliferation. In Ukraine, the state retained sufficient capacity to mobilize a national defense, transforming what began as separatist insurgency into interstate war; the state was contested but not collapsed. In West Asia, the Syrian state's partial collapse produced multi-actor fragmentation in which no single faction could achieve dominance, creating a "war of all against all" in which external powers became the decisive actors. Second, external intervention type shapes trajectory in ways that are not interchangeable. France's counterterrorism intervention in the Sahel (Operation Serval, then Barkhane) prioritized kinetic elimination of jihadist leaders over state-building, producing a "whack-a-mole" dynamic in which decapitation strikes disrupted leadership but did not degrade organizational capacity; the intervention also delegitimized the Malian state by substituting French military authority for Malian political authority. US/NATO support to Ukraine emphasized military assistance, intelligence sharing, and sanctions, reinforcing rather than replacing state capacity; the intervention was designed to enable Ukrainian self-defense rather than to fight on Ukraine's behalf. US, Iranian, and Russian interventions in West Asia created a proxy war architecture in which local actors—rebel factions, militias, Kurdish forces—became instruments of regional competition, with each external power backing a different constellation of actors and no single power able to impose order. Third, transnational political economy embeds each conflict differently and determines which external actors have stakes, what resources sustain fighting, and whether resolution requires addressing local grievances or regional bargains. The Sahel's conflict is linked to gold mining (artisanal and industrial),

trafficking routes (drugs, arms, migrants), and pastoralist mobility across porous borders; these economies sustain armed groups independently of ideological commitment. Ukraine's conflict is linked to energy transit (gas pipelines, nuclear infrastructure), grain exports (Black Sea shipping), and industrial supply chains (defense manufacturing, semiconductor inputs); these create dependencies that shape both war sustainability and bargaining positions. West Asia's conflict is linked to oil (production, transit, pricing), refugee flows (displacement as a weapon and a burden), and sectarian networks (transnational religious and ethnic solidarities); these create regional spillover effects that make the conflict inherently international. The mechanism is interactive: state capacity determines whether external intervention can be effective; intervention type determines whether state capacity is reinforced or undermined; political economy determines whether the conflict can be resolved through state-centric bargaining or requires addressing transnational networks.

Scope Conditions: This comparative framework applies most strongly when conflicts are (a) ongoing for more than a decade, (b) involve at least one external state actor, and (c) occur in regions with weak or contested state capacity. It applies less well to short, contained conflicts (where intervention type may not have time to shape trajectory) or to conflicts in strong states (where state capacity absorbs external pressure). The framework also assumes that "trajectory" can be measured by a combination of territorial control, civilian casualties, displacement, and state capacity indicators; if these metrics diverge—for example, if territory is stabilized but displacement continues, or if casualties decline but state capacity erodes—the comparison becomes more complex and may require disaggregating the concept of "trajectory" into multiple dimensions. The framework does not claim that the three cases are exhaustive of conflict types globally; rather, they represent three poles of a spectrum from state collapse (Sahel) to interstate war (Ukraine) to proxy fragmentation (West Asia), and other conflicts may occupy intermediate positions. The framework also assumes that external intervention is a variable rather than a constant; in conflicts without external intervention, the state capacity and political economy channels would dominate, and the comparison would need to be restructured.

Observable Implications: If the mechanism holds, we should observe several patterns. First, Sahel conflict indicators—ACLED event counts and fatalities—should remain high or increase despite French and subsequent Russian (Wagner/Africa Corps) intervention, with territorial control shifting between state, jihadist, and militia actors but no durable stabilization; the "whack-a-mole" dynamic should be visible in the replacement of decapitated leaders by new commanders without organizational degradation. Second, Ukraine should exhibit a different pattern: territorial contestation concentrated along a front line, with state institutions functioning in government-controlled areas, external support sustaining military capacity, and the conflict taking on increasingly interstate characteristics (mobilization, conscription, industrial warfare) rather than irregular ones. Third, West Asia should show the highest number of distinct armed actors and the most fragmented territorial control, with external powers maintaining influence through proxies rather than direct occupation, and with conflict intensity fluctuating in response to regional bargains (e.g., Iran-Saudi détente, US withdrawal from Syria) rather than to battlefield outcomes alone. Cross-regionally, conflicts with higher state capacity at onset (Ukraine) should sustain longer conventional phases, while conflicts with lower state capacity (Sahel, Syria) should fragment into irregular warfare and proxy competition. Civilian casualty patterns should differ systematically: Sahel casualties concentrated in rural areas and among pastoralist communities, reflecting the geographic distribution of state absence and armed group presence; Ukraine casualties concentrated along front lines and in urban areas, reflecting conventional warfare patterns; West Asia casualties distributed across multiple theaters with high displacement, reflecting proxy war and state fragmentation. Humanitarian funding per capita should be highest for Ukraine and lowest for the Sahel, reflecting the racialized and geopolitical attention structures that the African perspective highlights.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on comparing Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia begins from the premise that the comparison itself is politically consequential and that the categories used to compare are not neutral. Drawing on Grovogui's critique of international legal frameworks that privilege state sovereignty over communal survival, Mbembe's analysis of necropolitics and the coloniality of violence, Bayart's "politics of the belly" and the extraversion of African states, Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject in colonial governance, Rodney's underdevelopment thesis, Nkrumah's neo-colonialism, Nyerere's ujamaa and non-alignment, Cabral's theory of national liberation, and Fanon's analysis of colonial violence, the African perspective treats the Sahel conflict not as a "case" of state failure but as a continuation of colonial state formation. The comparison with Ukraine and West Asia risks obscuring the specific colonial genealogy of Sahelian state weakness: the French colonial partition of the region, the imposition of arbitrary borders, the extraction of resources without state-building, and the post-independence perpetuation of extraverted elites who depend on external patronage rather than domestic legitimacy. The African vantage point reveals what other perspectives miss: that "external intervention" in the Sahel is not a new phenomenon but a continuation of French military presence since independence, and that comparing the Sahel to Ukraine—where Western support is framed as defending sovereignty—exposes a double standard in which African sovereignty is routinely violated by the same powers that invoke sovereignty elsewhere. The African perspective further insists that the metrics of comparison (casualties, displacement, territorial control) are shaped by racialized attention: Sahelian casualties receive less international coverage and less humanitarian funding per capita than Ukrainian casualties, a disparity that comparative methodology must account for rather than reproduce. Finally, the African perspective contributes the insight that conflict trajectories in the Sahel are shaped by ecological and pastoralist dynamics—mobility, drought, land tenure, transhumance—that do not map onto the state-centric frameworks used to analyze Ukraine or West Asia, and that any comparison excluding these dimensions is analytically incomplete.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective approaches the three-way comparison through the lens of sovereignty, non-interference, and development-security linkage. China views the Sahel conflict as a symptom of underdevelopment and weak state capacity, addressable through infrastructure investment and economic engagement; Ukraine as a crisis of European security architecture in which NATO expansion is a root cause; and West Asia as a region destabilized by external intervention, particularly US regime-change efforts. The Chinese perspective contributes the emphasis on economic drivers of conflict and the critique of military intervention, but it occludes the role of Chinese economic interests in shaping conflict dynamics—resource extraction, arms sales, debt-trap diplomacy—and tends to treat sovereignty as an absolute principle that shields partner governments from accountability.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames the three conflicts through the lens of multipolarity and Western hegemony. Russia views the Sahel as a region where French neocolonial influence is being challenged and where Russian military cooperation offers an alternative security partnership; Ukraine as a direct threat to Russian security interests and a proxy war with NATO; West Asia as a theater where Russian intervention in Syria preserved a sovereign government against Western-backed regime change. The Russian perspective contributes the critique of Western interventionism and the emphasis on state sovereignty, but it occludes the destabilizing effects of Russian arms transfers, mercenary operations, and information warfare, and it tends to instrumentalize local conflicts for great-power competition.

Western: The Western perspective (US/EU) frames the comparison through liberal internationalism and security studies: the Sahel as a counterterrorism challenge requiring capacity-building and governance reform; Ukraine as a defense of the rules-based order against aggression; West Asia as a complex crisis requiring humanitarian response, counterterrorism, and great-power management. The Western perspective contributes

extensive data collection (ACLED, UCDP), institutional frameworks for comparison, and resources for intervention, but it occludes the historical responsibility of Western powers for state weakness in the Sahel and West Asia, and it tends to treat Western intervention as a solution rather than a variable in conflict trajectories.

UN: The UN perspective approaches the comparison through the lens of peace operations, humanitarian law, and sustainable development. The UN views all three conflicts as requiring integrated responses combining security, development, and governance, and emphasizes the protection of civilians, humanitarian access, and the role of regional organizations (AU, ECOWAS, OSCE, Arab League). The UN perspective contributes normative frameworks and operational experience, but it occludes the political constraints on UN action (Security Council divisions, host-state consent) and tends to treat conflicts as manageable through institutional mechanisms that may not address root causes.

2.4 KEY IDEA 3 — Synthesis of Realism, Political Economy, Post-Colonial Critique, and the Five Perspectives

Bolded Causal Claim: No single theoretical tradition—realism, political economy, or post-colonial critique—can adequately explain the three conflicts; each tradition captures a necessary but insufficient dimension, and the five perspectives each embed one or more of these traditions, so that rigorous comparative analysis requires a synthetic framework that assigns each theory a specific scope condition and treats their combination, not their competition, as the explanatory unit.

Mechanism: The synthesis operates through a division of labor among theories, with each theory assigned to a specific dimension of conflict and with explicit attention to where theories overlap and where they conflict. Realism—drawing on Morgenthau's (1948) classical realism, Waltz's (1979) structural realism, and Mearsheimer's (2001) offensive realism—explains the interstate and great-power dimensions: NATO-Russia competition in Ukraine, US-Iran-Russia rivalry in West Asia, and French/Russian competition for influence in the Sahel. Realism's mechanism is the security dilemma and balance of power: states act to maximize security under anarchy, and interventions are driven by relative power calculations rather than by normative commitments. Realism predicts that external powers will intervene when their security interests are threatened, that interventions will be shaped by power asymmetries, and that conflicts will persist as long as the underlying power competition persists. Political economy—drawing on Tilly's (1990) "war making and state making as organized crime," Kalyvas's (2006) "logic of violence in civil war," and Collier and Hoeffler's (2004) "greed vs. grievance" framework—explains the resource and incentive structures that sustain fighting. Tilly's mechanism is that war and state-making are mutually constitutive: rulers extract resources to fund armies, and armies protect extraction, creating a fiscal-military state that may or may not deliver public goods. In the Sahel, this mechanism explains how armed groups extract rents from gold mining and trafficking, becoming "stationary bandits" who provide a modicum of order in exchange for resources. Kalyvas's mechanism is that violence in civil war is not random but follows a "logic" determined by the interaction of macro-level cleavages (ethnic, ideological) and micro-level denunciations (local grievances, personal rivalries); violence is most intense where control is contested, not where one side dominates. This explains why Sahelian violence concentrates in areas where state and armed group presence overlap, and why Ukrainian violence concentrates along the front line. Collier and Hoeffler's mechanism is that resource endowments ("greed") and horizontal inequalities ("grievance") create the economic conditions for sustained rebellion; this explains why resource-rich regions (Sahelian gold zones, Ukrainian industrial east, Syrian oil fields) experience more intense and prolonged conflict. Post-colonial critique—drawing on Fanon's (1961) analysis of

colonial violence, Mbembe's (2001, 2019) work on necropolitics and the postcolony, Grovogui's (2006) critique of Eurocentric international relations, Mamdani's (1996, 2009) analysis of colonial governance and its contemporary legacies, Rodney's (1972) underdevelopment thesis, and Nkrumah's (1965) neo-colonialism—explains the historical depth and structural vulnerability of certain states. Its mechanism is that the colonial state was not a failed attempt at European state-building but a distinct "modality of power" designed for extraction and control rather than for public goods provision; post-independence states inherited this modality, and post-colonial elites perpetuated it through extraversion (Bayart 1993)—dependence on external resources and patronage rather than domestic legitimacy. This explains why Sahelian states are structurally weak, why West Asian states (Syria, Iraq, Libya) were vulnerable to fragmentation when challenged, and why the international order distributes attention and resources unequally. The synthesis mechanism is not additive but interactive: realism explains *why* external powers intervene, political economy explains *how* conflicts are sustained, and post-colonial critique explains *why* certain states are vulnerable to intervention and why certain populations bear disproportionate costs. The five perspectives embed these theories differently: the African perspective is primarily post-colonial with political economy elements; the Chinese perspective combines realism (multipolarity) with political economy (development); the Russian perspective is realist with post-colonial rhetorical elements; the Western perspective combines liberal institutionalism with political economy; the UN perspective combines liberal institutionalism with human security.

Scope Conditions: The synthesis applies when conflicts are (a) multi-actor, involving both state and non-state armed groups; (b) involve both internal and external dimensions, with at least one external state actor; and (c) persist over years or decades, allowing structural factors to manifest. It applies less well to short, contained conflicts (where realist power calculations may dominate and structural factors may not have time to operate) or to conflicts in strong states (where state capacity absorbs both internal and external pressure). The synthesis also requires that the analyst can identify which theoretical tradition applies to which dimension of the conflict; if the dimensions are inseparable—for example, when resource extraction is simultaneously a political economy mechanism (rent-seeking) and a post-colonial legacy (colonial extraction patterns)—the synthesis must treat them as co-constitutive rather than additive. The synthesis does not resolve the ontological tensions between realism (which treats the state as the primary unit of analysis) and post-colonial critique (which treats the state as a colonial artifact); it holds them in productive tension, using realism to explain interstate dynamics and post-colonial critique to explain state vulnerability. The synthesis also does not claim that all three traditions are equally applicable to all three cases; as the observable implications suggest, realism dominates in Ukraine, post-colonial critique dominates in the Sahel, and all three are strongly present in West Asia.

Observable Implications: If the synthesis holds, we should observe several patterns. First, in the Sahel, realist competition (France vs. Russia) overlays political economy (gold, trafficking, pastoralist resources) overlays post-colonial state weakness, producing a conflict that cannot be resolved by addressing any single dimension: counterterrorism (realist) fails without state-building (post-colonial) and without addressing resource economies (political economy). Second, in Ukraine, realism (NATO-Russia) dominates the macro-level, but political economy (energy, grain, industrial capacity, defense manufacturing) shapes the sustainability of war and the bargaining space; post-colonial critique is less applicable (though not absent—the colonial legacy of Soviet nationalities policy shaped the Donbas conflict, and the racialized attention to Ukrainian vs. Sahelian casualties reflects post-colonial hierarchies). Third, in West Asia, all three traditions are strongly present: realism (US-Iran-Russia competition), political economy (oil, arms, reconstruction contracts, refugee economies), and post-colonial critique (Sykes-Picot borders, sectarian statecraft, Western intervention). Cross-perspectivally, we should observe that each perspective's policy recommendations reflect

its theoretical embeddedness: the African perspective recommends addressing colonial legacies, extraversion, and resource sovereignty; the Chinese perspective recommends development, non-interference, and multipolarity; the Russian perspective recommends sovereignty, anti-hegemony, and great-power concert; the Western perspective recommends liberal order, capacity-building, and rules-based intervention; the UN perspective recommends integrated peacebuilding, civilian protection, and regional cooperation. The synthesis predicts that policies addressing only one dimension will fail: counterterrorism without state-building (Western approach in the Sahel) fails; development without security (Chinese approach) fails; sovereignty without accountability (Russian approach) fails; peacebuilding without power (UN approach) fails.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on synthesis begins from the insistence that post-colonial critique is not one theory among three but the foundational framework within which realism and political economy must be situated. Drawing on Grovogui's (2006) argument that international relations theory is itself a product of colonial power and that "anarchy" is a Eurocentric construct that obscures the hierarchical global order, the African perspective treats realism's state-centric ontology as historically specific rather than universal: the state form that realism takes as given was imposed on Africa through colonialism, and its weakness is not a deviation from a European norm but a consequence of colonial state formation. Mbembe's (2001) concept of the "postcolony" and his later work on necropolitics (2019) provide the mechanism: colonial violence established a "state of exception" in which certain populations were rendered killable, and this logic persists in contemporary conflict, where Sahelian pastoralists and West Asian civilians are subjected to violence that would be unthinkable in European contexts. Rodney's (1972) underdevelopment thesis and Nkrumah's (1965) neo-colonialism explain the political economy dimension: African underdevelopment is not a natural condition but a product of colonial extraction and its continuation through neo-colonial economic structures, and contemporary conflicts over resources (gold, uranium, oil) are continuations of colonial extraction patterns. Mamdani's (1996) distinction between "citizen" and "subject" in colonial governance explains why post-colonial states are structurally weak: colonial states governed through "decentralized despotism," empowering chiefs and ethnic authorities rather than building national institutions, and post-independence states inherited this structure. The African perspective's contribution to synthesis is the insistence that realism and political economy, when applied to Africa without post-colonial critique, reproduce colonial epistemologies: they treat African state weakness as a given rather than as a product of history, and they treat African conflicts as "internal" rather than as products of a global order shaped by colonialism. The African perspective also contributes the concept of "extraversion" (Bayart 1993): post-colonial states depend on external resources and patronage, making them vulnerable to external manipulation and unable to pursue autonomous development. This explains why external intervention in the Sahel is not an exception but a continuation of colonial patterns, and why the "synthesis" must include the historical dimension that realism and political economy typically exclude. The African perspective's occlusion risk is that it may underweight the agency of African actors—states, armed groups, civil society—and may overstate the determining power of colonial history, treating contemporary conflicts as overdetermined by the past.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective contributes to synthesis through its emphasis on development as a security strategy and its critique of Western interventionism. Drawing on the concept of "comprehensive national security" and the Belt and Road Initiative's security-development linkage, the Chinese perspective treats political economy (development, infrastructure, trade) as the primary mechanism for conflict prevention and resolution, with realism (multipolarity, sovereignty) as the framework for interstate relations. The Chinese perspective's contribution is the insistence that economic underdevelopment is a root cause of conflict and that military intervention without development is counterproductive; its occlusion risk is that it treats develop-

ment as a technical rather than political process, ignoring the distributional conflicts and power asymmetries that shape who benefits from development, and that it uses "non-interference" to shield partner governments from accountability.

Russian: The Russian perspective contributes to synthesis through its realist emphasis on great-power competition and its critique of Western hegemony. Drawing on the concept of "multipolarity" and the critique of "unipolarity," the Russian perspective treats realism as the primary framework, with post-colonial rhetoric (anti-imperialism, sovereignty) as a legitimating discourse. The Russian perspective's contribution is the insistence that Western interventionism is a source of conflict rather than a solution, and that the international order must be multipolar to be legitimate; its occlusion risk is that it instrumentalizes post-colonial critique for great-power competition, using anti-imperialist rhetoric to justify its own interventions (Syria, Sahel via Wagner) while occluding the destabilizing effects of Russian arms transfers and mercenary operations.

Western: The Western perspective contributes to synthesis through its combination of liberal institutionalism and political economy. Drawing on the "democratic peace" thesis, the "responsibility to protect" doctrine, and the "security-development nexus," the Western perspective treats liberal governance as the mechanism for conflict prevention and economic development as the mechanism for conflict resolution. The Western perspective's contribution is its extensive data collection, institutional frameworks, and resources for intervention; its occlusion risk is that it treats Western intervention as a solution rather than a variable, that it underweights the historical responsibility of Western powers for state weakness, and that it conflates Western interests with universal interests.

UN: The UN perspective contributes to synthesis through its integration of security, development, and governance in peacebuilding frameworks. Drawing on the "human security" concept and the "sustaining peace" agenda, the UN perspective treats conflict as a multi-dimensional phenomenon requiring multi-dimensional responses. The UN perspective's contribution is its normative frameworks, operational experience, and emphasis on civilian protection; its occlusion risk is that it treats conflicts as manageable through institutional mechanisms that may not address root causes, and that it is constrained by Security Council politics and host-state consent in ways that limit its effectiveness.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Forecasting implications: what does comparative analysis tell us about likely trajectories?

Bolded Causal Claim: Comparative analysis of the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia does not generate point predictions about when or how these conflicts will end; instead, it produces conditional, scenario-based forecasts about likely trajectories by identifying which structural features—state capacity, intervention type, resource endowment, ethnic geography, and great-power involvement—are associated with prolongation, escalation, or resolution across a reference class of comparable conflicts.

Mechanism: The forecasting mechanism operates through three linked steps. First, structural decomposition: each conflict is decomposed into a set of variables that comparative conflict research has associated with outcomes—state capacity (measured by Weberian monopoly of force, fiscal extraction, bureaucratic reach), intervention type (unilateral, multilateral, proxy, none), resource endowment (hydrocarbons, minerals, agricultural land), ethnic geography (concentrated versus dispersed, cross-border kinship), and great-power involvement (direct, indirect, absent). Second, reference-class matching: the three cases are matched against a reference class of conflicts with similar profiles—Sahel against other Sahelian and Saharan in-

surgencies (Mali 2012, Chad, Sudan), Ukraine against other interstate territorial disputes with great-power backing (Georgia 2008, Nagorno-Karabakh), West Asia against other state-collapse and proxy-war complexes (Lebanon, Yemen, Libya). Third, trajectory projection: based on the historical record of the reference class, the analyst projects a probability distribution over outcomes—prolonged stalemate, escalation to wider war, negotiated settlement, state collapse, or external imposition. The mechanism is probabilistic and conditional: it says that given features X, Y, and Z, outcome W has occurred in some share of comparable cases, not that outcome W will occur. This is the logic of reference-class forecasting applied to conflict, as developed in Tetlock's work on expert political judgment and in the quantitative conflict-forecasting literature (Ward, Greenhill, and Bakke 2010; Hegre et al. 2019). The mechanism also incorporates path dependence: early choices—whether to intervene unilaterally or multilaterally, whether to negotiate early or late, whether to prioritize military or political tracks—constrain the option space available later, so forecasts must be updated as path-dependent commitments accumulate. A further mechanism is feedback: forecasts themselves can become self-fulfilling or self-defeating if actors adjust behavior in response to predicted outcomes, for example if a forecast of stalemate reduces willingness to negotiate.

Scope Conditions: The forecasting mechanism operates reliably only under several scope conditions. First, structural stability: the underlying variables must remain relatively constant; exogenous shocks—regime change, pandemic, commodity price collapse, climate catastrophe—can invalidate forecasts by altering the variables themselves. Second, reference-class adequacy: the reference class must contain enough comparable cases to support probabilistic inference; with only three primary cases, the analyst must draw on broader comparative conflict literature, which introduces heterogeneity. Third, metric specificity: forecasts about duration, intensity, geographic spread, and political outcome are not interchangeable; a conflict may be forecast to be long but low-intensity, or short but escalatory. Fourth, time-horizon dependence: short-term forecasts of six to twelve months can rely on current momentum and commitments; long-term forecasts of five to ten years must account for political turnover, generational change, and shifting great-power priorities. Fifth, the mechanism assumes that the structural features are correctly identified and measured; if the analyst misidentifies the primary driver, for example treating a resource war as an ethnic conflict, the forecast will be systematically biased. Sixth, forecasts are most reliable for structural features and least reliable for contingent events such as assassinations, coups, or sudden policy shifts, which can dominate short-term trajectories.

Observable Implications: If the comparative forecasting framework is valid, several observable implications follow. First, conflicts with similar structural profiles should exhibit similar trajectory patterns: if the Sahel's trajectory continues to resemble West Asia's—fragmentation, proxy war, state collapse—rather than Ukraine's—territorial contestation with conventional forces—this supports the structural-analogy approach. Second, deviations from forecasted trajectories should be traceable to identifiable shocks or omitted variables, not to randomness; if a conflict deviates without identifiable cause, the framework is misspecified. Third, forecasts should improve as more cases enter the reference class and as measurement improves; if forecast accuracy does not improve over time, the structural variables may be poorly chosen. Fourth, the framework implies that intervention type is a strong predictor of trajectory: unilateral interventions should correlate with prolonged conflict, as in the Sahel under France and West Asia under the United States, while multilateral or absent intervention should correlate with different patterns, as in Ukraine where NATO support is multilateral but not direct combat. Fifth, the framework implies that state capacity is the strongest single predictor of resolution: conflicts in states with higher capacity should resolve faster, holding intervention constant. These implications are testable against ACLED data, the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset, and intervention timelines.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective on forecasting emphasizes that trajectories of African conflicts are shaped by external intervention patterns, resource extraction dynamics, and the political economy of state weakness. From this vantage point, forecasts should incorporate the likelihood of intervention fatigue among external powers, shifting great-power priorities, and the possibility that African states and regional organizations such as the African Union and ECOWAS will assert greater agency. The African perspective warns against treating African conflicts as inherently more unpredictable than others—a framing that often reflects Western analytical bias rather than actual structural indeterminacy. It also emphasizes that forecasting should account for climate change as a structural driver in the Sahel, and that forecasts should be disaggregated to capture sub-national variation that national-level models obscure. The African perspective's contribution is its attention to endogenous dynamics and external dependency; its occlusion risk is that it may underweight the role of non-African actors' autonomous decisions.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective on forecasting emphasizes stability and development trajectories. From this vantage point, conflicts are forecast to resolve when economic development proceeds and state capacity builds; the key variable is the development trajectory, not the military balance. The Chinese perspective tends to predict that conflicts in resource-rich but institutionally weak states will persist until development creates constituencies for peace. Its contribution is its long time horizon and its emphasis on structural transformation; its occlusion risk is that it may underweight political and identity factors that resist economic determinism.

Russian: The Russian perspective on forecasting emphasizes geopolitical competition dynamics. From this vantage point, conflicts are forecast to persist as long as great-power competition persists; resolution requires a multipolar equilibrium or great-power concert. The Russian perspective tends to predict that Western intervention prolongs conflicts and that Russian or Chinese counter-intervention creates stalemate rather than resolution. Its contribution is its attention to the systemic level; its occlusion risk is that it may treat all conflicts as proxies, underweighting local agency.

Western: The Western perspective on forecasting draws on quantitative conflict models, event data, and institutional indicators. From this vantage point, forecasts are generated through statistical models incorporating GDP, regime type, ethnic fractionalization, and conflict history. The Western perspective's contribution is its methodological rigor and its capacity for large-N inference; its occlusion risk is that it may overfit to historical patterns and underweight structural breaks, and that it may treat African and West Asian conflicts as more predictable in their dysfunction than they are.

UN: The UN perspective on forecasting emphasizes peacebuilding indicators and sustaining-peace metrics. From this vantage point, forecasts are tied to the presence or absence of inclusive political processes, civilian protection, and institutional capacity. The UN perspective's contribution is its operational grounding and its emphasis on human security; its occlusion risk is that it may conflate institutional activity with conflict resolution, and that it is constrained by Security Council politics in ways that limit the independence of its forecasts.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — Policy implications: what would each perspective recommend, and why?

Bolded Causal Claim: Each of the five perspectives generates distinct and partly incompatible policy recommendations for the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia because each identifies a different primary cause of conflict and a different legitimate authority for intervention; no single policy package can satisfy all five

simultaneously, so policy choice is necessarily a political act of prioritization that reveals the chooser's underlying theoretical commitments.

Mechanism: The mechanism is deductive: policy recommendations flow from causal diagnosis through a chain of inference. If conflict is caused by state weakness and institutional failure, as the Western and institutional diagnosis holds, the prescription is state-building—security sector reform, governance capacity, rule of law, conditionality. If conflict is caused by imperial extraction and external domination, as the African and post-colonial diagnosis holds, the prescription is decolonization of economic structures, non-intervention, and African-led solutions. If conflict is caused by geopolitical competition and hegemonic overreach, as the Russian and realist diagnosis holds, the prescription is great-power concert, respect for sovereignty, and opposition to unilateral intervention. If conflict is caused by underdevelopment and lack of connectivity, as the Chinese diagnosis holds, the prescription is development-first—infrastructure, trade, investment, non-conditionality. If conflict is caused by multi-dimensional deficits in security, development, and governance, as the UN diagnosis holds, the prescription is integrated peacebuilding—civilian protection, humanitarian access, inclusive political processes, sustaining peace. The mechanism operates at two levels: the diagnostic level, which identifies what causes the conflict, and the authority level, which identifies who has the right to act. These two levels interact: a diagnosis of state failure implies that the international community has a responsibility to protect and rebuild; a diagnosis of imperial intervention implies that the international community is the problem. The mechanism also includes a feedback loop: policies generate outcomes that are interpreted through the same perspective that generated them, creating confirmation bias, so that state-building that fails is read as insufficient state-building rather than as a flawed premise.

Scope Conditions: Policy recommendations are conditional on several factors. First, causal correctness: if the diagnosis is wrong, the prescription fails; state-building in a conflict driven by geopolitical competition may simply provide a stronger proxy. Second, implementability: some recommendations, such as decolonization of global economic structures, require transformations beyond the instrument of policy; others, such as humanitarian access, are immediately implementable but may not address root causes. Third, time horizon: short-term stabilization through ceasefire and humanitarian relief and long-term transformation through structural reform and reconciliation may require different and even contradictory policies; a policy that stabilizes in the short term may entrench in the long term. Fourth, legitimacy: recommendations assume a legitimate actor; if the actor lacks legitimacy, as with a former colonial power intervening in the Sahel, the policy's effectiveness is compromised regardless of design. Fifth, resource constraints: recommendations vary in cost; integrated peacebuilding is expensive, development-first requires sustained commitment, non-intervention is cheap but may leave vacuums. Sixth, the recommendations assume that the conflict is the primary problem; if the conflict is a symptom of deeper structural conditions such as climate change, demographic pressure, or global inequality, policy at the conflict level may be insufficient.

Observable Implications: If the policy-implication framework is valid, several observable implications follow. First, policies derived from a perspective should perform best when that perspective's causal diagnosis is most accurate for the specific conflict; state-building should work better in conflicts genuinely driven by institutional failure than in those driven by geopolitical competition. Second, policy failure should be interpretable through the lens of causal misdiagnosis: if state-building fails in the Sahel, this may indicate that the conflict is not primarily institutional. Third, the framework implies that policy debates are often proxy debates about causation: disagreements about whether to intervene in Ukraine are disagreements about whether the conflict is about sovereignty, as the Western view holds, or about NATO expansion, as the Russian view holds. Fourth, the framework implies that no perspective's recommendations are universally applicable; each has scope conditions. Fifth, the framework implies that hybrid policies combining elements from multiple

perspectives may outperform pure-perspective policies, but only if the hybridization is theoretically coherent rather than merely political compromise. These implications are testable against policy evaluation literature, intervention outcome data, and comparative case studies.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective recommends, for the Sahel, withdrawal of external military forces including French and Russian or Wagner forces, African-led security and political solutions through the African Union and ECOWAS, addressing root causes such as poverty, marginalization, climate change, and illicit economies, debt relief, and climate adaptation funding. For Ukraine, it recommends support for sovereignty and territorial integrity, but with emphasis on diplomatic solutions and African non-alignment, and attention to the food-security and energy impacts on African states. For West Asia, it recommends non-intervention, support for regional dialogue, and attention to humanitarian and refugee impacts. The African perspective's core recommendation is that external actors should address the structural conditions—economic extraction, climate, debt—that generate conflict rather than managing symptoms through military intervention. Its strength is its attention to root causes and its challenge to interventionist defaults; its weakness is that non-intervention may leave vacuums that other actors fill.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective recommends development-first approaches: infrastructure investment, trade integration, and capacity-building without political conditionality. For the Sahel, this means economic development programs, security cooperation without interference in internal affairs, and support for state capacity. For Ukraine, it means mediation, emphasis on sovereignty and territorial integrity, opposition to sanctions that harm the global economy, and promotion of a negotiated settlement. For West Asia, it means economic reconstruction, non-interference, and support for state sovereignty. The Chinese perspective's core recommendation is that development creates the material conditions for peace and that external actors should support rather than supplant state capacity. Its strength is its long-term orientation and its respect for sovereignty; its weakness is that it may underweight political and rights dimensions.

Russian: The Russian perspective recommends multipolar balance and great-power concert. For the Sahel, this means opposition to Western unilateral intervention, support for existing governments, and security cooperation on sovereign terms. For Ukraine, it means recognition of Russian security concerns, negotiation of a new European security architecture, and opposition to NATO expansion. For West Asia, it means support for state sovereignty, as in Syria, opposition to regime change, and coordination with Iran and other regional actors. The Russian perspective's core recommendation is that conflicts are resolved through great-power agreement, not through unilateral intervention or institutional peacebuilding. Its strength is its attention to systemic stability; its weakness is that it may legitimate authoritarian consolidation and underweight human rights.

Western: The Western perspective recommends governance reform, security sector reform, counter-terrorism, sanctions, conditionality, and human rights promotion. For the Sahel, this means security assistance, governance reform, counter-terrorism operations, and support for democratic transitions. For Ukraine, it means military and financial support, sanctions on Russia, NATO integration, and accountability for war crimes. For West Asia, it means counter-terrorism, support for allies, sanctions, human rights advocacy, and selective intervention. The Western perspective's core recommendation is that conflicts are resolved through institutional capacity-building and norm enforcement. Its strength is its attention to governance and rights; its weakness is that it may overestimate the transferability of institutional models and underestimate the costs of intervention.

UN: The UN perspective recommends integrated peacebuilding: civilian protection, humanitarian access, inclusive political processes, sustaining peace, and support for regional organizations. For the Sahel, this means humanitarian assistance, support for missions such as MINUSMA with host-state consent, development-peace nexus programs, and support for the African Union and ECOWAS. For Ukraine, it means humanitarian corridors, civilian protection, support for diplomatic processes, and accountability mechanisms. For West Asia, it means humanitarian access, civilian protection, support for political settlements, and reconstruction. The UN perspective's core recommendation is that conflicts require multi-dimensional responses addressing security, development, and governance simultaneously. Its strength is its comprehensiveness and its normative legitimacy; its weakness is that it may be constrained by Security Council politics and host-state consent in ways that limit effectiveness.

SECTION 2.7 — FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY) The African vantage point on comparative conflict analysis does not begin with the question of which theory best explains three wars; it begins with the prior question of who constructed the category "conflict" and for what purpose. From within African scholarship, the comparative project itself is an artifact of a particular epistemology—one that treats the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia as commensurable units of analysis, each a "case" amenable to most-similar or most-different design. Mahmood Mamdani's work on colonial state formation argues that the modern African state was not a failed version of the European state but a deliberately bifurcated structure, divided between "citizens" in urban centers and "subjects" in the countryside, governed through "define and rule" (Mamdani 1996, 2001). When comparative conflict analysts treat the Sahel as a "fragile state" case comparable to Ukraine's "resilience," they import a teleology that measures African polities against a European norm and finds them deficient. The African perspective's first contribution, therefore, is epistemic: it insists that the units being compared are not pre-given but historically produced, and that the act of comparison can reproduce the very hierarchies it claims to analyze.

This epistemic critique is not merely methodological; it is political. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972) established that African underdevelopment was not a natural condition but a product of centuries of extraction, and that the wealth of Europe was built on the impoverishment of Africa. Applied to comparative conflict analysis, Rodney's framework suggests that the Sahel's instability cannot be separated from the global political economy of uranium, gold, and labor migration that links Niamey to Paris and Bamako to Brussels. The conflict in Mali is not simply a "local" insurgency comparable to Donbas separatism; it is embedded in a transnational extractive structure whose beneficiaries are disproportionately external. Jean-François Bayart's concept of "extraversion" (Bayart 2000) sharpens this point: African states and elites have historically oriented themselves outward, seeking resources and legitimacy from external patrons rather than domestic constituencies. Comparative analysis that treats the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia as three parallel "conflict trajectories" misses the structural asymmetry that the Sahel's trajectory is shaped by a longer history of external economic penetration than either Ukraine or West Asia, even though all three experience external intervention.

The African perspective also reframes the meaning of external intervention. From a Western or UN standpoint, French Operation Barkhane in the Sahel, US/NATO support for Ukraine, and US/Iranian/Russian involvement in West Asia can be compared as instances of "external intervention" with varying outcomes. From an African standpoint, particularly through the lens of Kwame Nkrumah's neocolonialism (Nkrumah

1965) and Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial violence (Fanon 1961), intervention is not an episodic policy choice but a structural feature of the post-colonial order. France's military presence in the Sahel was not a response to a 2012 crisis; it was the continuation of a security architecture established at independence, in which African states outsourced their security to former colonial powers. The "failure" of Barkhane is therefore not a policy failure in the sense that a different counterinsurgency doctrine might have succeeded; it is the predictable outcome of a neocolonial security arrangement that prioritizes external interests over domestic legitimacy. Amílcar Cabral's insistence that national liberation must be rooted in the culture and material conditions of the people (Cabral 1973) suggests that security imposed from outside, however well-intentioned, cannot generate the political legitimacy required for durable peace. This is a contribution the other four perspectives struggle to make: the Western perspective tends to treat intervention as a tool whose effectiveness depends on implementation; the UN perspective treats it as a last resort requiring host-state consent; the Chinese and Russian perspectives treat it as a sovereignty violation or a hegemonic practice. Only the African perspective, drawing on the lived experience of post-colonial statehood, treats intervention as constitutive of the conflict itself.

Achille Mbembe's concept of necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) adds a further dimension. Comparative conflict analysis often measures outcomes in terms of battle deaths, territorial control, or refugee flows. Mbembe's framework asks a different question: who is made to die, and under what conditions? The racialized hierarchies of grievability that Mbembe identifies mean that civilian deaths in the Sahel do not register in global media or policy discourse with the same weight as deaths in Ukraine. This is not merely a media bias; it is a structural feature of the international order that comparative analysis must account for. When ACLED data show comparable or higher civilian casualty rates in the Sahel than in Ukraine in certain periods, the differential political response cannot be explained by the data alone; it requires an analysis of how certain lives are rendered visible and others invisible. The African perspective thus reveals that comparative conflict analysis is never purely technical; it is always embedded in a politics of recognition.

The African perspective also insists on agency. Too often, comparative analysis treats African actors—states, communities, armed groups—as objects of external forces rather than agents in their own right. Julius Nyerere's philosophy of ujamaa and self-reliance (Nyerere 1968) and Cabral's emphasis on the creative capacity of the people provide a counter-narrative to the "failed state" discourse. In the Sahel, community-based militias, traditional authorities, and local peace committees have played significant roles in conflict dynamics, both exacerbating and mitigating violence. Kalyvas's (2006) work on the logic of violence in civil war, while not African in origin, resonates with African scholarship in emphasizing that violence is locally produced and that civilian agency matters. The African perspective would push this further: the "local" is not a residual category but the primary site of political life, and external interventions that bypass local structures are likely to fail regardless of their resources. This has direct comparative implications: Ukraine's relative resilience in 2022 was partly attributable to pre-existing social cohesion and territorial defense structures, while West Asian conflicts have been shaped by the destruction of state institutions. The Sahel's trajectory reflects the erosion of local authority structures by both state and non-state actors, a process that external military intervention cannot reverse.

Gender and epistemology constitute another African contribution. Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's *The Invention of Women* (1997) demonstrates that the category "woman" as a universal subject was a colonial imposition, and that pre-colonial African societies organized gender differently. Sylvia Tamale's work on decolonization and African feminism (Tamale 2020) extends this to legal and political theory. Applied to comparative conflict analysis, this means that the gendered dimensions of conflict—sexual violence, women's participation in peace processes, the gendered division of labor in wartime—are not universal but historically specific.

The Western perspective's emphasis on "women, peace, and security" (WPS) agendas, while valuable, can impose a particular feminist framework that does not capture African women's diverse experiences. The African perspective thus contributes a decolonial gender lens that the other four perspectives, including the UN's WPS framework, often lack.

African security governance provides a further contribution. Kwesi Aning and Kwaku Danso's work on African security architecture (Aning and Danso 2014) documents the evolution of the African Union's Peace and Security Council, ECOWAS interventions, and regional mechanisms. Comparative conflict analysis that focuses only on great-power intervention misses the significant role of African institutions. ECOWAS's intervention in The Gambia (2017), the AU's role in Somalia through AMISOM, and regional responses to the Sahel crisis are all part of the comparative picture. The African perspective insists that these institutions be evaluated on their own terms, not merely as adjuncts to UN or Western operations. This is particularly important for the Sahel, where the G5 Sahel Joint Force and the Accra Initiative represent African-led security responses whose effectiveness and limitations must be assessed independently.

What does the African perspective occlude? First, it risks over-attributing causality to external factors. While colonialism and neocolonialism are real, intra-African dynamics—elite competition, resource rents, ethnic mobilization, religious ideology—also drive conflict. Mamdani's framework, while powerful, can be read as implying that all African violence is ultimately a product of colonial state formation, which may understate the agency of African actors in producing violence. Second, the African perspective may struggle to account for variation within Africa: why has Botswana remained stable while Mali has not? A purely structural account may miss the role of leadership, institutions, and contingency. Third, when applied to non-African cases like Ukraine, the African perspective's tools may be less directly applicable; the colonial history of Ukraine is different from that of the Sahel, and the racialized hierarchies of grievability, while real, may not capture the full dynamics of interstate war. Fourth, there is a risk of romanticizing pre-colonial Africa or treating "African solutions" as inherently superior, which can obscure the real limitations of African institutions. Finally, the African perspective's emphasis on decolonization can sometimes slide into a methodological nationalism that treats "Africa" as a coherent unit, when in fact the continent contains enormous diversity. These occlusions do not invalidate the perspective; they mark its boundaries and invite synthesis with other frameworks.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective The Chinese perspective on comparative conflict analysis is anchored in a distinctive normative architecture: sovereignty, non-interference, development as the foundation of security, and multipolarity as the desirable international order. These principles are not merely rhetorical; they structure how Chinese analysts and policymakers interpret the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia, and they generate specific policy recommendations that differ systematically from Western, Russian, and UN approaches.

Sovereignty and non-interference are the foundational commitments. Rooted in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (1954) and reiterated in every major Chinese foreign policy document, these principles hold that states should not interfere in each other's internal affairs, that territorial integrity is inviolable, and that the use of force without Security Council authorization is illegitimate. Applied to the three cases, this generates a consistent critique of Western intervention: French military operations in the Sahel, NATO's expansion and support for Ukraine, and US interventions in Iraq, Syria, and Libya are all framed as violations of sovereignty that have produced or exacerbated conflict. The Chinese perspective thus contributes a powerful counter-narrative to the Western assumption that intervention can be a tool for conflict resolution. It points to the documented failures of externally imposed regime change—Libya's collapse into civil war after 2011, Iraq's prolonged instability—and argues that these outcomes were predictable consequences of

violating sovereignty.

However, the Chinese perspective is not simply anti-interventionist; it is also developmentalist. The core claim is that underdevelopment is the root cause of conflict, and that economic development, infrastructure, and state capacity-building are the most effective forms of conflict prevention. This is operationalized through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and bilateral economic partnerships. In the Sahel, China has invested in infrastructure, mining, and energy projects, and has provided security assistance without the governance conditionality that characterizes Western aid. The Chinese perspective would argue that this approach addresses the structural drivers of conflict more effectively than military intervention. In West Asia, China's energy interests and BRI investments create stakes in stability, and its mediation of the Saudi-Iran rapprochement in 2023 demonstrated a diplomatic model based on economic incentives rather than military pressure. In Ukraine, China's position has been more complex: it has maintained economic ties with Russia while rhetorically supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and has offered itself as a mediator. The Chinese perspective here reveals a tension between its sovereignty principle and its strategic partnership with Russia, a tension that Western analysts frequently highlight as hypocrisy but that Chinese analysts frame as pragmatic balancing.

The Chinese perspective also contributes a critique of Western double standards. It points to the inconsistency of Western support for Ukrainian sovereignty while simultaneously undermining Syrian or Libyan sovereignty, and argues that this selectivity undermines the credibility of the Western-led order. The concept of "democracy" itself is contested: China argues that democracy should be defined by outcomes (development, stability, popular satisfaction) rather than procedures (elections, multiparty systems), and that Western democracy promotion in conflict zones has often produced instability. This is a significant contribution to comparative conflict analysis because it challenges the assumption that liberal democratic institutions are the natural endpoint of conflict resolution.

What does the Chinese perspective occlude? First, its sovereignty principle can function as a shield for authoritarian governments, including those whose repression contributes to conflict. By treating sovereignty as absolute, it may underweight the responsibility of states to protect their populations, a principle that the UN's Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework attempts to codify. Second, the developmentalist claim, while plausible, is difficult to verify: China's economic engagement in the Sahel has not prevented the spread of insurgency, and BRI projects have sometimes generated local resentment over labor practices, environmental damage, and debt. Third, China's own security practices—including its treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, its militarization of the South China Sea, and its support for Russia's war in Ukraine—create credibility gaps that limit its normative appeal. Fourth, the Chinese perspective tends to treat "development" as a technocratic process, underweighting the political and distributive conflicts that development itself can generate. Finally, its multipolarity advocacy, while appealing to many Global South states, can obscure the fact that a multipolar order may simply replace Western hegemony with great-power competition, with smaller states caught in between. These occlusions suggest that the Chinese perspective is most valuable as a corrective to Western interventionism rather than as a comprehensive theory of conflict.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective The Russian perspective on comparative conflict analysis is shaped by a worldview that treats the post-Cold War international order as fundamentally illegitimate: a unipolar system dominated by the United States and its allies, in which NATO expansion, color revolutions, and humanitarian intervention are instruments of Western hegemony. This perspective is not merely descriptive; it is constitutive of Russian foreign policy and generates specific interpretations of the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia that differ sharply from both Western and Chinese accounts.

The core analytical claim is that NATO expansion is the primary cause of the Ukraine conflict. Russian officials and scholars argue that the eastward expansion of NATO, despite promises made to Soviet leaders in 1990, violated Russia's security interests and created an existential threat. From this standpoint, the 2014 Maidan revolution was not a democratic uprising but a Western-backed coup, and Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for Donbas separatists were defensive responses to NATO encroachment. The Russian perspective thus contributes a security-dilemma analysis that Western accounts often underweight: it treats great-power security concerns as legitimate and argues that ignoring them produces conflict. This is a genuine theoretical contribution, even if its empirical application is contested, because it forces comparative analysis to take seriously the role of alliance politics and security guarantees in conflict dynamics.

In West Asia, the Russian perspective emphasizes its role as a counterweight to US hegemony. Russia's military intervention in Syria in 2015 is framed not as aggression but as a defense of state sovereignty against externally backed regime change. The Russian perspective argues that the US-led invasion of Iraq, the intervention in Libya, and support for Syrian rebels destabilized the region and created space for extremist groups like ISIS. By supporting the Assad government, Russia claims to have prevented Syria's collapse into a failed state and to have preserved a secular, multi-confessional political order. This narrative contributes a state-centric, order-preserving framework that contrasts with the Western emphasis on democracy and human rights. It also highlights the unintended consequences of intervention: the Russian perspective argues that Western interventions in West Asia consistently produce worse outcomes than the authoritarian status quo they seek to replace.

In the Sahel, the Russian perspective has gained traction through the Wagner Group (now Africa Corps) and its partnerships with military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Russia frames its engagement as an alternative to failed Western intervention: it provides security assistance without governance conditionality, respects sovereignty, and does not lecture on human rights. The Russian perspective argues that France's counterterrorism mission failed because it was driven by neocolonial interests rather than African needs, and that Russia's presence represents a genuine partnership. This narrative resonates with anti-French sentiment in the Sahel and contributes to the broader Russian project of positioning itself as a champion of the Global South against Western hegemony.

What does the Russian perspective occlude? First and most significantly, it provides an ex post facto justification for Russia's own aggression. The claim that NATO expansion "caused" the Ukraine war, while containing a partial truth about security dilemmas, is used to legitimize the invasion of a sovereign state, the annexation of territory, and the commission of war crimes. The Russian perspective's sovereignty principle is applied selectively: it defends Syrian sovereignty while violating Ukrainian sovereignty. Second, the Russian perspective underweights the agency of non-Russian actors. Ukrainians are portrayed as Western puppets rather than agents with their own political aspirations; Sahelian populations are portrayed as victims of French neocolonialism rather than actors with complex relationships to both France and Russia. Third, the Russian perspective's emphasis on order and stability can justify authoritarianism: by treating any challenge to the status quo as Western-backed subversion, it delegitimizes legitimate grievances and democratic movements. Fourth, the Russian perspective's information warfare and disinformation campaigns—documented in multiple contexts—undermine its credibility as an analytical framework. Finally, the Russian perspective's economic and strategic interests in the Sahel (mining concessions, military bases) are obscured by its anti-imperialist rhetoric. These occlusions mean that the Russian perspective is most useful as a diagnostic of Western overreach and great-power security dilemmas, but least trustworthy as a normative guide.

2.7.4 Western Perspective The Western perspective on comparative conflict analysis is rooted in liberal internationalism: the belief that international order should be based on democratic governance, human rights, market economics, and multilateral institutions, and that the international community has a responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocities and to promote democratic transitions. This perspective has been the dominant framework in Western policy and academic circles since the end of the Cold War, and it shapes how the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia are analyzed and addressed.

The Western perspective's core contribution is its emphasis on human rights and civilian protection. In Ukraine, Western support for Ukrainian sovereignty, military assistance, sanctions against Russia, and documentation of war crimes reflect a commitment to the principle that territorial integrity and human rights are non-negotiable. The Western perspective treats Russia's invasion as an unprovoked act of aggression that threatens the entire post-1945 order, and argues that failure to resist it would embolden other revisionist powers. In West Asia, the Western perspective has been more ambivalent: it supported democratic uprisings during the Arab Spring but also backed authoritarian allies (Saudi Arabia, Egypt) when stability was prioritized over democracy. The intervention in Libya (2011) was justified on R2P grounds but produced a state collapse that the Western perspective has struggled to explain or remedy. In the Sahel, the Western perspective has focused on counterterrorism, governance reform, and development, with France and the EU leading military and civilian missions. The Western perspective's strength is its normative clarity: it identifies human rights violations, holds perpetrators accountable, and mobilizes resources for protection.

The Western perspective also contributes institutional frameworks. The UN Security Council, NATO, the EU, and various bilateral partnerships provide mechanisms for coordination, burden-sharing, and legitimacy. The Western perspective argues that these institutions, however imperfect, are superior to unilateral or ad hoc arrangements. In Ukraine, NATO's role in coordinating military assistance and the EU's sanctions regime demonstrate the effectiveness of institutionalized cooperation. In the Sahel, the EU's training missions and development programs complement French military operations. The Western perspective thus contributes a theory of institutional effectiveness: conflicts are best managed through multilateral frameworks that pool resources and share burdens.

However, the Western perspective occludes several critical dimensions. First, it tends to treat Western intervention as well-intentioned and to attribute failures to implementation rather than to structural flaws in the interventionist model. The "lessons learned" literature on Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya typically focuses on tactical errors—insufficient troops, inadequate planning, premature withdrawal—rather than questioning whether external military intervention can ever produce sustainable political order. Second, the Western perspective is marked by selectivity that undermines its credibility: it champions Ukrainian sovereignty while having undermined Iraqi, Libyan, and Syrian sovereignty; it condemns Russian war crimes while having committed or enabled atrocities in the "war on terror." This selectivity is not merely hypocritical; it is structural, reflecting the fact that Western foreign policy is driven by interests as well as values, and that the two are often in tension. Third, the Western perspective tends to overestimate the transferability of liberal institutions. The assumption that democracy, free markets, and rule of law can be exported to conflict zones has been repeatedly falsified, yet it persists as a default framework. Fourth, the Western perspective underweights the historical responsibility of Western powers for the conditions that produce conflict: colonialism, Cold War interventions, and economic structures that disadvantage the Global South. Finally, the Western perspective's focus on state-level and interstate dynamics can obscure the transnational and local dimensions of conflict that African and other perspectives highlight. These occlusions suggest that the Western perspective is most valuable as a source of normative standards and institutional resources, but least reliable as a causal theory of conflict.

2.7.5 UN Perspective The UN perspective on comparative conflict analysis is distinct from both the Western and the other perspectives in that it is not the view of a single state or bloc but an institutional vantage point shaped by the UN Charter, the Security Council, the General Assembly, and the specialized agencies. Its core commitments are multilateralism, the peaceful settlement of disputes, the protection of civilians, and the integration of security, development, and human rights. These commitments generate a distinctive approach to the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia that emphasizes comprehensive, multi-dimensional responses.

The UN perspective's first contribution is its legal framework. The UN Charter prohibits the use of force except in self-defense or with Security Council authorization, and this framework provides a common reference point for evaluating interventions. The UN perspective thus contributes a normative standard against which all other perspectives can be measured: French intervention in the Sahel, Russian intervention in Ukraine, and US intervention in West Asia are all subject to the same legal test. This is valuable because it prevents any single power from claiming exceptional status. The UN perspective also contributes the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, which holds that states have a responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, and that the international community has a responsibility to act when states fail. R2P has been invoked in Libya (2011) and Syria, with contested results, but it remains an important normative framework.

The UN perspective's second contribution is its operational capacity. UN peacekeeping missions—MINUSMA in Mali, various missions in West Asia, and the humanitarian coordination in Ukraine—provide on-the-ground presence, civilian protection, and support for political processes. The UN perspective argues that these missions, despite their limitations, are essential for stabilizing conflict zones and protecting civilians. In the Sahel, MINUSMA provided a framework for international engagement that was more legitimate than unilateral French intervention, though it was constrained by host-state consent and Security Council politics. In Ukraine, UN agencies have coordinated humanitarian assistance and documented violations. In West Asia, UN mediators have facilitated ceasefires and political processes. The UN perspective thus contributes a theory of operational multilateralism: conflicts are best managed through institutions that pool legitimacy and resources.

The UN perspective's third contribution is the development-peace nexus. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the peacebuilding architecture, and the "sustaining peace" agenda all reflect the view that conflict is rooted in underdevelopment, inequality, and weak institutions, and that durable peace requires addressing these root causes. This is particularly relevant to the Sahel, where the UN has promoted integrated approaches combining security, development, and governance. The UN perspective thus contributes a comprehensive theory of conflict that goes beyond military or diplomatic solutions.

What does the UN perspective occlude? First, it is constrained by Security Council politics. The P5 veto means that the UN cannot act decisively when great powers disagree, as in Syria and Ukraine. This structural limitation means that the UN perspective's normative commitments are often not matched by operational capacity. Second, the UN perspective depends on host-state consent, which can be withdrawn or manipulated, as in Mali's expulsion of MINUSMA. Third, the UN perspective can be captured by powerful states: the Security Council's composition reflects 1945 power realities, and reform efforts have stalled. Fourth, the UN perspective's comprehensive approach can be diluted by bureaucratic fragmentation: different agencies pursue different mandates, and coordination is often poor. Fifth, the UN perspective's emphasis on consensus can produce lowest-common-denominator outcomes that fail to address the root causes of conflict. These occlusions mean that the UN perspective is most valuable as a source of legitimacy and coordination, but least effective as an independent actor when great powers are in conflict. The UN perspective's core

recommendation—that conflicts require multi-dimensional responses addressing security, development, and governance simultaneously—remains valid, but its implementation depends on the political will of member states, which is often lacking.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African (primary)	Centers post-colonial state formation, external extraction, and local agency; shows how intervention reproduces dependency	Can underweight intra-elite predation and variation in state capacity across cases	Sovereignty, self-determination, and reparative justice	Sahelian coups and jihadist expansion linked to weak states and competitive external intervention	Western: overemphasizes colonial legacy and underweights universal human-rights obligations
Chinese	Defends sovereignty and non-interference; links security to development and state capacity	Downplays accountability, minority protection, and the costs of authoritarian consolidation	Multipolarity, territorial integrity, and development-first order	Opposition to externally engineered regime change in West Asia; emphasis on state capacity	Western: legitimizes authoritarianism and excuses coercion by powerful states
Russian	Articulates anti-hegemonic critique of NATO expansion and Western unilateralism	Masks its own interventions and presents sphere-of-influence claims as defensive	Multipolar security order and great-power equality	Framing of Ukraine as NATO-driven crisis; intervention in Syria as counterterrorism	Western: converts security dilemma rhetoric into justification for aggression
Western	Defends liberal order, alliance security, human rights, and resistance to aggression	Universalizes its own interests and underweights intervention asymmetries	Rules-based order and democratic sovereignty	Sustained support for Ukrainian resistance; sanctions and alliance coordination	African: applies sovereignty norms unevenly across regions and races

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
UN	Provides legitimacy, humanitarian norms, peacekeeping frameworks, and multidimensional coordination	Depends on great-power consensus; bureaucratic fragmentation dilutes implementation	Collective security and human protection	Humanitarian access frameworks and multidimensional missions where consent exists	All major powers: lowest-common-denominator outcomes fail to address root causes

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: Comparative analysis of the Sahel (2012–present), Ukraine (2014–present), and West Asia (2011–present).

This worked example treats three conflicts not as isolated tragedies but as a comparative field. Each began with a crisis of political order in the 2010s; each drew in external powers; each produced large-scale violence; yet their trajectories diverged. The Sahel moved from localized insurgency to regionalized jihadist violence and serial military coups; Ukraine moved from hybrid war to full-scale interstate war and national mobilization; West Asia moved from uprising to state collapse, proxy war, and partial authoritarian reconstitution. Comparative analysis asks why similar shocks produced different paths. The answer is not a single variable but an interaction among state capacity, intervention structure, and transnational networks. Methodologically, the cases form a most-similar design on timing, externalization, and violence, while differing on state capacity and regional order; that difference is precisely what the mechanism must explain.

Levels of analysis. At the individual level, leadership choices and armed-group entrepreneurship matter: jihadist commanders in the Sahel, Ukrainian and Russian political-military elites, and Syrian regime and rebel leaders made decisions that narrowed or widened escalation. Yet individuals operated within constraints; the same leader in a stronger state faces different options, and insurgent entrepreneurs exploit gaps created by institutional weakness. At the state level, the contrast is sharpest. Ukraine retained enough institutional capacity after 2014 to reform, mobilize, and absorb external support; Sahelian states experienced repeated breakdowns of civil-military relations; Syria's state collapsed in parts but was reconstituted through external backing. At the systemic level, the three cases sit in different regional orders: the Sahel in a post-colonial security architecture dominated by France and then contested by Russia; Ukraine in a European order structured by NATO and Russian claims; West Asia in a multipolar arena involving the United States, Iran, Russia, Turkey, and Gulf states. At the transnational level, arms, fighters, refugees, finance, and ideology cross borders: jihadist networks in the Sahel, diaspora and sanctions-evasion channels around Ukraine, and transnational militias and refugee flows in West Asia. The comparative lesson is that transnational flows amplify local crises, but their effects depend on state and systemic filters.

Mechanism. The core mechanism can be stated as a conditional chain: (1) a legitimacy or capacity shock weakens the state's monopoly of force; (2) armed actors mobilize around grievances, ideology, or elite com-

petition; (3) external powers intervene to protect interests, allies, or norms; (4) intervention alters the local balance of power and often militarizes politics; (5) the resulting trajectory depends on whether the state can still coordinate coercion and whether external actors compete or cooperate. In the Sahel, weak state capacity and competitive external intervention allowed jihadist and coup networks to exploit gaps; violence regionalized because borders were porous and states could not police them. In Ukraine, stronger state capacity and a relatively coherent external backer enabled sustained resistance, while Russian intervention produced interstate war rather than state collapse. In West Asia, state collapse in Syria and competitive multipolar intervention produced proxy war and fragmented sovereignty, with some states reconstituting through external support. Thus the same broad process—crisis plus intervention—yields state breakdown, national defense, or proxy fragmentation depending on capacity and intervention structure.

Perspective reconstruction. The African perspective, treated as primary, reads the three cases through the lens of post-colonial state formation and global racialized hierarchy. It argues that the Sahel is not an exception but a revealing case: externally imposed security frameworks, from French Operation Barkhane to Russian Wagner or Africa Corps deployments, have repeatedly prioritized external interests over local legitimacy, while coups reflect both elite predation and popular exhaustion with civilian governments that failed to deliver security. It further notes that Ukraine received rapid, large-scale Western support that Sahelian states did not, exposing an unequal global valuation of lives and sovereignty; West Asia, meanwhile, shows how great powers can devastate societies while invoking order. On this view, comparative analysis must begin with the historical production of weak states and unequal intervention, not treat all three cases as equivalent units. The Chinese perspective emphasizes sovereignty, non-interference, and development: it sees Ukraine as a crisis triggered by NATO expansion and bloc confrontation, West Asia as a demonstration that externally engineered regime change produces chaos, and the Sahel as a governance and development problem that cannot be solved by foreign military bases. It recommends strengthening state capacity, respecting territorial integrity, and prioritizing economic development over coercive intervention. The Russian perspective frames the cases as evidence of Western hegemony and its limits: NATO expansion caused the Ukraine crisis; Western interventions in West Asia destabilized the region; and Sahelian governments turned to Russia because Western counterterrorism failed. It presents multipolarity as a corrective to unilateralism, while downplaying its own coercive actions. The Western perspective treats Ukraine as a defense of sovereignty against aggression, West Asia as a mix of atrocity, terrorism, and great-power rivalry, and the Sahel as a counterterrorism and stabilization challenge. It emphasizes alliances, sanctions, human rights, and military support, but often universalizes its own security preferences. The UN perspective stresses multidimensional responses: civilian protection, humanitarian access, peacekeeping where consent exists, and coordination across security, development, and governance. It is strongest where great powers allow consensus, as in some humanitarian frameworks, and weakest where they are directly opposed, as in Ukraine or Syria.

Explicit adjudication. No single perspective best explains all three cases. The African perspective provides the strongest account of the Sahel and correctly identifies the unequal global distribution of attention and support, but it under-specifies the variation in state capacity that allowed Ukraine to resist collapse and Syria to be reconstituted. The Western perspective best explains Ukraine's resistance and the normative stakes of aggression, yet it occludes how Western interventions and double standards shape perceptions in the Sahel and West Asia. The Chinese and Russian perspectives capture sovereignty concerns and anti-hegemonic grievances, but they risk excusing state violence and great-power coercion. The UN perspective supplies legitimacy and humanitarian coordination but lacks independent coercive power. The best-supported synthesis is conditional: where state capacity is relatively high and external backing is coherent, conflicts tend toward interstate or national-defense trajectories; where state capacity is low and external actors compete,

they tend toward fragmentation and coup cycles; where states collapse and multipolar intervention follows, proxy war and partial reconstitution are likely. Comparative analysis therefore does not yield one universal theory; it yields scope conditions for competing mechanisms.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

1. Define a most-similar systems design and a most-different systems design, then classify the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia cases. Which pair is most similar on state capacity, external intervention, and armed non-state actor presence, and which is most different on geopolitical stakes and intervention type?
2. Reconstruct the intervention logics in each case: France and Russia in the Sahel, US/NATO support in Ukraine, and US, Iranian, and Russian involvement in West Asia. For each, identify the stated mechanism (coercion, deterrence, proxy support, regime change, stabilization, or counterterrorism) and the mechanism most visible in outcomes.
3. Apply Kalyvas (2006) to explain how external intervention reshapes local cleavages. Distinguish collaboration, denunciation, and control, and identify which local actors gain or lose bargaining power when an external patron arrives.
4. Apply Tilly (1990) to compare whether intervention strengthens state-making, war-making, or neither. What observable indicators would show that a host state is converting external support into durable capacity rather than dependency?
5. Use Buzan and Wæver (2003) to compare regional security complexes. How does intervention in one theater alter threat perceptions, alliance patterns, and escalation risks in neighboring states?
6. Adjudicate across the five perspectives. Which perspective best explains variance in intervention outcomes across the three cases, and what evidence would falsify that judgment?

Model answer (continuous prose): A rigorous comparative analysis begins by refusing to treat the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia as interchangeable instances of "intervention." They are most similar in that all three involve contested sovereignty, armed non-state actors, and external powers using force or assistance to shape political outcomes; they are most different in the type of intervention and the level of geopolitical stakes. Ukraine is primarily an interstate war in which external support reinforces a recognized state's territorial defense; the Sahel is a fragmented internal conflict in which external counterterrorism has repeatedly substituted for, rather than rebuilt, state authority; West Asia is a multipolar proxy arena in which several external powers back competing state and non-state actors. The key causal question is therefore not whether intervention occurred, but whether it strengthened the host state's monopoly of violence and local legitimacy. Tilly's framework suggests that war-making can produce state-making only when external support is tied to fiscal extraction, bureaucratic consolidation, and accountable service delivery; where support bypasses the state or funds parallel security providers, it may produce warlordism or dependency. Kalyvas adds that intervention changes local cleavage dynamics: external patrons alter who can denounce rivals, who can claim protection, and which grievances become politically salient, often turning local disputes into components of a larger war. In the Sahel, this helps explain why counterterrorism campaigns can fragment authority and create opportunities for armed groups to present themselves as alternative providers of order. In Ukraine, external support has generally reinforced state capacity, though it also creates risks of escalation and long-term dependency. In West Asia, multiple interveners have produced overlapping sovereignties, with state capacity varying sharply by arena and patron. Realism explains why powers intervene to balance rivals, but it under-

predicts variation in local outcomes; political economy explains resource rents, arms flows, and smuggling networks that sustain violence; post-colonial critique explains how intervention can reproduce hierarchical sovereignty and constrain African or regional agency. The African perspective is especially important in the Sahel: it treats the crisis not merely as terrorism or state failure, but as a postcolonial problem of security dependency, uneven development, and external priorities that may not align with civilian protection. The Chinese perspective emphasizes sovereignty and non-interference while still accepting development-security linkages; the Russian perspective frames intervention as multipolar resistance to Western dominance; the Western perspective emphasizes liberal order, counterterrorism, and alliance credibility; the UN perspective emphasizes multilateral legitimacy, humanitarian protection, and civilian harm reduction. The strongest synthesis is that intervention outcomes depend on whether external power is converted into host-state bargaining capacity and local legitimacy. This claim is falsifiable: if higher levels of intervention consistently correlate with reduced civilian harm, improved service delivery, and stronger state authority across all three cases, then capacity-building explanations are supported; if intervention correlates with fragmentation regardless of its stated purpose, then structural dependency and proxy-competition explanations are stronger.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description: A regional organization proposes a joint stabilization force for a conflict zone resembling the Sahel: weak rural state presence, jihadist and militia violence, mineral smuggling, and competing French, Russian, and Gulf security offers. The force would combine counterterrorism operations with infrastructure projects and local mediation. Member states disagree over rules of engagement, intelligence sharing, and whether to negotiate with armed groups. Your memo must advise whether the force is likely to reduce violence or reproduce fragmentation, using comparative evidence from the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia. Treat external intervention not as a uniform treatment but as a set of mechanisms that interact with local cleavages, state capacity, and regional security complexes. Specify what evidence would change your recommendation.

(b) Required memo headings as prompts:

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal chain from intervention design to violence or stabilization, specifying scope conditions and the local actors who mediate outcomes.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would each explain the proposed force's likely effects, and identify what each perspective occludes.
- **Historical analogue:** Compare the proposed force to one or more historical interventions in the Sahel, Ukraine, or West Asia, explaining which features transfer and which do not.
- **Falsifiers:** State observable evidence that would support or undermine your recommendation, including indicators of state capacity, civilian harm, and regional escalation.

(c) Self-check: Have you kept description, explanation, prediction, and prescription analytically separate, and flagged where the evidence is insufficient to support a firm recommendation?

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

In a most-similar systems design comparing the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia, which variable best explains why external intervention is associated with stronger state capacity in one case but fragmentation in others?

A. The total volume of external military spending. B. Whether intervention reinforces or fragments the host

state's monopoly of violence and local bargaining capacity. C. The geographic size of the conflict zone. D. The presence of a United Nations peacekeeping mission.

Correct answer: B.

Distractor diagnoses: - A is wrong because spending volume is an input, not a mechanism; high spending can fund either state capacity or parallel armed actors. - C is wrong because geographic size is descriptive and does not explain variation in state authority or intervention effects. - D is wrong because institutional presence alone does not establish whether an intervention strengthens host-state bargaining, legitimacy, or service delivery.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Table 1 — Conflict Event Intensity by Region (ACLED, approximate annual patterns, 2012–2024)

Region / Sub-period	Avg. annual battle events	Avg. annual violence vs. civilians	Overall trajectory
Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger), 2012–2018	Low–moderate	Low	Rising slowly
Sahel, 2019–2024	High	Very high	Sharply rising; geographic spread
Ukraine (Donbas), 2014–2021	Moderate	Low–moderate	Stable / slowly declining
Ukraine, 2022–2024	Very high	High	Massive spike; conventional war
Syria, 2011–2016	Very high	Very high	Peak intensity
Syria, 2017–2024	Moderate	Moderate	Declining; fragmented stalemate

Source: ACLED event data (approximate ranges; ACLED counts are event-based, media-dependent, and undercount in remote or low-access areas).

Table 2 — External Intervention Timelines

Actor	Region	Entry	Modality	Status (2024)
France (Serval/Barkhane)	Sahel	2013	Counter-terrorism, air + ground	Withdrew 2022
Russia (Wagner/Africa Corps)	Sahel	2021	Counter-terrorism, advisory, mining-linked	Expanding
US/NATO	Ukraine	2014 (aid); 2022 (massive)	Arms, intelligence, training	Ongoing

Actor	Region	Entry	Modality	Status (2024)
US	Syria/West Asia	2014	Air strikes, special operations	Reduced footprint
Iran (IRGC, proxies)	Syria/Lebanon/Iraq	2011+	Advisors, militias, logistics	Entrenched
Russia	Syria	2015	Air power, naval basing	Entrenched

Source: intervention chronologies compiled from ACLED and open-source reporting; dates are approximate.

Table 3 — Civilian Harm and Displacement (approximate, ACLED/UN estimates)

Region	Period	Civilian fatalities (approx.)	Displaced persons (approx.)
Sahel	2012–2024	Tens of thousands	Millions
Ukraine	2014–2024	Tens of thousands (majority post-2022)	Millions (internal + refugee)
Syria	2011–2024	Hundreds of thousands	Millions (largest displacement crisis)

Source: ACLED fatality estimates and UNHCR displacement figures (approximate ranges; civilian/combatant distinction is contested in all three cases).

Five Numbered Analysis Questions

1. **Trend.** Describe the trajectory of violence in each region using Table 1. Which region shows a "late escalation" pattern (low early, sharp late rise), which shows "early peak then fragmentation," and which shows "stable low-intensity then sudden conventionalization"? What does this imply about the role of external intervention timing?

2. **Level of analysis.** Using the four levels from Lesson 1 (individual, state, systemic, transnational), which level best explains the *variation* across the three cases? Argue for one level as primary and one as secondary, and identify what each level cannot explain.

3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct how the African (primary), Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each read the three cases together. For each perspective, state (a) its central causal claim about why the three trajectories differ, (b) the evidence it privileges, and (c) the evidence it must downplay or ignore.

4. **Interpretation.** Apply most-similar and most-different designs. Which pair of cases is most-similar (shared features, different outcome) and which is most-different (shared outcome, different features)? What causal inference does each design license, and what does it forbid?

5. **Limitation.** Identify three specific biases in ACLED-based comparison across these three regions (e.g., media-density bias, definitional variation in "civilian," undercounting in remote Sahelian zones, conflation of battle and one-sided violence). How would each bias change the apparent ranking of regions by severity?

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — Most-Similar / Most-Different Design Matrix

What to draw: A 2×2 grid on a landscape page. X-axis: "State capacity / institutional strength" (low → high). Y-axis: "External intervention intensity" (low → high). Place three large dots: Sahel (low capacity, high intervention), Ukraine (moderate-high capacity, high intervention), Syria (low capacity, very high intervention). Draw dashed ellipses grouping Sahel+Syria as "most-similar on capacity" and Ukraine+Syria as "most-similar on intervention." Label the diagonal "most-different pair: Sahel vs. Ukraine."

Labels to place: Axis titles; case names with years; ellipse labels "Most-similar (capacity)" and "Most-similar (intervention)"; diagonal label "Most-different"; legend: "Dot size = civilian fatalities (approx.)."

Perspective overlay: In the bottom-right corner, annotate four small boxes: "African: capacity collapse is colonial legacy"; "Chinese: sovereignty violation drives escalation"; "Russian: Western intervention is the common cause"; "Western: state fragility + spoiler groups"; "UN: protection gaps." Draw thin lines from each box to the case it best explains.

Visual 2 — Three Trajectories Timeline

What to draw: Three horizontal timelines stacked vertically, each 2011–2024. Top: Sahel (Mali 2012 coup, French intervention 2013, spread to Burkina/Niger 2019, Wagner entry 2021, coups 2020–2023). Middle: Ukraine (Euromaidan 2014, Donbas war, Minsk 2015, 2022 invasion, counteroffensives). Bottom: Syria/West Asia (2011 uprising, regime survival, Russian entry 2015, ISIS peak 2014–2017, stalemate). Use vertical bars whose height = approximate event intensity; shade intervention periods in grey.

Labels to place: Year ticks every two years; event labels at peaks; legend for bar height = "ACLED events (approx.)"; grey shading = "major external intervention."

Perspective overlay: Along the right margin, three short annotations: "African lens: Sahel line shows intervention without legitimacy"; "Chinese lens: Ukraine line shows bloc confrontation"; "Western lens: Syria line shows proxy war." Keep each to one line.

Visual 3 — Five-Perspective Lens Diagram

What to draw: A central triangle labeled "Three conflicts (Sahel / Ukraine / Syria)" with three vertices. Around it, five concentric or radial "lenses" (ovals) labeled African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN. Each lens has two arrows: one pointing inward (what it sees) and one pointing outward (what it misses). Draw the African lens largest and closest to the center; the others smaller and peripheral.

Labels to place: Lens names; inward arrow labels: "African: colonial state, extraction, agency"; "Chinese: sovereignty, non-interference"; "Russian: multipolarity, Western overreach"; "Western: democracy, security, norms"; "UN: protection, humanitarian law." Outward arrow labels: "African: misses great-power

agency?"; "Chinese: misses local agency"; "Russian: misses local suffering"; "Western: misses structural inequality"; "UN: misses power politics."

Perspective overlay: Shade the African lens in a distinct color (e.g., amber) to mark it as primary; add a note "Primary vantage: reconstructed from within, not applied as regional case."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue Column (prompts) and Notes Column

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
What is most-similar design?	Compare cases sharing many features but differing on outcome/cause; isolates the differing factor. Source: comparative conflict literature; Mill's methods.
What is most-different design?	Compare cases differing on many features but sharing an outcome; identifies common cause across diversity. Source: comparative conflict literature.
Sahel trajectory in one line?	Low-intensity insurgency (2012) → French intervention → spread and militarization → coups → Russian entry → civilian harm surge. Source: ACLED; Buzan & Wæver 2003 (regional security complex).
Ukraine trajectory in one line?	Protest (2014) → hybrid war in Donbas → Minsk stalemate → 2022 full-scale invasion → conventional war with external support. Source: ACLED; Tilly 1990 (state-making/war-making).
Syria/West Asia trajectory in one line?	Uprising (2011) → regime survival with external backing → proxy war → ISIS → Russian/Iranian entrenchment → frozen conflict. Source: ACLED; Kalyvas 2006 (civil war dynamics).
African perspective core claim?	Colonial state structures, extraction, and external intervention without legitimacy drive escalation; local agency is central. Sources: Grovogui; Mbembe; Mamdani; Rodney; Nkrumah.
Chinese perspective core claim?	Sovereignty violation and bloc confrontation destabilize; non-interference and development are stabilizers. Sources: Chinese IR scholarship; UN Charter norms.
Russian perspective core claim?	Western unipolarity and interventionism are root causes; multipolarity and state sovereignty are remedies. Sources: Russian foreign-policy discourse.

Cue (prompt)	Notes (with source log)
Western perspective core claim?	State fragility, spoiler groups, and norm violations drive conflict; democracy promotion and security assistance are remedies. Sources: Western IR; Kalyvas 2006.
UN perspective core claim?	Protection gaps, humanitarian law violations, and weak multilateralism; remedies are mandates, peacekeeping, accountability. Sources: UN Charter; R2P debates.
Key synthesis claim?	No single theory explains all three; realism explains intervention, political economy explains extraction, post-colonial critique explains state form. Sources: Tilly 1990; Buzan & Wæver 2003; Kalyvas 2006.
Forecasting implication?	Trajectories are path-dependent; intervention timing and legitimacy matter more than capacity alone. Source: comparative conflict literature.
Policy implication?	Recommendations diverge by perspective; convergence only on civilian protection and de-escalation channels. Source: UN; regional organizations.
Data limitation?	ACLED is event-based, media-dependent, undercounts remote areas; civilian/combatant distinction contested. Source: ACLED methodology notes.

Source log: Buzan, B. & Wæver, O. (2003) *Regions and Powers*; Tilly, C. (1990) *Coercion, Capital, and European States*; Kalyvas, S. (2006) *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*; ACLED data and methodology; UNHCR displacement figures; comparative conflict literature; African scholarship (Grovogui, Mbembe, Mamdani, Rodney, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Cabral, Fanon).

Summary (3–5 sentences): Comparative analysis of the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia shows that conflict trajectories are shaped by the interaction of state capacity, external intervention timing and legitimacy, and transnational networks, with no single theory sufficient. Most-similar designs highlight intervention legitimacy as a key differentiator; most-different designs highlight external great-power competition as a common driver. The African perspective, reconstructed from within, reveals that colonial state forms and extraction structures are preconditions that other perspectives underweight. Forecasting must be scenario-based and path-dependent, and policy recommendations diverge sharply by perspective, converging only on civilian protection and de-escalation.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

Step 1 — Explain without jargon. Three regions have been at war for years. In the Sahel, a small rebellion grew into a huge crisis after foreign armies arrived and local governments lost legitimacy. In Ukraine, a

political protest turned into a border war and then a full invasion. In Syria, a popular uprising became a multi-sided war with many outside powers. Comparing them shows that wars grow when outside help arrives without local trust, and that the same outside power can make things better or worse depending on whether locals accept it. No single story explains all three; you need several lenses.

Step 2 — Mark gaps. I have not specified the mechanism linking intervention timing to escalation (is it legitimacy, capacity, or signaling?). I have not quantified the "local trust" variable. I have not addressed whether the three cases are comparable given different regime types. I have not stated falsifiers for the claim that intervention without legitimacy escalates conflict.

Step 3 — Reread verification. Re-reading the key ideas: comparative methodology (most-similar/most-different) licenses causal claims only when cases are selected on theoretical grounds, not convenience. The synthesis claim requires that realism, political economy, and post-colonial critique be treated as complementary scope-conditions, not rivals. Forecasting must be conditional and scenario-based, not point prediction. Policy implications must be perspective-indexed. The African perspective must remain primary and reconstructed from within.

Step 4 — Analogy with explicit limits. Analogy: three patients with different diseases receive the same drug; outcomes differ because of underlying health, dosage timing, and whether the patient consented. This captures path-dependence and legitimacy. Limit: patients are passive; states and armed groups are strategic actors who adapt, so the analogy understates agency and feedback loops.

Step 5 — Rewrite. Comparative conflict analysis treats the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia as a structured comparison rather than three separate stories. Using most-similar and most-different designs, it isolates intervention legitimacy and great-power competition as key variables while holding state capacity and transnational networks in view. The African perspective, taken as primary, shows that colonial state forms and extraction make the Sahel case distinctively legible; the other four perspectives add partial truths. Forecasting yields scenario-conditioned expectations, not predictions, and policy advice must be indexed to perspective, converging only on civilian protection and de-escalation.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L60	definition	What is most-similar systems design in comparative conflict analysis?	A research design that holds most variables constant across cases to isolate the effect of one or a few causal factors; in conflict studies it compares wars sharing structural features (state weakness, external intervention) to identify which intervention type produces different outcomes.	African scholars note that "similar" cases are often defined by Western categories that obscure local variation.
L60	definition	What is most-different systems design?	A design selecting cases differing on most dimensions but sharing the outcome of interest, used to test whether a theory holds across diverse contexts; in conflict analysis it tests whether resource predation or identity mobilization operates in the Sahel, Ukraine, and Syria alike.	Chinese and Russian scholars often favor this design to challenge Western universalism.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L60	mechanism	What mechanism links state fragility to prolonged insurgency?	Tilly's (1990) war-making/state-making nexus: where states cannot extract resources or provide protection, armed actors fill the gap, converting violence into political authority and taxation; Kalyvas (2006) adds that control of civilian populations, not territory alone, sustains insurgency.	African perspective emphasizes that fragility is partly produced by external extraction and post-colonial state forms.
L60	application	Apply most-similar design to the Sahel and Ukraine: what is held constant?	Both feature weak or contested state authority in peripheral regions, external military intervention, and non-state armed groups; the design isolates intervention type (French counter-terrorism vs. Russian hybrid warfare vs. US/NATO support) as the key variable.	Western analysts often overstate the similarity; African analysts stress different colonial legacies.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L60	comparison	How do the Sahel, Ukraine, and West Asia differ in conflict trajectory?	The Sahel shows fragmented, multi-actor insurgency with jihadist expansion and state collapse; Ukraine shows interstate war with conventional fronts and a nuclear backdrop; West Asia shows proxy war with sectarian framing and regional power competition.	Each trajectory reflects a distinct regional security complex (Buzan and Wæver 2003).
L60	source	What does Buzan and Wæver (2003) contribute to comparative conflict analysis?	Regional Security Complex Theory: security interdependence is clustered regionally, so conflicts must be analyzed within their regional complexes; the Sahel, Eastern Europe, and West Asia constitute separate complexes with different logics.	UN perspective draws on RSC to justify regional mediation architectures.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L60	debate	Realism vs. political economy: what explains prolonged conflict?	Realism emphasizes anarchy, power balancing, and external intervention; political economy emphasizes resource extraction, war economies, and elite incentives; the debate turns on whether violence is driven by security dilemmas or profit.	Post-colonial critique argues both miss racialized and colonial dimensions.
L60	reconstruction	Reconstruct the African perspective on comparative conflict.	African scholarship (Mamdani, Bayart, Rodney) treats conflict as shaped by colonial state forms, external extraction, and the international system's racial hierarchy; comparative analysis must center African agency and the longue durée of imperialism.	Primary perspective; longest and most developed in Section 2.7.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L60	occlusion	What does the Western perspective occlude in comparative conflict analysis?	It tends to universalize liberal state-building models, underweight colonial legacies, and frame non-Western actors as spoilers rather than rational strategists; it also undercounts civilian harm from Western interventions.	African and Russian critiques converge on this point.
L60	adjudication	How should one adjudicate between realism and post-colonial critique on Ukraine?	Realism explains the NATO-Russia security dilemma and great-power bargaining; post-colonial critique explains how colonial and racial hierarchies shape whose sovereignty is defended; evidence favors a synthesis: security dilemma plus racialized international order.	Adjudication requires specifying scope conditions for each theory.
L60	visual	What visual anchor captures the three-trajectory comparison?	A three-panel timeline (Sahel 2012-, Ukraine 2014-, West Asia 2011-) with intervention markers and civilian-casualty trend lines, annotated by perspective.	Dual-coded visuals must show perspective overlays, not just data.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L60	mechanism	What is the war economy mechanism in prolonged conflict?	Armed actors tax populations, control smuggling routes, and extract rents; violence becomes self-financing, reducing incentives for peace; Tilly (1990) and Kalyvas (2006) both stress resource extraction as state-making.	African scholars (Bayart) emphasize extraversion: elites profit from external linkages.
L60	application	What forecasting implication follows from comparing the three cases?	Conflicts with fragmented armed actors and weak state capacity (Sahel) tend toward protracted low-intensity war; interstate wars with nuclear powers (Ukraine) risk escalation; proxy wars (West Asia) tend toward frozen conflicts.	Forecasting must be probabilistic and perspective-aware.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
L60	debate	What policy recommendation would each perspective make?	Western: state-building and liberal peace; African: decolonize security assistance and center local legitimacy; Chinese: development-first and non-interference; Russian: multipolarity and anti-hegemony; UN: multilateral mediation and protection of civilians.	Policy divergence tracks normative stance.
L60	source	What does Kalyvas (2006) contribute?	The Logic of Violence in Civil War: violence is shaped by control of populations and information; indiscriminate violence often backfires; selective violence requires local knowledge.	Applies across all three cases but with different local logics.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence audit table (scored 0-100).

Skill / Objective	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Gap to close
Distinguish most-similar from most-different designs		Can state which variables are held constant and which vary	Practice applying to a new case pair
Apply five perspectives to all three cases		Can reconstruct each perspective in 3-5 sentences	Deepen African primary perspective

Skill / Objective	Self-score (0-100)	Evidence of mastery	Gap to close
Identify mechanisms (Tilly, Kalyvas, war economy)		Can specify causal chain, not just outcome	Link mechanism to observable implication
Forecast from comparative evidence		Can produce probabilistic, scenario-based claims	Add falsifiers to each forecast
Reconstruct policy recommendations by perspective		Can match recommendation to normative stance	Note where perspectives converge
Adjudicate between competing theories		Can specify scope conditions and evidence	Avoid declaring a single winner
Interpret ACLED-style data across regions		Can distinguish trend, level, and limitation	Check for reporting bias
Construct dual-coded visual anchor		Can overlay perspective annotations on data	Ensure labels are legible

7.2 Three-question debrief.

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to steel-man from within, and what assumption of yours blocked it?
2. Did your comparative analysis change any prior belief about one of the three conflicts, or only confirm it?
3. Which mechanism (state-making, war economy, control of civilians) best explains the case you know least well, and what evidence would falsify that?

7.3 Error-log table.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Most-similar design means the cases are identical.	It holds most variables constant to isolate one or a few; cases remain distinct in history and agency.	Comparative methodology literature; African critique of category-making.
Realism fully explains Ukraine.	The security dilemma is partial; domestic politics, identity, and racialized international order also matter.	Post-colonial and constructivist critiques; adjudication in Section 2.8.
African conflicts are primarily about resources or ethnicity.	Post-colonial state forms, external extraction, and international racial hierarchy are constitutive.	Mamdani, Bayart, Rodney; African perspective in Section 2.7.1.

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
External intervention always stabilizes.	Intervention often prolongs conflict by altering incentive structures; evidence from Sahel and Libya.	Kalyvas (2006) on control; ACLED trend data.
Forecasting can predict exact outcomes.	Comparative analysis yields probabilistic, scenario-based expectations with explicit falsifiers.	Forecasting implications in Key Idea 4.
The UN perspective is neutral.	It is embedded in power asymmetries and institutional mandates that shape what is visible.	UN perspective in Section 2.7.5.

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core concepts	Key mechanisms	Theories and authors	Cases and evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-links
Most-similar / most-different designs; regional security complex; comparative conflict analysis	War-making/state-making (Tilly 1990); control of civilians (Kalyvas 2006); war economy; extraversion	Buzan and Wæver (2003); Tilly (1990); Kalyvas (2006); Mamdani, Bayart, Rodney; realism, political economy, post-colonial critique	Sahel 2012- (fragmented insurgency, jihadist expansion); Ukraine 2014- (interstate war, nuclear backdrop); West Asia 2011- (proxy war, sectarian framing); ACLED event data; intervention timelines	Realism vs. political economy; universalism vs. post-colonial critique; stabilization vs. prolongation	If Sahel insurgency declines without state capacity gains; if Ukraine de-escalates via great-power deal alone; if West Asia proxy war resolves via local actors only	L1 levels of analysis; L61 grand strategy; Modules 4-7 regional cases

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

- **R1 (Day 1, 20 min):** Re-read the flashcard table; self-test the five perspective reconstructions aloud without notes.
- **R2 (Day 3, 30 min):** Redraw the three-panel timeline visual anchor from memory; check against Section 3.

- **R3 (Day 7, 45 min):** Re-attempt the Problem Pair tasks; compare to the model answer; log errors in Section 7.3 format.
- **R4 (Day 14, 60 min):** Write a one-page adjudication between realism and post-colonial critique using the Ukraine case; specify scope conditions.
- **R5 (Day 30, 90 min):** Produce a fresh independent memo on a new case pair (e.g., Sudan vs. Myanmar) using the four headings; run the self-check line.

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define most-similar and most-different designs and apply each to a case pair.
- ☐ I can state what Buzan and Wæver (2003) Regional Security Complex Theory implies for the three cases.
- ☐ I can explain Tilly's (1990) war-making/state-making mechanism in my own words.
- ☐ I can explain Kalyvas's (2006) control-of-civilians mechanism and its scope conditions.
- ☐ I can describe the Sahel trajectory (2012-present) with dates and actors.
- ☐ I can describe the Ukraine trajectory (2014-present) with dates and actors.
- ☐ I can describe the West Asia trajectory (2011-present) with dates and actors.
- ☐ I can reconstruct all five perspectives on the three cases, African first and longest.
- ☐ I can identify what each perspective occludes.
- ☐ I can adjudicate between realism and political economy with evidence.
- ☐ I can produce a probabilistic forecast with explicit falsifiers.
- ☐ I can match each perspective to its policy recommendation.
- ☐ I can interpret ACLED-style data noting trend, level, and limitation.
- ☐ I can draw the three-panel timeline visual anchor with perspective overlays.
- ☐ I have completed the independent memo and run the self-check line.
- ☐ I have logged at least two errors in the error-log table.
- ☐ I can state the strongest counterargument to my preferred theory.
- ☐ I can link this lesson forward to L61 grand strategy and backward to Modules 4-7.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Comparative methodology - Tilly, C. (1990). *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992*. Blackwell. - Kalyvas, S. N. (2006). *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. Cambridge University Press. - Buzan, B., and Wæver, O. (2003). *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge University Press.

African perspective (primary) - Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press. - Bayart, J.-F. (1993). *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. Longman. - Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture.

Realism and political economy - Mearsheimer, J. J. (2014). "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault." *Foreign Affairs*. - Collier, P., and Hoeffler, A. (2004). "Greed and Grievance in Civil War." *Oxford Economic Papers*.

Post-colonial and critical perspectives - Grovogui, S. N. (2006). *Beyond Eurocentrism and Anarchy*. Palgrave Macmillan. - Mbembe, A. (2001). *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press.

UN and multilateral perspectives - United Nations. (2004). *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* (High-Level Panel Report).

End of Lesson 60. Say **Next** when you are ready.

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62. Capstone II: Grand Strategy for a Middle Power

LESSON METADATA

Field	Value
Lesson number and title	Lesson 61 — Capstone II: Grand Strategy for a Middle Power
Module	Module 10: Forecasting, Diplomacy, and Capstones
Prerequisites	All previous lessons (Lessons 1–60)
Interleaved links	Terminal — integrates the whole curriculum; feeds back into Lessons 1–60 via case application
Reading load	7-9 hours
Content channels	Text, data lab, worked example, problem pair, flashcards, Cornell notes, Feynman compression
Bloom ceiling	Create / Evaluate (design a grand strategy for a specified middle power under constraints)
Estimated study time	7-9 hours

SECTION 0 — Why This Lesson Exists

This lesson exists because the curriculum has, up to this point, equipped you with a set of analytical instruments — levels of analysis, causal mechanisms, perspective reconstruction, adjudication, falsification — but has not yet asked you to *assemble* them into a single, coherent strategic judgment about a state that is neither a great power nor a passive object of great-power politics. The capstone is not a summary. It is a stress test. It takes the full toolkit and applies it to the hardest case in contemporary international relations: the middle power that must survive, prosper, and retain agency in a fragmented order in which the two largest economies are locked in strategic competition, the multilateral institutions built after 1945 are under strain, and the very definition of "alignment" has become contested. The central puzzle is this: **how does a state with limited material power but significant normative and institutional ambition construct a grand strategy that is simultaneously feasible, legitimate, and resilient across the time horizons that matter for its survival?** The answer is not a single doctrine. It is a method for reasoning about trade-offs that cannot be eliminated, only managed.

The puzzle matters because the international system of the 2020s is not the unipolar moment of the 1990s, nor the bipolar stability of the Cold War, nor the multipolar fluidity of the pre-1914 era. It is something analytically novel: a system in which power is concentrated at the top (the United States and China), diffused in the middle (a tier of states with regional reach and institutional voice), and fragmented at the bottom (weak

states, non-state actors, and transnational threats). In such a system, the middle power occupies a structurally ambiguous position. It is too strong to be ignored, too weak to dictate terms, and too consequential to be treated as a mere swing state. Its choices — alignment, hedging, multi-alignment, autonomy — shape regional orders, institutional legitimacy, and the distribution of global public goods. Yet the theoretical literature on grand strategy has been written overwhelmingly from the perspective of great powers: the United States, the Soviet Union, China, the United Kingdom. The middle power is either absent from the theory or treated as a residual category. This lesson corrects that asymmetry by placing the middle power at the center of strategic analysis and by insisting that its perspective — not the great power's — is the appropriate vantage point from which to understand the contemporary order.

The curriculum has prepared you for this through a specific sequence. Lessons 1–10 established the epistemological and methodological foundations: what counts as evidence, how to distinguish description from explanation from prediction from prescription, and how to adjudicate between competing theories. Lessons 11–20 developed the theoretical architecture of international relations: realism, liberalism, constructivism, and the critical and post-colonial traditions. Lessons 21–30 examined the historical and institutional structures of the international order: the United Nations, regional organizations, international law, and the global economy. Lessons 31–40 turned to security studies: war, deterrence, coercion, and the changing character of conflict. Lessons 41–50 addressed political economy: trade, finance, development, and the distribution of gains from globalization. Lessons 51–60 examined diplomacy, negotiation, and forecasting — the practical arts of statecraft. This lesson, Lesson 61, is the terminal integration. It does not introduce new theory. It demands that you *deploy* the theory you already possess in a context where no single theory is sufficient and where the choice of theory is itself a strategic act.

What you will be able to do after mastering this lesson is threefold. First, you will be able to construct a grand strategy for a specified middle power from the ground up: defining its interests, mapping its threats, inventorying its resources, and selecting among strategic options with explicit scope conditions and falsifiers. Second, you will be able to reconstruct the same strategic problem from five distinct perspectives — African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN — and to adjudicate among them on the basis of evidence rather than assertion. Third, you will be able to identify the domestic political constraints on strategy-making and to explain why the same external environment produces different strategic choices in different states. These are not academic exercises. They are the skills required of a policy analyst, a diplomat, a strategic planner, or a scholar who wishes to speak to practitioners without losing analytical rigor.

The lesson is also designed to correct a persistent bias in the teaching of international relations: the tendency to treat the "international" as synonymous with the "great-power." When the curriculum is built around Washington, Beijing, Moscow, and Brussels, the student learns to see the world from the center. The middle power is then either a dependent variable — its behavior explained by great-power pressure — or a nuisance variable — its agency acknowledged but not theorized. This lesson inverts that framing. It treats the middle power as the independent variable and asks what the international system looks like from Jakarta, Pretoria, Brasília, Ankara, or Seoul. The answer is not that the great powers disappear. They remain the primary structural constraints. But the middle power's experience of those constraints — its vulnerabilities, its opportunities, its normative commitments, its domestic politics — reveals dimensions of the order that the great-power vantage point systematically obscures. The African perspective, which is primary in this lesson, is particularly important here because it foregrounds questions of sovereignty, agency, and historical justice that the Western and Chinese perspectives tend to treat as secondary to material power.

Finally, this lesson is a capstone in a second sense: it is the last opportunity in the curriculum to practice the

full analytical protocol before you are expected to deploy it independently. The worked example (Indonesia) and the problem pair (South Africa) are not illustrations of a theory. They are training grounds for a method. The method is: state the puzzle, identify the level of analysis, reconstruct the mechanism, test it against evidence, reconstruct the perspectives, adjudicate, and specify falsifiers. If you can execute this protocol on Indonesia and South Africa, you can execute it on any middle power in any region. That is the claim this lesson makes, and it is the standard against which your mastery will be assessed.

SECTION 1 — Pre-Class Priming

1.1 Retrieval Warm-Up Answer each question from memory before consulting any notes. The purpose is to activate prior knowledge that this lesson will integrate.

1. **Levels of analysis.** Lesson 1 introduced four levels of analysis: individual, state, systemic, and transnational. For each level, give one example of a causal mechanism that operates primarily at that level in the study of international security. (Recall: mechanisms must specify *how* an outcome is produced, not merely *that* it occurs.)

2. **Grand strategy vs. strategy vs. tactics.** Distinguish the three concepts. Which of the three is most dependent on domestic political coalitions, and why? (Hint: recall the distinction between ends, ways, and means, and the role of institutional capacity in sustaining each.)

3. **Hedging.** Define hedging as a strategic behavior. Under what scope conditions does hedging become unsustainable? Identify at least two conditions (one material, one normative) under which a state that has been hedging must choose a clearer alignment.

4. **Ontological security.** Recall the concept of ontological security from the security studies module. How does it differ from physical security? Give one historical example in which a state prioritized ontological security over material gain, and explain the mechanism.

5. **Multi-alignment.** Distinguish multi-alignment from non-alignment and from bandwagoning. What is the difference between multi-alignment as a *strategy* and multi-alignment as a *rhetoric*? What evidence would allow you to tell them apart in a given case?

6. **Perspective reconstruction.** State the five perspectives used throughout this curriculum (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN). For each, identify the core normative commitment that distinguishes it from the others. (This is a retrieval check on the method, not on any single lesson.)

1.2 Orientation Questions These questions frame the central puzzle of the lesson. You are not expected to answer them fully before reading; they are here to orient your attention.

1. If a middle power's material interests (trade, security guarantees, investment) pull it toward one great power while its normative commitments (sovereignty, anti-colonial solidarity, multilateralism) pull it toward another, which should prevail in the construction of grand strategy — and what does "prevail" even mean when the two are incommensurable?

2. Is "multi-alignment" a genuine grand strategy with identifiable scope conditions and falsifiers, or is it a description of behavior that any state exhibits when it lacks the power to choose? What evidence

would distinguish the two?

3. How does the domestic political structure of a middle power — its regime type, its coalition politics, its institutional capacity — constrain the range of grand strategies available to it? Can the same external environment produce different strategies in different states, and if so, what explains the variation?

4. What does the African vantage point reveal about the middle-power problem that the Western, Chinese, Russian, and UN perspectives systematically miss? Conversely, what does the African perspective risk occluding?

1.3 Vocabulary Pre-Teach Provisional definitions for terms that will be used throughout the lesson. These are starting points; the lesson will refine and contest them.

1. **Grand strategy** — The highest level of statecraft: the coordinated use of all instruments of national power (military, economic, diplomatic, informational) to achieve a state's long-term objectives in an anarchic international system. *Provisional note:* The definition is contested; some scholars (Posen, 2014) restrict grand strategy to military-diplomatic coordination, while others (Brands, 2016) include economic and domestic policy. This lesson adopts the broader definition but flags the narrower one where relevant.

2. **Middle power** — A state that lacks the material capacity to shape the global order unilaterally but possesses sufficient resources, institutional standing, and regional influence to act as a consequential actor in specific issue-areas and regions. *Provisional note:* The category is analytically slippery; "middle power" is sometimes a description of capability, sometimes a self-identification, and sometimes a diplomatic strategy. The lesson treats it as a *relational* category: a state is a middle power relative to the great powers above it and the weak states below it.

3. **Strategic autonomy** — The capacity of a state to make and implement decisions in its core interest areas without being compelled by external actors. *Provisional note:* Autonomy is not independence; it is the *margin of maneuver* within constraints. A state with high autonomy can choose among options; a state with low autonomy faces a single option.

4. **Hedging** — A strategic behavior in which a state maintains ambiguous or dual relationships with competing great powers in order to preserve flexibility, avoid premature commitment, and reduce risk. *Provisional note:* Hedging is distinct from balancing (which is adversarial) and bandwagoning (which is submissive). It requires the state to send contradictory signals, which carries reputational costs.

5. **Multi-alignment** — The simultaneous pursuit of strategic partnerships with multiple, sometimes competing, great powers across different issue-areas, without a single overarching alliance commitment. *Provisional note:* Multi-alignment is often conflated with hedging, but it is broader: hedging is a *tactic* within a strategy of multi-alignment, which is a *grand strategy*.

6. **Ontological security** — The security of a state's (or society's) identity, narrative, and sense of self-continuity. *Provisional note:* Ontological security is not reducible to physical survival; a state may risk material loss to preserve its identity, and may accept material gain that threatens its identity only at the cost of internal instability.

7. **Non-alignment** — A foreign policy doctrine, historically associated with the Bandung Conference (1955) and the Non-Aligned Movement, in which states refuse to join military alliances with great

powers and assert sovereign equality. *Provisional note:* Non-alignment is not neutrality; it is an active political stance, not a passive absence of commitment.

8. **Bandwagoning** — The strategic choice to align with the stronger or rising power in anticipation of its victory or dominance, accepting subordinate status in exchange for protection or gain. *Provisional note:* Bandwagoning is the opposite of balancing; it is chosen when balancing is infeasible or when the costs of opposition exceed the costs of subordination.

9. **Scope conditions** — The specific circumstances under which a theory, mechanism, or strategy is expected to hold. *Provisional note:* A claim without scope conditions is unfalsifiable; specifying scope conditions is what makes a strategic argument testable.

10. **Falsifier** — An observable outcome that, if it occurs, would refute a strategic hypothesis or prediction. *Provisional note:* Falsifiers must be specified *before* the strategy is implemented, not constructed post hoc to explain failure.

11. **Relationality** — A concept from Chinese IR theory (and resonant with African communitarian thought) holding that actors are constituted by their relationships rather than by pre-given attributes; order emerges from relational practice, not from power distribution alone. *Provisional note:* Relationality challenges the methodological individualism of Western IR theory.

12. **Sovereign choice** — A concept from Russian IR discourse emphasizing the right of states to determine their own political and strategic orientation without external interference, often invoked to resist Western normative conditionality. *Provisional note:* Sovereign choice is both a legal principle (UN Charter Article 2.1) and a political rhetoric; the lesson examines when it functions as each.

End of requested sections. Section 2 and beyond are not included in this chunk.

SECTION 2 — LESSON CORE

2.1 Learning objectives By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Define** grand strategy as an integrative framework that links a state's interests, threats, resources, and strategic choices, rather than as a synonym for military planning or foreign policy ambition.

2. **Analyze** the causal mechanisms through which ends, ways, and means become aligned or misaligned, including prioritization, sequencing, opportunity cost, feedback between threat perception and resource mobilization, and path dependence created by prior commitments.

3. **Evaluate** competing grand-strategy frameworks—especially expansive, restraint-oriented, and middle-power variants—by their scope conditions, their assumptions about adversary behavior and domestic capacity, and their strongest counterarguments.

4. **Apply** the ends-ways-means diagnostic to a middle-power case by identifying the state's core interests, principal threats, feasible resources, and the strategic choices that follow, while distinguishing description, explanation, prediction, and prescription.

5. **Synthesize** African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives on middle-power grand strategy into a comparative judgment that specifies what each perspective contributes, what it occludes, and under what evidence one would revise the judgment.

2.2 KEY IDEA 1 — Grand strategy frameworks: defining interests, threats, resources, and strategic choices Bolded Causal Claim:

A state's grand strategy succeeds or fails primarily through the causal alignment of four components—interests as desired end-states, threats as dangers to those end-states, resources as feasible means, and strategic choices as the allocation of means across time, space, and domains—so that incoherence among these components can defeat a state even when its individual policies are technically competent.

Mechanism:

The mechanism is integrative prioritization under constraint. Interests establish the political object that all instruments are meant to serve; threats rank those interests by urgency and vulnerability; resources bound what is feasible; strategic choices then allocate scarce means among competing demands. Liddell Hart (1954) treated grand strategy as the coordination of all resources toward the political object, not merely the direction of military operations. Kennedy (1991) added the historical mechanism of overstretch: when commitments expand faster than productive and military resources, relative power declines even if absolute power grows. Posen (2014) sharpened the mechanism by arguing that restraint can be a strategy of deliberate non-use of power, reducing exposure and preserving freedom of action. Brands (2016) emphasized that grand strategy is an intellectual and institutional framework that forces trade-offs into view. The causal chain runs as follows: threat perception raises the salience of certain interests; salience drives resource mobilization; mobilization alters the state's capabilities and vulnerabilities; altered capabilities feed back into threat perception and into the credibility of commitments. Strategic choices are therefore not one-time decisions but path-dependent sequences. A choice to build a blue-water navy, for example, commits future budgets, alliance expectations, industrial capacity, and diplomatic signaling; it also invites countermeasures. Middle powers face a compressed version of this mechanism because their resources are thinner, their threats are often asymmetric, and their choices are made in the shadow of great-power rivalry. Gecelovsky (2009) and Beeson and Higgott (2014) are useful here for situating middle-power strategy in regional and institutional settings rather than treating it as a scaled-down great-power strategy. The mechanism also includes domestic translation: strategic choices must pass through legislatures, ministries, militaries, firms, and publics, so a grand strategy that is coherent on paper but unsupported domestically becomes a declaratory document rather than a causal force.

Scope Conditions:

This framework applies most strongly to states with (a) a relatively stable definition of core interests, (b) bureaucratic capacity to coordinate across military, economic, and diplomatic domains, (c) enough resource slack to make trade-offs meaningful rather than existential, and (d) a time horizon long enough for sequencing to matter. It applies less cleanly to revolutionary regimes, states facing imminent existential threat, highly fragmented polities, or governments whose survival depends on short-term patronage rather than long-term capability. For middle powers, the framework must be modified: their interests often include autonomy, status, and developmental capacity rather than only territorial security; their threats include dependence, coercion, and marginalization; their resources include diplomatic skill, institutional position, and economic niche advantages as well as military force. A strong counterargument is that grand strategy is often retrospective coherence imposed on ad hoc decisions: leaders may not possess the information, unity, or foresight

required to align ends, ways, and means, and scholars may overstate coherence by selecting successful cases. Another counterargument is that domestic politics, bureaucratic politics, and chance can override strategic design, making grand strategy an elite narrative rather than a causal mechanism. The framework should therefore be treated as a diagnostic and prescriptive tool, not as proof that states actually behave strategically.

Observable Implications:
If a grand strategy is coherent, one should observe cross-domain consistency: defense procurement, trade policy, alliance commitments, development finance, and diplomatic voting should point toward the same hierarchy of interests; budget documents should reveal explicit trade-offs; strategic white papers should state assumptions about threats and resources; and leaders should be able to explain what they are not doing as clearly as what they are doing. If incoherent, one should observe contradictory signals, simultaneous overcommitment and underinvestment, reactive crisis management, and a gap between declared priorities and fiscal allocations. For middle powers, coherent hedging should appear as diversification rather than contradiction: multiple partnerships, investment in autonomous capabilities, participation in competing institutions, and calibrated ambiguity about ultimate alignment. Metrics include defense spending as a share of GDP, trade concentration by partner, foreign direct investment dependence, UN voting alignment, diplomatic initiative density, and the institutionalization of strategic planning. A useful falsifier would be evidence that a state's major resource allocations and diplomatic commitments are better explained by domestic factional competition or by external great-power pressure than by an internally generated ends-ways-means logic.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):
African (primary): From an African vantage, grand strategy cannot be reduced to the optimization of a unitary state's security and prosperity; it is bound up with sovereignty after colonialism, the memory of external intervention, developmental imperatives, and Pan-African solidarity. African scholarship—Nkrumah on neo-colonialism, Nyerere on ujamaa and non-alignment, Cabral on culture and liberation, Fanon on colonial violence and its afterlives, Rodney on underdevelopment, Mamdani on the colonial state and bifurcated citizenship, Bayart on extraversion, Grovogui on sovereignty and international law, and Tamale on feminist and decolonial statecraft—suggests that interests are often defined against imperial and racial hierarchies as much as against rival states. A middle-power grand strategy in Africa may therefore prioritize economic sovereignty, regional integration, strategic non-alignment, and institutional voice in global governance, not merely military balance. The African perspective also warns that Western frameworks can treat African states as arenas of great-power competition, thereby occluding African agency and the historical production of vulnerability. It contributes the insight that autonomy is not only material but juridical and epistemic: who defines the threat, who sets the agenda, and whose knowledge counts as strategic. Its strongest limitation is that Pan-African solidarity and normative foreign policy can conflict with immediate material interests, and that regional institutions may lack the capacity to convert shared interests into coordinated strategy.
Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames grand strategy through relationality, comprehensive national power, and the idea of a community of shared future, emphasizing long-term connectivity, strategic patience, and non-interference. Interests are defined not only by territorial security but by developmental trajectories and the stability of surrounding relationships; resources include economic statecraft, infrastructure, and institutional influence. This perspective contributes a critique of zero-sum balancing and a focus on cumulative, long-horizon gains, but it can occlude asymmetries in bilateral relationships and the coercive potential of economic dependence.
Russian: The Russian perspective emphasizes sovereign choice, multipolarity, strategic depth, and resis-

tance to unipolar dominance. Grand strategy is framed as preserving autonomy against hegemonic pressure, often through energy, geography, military modernization, and selective partnerships. It contributes a sharp critique of liberal universalism and a reminder that security is experienced differently by states near great-power centers, but it can occlude the costs of coercive diplomacy and overstate the coherence of a multipolar alternative.

Western: The Western perspective, especially in its liberal-internationalist and realist variants, frames grand strategy around rules-based order, alliance management, deterrence, and the balance of power. It contributes sophisticated tools for assessing capabilities, commitments, and credibility, and it treats hedging as a rational response to uncertainty. Its occlusion is a tendency to universalize Western institutional preferences and to understate the agency and historical grievances of postcolonial states.

UN: The UN perspective frames grand strategy within Charter multilateralism, collective security, development, and mediation. It contributes norms of lawful force, sovereign equality, and institutionalized cooperation, and it reminds middle powers that legitimacy and coalition-building are strategic resources. Its limitation is that it can assume state capacity and consent that do not exist, and it may understate the competitive realities that drive hedging.

SECTION 2.3 — KEY IDEA 2: The Middle Power Problem — Balancing Autonomy with Security in a Fragmented Order

Bolded Causal Claim: The middle power's central strategic problem is not a simple choice between autonomy and security, but the management of a structural tension in which neither can be maximized independently; in a fragmented order, the same interdependencies that create bargaining leverage also create exposure, so strategy consists in converting dependence into optionality rather than escaping dependence altogether.

Mechanism: Grand strategy, in the classical formulation, is the coordination of military, economic, and diplomatic instruments toward political ends (Liddell Hart, 1954; Kennedy, 1991). For a middle power, the difficulty begins with a mismatch between ends and means: it possesses enough capability to be consequential in specific domains, but not enough to set the terms of order. Autonomy is therefore not independence; it is the capacity to choose among constrained options. Security is not merely survival; it is the reduction of coercion to tolerable levels. The mechanism is asymmetric interdependence. Middle powers depend on great powers for security guarantees, market access, technology, finance, and institutional legitimacy, while great powers depend on middle powers for regional stability, basing, votes, resources, and legitimacy. This produces a bargaining structure in which alignment is simultaneously shield and leash. Fragmentation of the international order multiplies poles, institutions, and transactional opportunities, increasing optionality but also uncertainty. Hedging is best understood not as indecision but as a portfolio strategy: diversifying dependencies so that no single patron can impose unacceptable costs. Yet hedging carries its own costs—duplication, credibility discounts, and the risk that all partners interpret ambiguity as unreliability. Institutional entrepreneurship can amplify voice, but it can also provoke backlash when great powers read multilateral activism as disguised balancing. Thus middle-power strategy is a continuous optimization under incomplete information, not a one-time alignment choice (Posen, 2014; Brands, 2016).

Scope Conditions: The autonomy-security tension becomes acute under five conditions: (1) high trade openness combined with concentrated partner dependence; (2) security dependence on an external guarantor; (3) geographic exposure to great-power competition; (4) domestic fragmentation over foreign-policy

orientation; and (5) issue linkage, whereby economic access is conditioned on political alignment. It relaxes when a state possesses regional hegemony, credible deterrence, diversified markets, consolidated elite consensus, or low salience in great-power rivalry. A further scope condition is issue-specificity: "middle power" is not a fixed rank but a relational position. A state may be a middle power in maritime governance or regional diplomacy while remaining dependent in high-end military technology or finance. Indonesia, for example, can exercise agenda-setting influence in ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific while remaining structurally dependent on external suppliers for advanced defense platforms. South Africa can act as a diplomatic broker in Africa while facing severe fiscal and energy constraints. Strategy must therefore be assessed domain by domain rather than through a single hierarchy of power.

Observable Implications: If this mechanism holds, middle powers should display diversified procurement, multi-vector trade, non-exclusive security partnerships, institutional brokerage, strategic ambiguity, selective compliance with great-power demands, and domestic contestation over alignment. They should also practice what might be called omni-enmeshment: embedding themselves in multiple regional and global institutions so that no single power can isolate them. Observable failure modes include coercive economic retaliation, credibility loss among all partners, overextension, and the collapse of hedging into bandwagoning or Finlandization when dependence exceeds tolerable thresholds. In data terms, the relevant indicators are not only aggregate GDP or military spending, but trade concentration by partner, security-assistance dependence, voting alignment in multilateral forums, and the gap between doctrinal autonomy and procurement reality. A state whose doctrine proclaims non-alignment while its logistics, finance, and intelligence systems are fused with one patron is not hedging; it is aligned with rhetorical insulation.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): From an African vantage point, the middle-power problem is inseparable from the unfinished project of sovereignty. The relevant question is not merely how to balance Washington and Beijing, but how to prevent external powers from converting African territory, resources, and institutions into instruments of their own rivalry. African scholarship and political thought—Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism, Rodney's analysis of underdevelopment, Fanon's insistence on psychological and political liberation, Cabral's theory of class and national liberation, Nyerere's ujamaa and non-alignment, Mamdani's critique of bifurcated state power, Bayart's "politics of the belly," Mbembe's postcolonial critique, and Grovogui's insistence on African agency in international law—treat autonomy as historically denied rather than naturally possessed. For many African states, the middle-power label can obscure structural subordination: a state may be regionally influential while remaining financially, militarily, and technologically dependent. The African perspective therefore emphasizes Pan-African coordination, resource sovereignty, institutional self-reliance, and resistance to externally imposed conditionality. It sees fragmentation not only as an opportunity for hedging but as a risk that Africa becomes a theater for great-power competition. Its contribution is to place historical grievance, racialized hierarchy, and economic extraction at the center of strategic analysis; its occlusion, in some formulations, is a tendency to understate intra-African power asymmetries and the agency of African elites in reproducing dependence.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective frames the middle-power problem through relationality and the idea of a community of shared future. Middle powers are valued as partners in networked order rather than as autonomous balancers; their security is best achieved through economic integration, infrastructure connectivity, and respect for sovereignty. This perspective contributes a critique of alliance-based coercion and a vocabulary of win-win cooperation, but it can occlude asymmetry within partnerships and the strategic leverage created by debt, technology, and market access.

Russian: The Russian perspective treats the middle-power problem as a question of sovereign choice in a

multipolar order. It emphasizes resistance to unipolar dominance, the legitimacy of diversified partnerships, and the right of states to select security arrangements without external dictation. It contributes a powerful critique of Western conditionality and sanctions, but it can occlude the coercive dimensions of its own partnerships and the domestic costs of alignment with Moscow.

Western: The Western perspective, especially in liberal and realist variants, treats middle powers as stakeholders in a rules-based order and hedging as rational risk management. It contributes sophisticated tools for assessing capabilities, commitments, and credibility, and it treats institutional embeddedness as a source of security. Its occlusion is a tendency to universalize Western institutional preferences and to understate the agency and historical grievances of postcolonial states.

UN: The UN perspective frames the middle-power problem within Charter multilateralism, collective security, development, and mediation. It contributes norms of lawful force, sovereign equality, and institutionalized cooperation, and it reminds middle powers that legitimacy and coalition-building are strategic resources. Its limitation is that it can assume state capacity and consent that do not exist, and it may understate the competitive realities that drive hedging.

SECTION 2.4 — KEY IDEA 3: Ontological Security vs Material Survival — When Do Identity Concerns Override Security Interests?

Bolded Causal Claim: Ontological security—the need for a coherent, continuous, and socially recognized state identity—can override material survival calculations when threats are interpreted as assaults on the self rather than merely on interests, producing strategies that accept higher material risk in exchange for narrative continuity and recognition.

Mechanism: Materialist theories of security, especially classical and structural realism, treat states as survival-maximizing actors whose primary interest is physical existence and relative capability. Ontological security theory adds a second, non-material dimension: states also seek security of being. Drawing on sociological and psychological traditions, Mitzen (2006) emphasizes routines and anxiety reduction, while Steele (2008) emphasizes biographical narratives and the need for a consistent self. The mechanism is identity threat. When a state's foundational narrative—anti-colonial liberation, non-alignment, Islamic solidarity, ASEAN centrality, great-power status, or civilizational distinctiveness—is challenged, the resulting anxiety can be experienced as existential even if physical survival is not immediately at stake. Policy then aims not only to protect territory or resources but to restore or defend the self. This can produce symbolic commitments, refusal to abandon allies, legal activism, status-seeking, and risk acceptance that materialist models would classify as irrational. The key causal chain is: identity narrative -> social recognition -> anxiety when recognition is withheld or narrative is disrupted -> securitization of identity -> policy choices that prioritize continuity over optimization. Ontological security is not the absence of rationality; it is a different rationality, one in which the coherence of the state's story becomes a strategic good. For middle powers, this mechanism is especially important because their material capabilities are limited; identity, status, and moral authority often constitute their most deployable strategic resources.

Scope Conditions: Identity concerns are most likely to override material interests under six conditions: (1) historical trauma or colonial legacy that makes sovereignty and dignity non-negotiable; (2) regime legitimation tied to a foreign-policy doctrine, such that retreat would undermine domestic authority; (3) status inconsistency, where a state's self-image exceeds its material rank; (4) high domestic audience costs for perceived humiliation; (5) symbolic issues—Palestine, Taiwan, nuclear status, territorial memory, or international legal cases—that condense identity into a single decision; and (6) situations where material stakes

are significant but not immediately existential. Conversely, material survival is more likely to override identity when a state faces imminent military defeat, economic collapse, elite pragmatism consolidated through institutionalized restraint, or a credible security guarantee that reduces anxiety. A further scope condition is the difference between elite and mass identity: ontological security may be invoked by leaders for domestic legitimation even when the broader public is materially focused, or it may reflect genuine societal narratives that constrain elites. The theory therefore requires careful specification of whose identity is at stake and through which institutions it is performed.

Observable Implications: If ontological security mechanisms are operating, one should observe refusal to abandon positions despite sanctions or economic cost; symbolic diplomacy disproportionate to material gain; status-seeking in international institutions; persistence in alliances that no longer optimize security; risk acceptance in defense of identity; domestic mobilization around foreign-policy symbols; and legal or normative activism, such as ICJ cases or human-rights diplomacy, that asserts moral standing. One should also observe pathologies: overcommitment, escalation spirals, self-fulfilling insecurity, and the treatment of compromise as betrayal. Falsifiers include cases where states rapidly abandon identity-laden positions when material costs rise, where foreign-policy rhetoric changes without domestic legitimation crisis, or where identity claims are purely instrumental and reversible. The distinction between description, explanation, prediction, and prescription matters here: describing a state's identity narrative is not explaining its behavior; explaining identity-driven behavior is not predicting that it will persist under all cost conditions; and neither description nor explanation by itself prescribes whether such behavior should be encouraged or resisted.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief):

African (primary): The African perspective treats ontological security as inseparable from decolonial selfhood. Identity is not a psychological preference layered onto material interests; it is the product of historical dispossession, racialized hierarchy, and the struggle to reclaim agency. Fanon's analysis of colonial violence and psychological domination, Cabral's insistence that liberation requires cultural and political reclamation, Nkrumah's critique of neo-colonialism, Mamdani's examination of colonial state forms, Mbembe's critique of the postcolony, Tamale's decolonial feminism, and Oyěwùmí's challenge to gendered and epistemic hierarchies all point to a common theme: the self of the postcolonial state has been systematically denied recognition. Ontological security therefore appears as dignity, sovereignty, and the right to define one's own development path. This explains why African states may accept material costs to defend positions on Palestine, Western Sahara, anti-racism, or anti-colonial solidarity, and why Pan-African identity can override narrow national interest. The African vantage point reveals what materialist and Western-liberal accounts often miss: that recognition is not a side issue but a core strategic resource, and that humiliation can be as destabilizing as invasion. Its risk is that identity claims can be mobilized by elites to obscure domestic failures or to justify authoritarian closure.

Chinese: The Chinese perspective links ontological security to civilizational continuity, relational identity, and the pursuit of a community of shared future. Security of being is achieved through recognition as a responsible great power and through the restoration of historical centrality. This contributes a critique of Western universalism and a vocabulary of mutual respect, but it can occlude the ways in which civilizational narratives may be used to legitimize hierarchy or to discipline dissent.

Russian: The Russian perspective frames ontological security through sovereign identity, historical memory, and great-power status. Threats to identity are often interpreted as Western attempts to deny Russia its rightful role, producing risk-acceptant behavior in defense of status and narrative. This contributes an understanding of status anxiety and historical grievance, but it can occlude the coercive implications of imperial memory and the domestic political uses of external threat.

Western: The Western perspective, particularly in liberal institutionalism and rationalist realism, often treats identity as epiphenomenal to interests or as a variable to be managed through institutions. It contributes tools for analyzing credibility, audience costs, and normative commitment, but it frequently occludes the possibility that identity itself is the interest being defended. Its strongest version, constructivism, partially corrects this by taking norms and identity seriously, yet it can still understate the material and coercive contexts in which identity claims are made.
UN: The UN perspective connects ontological security to Charter norms of sovereign equality, human dignity, and recognition. It contributes a framework in which identity claims can be mediated through law and multilateral institutions, reducing the need for unilateral risk acceptance. Its limitation is that it may assume a level of consensus and institutional legitimacy that does not exist, and it can understate the depth of historical grievance that makes recognition politically non-negotiable.

2.5 KEY IDEA 4 — Multi-alignment as a grand strategy — theory, practice, and limits

Bolded Causal Claim: Multi-alignment functions as a grand strategy for middle powers only under the joint conditions that (i) no single great power can impose alignment at acceptable cost, (ii) the middle power can credibly compartmentalize cooperation across issue areas, and (iii) domestic coalitions tolerate the ambiguity that multi-alignment requires; absent any of these, the strategy collapses into either forced alignment or incoherent drift.

Mechanism: Multi-alignment differs from Cold War non-alignment, which was largely abstentionist, and from hedging, which is typically reactive and risk-minimizing. Multi-alignment is an active portfolio strategy: the state deliberately cultivates overlapping and sometimes contradictory relationships with competing powers, extracting benefits from each while preventing any from achieving dominance. The mechanism operates through four channels. First, issue compartmentalization: security cooperation with one power is delinked from economic cooperation with another, allowing the middle power to avoid binary choices. Second, diversification of dependence: spreading trade, investment, and technology sourcing across poles reduces vulnerability to coercion. Third, signaling and reassurance: calibrated diplomatic language, participation in multiple institutions, and avoidance of exclusive commitments signal non-threatening intent, lowering the perceived cost of tolerating ambiguity. Fourth, institutional embedding: anchoring relationships in multilateral frameworks such as ASEAN, BRICS, the G20, and the African Union raises the transaction costs of unilateral pressure. The strategy also has a domestic mechanism: it requires bureaucratic capacity to manage complex, sometimes contradictory portfolios and political leadership willing to absorb criticism from factions favoring clearer alignment. The risk mechanism runs in parallel: if major powers perceive multi-alignment as free-riding or deception, they may escalate coercion; if domestic audiences perceive it as incoherence, governments may be punished electorally. The theory draws on portfolio theory in economics and on the strategic-studies literature on hedging, but it adds the claim that ambiguity itself can be a resource when the middle power's location or assets make it worth courting.

Scope Conditions: Multi-alignment is most viable when the international system is multipolar or fragmented rather than bipolar; when economic interdependence is high enough that coercion is costly for all sides; when the middle power possesses assets that make it worth courting, such as strategic location, resources, diplomatic convening power, or market size; and when major powers are distracted or constrained by other commitments. It is least viable when a single power achieves regional hegemony, when issue-linkage is strong (for example, security guarantees tied to technology access), or when domestic politics polarize around

identity-based alignment choices. It also requires a minimum of state capacity: foreign ministries able to manage complex portfolios, intelligence services capable of assessing multiple partners, and leaders with sufficient political capital to sustain ambiguity. Where these capacities are absent, multi-alignment tends to produce not strategic flexibility but strategic confusion, with different agencies pursuing contradictory lines.

Observable Implications: Successful multi-alignment should produce diversified trade shares with no single partner exceeding a critical threshold; sustained participation in competing institutional blocs without exclusion; absence of sanctions or coercive economic measures; and diplomatic access to all major powers. Failure indicators include sharp trade concentration, exclusion from key forums, targeted sanctions, or domestic political crises triggered by foreign policy ambiguity. At the level of discourse, successful multi-alignment produces a recognizable vocabulary of "strategic autonomy," "independent foreign policy," and "friends to all," while failure produces accusations of "fence-sitting" or "unreliability." Analysts can track these implications through trade-dependence metrics, UN voting alignment scores, military-exercise participation, and the frequency of high-level bilateral visits. A further implication is that multi-alignment should be associated with higher diplomatic transaction costs: more summits, more hedging language, and more frequent recalibration of positions.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): African scholarship treats multi-alignment as a contemporary expression of the non-alignment and Pan-African traditions, but with greater emphasis on agency and material benefit. Scholars such as Grovogui and Bayart frame it not as neutrality but as strategic opportunism in a system historically structured against African interests; the African vantage point highlights how multi-alignment can reproduce dependency if it is not accompanied by industrial policy and regional integration. It contributes the insight that alignment choices are also choices about development models, and that a middle power which multi-aligns without building productive capacity may simply be diversifying its subordination. The African perspective also stresses that multi-alignment must be evaluated against the standard of whether it advances continental integration and reduces external dependency, not merely whether it preserves autonomy. Chinese: Chinese IR frames multi-alignment through relationality and the "community of shared future," viewing it as acceptable when it does not target third parties and as destabilizing when it becomes a vehicle for containment. It contributes the concept of "win-win" cooperation and the norm that alignment should not be exclusive. Russian: Russian discourse treats multi-alignment as legitimate sovereign choice in a multipolar order, often endorsing it as evidence of Western decline; it contributes the principle that no state should be forced into blocs, while occluding the coercive dimensions of Russia's own regional influence. Western: Western scholarship, especially in the US and Australia, tends to view multi-alignment with suspicion as "hedging" or "free-riding," contributing rigorous analysis of credibility and commitment problems but often assuming that alignment with the liberal order is the default optimal strategy. UN: The UN perspective frames multi-alignment as compatible with Charter principles of sovereign equality and non-intervention, contributing institutional mechanisms such as mediation and good offices that can reduce the costs of ambiguity; its limitation is that it may underestimate the power asymmetries that make multi-alignment costly for weaker states.

2.6 KEY IDEA 5 — The politics of strategy-making — coalitions, institutions, and domestic constraints

Bolded Causal Claim: Grand strategy is produced not by a unitary state but by domestic political coalitions operating through institutions with distinct interests and time horizons; strategic coherence is therefore a function of institutional capacity to aggregate preferences and of the political conditions that permit long-

horizon commitments, not of analytical clarity alone.

Mechanism: The mechanism draws on bureaucratic politics, organizational process theory, and veto-player analysis. Foreign policy decisions emerge from bargaining among agencies—foreign ministry, defense, intelligence, treasury, trade—each with organizational missions, budgets, and constituencies. Coalitions form across state and society: business lobbies, diaspora groups, military-industrial interests, religious and ethnic organizations, and regional elites. Institutions mediate: parliamentary committees, national security councils, courts, and independent agencies can either aggregate or fragment preferences. Time inconsistency is central: electoral cycles of two to five years are shorter than strategic horizons of decades, creating incentives for leaders to prioritize short-term gains or symbolic gestures over sustained commitments. The mechanism also includes strategic culture: historically sedimented beliefs about the state's role, threats, and appropriate means, which constrain the range of thinkable strategies. Domestic constraints operate through multiple channels: public opinion, especially in democracies; coalition government bargaining; federal or regional interests in large states; and the need to maintain legitimacy. The result is that strategy documents often represent lowest-common-denominator compromises rather than coherent plans, and implementation frequently diverges from stated doctrine. A further mechanism is the "rhetoric-action gap": governments may adopt ambitious strategic language to satisfy domestic audiences while lacking the resources or will to implement it, producing a cycle of overcommitment and retrenchment.

Scope Conditions: Coherent strategy-making is more likely when threat perception is shared across elites; when institutions are centralized and professionalized; when the executive has sufficient autonomy; and when there is cross-party consensus on core interests. Incoherence is more likely under coalition governments with divergent foreign policy preferences; high polarization; weak or politicized bureaucracies; federal systems with powerful regional actors; and societies with deep identity cleavages that foreign policy activates. The scope condition also includes resource constraints: even coherent strategies fail if budgets do not match commitments. A further scope condition concerns information: strategy-making requires accurate intelligence and analysis, and where intelligence is politicized or fragmented, the resulting strategy will reflect organizational biases rather than strategic reality. Finally, the international environment matters: a permissive environment allows more experimentation, while a threatening one may force coherence through crisis, though crisis-driven coherence is often brittle.

Observable Implications: Indicators of coherent strategy-making include stable defense budgets aligned with doctrine; consistent diplomatic messaging across agencies; long tenure of key officials; bipartisan support for core commitments; and implementation fidelity in crises. Indicators of incoherence include frequent strategy document revisions; public contradictions between officials; budget-doctrine mismatches; abrupt policy reversals after elections; and rhetoric-action gaps where stated strategy is not reflected in deployments or spending. Comparative analysis can measure coherence through indices of institutional capacity and political consensus. A further implication is that strategy documents themselves are political artifacts: their timing, authorship, and language reveal coalition dynamics, and changes in document language often precede changes in policy. Analysts should therefore read strategy documents as evidence of domestic politics, not merely as statements of intent.

Perspective Note (five traditions in brief): African (primary): African scholarship, particularly Mamdani, Bayart, and Grovogui, emphasizes that strategy-making in postcolonial states is shaped by the "politics of the belly," neopatrimonial networks, and the colonial inheritance of weak institutions. The African vantage point reveals that domestic constraints are not merely technical but historical: states may lack the bureaucratic autonomy assumed by Western models, and foreign policy often serves regime survival as much as

national interest. It contributes the insight that strategy-making must be analyzed through the lens of state formation and political economy, not just rational choice, and that the gap between formal institutions and actual practice is often wider in postcolonial states. The African perspective also highlights how external actors—donors, former colonial powers, multinational corporations—can shape domestic coalitions in ways that constrain strategic autonomy from within. Chinese: Chinese discourse emphasizes party-state coherence and the role of the CCP in aligning domestic and foreign policy; it contributes the model of "top-level design" and the integration of development and security, while occluding the role of internal factional politics and the costs of centralized control. Russian: Russian analysis highlights the role of the security apparatus and the personalization of strategy around the presidency; it contributes the concept of "sovereign democracy" and the fusion of domestic legitimacy with foreign policy assertiveness, while understating institutional checks. Western: Western scholarship, from Allison to contemporary veto-player theory, provides the most developed toolkit for analyzing domestic constraints; it contributes rigorous causal mechanisms but can overstate the universality of democratic institutional patterns and understate the role of informal networks. UN: The UN perspective frames strategy-making as ideally subject to international law and multilateral consultation; it contributes norms of transparency and accountability, and mechanisms such as peacebuilding commissions, but may assume institutional capacities and political will that are absent in many states.

2.7 FIVE PERSPECTIVES IN DEPTH

2.7.1 African Perspective (PRIMARY) The African vantage point begins from a different starting premise than the other four: the middle power is not a naturally occurring unit in an anarchic system but a historically produced position within a racialized and colonial international order. From this standpoint, grand strategy is not primarily the optimization of interests, threats, resources, and choices by a sovereign actor; it is the continuous negotiation of recognition, autonomy, and survival by states whose sovereignty was granted, delimited, and often hollowed out by external powers. The African perspective therefore does not reject the language of grand strategy; it re-situates it. Interests are not simply security and prosperity but also dignity, historical redress, and the capacity to define development without external prescription. Threats include not only invasion or coercion but debt conditionality, commodity dependence, sanctions, climate vulnerability, and the political economy of extraction. Resources include not only GDP and military capacity but diplomatic legitimacy, demographic weight, mineral endowments, and the moral authority derived from anti-colonial struggle. Strategic choices are made under conditions of "quasi-sovereignty," in which formal independence coexists with structural dependence (Grovogui, 2006). This is the central contribution of the African perspective: it makes visible the coloniality of the international order that other perspectives often treat as a neutral background.

This perspective is not monolithic. It spans Nkrumah's critique of neocolonialism, Nyerere's emphasis on self-reliance and ujamaa, Cabral's insistence that national liberation requires both political and social transformation, Fanon's analysis of the psychological and institutional damage of colonial rule, Rodney's argument that underdevelopment was actively produced, and later scholarship on the postcolonial state, including Mamdani's distinction between citizen and subject, Bayart's analysis of the "politics of the belly," Mbembe's work on necropolitics and the postcolony, and Grovogui's critique of sovereignty as a racialized legal category. African feminist and decolonial scholars such as Tamale and Oyěwùmí add that the state and the international order are gendered and epistemically hierarchical, so that "middle power" status itself may reproduce masculinist and Eurocentric assumptions about authority, rationality, and development. The African

perspective is therefore best understood as a family of arguments rather than a single doctrine, but it shares a common insistence that the international system is not merely anarchic; it is historically stratified.

On the middle-power problem—balancing autonomy with security in a fragmented order—the African perspective reframes autonomy as more than non-alignment or hedging. It is the capacity to make decisions without the structural veto of external creditors, donors, multinational corporations, or security patrons. Many African states are formally sovereign but materially constrained by aid dependence, debt servicing, export concentration, and security partnerships. In this context, "security" cannot be reduced to territorial defense; it includes food security, energy security, fiscal space, and the survival of governing coalitions. The African perspective therefore treats the middle-power dilemma as a problem of structural power, not only of strategic choice. A state may be a "middle power" in diplomatic forums while remaining a price-taker in global markets and a rule-taker in financial institutions. This is why African scholarship often emphasizes collective action—Pan-Africanism, the African Union, regional economic communities, and the Non-Aligned Movement—not as sentiment but as a strategy for aggregating bargaining power. Nkrumah's call for continental unity, for example, can be read as a grand-strategic response to the impossibility of individual African states negotiating as equals with great powers. The African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area are contemporary expressions of the same logic: autonomy is produced through scale, not merely declared through diplomacy.

Ontological security versus material survival is a particularly important theme in the African perspective. Postcolonial states often face a tension between material survival—access to finance, markets, security assistance, and diplomatic support—and ontological security, understood as the continuity of a dignified collective identity and the legitimacy of the state. Because colonial rule denied full humanity and sovereignty to African peoples, recognition itself becomes a strategic good. This can lead states to prioritize positions that affirm sovereignty, anti-racism, or Pan-African solidarity even when they carry material costs. South Africa's decision to bring a case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, for example, can be interpreted not only as legal diplomacy but as an assertion of post-apartheid moral identity and Global South solidarity, even as it risks economic and diplomatic friction with Western partners. Similarly, African support for multilateral norms such as the "responsibility to protect" has often been tempered by suspicion that humanitarian intervention can reproduce imperial hierarchies. The African perspective thus contributes a crucial insight: identity is not a luxury added to material interest; for states whose sovereignty has been historically contested, identity claims can be constitutive of security itself. At the same time, this perspective can occlude the ways in which elite actors instrumentalize identity for domestic legitimation or personal enrichment, and it can understate the costs of principled positions for vulnerable populations.

Multi-alignment, in the African perspective, is not simply "hedging" in the Western sense of risk management between great powers. It is often a continuation of non-alignment as a postcolonial survival strategy. African states have long sought to avoid exclusive dependence on any single external power, whether Western, Soviet, or Chinese. This is visible in the NAM legacy, in the diversification of partnerships across the Cold War and post-Cold War periods, and in contemporary engagement with BRICS+, the Belt and Road Initiative, Western development finance, and regional security arrangements. The African perspective emphasizes that multi-alignment is not neutral; it is shaped by asymmetries of power. A state may sign multiple partnerships while remaining dependent on one or two for critical infrastructure, debt, or security. The perspective therefore warns against confusing diplomatic diversification with strategic autonomy. It also highlights that African states are not merely objects of great-power competition; they exercise agency by playing powers against one another, extracting concessions, and using multilateral forums to amplify their voice. Yet this agency is bounded. The "politics of the belly" (Bayart) reminds us that external resources can be captured by domestic

elites, and that strategy-making may serve regime survival rather than national development. The African perspective contributes a sophisticated account of agency under constraint, but it can sometimes romanticize resistance and understate the complicity of local elites in external domination.

The politics of strategy-making is where the African perspective is especially distinctive. Western institutionalist accounts often focus on veto players, bureaucratic politics, and democratic accountability. African scholarship adds the importance of informal networks, neopatrimonialism, ethnic and regional coalitions, military influence, and the "extraversion" of the state—its orientation toward external resources for domestic legitimation (Bayart). Strategy is often made not through formal grand-strategic documents but through patronage, elite bargains, and the management of external rents. This does not mean African states lack strategy; rather, their strategies may be embedded in practices that Western frameworks classify as corruption or institutional weakness. Mamdani's analysis of the bifurcated state suggests that colonial administrative legacies continue to shape how authority is exercised, making "national interest" a contested and layered concept. Oyěwùmí and Tamale further remind us that gendered and epistemic hierarchies shape whose knowledge counts in strategy-making, often excluding women and marginalized groups from decisions about security and development. The African perspective thus contributes a critique of the technocratic assumption that grand strategy can be separated from domestic power and social structure. Its occlusion, however, is that it can sometimes overstate the uniqueness of African politics and understate the extent to which informal networks and elite capture also shape strategy in Western and other states.

What the African perspective reveals that the other four miss is the historical and racialized constitution of the international order itself. Western perspectives often treat the liberal order as a framework of rules; Chinese and Russian perspectives treat it as a hegemonic or unipolar structure; the UN perspective treats it as a legal and normative architecture. The African perspective adds that the order was built through colonial conquest, racial hierarchy, and unequal exchange, and that these legacies continue to shape who can be a "middle power," what counts as "security," and whose identity is recognized as legitimate. It also reveals that agency is not binary—states are neither fully autonomous nor merely passive—but exercised through collective mobilization, diplomatic entrepreneurship, and the strategic use of weakness. Its strongest counterargument is that it can understate the genuine benefits of alignment with great powers, including security guarantees, market access, and institutional support, and that it can sometimes treat all external engagement as neocolonial, thereby obscuring variation in the intentions and effects of different partners. Nevertheless, as a corrective to Eurocentric and great-power-centric theories of grand strategy, the African perspective is indispensable.

2.7.2 Chinese Perspective The Chinese perspective on the middle-power problem is rooted in a relational ontology of international politics: states are not atomistic units in an anarchic system but nodes in a web of relationships shaped by history, civilization, and mutual obligation. From this vantage, grand strategy is not merely the balancing of material interests and threats; it is the cultivation of a "community of shared future for mankind," in which development, security, and order are mutually constitutive. The framework of interests, threats, resources, and choices is therefore interpreted through the lens of relationality: interests include not only national gain but regional stability and the legitimacy of a multipolar order; threats include hegemonism, containment, and the disruption of development; resources include infrastructure, connectivity, manufacturing capacity, and diplomatic patience; choices are evaluated by whether they produce "win-win" outcomes rather than zero-sum advantage. This perspective contributes a distinctive critique of Western alliance politics: it argues that exclusive blocs and security dilemmas are not inevitable features of anarchy but products of a particular, historically contingent, Western-centric approach to order.

On the middle-power problem, China presents itself as both a great power and a developing country, and it often frames its rise as compatible with the autonomy of middle powers. The Belt and Road Initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and various bilateral partnerships are presented as development-oriented alternatives to Western conditionality. From the Chinese perspective, middle powers should not be forced to choose between the United States and China; instead, they can benefit from diversified partnerships that prioritize economic development and non-interference. This is not merely rhetoric: it reflects a strategic interest in preventing the consolidation of a US-led coalition in the Indo-Pacific and in creating a multipolar environment in which China's influence is normalized. The Chinese perspective therefore treats multi-alignment as legitimate and desirable, provided it does not become a vehicle for containment. It also emphasizes that security and development are inseparable: a middle power's autonomy depends on its economic capacity, and economic capacity depends on stable relations with major markets and investors.

Ontological security plays a significant role in the Chinese perspective, though it is often expressed in civilizational and national-rejuvenation terms rather than in the individual-state identity language common in Western IR. China's strategic discourse emphasizes historical humiliation, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the restoration of great-power status. These identity concerns can override narrowly material calculations, as seen in the insistence on sovereignty over Taiwan and the South China Sea, even when such positions carry economic or diplomatic costs. For middle powers, the Chinese perspective suggests that respect for sovereignty and non-interference are not just procedural norms but conditions of ontological security: states need recognition as equals, not as subordinates in a hierarchical order. This is one of the perspective's most important contributions. It challenges the assumption that all states share the same hierarchy of needs and that material survival always trumps identity. At the same time, the perspective can occlude the ways in which China's own sovereignty claims and development projects may threaten the ontological and material security of smaller states, particularly in contested maritime spaces or through debt and infrastructure dependence.

Multi-alignment is treated by the Chinese perspective as both a description of the emerging order and a normative preference. China argues that the world is moving toward multipolarity and that middle powers should diversify their partnerships rather than align exclusively with any single power. In practice, however, China's own strategy combines multi-alignment rhetoric with efforts to build exclusive or preferential relationships, particularly in regions where it seeks to reduce US influence. The perspective contributes the insight that alignment is not a binary choice and that middle powers can derive leverage from maintaining multiple relationships. Its occlusion is that it often understates the asymmetry between China and its partners, the opacity of Chinese lending and contracting, and the security implications of dual-use infrastructure. It also tends to frame criticism of Chinese practices as Western containment rather than as legitimate concerns about sovereignty, transparency, or human rights.

The politics of strategy-making in the Chinese perspective is shaped by the party-state, long-term planning, and a relatively centralized decision-making structure. Strategy is often articulated through five-year plans, national security concepts, and party congress reports, with an emphasis on continuity and elite consensus. This can produce a capacity for sustained, long-horizon strategy that democratic systems sometimes lack. The perspective contributes the idea that domestic political structure shapes strategic time horizons and that institutional continuity can be a strategic asset. Its occlusion is that it may understate the role of factional politics, bureaucratic competition, and public opinion, and it may overstate the coherence of Chinese strategy. It also tends to treat the Chinese model as universally applicable, understating the importance of domestic institutional variation among middle powers. Overall, the Chinese perspective is most valuable for its relational critique of atomistic IR theory and its emphasis on development as a component of security; its greatest

weakness is its tendency to present asymmetric power as mutual benefit.

2.7.3 Russian Perspective The Russian perspective on grand strategy for middle powers is organized around the principle of sovereign choice and the rejection of a unipolar or Western-dominated international order. From this vantage, the central problem of international politics is not anarchy but hegemony: the attempt by one power or bloc to impose its preferences, values, and security architecture on others. Grand strategy is therefore defined as the defense of sovereignty, the preservation of strategic autonomy, and the construction of a multipolar order in which multiple centers of power coexist. Interests are framed in terms of security, status, and the right to an independent foreign policy; threats include NATO expansion, regime change, sanctions, and the erosion of state sovereignty through international norms and institutions; resources include energy, military capacity, diplomatic tradition, and geographic depth; choices are evaluated by whether they strengthen sovereignty or subordinate it to external actors. This perspective contributes a powerful critique of liberal universalism and a reminder that for many states, the primary threat is not another state's power but the loss of the capacity to choose.

On the middle-power problem, the Russian perspective argues that autonomy and security are inseparable: a state that lacks hard security capacity will eventually be forced to align with a great power, and alignment itself becomes a source of vulnerability. This is why Russia emphasizes military modernization, energy leverage, and strategic partnerships with states that share its skepticism of Western dominance. For middle powers, the Russian perspective suggests that true autonomy requires not only diplomatic diversification but also the capacity to resist coercion, whether military, economic, or normative. It is sympathetic to non-alignment and multi-alignment when these are expressions of sovereign choice, but it is critical of arrangements that it sees as disguised alignment with the West, such as NATO partnerships or conditionality-laden Western aid. The perspective therefore treats multi-alignment as legitimate only if it is genuinely independent; if it becomes a mechanism for preserving Western primacy, it is viewed as a form of subordination.

Ontological security is central to the Russian perspective, though it is often expressed in terms of great-power status, historical narrative, and civilizational identity. Russia's strategic discourse emphasizes its role as a distinct civilization, its historical sacrifices, and its entitlement to a sphere of influence or at least a voice in regional security. These identity concerns can override material calculations, as seen in the willingness to bear economic costs for actions framed as defending sovereignty or historical justice. For middle powers, the Russian perspective highlights that identity and status are not secondary to material interests; they shape threat perception, alliance choices, and tolerance for risk. A state that feels humiliated or unrecognized may pursue policies that appear materially irrational but are ontologically rational. This is an important contribution, especially for understanding states with strong historical narratives or post-imperial identities. The perspective's occlusion is that it can treat Russian identity claims as legitimate while dismissing similar claims by other states, and it can understate the ways in which Russian actions—such as the invasion of Ukraine—violate the sovereignty and ontological security of others.

Multi-alignment, in the Russian perspective, is valued as a tool for breaking Western monopoly and creating a multipolar order. Russia promotes partnerships with China, India, Iran, and various Global South states, and it frames BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as platforms for sovereign equality. However, the perspective also reveals tensions: Russia expects loyalty from partners on core security issues, and its own strategy is not always consistent with the non-interference it advocates. The contribution is the insistence that multipolarity requires not just many powers but genuine equality of voice; the occlusion is that Russia's practice often resembles a sphere-of-influence logic that limits the autonomy of neighboring states. The Russian perspective is therefore strongest as a critique of unipolarity and as a defense of sovereign choice;

it is weakest when it conflates multipolarity with Russian entitlement.

The politics of strategy-making in the Russian perspective is shaped by a strong presidency, security elites, and a narrative of national revival. Strategy is often centralized, with limited institutional checks, and is closely tied to domestic legitimacy. The perspective contributes the concept of "sovereign democracy," which fuses domestic political legitimacy with foreign policy assertiveness, and it highlights the role of historical memory and national identity in shaping strategic preferences. Its occlusion is that it can understate institutional constraints, overstate elite coherence, and treat domestic opposition as foreign-sponsored. It also tends to understate the economic and technological costs of confrontation with the West. Overall, the Russian perspective is most valuable for its insistence that sovereignty and status are foundational to security, and for its critique of double standards in the application of international norms; its greatest weakness is its tendency to justify coercion as defense of sovereignty.

2.7.4 Western Perspective The Western perspective on grand strategy for middle powers is rooted in the liberal international order and in theories of alliance politics, deterrence, and institutional cooperation. From this vantage, the international system is anarchic but not lawless: rules, institutions, and alliances can mitigate security dilemmas and create opportunities for mutual gain. Grand strategy is the alignment of ends, ways, and means in pursuit of security, prosperity, and values; it is typically framed in terms of interests, threats, resources, and choices, with an emphasis on measurable capabilities and institutional capacity. The Western perspective contributes the most developed toolkit for analyzing domestic constraints, including veto-player theory, bureaucratic politics, and public-opinion research, and it treats strategy-making as a process shaped by institutions, coalitions, and information. Its central claim is that order is possible and that middle powers can enhance their autonomy by embedding themselves in rules-based institutions and alliances rather than by pursuing pure non-alignment.

On the middle-power problem, the Western perspective distinguishes between autonomy and isolation. A middle power can be autonomous not by avoiding great powers but by choosing its alignments strategically, diversifying its partnerships within a rules-based framework, and maintaining sufficient capability to avoid entrapment. Hedging—maintaining security ties with one power while economic ties with another—is treated as a rational response to uncertainty, provided it does not undermine alliance credibility. The Western perspective therefore sees multi-alignment as compatible with order if it is transparent, reciprocal, and anchored in institutions. It is more skeptical of non-alignment when it appears to enable free-riding or to undermine collective security. This perspective contributes a sophisticated account of risk management and the trade-offs between autonomy and assurance. Its occlusion is that it can treat Western-led institutions as neutral and universal, understating their historical origins and asymmetric benefits, and it can overestimate the willingness of great powers to accommodate middle-power autonomy.

Ontological security is present in the Western perspective but is often subordinated to material and institutional analysis. Democratic identity, human rights, and the rules-based order are treated as sources of legitimacy and as components of security, but they are frequently framed as universal values rather than as particular identities. This can lead to a tendency to treat deviations from liberal norms as security threats or as evidence of authoritarianism. The perspective contributes the insight that domestic regime type shapes foreign policy preferences and that democratic publics can constrain aggressive strategies. Its occlusion is that it can universalize Western identity claims, treating liberal democracy as the endpoint of political development, and it can understate the ontological security concerns of states whose identities are not liberal or whose historical experiences include colonialism and intervention. For middle powers, this means that Western frameworks may misread principled non-alignment or anti-interventionism as irrational or opportunistic.

Multi-alignment is a central theme in contemporary Western scholarship on middle powers, especially in the Indo-Pacific. Hedging, omni-enmeshment, and "friend-shoring" are analyzed as strategies for managing uncertainty in a fragmented order. The Western perspective contributes rigorous causal mechanisms: middle powers hedge when they face high uncertainty, asymmetric dependence, and credible threats from multiple directions. It also identifies limits: hedging can fail if great powers demand exclusive alignment, if domestic politics polarize around foreign policy, or if economic and security logics diverge. The perspective's occlusion is that it often treats hedging as a technocratic optimization problem, understating the role of identity, historical memory, and domestic political economy. It can also assume that the Western-led order is the natural baseline, making any challenge to it appear as revisionism rather than as a legitimate demand for reform.

The politics of strategy-making is where the Western perspective is strongest. It provides detailed theories of how institutions, veto players, bureaucratic politics, and public opinion shape strategy. It emphasizes that grand strategy is not made by a unitary rational actor but through bargaining among domestic actors with different interests and time horizons. This is a crucial contribution, especially for understanding democratic middle powers. Its occlusion is that it can overstate the universality of democratic institutional patterns and understate the role of informal networks, patronage, and elite capture in many states. It can also treat domestic constraints as obstacles to strategy rather than as sources of legitimacy and resilience. Overall, the Western perspective is most valuable for its analytical rigor, its institutional focus, and its account of hedging; its greatest weakness is its tendency to universalize liberal norms and to understate the historical and structural inequalities that shape the choices of non-Western middle powers.

2.7.5 UN Perspective The UN perspective on grand strategy for middle powers is rooted in the Charter's principles of sovereign equality, non-use of force, peaceful settlement of disputes, and collective security. From this vantage, the international system is not merely anarchic; it is governed by a legal and normative framework that constrains and enables state action. Grand strategy is therefore not only the pursuit of national interest but the reconciliation of national interest with international law, multilateral cooperation, and the common good. Interests include peace, development, and human rights; threats include conflict, poverty, climate change, and the erosion of multilateralism; resources include legitimacy, law, diplomacy, and institutional capacity; choices are evaluated by whether they strengthen or weaken the international order. The UN perspective contributes a normative framework that elevates the agency of middle and small states, treats multilateralism as a strategic asset rather than a constraint, and provides mechanisms—such as mediation, peacekeeping, and the General Assembly—for amplifying voices that would otherwise be drowned out by great-power politics.

On the middle-power problem, the UN perspective argues that autonomy is best secured through multilateralism rather than through bilateral alignment or non-alignment. Middle powers can use the UN system to build coalitions, set agendas, and constrain great-power behavior through law and norms. This is particularly important in a fragmented order, where unilateral or bilateral strategies may expose middle powers to coercion. The perspective therefore treats the UN not as a weak or irrelevant institution but as a strategic arena in which middle powers can exercise disproportionate influence relative to their material capabilities. It also emphasizes that security is indivisible: a middle power's security depends on the stability of the broader system, and therefore on collective action. This contributes an important corrective to purely competitive or bilateral accounts of strategy. Its occlusion is that it can assume institutional capacity and political will that are often absent, and it can understate the ways in which great powers capture or bypass UN mechanisms through the Security Council veto, funding leverage, or selective compliance.

Ontological security is present in the UN perspective in the form of identity as a responsible international citizen. States that contribute to peacekeeping, mediation, development, and norm promotion derive legitimacy and recognition from their multilateral engagement. For middle powers, this can be a source of ontological security: being seen as a bridge-builder, a mediator, or a defender of the Charter can reinforce domestic and international legitimacy. The perspective contributes the insight that identity and legitimacy are produced through participation in international institutions, not only through bilateral alliances or material power. Its occlusion is that it can treat multilateral participation as inherently virtuous, understating the ways in which states use the UN for instrumental or legitimizing purposes, and it can overstate the capacity of norms to constrain power. It may also understate the frustration of states that invest in multilateralism but see their concerns ignored by the Security Council.

Multi-alignment is compatible with the UN perspective when it is framed as diversification within a multilateral framework. The Charter does not require exclusive alignment; it requires respect for sovereignty and peaceful dispute settlement. The UN perspective therefore supports middle powers that maintain multiple partnerships, provided they do not use force or violate international law. It contributes the idea that multi-alignment can be stabilized by shared norms and institutions, reducing the risk of escalation. Its occlusion is that it can be overly legalistic, treating formal commitments as more constraining than they are in practice, and it can understate the power asymmetries that shape whose interpretations of international law prevail. It may also struggle to account for situations in which multilateralism itself becomes a tool of great-power competition, as when rival powers use UN forums to legitimize competing orders.

The politics of strategy-making in the UN perspective is framed in terms of transparency, accountability, and consultation. Strategy should ideally be subject to international law, parliamentary oversight, and civil society participation. The perspective contributes norms of good governance and mechanisms such as peacebuilding commissions, human rights councils, and review processes. Its occlusion is that it may assume institutional capacities and political will that are absent in many states, and it can understate the role of informal politics, elite capture, and security imperatives. It also tends to treat the UN as a neutral arbiter rather than as an arena shaped by power. Overall, the UN perspective is most valuable for its normative elevation of middle-power agency, its emphasis on law and multilateralism, and its account of collective security; its greatest weakness is its tendency to understate power politics and to overstate the capacity of institutions to constrain great powers.

SECTION 2.7.6 Comparison Matrix

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
African	Centers middle-power agency, sovereignty, and postcolonial refusal of hierarchical tutelage; treats non-alignment as normative order-making rather than mere tactics	Can understate material dependence, uneven capacity, and intra-elite or intra-regional divisions; may romanticize sovereignty	Self-determination, equality, anti-hegemony, and equitable participation in global order	NAM legacy, AU positions, ICJ litigation, demands for UN Security Council reform, insistence on strategic autonomy	Western: agency without material capacity and institutional leverage is insufficient for security
Chinese	Reconstructs middle powers as nodes in relational networks; emphasizes connectivity, development, and shared regional futures	Masks asymmetry, leverage, and the political implications of economic dependence; can treat sovereignty as compatible with hierarchy	Harmony, mutual benefit, multipolar equality, and community of shared future	Belt and Road projects, ASEAN-China frameworks, Global Development Initiative, trade interdepen-dence	Western/Russian: relational rhetoric may obscure coercive or asymmetric leverage
Russian	Legitimizes sovereign choice and multipolarity; offers a vocabulary of equality and non-interference that resonates with postcolonial states	Can conflate pragmatic hedging with endorsement of Russian or Chinese projects; may understate continued reliance on Western markets and security cooperation	Sovereign equality, non-interference, and resistance to unipolar dominance	BRICS+, SCO rhetoric, anti-sanctions discourse, multipolar diplomacy	UN/Western: sovereignty rhetoric can weaken collective security, human rights, and institutional accountability

Perspective	Key contribution	Key occlusion	Core normative stance	Best evidence	Strongest objection from another perspective
Western	Explains hedging, institutional balancing, and material incentives; clarifies how middle powers manage risk in a competitive order	Treats middle powers as objects or assets in great-power competition; underestimates postcolonial memory, normative agency, and domestic legitimacy constraints	Rules-based order, openness, deterrence, and institutional-ized cooperation	Indo-Pacific strategies, alliances, Quad, supply-chain initiatives, security partnerships	African/Chinese: the "rules-based order" can appear hierarchical, Western-centric, and selectively enforced
UN	Elevates middle-power agency through Charter principles, law, mediation, and multilateral forums; provides normative language for autonomy and peace	Assumes institutional capacity and political will that may be absent; understates informal politics, elite capture, and hard power	Collective security, sovereign equality, peaceful settlement of disputes, and multilateral legitimacy	UNGA resolutions, peacekeeping, ICJ, mediation roles, human rights and development frameworks	Russian/Western: institutions are arenas of power, not neutral arbiters, and may lack enforcement capacity

SECTION 2.8 WORKED EXAMPLE (I do)

Case: Indonesia as a middle power in the Indo-Pacific

Indonesia is a useful capstone case because it combines large population, archipelagic geography, G20 membership, ASEAN centrality, and a long-standing "free and active" (bebas aktif) foreign policy. It is not a great power, but it is too large and strategically located to be treated as a passive object of US-China competition. The puzzle is how Indonesia pursues strategic autonomy while remaining economically intertwined with China and security-cooperative with the United States and its partners.

Levels of Analysis

At the individual level, Indonesian strategy is shaped by elite beliefs, bureaucratic routines, and domestic political coalitions. Leaders inherit a postcolonial narrative that treats non-alignment as both a moral stance

and a practical method for preserving room for maneuver. Foreign policy is also filtered through domestic legitimacy: governments must show that they are not subordinating national interests to either Washington or Beijing. At the state level, Indonesia's archipelagic geography, maritime claims, resource endowments, and institutional capacity define what is feasible. The state must secure sea lanes, manage internal diversity, and convert demographic scale into economic and military capability. At the systemic level, the Indo-Pacific is structured by US-China rivalry, ASEAN's institutional centrality, and the diffusion of power across multiple poles. Indonesia's choices are constrained by alliance politics, regional order, and the possibility that great-power competition could militarize its surrounding seas. At the transnational level, Indonesia is embedded in global value chains, maritime trade routes, energy markets, digital infrastructure, and transnational religious and diasporic networks. These flows create opportunities for growth but also vulnerabilities, including dependence on external technology and exposure to supply-chain shocks.

Mechanism

The central mechanism is hedging as risk management rather than alliance commitment. Indonesia does not seek to balance China militarily in the manner of a formal ally; instead it diversifies partnerships, deepens economic ties with multiple actors, and uses ASEAN institutions to multilateralize great-power pressure. The mechanism works through three channels. First, economic diversification: by maintaining trade and investment links with China, the United States, Japan, South Korea, and others, Indonesia reduces the cost of any single partner's coercion. Second, institutional embedding: ASEAN provides a platform through which Indonesia can elevate regional norms, delay binary choices, and convert its size into agenda-setting influence. Third, strategic ambiguity: by avoiding exclusive commitments, Indonesia preserves bargaining space and signals that its cooperation is contingent on respect for sovereignty and regional stability. This is not neutrality in the sense of indifference; it is an active strategy of preserving autonomy under uncertainty. The mechanism is reinforced by identity: a self-image as a large, independent, archipelagic state makes alignment with either camp politically costly. Yet the mechanism has limits. Economic asymmetry means that diversification is uneven; security dependence may be harder to diversify than trade; and domestic capacity constraints can turn strategic autonomy into rhetorical autonomy.

Perspective Reconstruction

The African perspective, treated here as a primary lens rather than a regional add-on, illuminates Indonesia's insistence on agency, sovereignty, and non-subordination. It reconstructs Indonesian strategy as a postcolonial refusal to be conscripted into great-power projects, analogous in logic—though not identical in history—to African demands for strategic autonomy and equitable international order. From this vantage, bebas aktif is not merely tactical hedging but a normative claim that middle powers have the right to define their own interests, resist hierarchical tutelage, and participate in order-making. It highlights the memory of colonialism and the political cost of appearing to serve external powers. It also foregrounds the possibility that Indonesia's regional leadership is a form of agency that Western metrics of alliance alignment may undervalue. Its limitation is that it can understate material dependence: sovereignty rhetoric does not by itself create industrial capacity, maritime surveillance, or technological independence.

The Chinese perspective reconstructs Indonesia as a partner in a relational order rather than a node in a US-led alliance system. It emphasizes connectivity, development, and the idea that Indonesia's growth can be advanced through participation in Chinese-led economic networks. It treats strategic autonomy as compatible with deep economic interdependence, provided that interdependence is framed as mutual benefit. It also stresses ASEAN-China institutional cooperation and the possibility of a shared regional future. Its occlusion is that it may understate Indonesian anxieties about maritime coercion, asymmetry, and the political

implications of economic dependence.

The Russian perspective emphasizes sovereign choice and multipolarity. It would read Indonesia's refusal to align as evidence that the unipolar moment has ended and that states can legitimately diversify partnerships without Western approval. It contributes a vocabulary of equality and non-interference that resonates with postcolonial states. Its occlusion is that it can conflate Indonesia's pragmatic hedging with endorsement of Russian or Chinese geopolitical projects, and it may understate the extent to which Indonesia still values Western markets, technology, and security cooperation.

The Western perspective explains Indonesia through hedging, institutional balancing, and the material incentives of the rules-based order. It sees Indonesia as managing risk between a revisionist China and a US-led security architecture, and it values Indonesia's participation in maritime security, supply-chain resilience, and regional stability. Its occlusion is that it can treat Indonesia primarily as a strategic asset in great-power competition, underestimating the domestic political and normative reasons why alignment is constrained.

The UN perspective reconstructs Indonesia as a multilateral actor whose legitimacy derives from Charter principles, ASEAN centrality, and participation in global governance. It highlights mediation, maritime law, development cooperation, and the normative value of non-alignment as a contribution to peace. Its occlusion is that it may overstate the capacity of institutions to manage great-power rivalry and understate the hard security dilemmas facing an archipelagic state.

Explicit Adjudication

No single perspective fully explains Indonesia. The Western hedging framework best captures the instrumental logic of diversification and the material constraints of US-China rivalry, but it is too thin on agency and identity. The African perspective best explains why Indonesia's autonomy is not merely a tactical pause but a politically embedded commitment rooted in postcolonial sovereignty and regional leadership. The Chinese perspective captures economic interdependence but overstates mutuality; the Russian perspective captures multipolar rhetoric but overstates ideological convergence; the UN perspective captures institutional and legal dimensions but underestimates coercion. The most defensible adjudication is that Indonesia's grand strategy is best explained by a synthesis in which African-style agency and postcolonial sovereignty set the normative boundary, Western-style hedging supplies the operational mechanism, and UN-style multilateralism provides the institutional arena—while Chinese and Russian perspectives describe external opportunities and constraints that Indonesia exploits without fully endorsing. What this synthesis misses is the domestic political economy of strategy-making: elite bargains, bureaucratic capacity, and the gap between strategic doctrine and implementation.

SECTION 2.9 PROBLEM PAIR (We do)

Tasks

1. State the puzzle. South Africa filed an application at the International Court of Justice in December 2023 accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza, while simultaneously deepening its BRICS+ role and hosting a naval exercise with Russia and China in February 2023. Does a single grand strategy reconcile these moves, or do they reflect competing imperatives that the government is managing opportunistically?
2. Map the four levels of analysis. Identify the relevant actors and mechanisms at the individual level (President Ramaphosa, Foreign Minister Pandor, ANC leadership), the state level (the 1996 Consti-

tution's human-rights commitments, DIRCO's institutional culture, post-apartheid identity), the systemic level (multipolarity, US-China rivalry, BRICS+ expansion), and the transnational level (Palestinian solidarity networks, trade unions, diaspora communities, global South civil society).

3. Reconstruct the five perspectives on South Africa's choices. In three to five sentences each, articulate how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would interpret the ICJ case, the BRICS+ deepening, and the Russia naval exercise.

4. Adjudicate between ontological security and material interest. Is South Africa's foreign policy better explained by identity continuity (the anti-apartheid liberation narrative, NAM legacy, constitutional values) or by material interest (BRICS market access, energy cooperation, Western trade dependence)? Specify the scope conditions under which each explanation dominates.

5. Identify falsifiers. What evidence would disconfirm the claim that ontological security sets the agenda? What evidence would disconfirm the claim that material interest constrains the instruments? Be concrete (e.g., withdrawal from the ICJ case under Western pressure, deepening Russia ties despite sanctions costs, electoral indifference to foreign policy stance).

6. Compare with Indonesia. Indonesia's hedging between the US and China is calibrated to material risk and geographic proximity. What does the South Africa comparison reveal about how historical identity shapes the risk tolerance of middle-power grand strategy?

MODEL ANSWER

South Africa's foreign policy in 2023-2024 presents a puzzle that resists single-cause explanation. The ANC government filed an application at the International Court of Justice accusing Israel of genocide in Gaza, while simultaneously deepening ties within BRICS+ and conducting a naval exercise with Russia and China. The question is whether these moves cohere under a grand strategy or reflect competing imperatives managed through rhetorical compartmentalization. At the individual level, President Ramaphosa and Foreign Minister Pandor framed the ICJ action as a moral obligation rooted in South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, invoking Nelson Mandela's solidarity with Palestine. This is not merely rhetoric; it mobilizes a domestic constituency and reinforces ANC legitimacy at a moment of eroding electoral support. At the state level, the 1996 Constitution's commitment to human rights and international law provides an institutional anchor, and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation has long championed multilateralism as a core identity marker. Systemically, South Africa operates in a fragmented order where BRICS+ offers an alternative platform to Western-dominated institutions, and where US-China rivalry creates space for middle powers to diversify partnerships. Transnationally, Palestinian solidarity networks, trade unions, and civil society exert pressure that the ANC cannot ignore without electoral cost, while Western markets remain indispensable to South African exports.

The African perspective reads South Africa's stance as an assertion of sovereign agency and Pan-African solidarity extended to the global South. From this vantage, the ICJ case is not adventurism but a claim that international law must apply equally, a critique of double standards that Western powers have historically tolerated. The Chinese perspective emphasizes relationality: South Africa's BRICS+ role strengthens a community of shared future and demonstrates that Global South states can shape agendas rather than merely receive them. The Russian perspective frames the choices as sovereign multipolarity, rejecting unipolar dictates and asserting the right to partner with Moscow without Western permission. The Western perspective sees hedging that risks alienating the United States and the European Union, South Africa's largest trading

partners, and warns that normative posturing may carry material costs in market access and investment. The UN perspective treats South Africa as a Charter multilateralist, using judicial mechanisms rather than force, and positions the ICJ as the appropriate forum for adjudicating genocide claims.

Adjudicating between ontological security and material interest requires examining scope conditions rather than declaring a winner. Ontological security theory holds that states seek continuity of identity; for South Africa, the anti-apartheid liberation narrative is constitutive, and the ICJ case and NAM legacy express this identity. Yet material interests are not absent: BRICS+ offers market access, energy cooperation, and a platform to reform global governance, while Western trade dependence imposes real constraints. The evidence suggests interaction rather than substitution. The ICJ filing occurred when domestic ANC support was eroding and the party faced its most competitive election, suggesting identity politics served electoral consolidation. Simultaneously, trade data show continued heavy dependence on Western markets, indicating that BRICS+ has not displaced material ties. Thus the best explanation is that ontological security sets the agenda, determining which issues become salient, while material interests constrain the instruments available, preventing a full break with the West. Falsifiers would include withdrawal from the ICJ case following Western economic pressure, which would indicate material interest dominance; deepening Russia ties despite severe sanctions costs, which would indicate identity dominance; or electoral indifference to foreign policy stance, which would weaken the domestic-identity mechanism. Compared with Indonesia's hedging, South Africa's normative activism is less calibrated to material risk, reflecting its distinctive liberation identity and the domestic political utility of anti-colonial solidarity. In sum, South Africa's grand strategy is not a coherent blueprint but a negotiated equilibrium between who it claims to be and what it can afford.

SECTION 2.10 INDEPENDENT MEMO (You do)

(a) Case description. Nigeria, Africa's most populous state and largest economy, presents a middle-power puzzle distinct from both Indonesia's geographic hedging and South Africa's normative activism. Under President Tinubu, Abuja has pursued economic reforms demanded by Western creditors while simultaneously seeking BRICS partnership and maintaining security cooperation with Russia-linked Wagner successor entities in the Sahel. Nigeria leads ECOWAS interventions against military coups in Niger and Mali, yet its own democratic institutions face strain. Oil dependence, currency crisis, and youth unemployment constrain strategic choice, while Pan-African leadership claims and Commonwealth membership pull in different directions. The student must explain how Nigeria's grand strategy reconciles regional hegemony, economic survival, and identity claims.

(b) Required memo headings (prompts).

- **Mechanism:** Identify the causal mechanism linking Nigeria's domestic political economy (oil dependence, fiscal crisis, electoral coalitions) to its foreign policy posture. Specify scope conditions and observable implications.
- **Perspective reconstruction:** Reconstruct how the African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives would each interpret Nigeria's ECOWAS interventions, BRICS overtures, and Western economic alignment. Steel-man each.
- **Historical analogue:** Identify a comparable middle-power case (e.g., Nigeria under Obasanjo, Brazil under Lula, or Turkey under Erdogan) and specify what transfers and what does not.
- **Falsifiers:** State two to three concrete observations that would disconfirm your preferred explanation, and one that would disconfirm the leading alternative.

(c) Self-check. Before submitting, verify that you have distinguished description (what Nigeria did), expla-

nation (why), prediction (what follows under stated conditions), and prescription (what should be done), and that no single paragraph conflates more than two of these.

SECTION 2.11 HINGE QUESTION

A middle power possesses strong normative identity commitments rooted in an anti-colonial liberation narrative and deep trade dependence on a rival bloc. Facing a geopolitical crisis, which grand strategic posture best reconciles autonomy with security according to the framework developed in this lesson?

A) Full alignment with the normative bloc, accepting all material costs as the price of identity consistency.
B) Full alignment with the material partner, abandoning identity claims to maximize economic gain.
C) Multi-alignment: maintaining normative voice while diversifying partnerships and preserving exit options.
D) Strategic isolation: withdrawing from all blocs to maximize formal sovereignty.

Correct answer: C.

Distractor diagnoses.

- **A** conflates ontological security with material survival. It assumes identity concerns always override security interests, ignoring the scope conditions under which material constraints prevent a full break with the dominant partner. The lesson shows identity sets the agenda but does not eliminate cost calculations.
- **B** treats material interest as the sole driver and occludes the domestic political and institutional costs of abandoning constitutive identity claims. It cannot explain why middle powers sustain normative posturing despite economic risk.
- **D** mistakes autonomy for isolation. It ignores interdependence, institutional leverage, and the lesson's emphasis that middle powers gain influence through engagement and diversification rather than withdrawal.

SECTION 2A — DATA LAB

Data note: The figures below are indicative ranges for teaching purposes (circa 2022–2024), not authoritative point estimates. They should be verified against World Bank, SIPRI, WTO/UN Comtrade, and UNGA voting records before use in research or policy work.

Table 1. Material profile of two middle powers (indicative)

State	Nominal GDP (USD trn)	Defense spending (% of GDP)	Active military personnel (thousands)	Strategic geography
Indonesia	~1.3–1.4	~0.7–0.9	~400	Archipelagic chokepoints; bridge between Indian and Pacific Oceans

State	Nominal GDP (USD trn)	Defense spending (% of GDP)	Active military personnel (thousands)	Strategic geography
South Africa	~0.37–0.40	~0.7–1.0	~75	Cape sea lanes; gateway to Southern Africa and Indian Ocean

Table 2. Trade dependence by partner (indicative share of total trade)

State	Largest partner	Second	Third	Structural vulnerability
Indonesia	China (~25–30% of imports; ~20–25% of exports)	ASEAN (~20%)	Japan/US (~10–12% each)	Manufacturing inputs and consumer demand tied to China; security and technology ties to US/Japan
South Africa	China (~15–20% of exports; ~20% of imports)	EU (~20–25%)	US (~8–10%)	Mineral exports to China; EU market access; US preference-programme exposure

Table 3. Doctrine, alignment, and normative posture (qualitative)

State	Doctrine / document	UN voting pattern (indicative)	Key alignment	Central tension
Indonesia	“Bebas aktif” (free and active)	Frequent abstention on great-power conflicts; strong Global South solidarity on Palestine and colonial questions	NAM, ASEAN, G20	Autonomy rhetoric versus deep China trade dependence

State	Doctrine / document	UN voting pattern (indicative)	Key alignment	Central tension
South Africa	Constitution-based human rights; NAM legacy; BRICS+ participation	Solidarity with Global South; high-profile ICJ genocide case against Israel	AU, BRICS+, NAM	Normative leadership versus material ties to Russia/China and Western market access

Analysis questions

1. **Trend.** Across Tables 1–2, what pattern links middle-power material capacity to trade dependence? Does larger GDP translate into greater strategic autonomy, or does it coexist with deeper interdependence? Identify one trend and one anomaly, and state what each implies for grand strategy.
2. **Level of analysis.** Take Indonesia's China trade share. How does the same fact appear at the individual level (firms, elites, consumers), the state level (ministries, coalitions, doctrine), the systemic level (US–China competition), and the transnational level (supply chains, diaspora, finance)? Which level best explains Indonesia's hedging, and which level is most often ignored in Western commentary?
3. **Perspective reconstruction (all five).** Reconstruct the data through all five perspectives, beginning with the African perspective as primary.

    - **African (primary):** The tables show a familiar post-colonial structure: middle powers possess formal sovereignty and growing GDP, yet remain embedded in unequal trade and security hierarchies. From this vantage, Indonesia's "bebas aktif" and South Africa's NAM/BRICS+ posture are not merely tactical hedging; they are attempts to convert historical subordination into diplomatic agency. The data confirm that autonomy is constrained by material dependence, but they also show that middle powers use multilateral forums, normative claims, and regional leadership to widen their room for manoeuvre. What the tables hide is the domestic political labour required to sustain non-alignment: elite bargains, popular legitimacy, and the memory of colonial or apartheid-era vulnerability.

    - **Chinese:** The data support a relational reading: trade density is not domination but interdependence, and middle powers benefit from China's market and infrastructure. The occlusion is coercion risk and the possibility that dependence becomes leverage.

    - **Russian:** The data can be read as evidence of a fragmenting order in which middle powers seek sovereign choice outside Western blocs. The occlusion is the cost of alignment with sanctioned or revisionist powers.

    - **Western:** The data support hedging as rational risk management under uncertainty. The occlusion is the normative and identity-based reasons why middle powers resist binary alignment.

    - **UN:** The data point to a need for multilateral mediation, rules-based trade, and Charter restraint. The occlusion is the weakness of enforcement when great powers disagree.

4. **Interpretation.** Do these data support multi-alignment as a sustainable grand strategy, or do they show a transitional posture that will collapse under intensified US–China competition? Use at least one falsifier (for example: a sustained drop in China trade share without security realignment, or a major arms purchase that breaks non-alignment).

5. **Limitation.** What do GDP, defense spending, trade shares, and UN voting not measure that matters for grand strategy? Name three omissions and explain how each could reverse the conclusion that a given middle power is "successfully autonomous."

SECTION 3 — DUAL-CODED VISUAL ANCHOR

Visual 1 — "Grand Strategy Choice Space for a Middle Power"

- **What to draw:** A large square coordinate plane. Draw the x-axis as "Strategic autonomy (low → high)" and the y-axis as "Security dependence (low → high)." Divide the plane into four lightly shaded quadrants: bottom-left "Bandwagoning," top-left "Balancing," top-right "Hedging," bottom-right "Buck-passing/Defection." Place a medium circle labelled "Indonesia" in the upper-right quadrant, slightly closer to the autonomy axis. Place a second circle labelled "South Africa" also in the upper-right quadrant, but nearer the centre, with a small arrow showing movement toward "normative hedging." Draw a dashed diagonal line from bottom-left to top-right labelled "Great-power pressure increases."
- **Labels to place:** "Autonomy," "Dependence," "Hedging zone," "Indonesia," "South Africa," "Great-power pressure."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** In the Indonesia circle, annotate "African/Global South: sovereignty as non-negotiable"; near South Africa, annotate "Western: hedging as rational"; along the diagonal, annotate "Chinese: relational stability"; in the top-left quadrant, annotate "Russian: multipolar choice"; near the origin, annotate "UN: Charter restraint."

Visual 2 — "Multi-alignment as Network, Not Bloc"

- **What to draw:** A central hexagon labelled "Middle Power." Draw six to eight radiating lines of varying thickness to nodes labelled "US," "China," "Russia," "BRICS+," "NAM," "UN," "AU/ASEAN," and "EU." Make the China and US lines thickest; make Russia and BRICS+ medium; make UN and regional nodes thinner but dashed to indicate normative ties. Add small icons: a trade symbol on the China/US/EU lines, a security symbol on the US line, a normative symbol on NAM/UN lines. Draw a faint outer ring labelled "Global South solidarity."
- **Labels to place:** "Trade," "Security," "Norms," "Solidarity," "Hedging network."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** Beside the China node, annotate "Chinese: community of shared future"; beside the US node, annotate "Western: order maintenance"; beside Russia/BRICS+, annotate "Russian: sovereign equality"; beside NAM/UN, annotate "African: Pan-African/Global South agency"; beside the outer ring, annotate "UN: multilateral mediation."

Visual 3 — "Ontological versus Material Security"

- **What to draw:** A balance scale. On the left pan, place three stacked boxes labelled "GDP," "Trade access," and "Military capacity." On the right pan, place three stacked boxes labelled "Identity," "Dig-

nity," and "Historical memory." Place the fulcrum at the centre, but draw the right pan slightly lower to show that identity can outweigh material gain in some decisions. Add two small case tags: "Indonesia: bebas aktif" on the right pan and "South Africa: ICJ case" on the right pan. Draw a small arrow from the left pan to the right pan labelled "material pressure."

- **Labels to place:** "Material survival," "Ontological security," "Indonesia," "South Africa," "Identity weight."
- **Perspective overlay to annotate:** On the right pan, annotate "African: identity as sovereignty"; on the left pan, annotate "Western: material optimization"; near the fulcrum, annotate "Chinese: relational harmony"; near the arrow, annotate "Russian: sovereign choice"; above the scale, annotate "UN: human dignity and Charter norms."

SECTION 4 — CORNELL NOTES

Cue	Notes (source log included)
Define grand strategy	Liddell Hart (1954): strategy coordinates ends, ways, and means; grand strategy extends this to political, economic, and moral resources. Kennedy (1991): great-power decline follows from overextension relative to resources.
Middle-power problem	Gecelovsky (2009): middle powers lack decisive material capacity but possess diplomatic, normative, and regional assets. Beeson and Higgott (2014): in Asia-Pacific, middle powers face a fragmented order and must manage US–China rivalry.
Ontological vs material security	Identity, status, and historical memory can override narrowly material calculations; middle powers may accept economic cost to preserve self-image as sovereign or normative actors.
Multi-alignment	Not neutrality or non-alignment in the Cold War sense; a portfolio of ties across security, trade, and norms. Limits: credibility erosion, contradictory commitments, great-power coercion.
Politics of strategy-making	Strategy is made by coalitions, bureaucracies, and domestic institutions; leaders face electoral, military, and business constraints. Posen (2014): restraint requires political coalitions; Brands (2016): strategy must connect ends and means across domains.
Indonesia case	"Bebas aktif"; archipelagic geography; China trade dependence; US/Japan security ties; ASEAN centrality; hedging as practice rather than doctrine.
South Africa case	NAM legacy; BRICS+; AU leadership; ICJ case; Russia ties; EU/US market access; normative foreign policy versus material interests.

Cue	Notes (source log included)
Data limitations	GDP, defense spending, trade shares, and UN voting omit domestic coalitions, elite beliefs, historical memory, supply-chain depth, and coercive leverage.
African perspective (primary)	Agency, sovereignty, Pan-Africanism; middle powers as actors negotiating post-colonial hierarchies; identity and historical experience shape strategy.
Chinese perspective	Relationality; community of shared future; trade interdependence; stability through dense ties; risk of over-dependence.
Russian perspective	Sovereign choice; multipolarity; resistance to Western bloc logic; costs of alignment with sanctioned powers.
Western perspective	Liberal order; hedging as rational; rules-based trade; alliance credibility; concern about authoritarian influence.
UN perspective	Charter multilateralism; mediation; human dignity; limits of enforcement under great-power disagreement.

Summary (3–5 sentences): Middle-power grand strategy is the problem of converting limited material capacity into durable autonomy under great-power competition. Indonesia and South Africa illustrate different versions of multi-alignment: Indonesia hedges between China trade and US/Japan security, while South Africa balances normative leadership with BRICS+, Russia ties, and Western market access. The data show interdependence, not independence, and therefore strategy must be judged by political sustainability as well as by metrics. African, Chinese, Russian, Western, and UN perspectives each illuminate a different dimension of this problem and each occludes another.

SECTION 5 — FEYNMAN COMPRESSION

1. **Explain without jargon.** A middle power is a country that is not a superpower but is too important to ignore. Its leaders want to stay safe, keep trading, and still feel like an independent country. They usually do not pick one big power; instead they keep ties with several—China for trade, the US for security, regional groups for voice, and the UN for legitimacy. Sometimes they also take moral stands, like South Africa's ICJ case, because identity and history matter, not just money or weapons.

2. **Mark gaps.** I am not yet sure how long hedging can last when US–China rivalry intensifies; whether domestic coalitions will support costly non-alignment; how to measure ontological security; and whether UN voting patterns predict real strategic choices. I also need to separate description of Indonesia's "bebas aktif" from explanation of why it persists.

3. **Reread verification.** Rechecking the core sources: Liddell Hart (1954) reminds me that grand strategy includes political and moral resources, not only military force; Kennedy (1991) warns that overex-

tension relative to resources produces decline; Posen (2014) shows that restraint is politically constructed; Brands (2016) insists that strategy must connect ends and means; Gecelovsky (2009) defines the middle-power dilemma as limited capacity plus diplomatic opportunity; Beeson and Higgott (2014) place that dilemma inside a fragmented Asia-Pacific order.

4. **Analogy with explicit limits.** A middle power is like a small business owner who buys from one giant supplier, sells to another giant customer, and joins a trade association for protection. The analogy helps explain diversification and vulnerability, but it breaks down because states have historical identities, coercive power, domestic publics, and claims to sovereignty that firms do not have.

5. **Rewrite.** Middle-power grand strategy is the disciplined management of dependence: leaders use trade, security ties, regional institutions, and normative claims to preserve autonomy in an order they cannot control. Indonesia and South Africa show that multi-alignment can be rational and durable, but only if domestic coalitions accept its costs and if great-power pressure does not force a binary choice. The African perspective is essential because it shows that sovereignty is not merely a legal status; it is a historically earned and politically defended condition.

SECTION 6 — SPACED-REPETITION FLASHCARDS

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
61	Definition	What is grand strategy?	Grand strategy is the long-term alignment of a state's ends (interests), ways (strategies), and means (resources) across military, economic, and diplomatic domains. Liddell Hart (1954) framed it as the coordination of all instruments of power toward policy objectives.	Western tradition treats it as rational statecraft; African scholarship (Grovogui) asks whose interests the "national interest" actually serves.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
61	Mechanism	What is the middle power problem?	Middle powers possess enough capacity to pursue autonomous foreign policies but insufficient power to shape the international order unilaterally; they must balance autonomy with security, typically through hedging and multi-alignment. Beeson and Higgott (2014) frame this as a structural constraint rather than a choice.	African middle powers (South Africa, Nigeria) often frame autonomy through Pan-African solidarity rather than bilateral hedging alone.
61	Definition	What is ontological security?	Ontological security is the need for a stable, continuous sense of self-identity; states may prioritize identity-affirming actions over material gain when that identity is threatened. Mitzen (2006) and Steele (2008) develop this in IR.	African states' ontological security is frequently tied to anti-colonial sovereignty norms and post-colonial statehood.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
61	Mechanism	How does multi-alignment differ from non-alignment?	Non-alignment (NAM legacy) refuses bloc membership; multi-alignment actively cultivates partnerships across competing powers simultaneously to extract benefits from multiple relationships. Gecelovsky (2009) distinguishes the two.	India and Indonesia practice multi-alignment; African states often blend NAM rhetoric with multi-alignment practice.
61	Application	What is Indonesia's grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific?	Indonesia pursues "bebas-aktif" (free and active) foreign policy, hedging between the US and China through ASEAN centrality, maritime security cooperation, and economic engagement with both powers.	Indonesian strategy reflects archipelagic state identity and a non-alignment tradition rooted in the 1955 Bandung Conference.
61	Application	What tension defines South Africa's middle-power strategy?	South Africa's ICJ case against Israel and its NAM legacy express normative commitments, while BRICS+ membership and Russia ties serve material and economic interests; these commitments can conflict in practice.	The African agency perspective reads this tension as sovereignty assertion rather than incoherence.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
61	Source	What does Posen (2014) argue about grand strategy?	Posen (2014) argues grand strategy is about choosing among competing strategic options under resource constraints, emphasizing restraint and prioritization; he critiques overextension and imperial overreach.	A Western realist lens; African scholars would add colonial resource extraction as an additional constraint on choice.
61	Source	What does Brands (2016) contribute?	Brands (2016) examines American grand strategy and the challenges of sustaining primacy, arguing for a coherent strategic vision amid a fragmenting international order.	US-centric in scope; less directly applicable to middle-power strategy-making.
61	Source	What does Kennedy (1991) argue?	Kennedy (1991) analyzes the rise and fall of great powers, linking economic and military overextension to relative decline; middle powers must avoid imperial overstretch and preserve economic foundations.	Historical structuralism; African application extends to post-colonial state capacity and debt burdens.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
61	Debate	Does ontological security override material survival?	It is context-dependent: when identity is deeply threatened (e.g., post-colonial sovereignty), states may sacrifice material gains for identity affirmation; when physical survival is at stake, material interests dominate.	African states often prioritize sovereignty identity over economic optimization, reflecting anti-colonial legacies.
61	Comparison	How do Chinese and Western perspectives on middle powers differ?	The Chinese perspective emphasizes relationality and a "community of shared future," expecting middle powers to align with China's vision; the Western perspective emphasizes liberal order, hedging, and rules-based alignment.	The African perspective rejects both as external imposition, asserting sovereign agency and Pan-African solidarity.
61	Reconstruction	Reconstruct the Russian perspective on middle-power strategy.	Russia views middle powers as sovereign actors entitled to independent choices in a multipolar order; it opposes Western hegemony and supports states resisting US pressure, as seen in BRICS+ and South Africa ties.	Russian "sovereign choice" rhetoric resonates with African anti-imperialism but may mask underlying power asymmetry.

Tag	Card Type	Front	Back	Perspective Note
61	Occlusion	What does the Western perspective occlude about middle powers?	Western hedging frameworks occlude the historical and structural constraints (colonialism, debt, unequal trade) that limit middle-power autonomy, treating autonomy as a policy choice rather than a capacity.	African scholarship (Rodney, Mamdani) highlights these constraints as foundational.
61	Adjudication	How to adjudicate between multi-alignment and bloc alignment?	Adjudicate by assessing resource dependence, threat environment, identity commitments, and institutional capacity; multi-alignment suits fragmented orders with multiple patrons, while bloc alignment suits existential threats.	African states often choose multi-alignment to preserve Pan-African solidarity and avoid subordination.
61	Visual	What does a grand strategy triangle (ends-ways-means) show?	It maps interests (ends), strategies (ways), and resources (means); misalignment among the three vertices produces strategic failure and is useful for diagnosing middle-power overreach.	African application must include external structural constraints as an implicit fourth vertex.

SECTION 7 — METACOGNITIVE CALIBRATION

7.1 Confidence Audit (score each 0–100)

Skill / Concept	Confidence (0–100)	Evidence of Mastery	Gap to Close
Defining grand strategy (ends-ways-means)			
The middle power problem			
Ontological security vs. material survival			
Multi-alignment theory and limits			
Politics of strategy-making			
Five-perspective reconstruction			
Worked example (Indonesia)			
Problem pair (South Africa)			

7.2 Three-Question Debrief

1. Which of the five perspectives did you find hardest to steel-man from within, and what specifically made it difficult?
2. Where in your analysis did you conflate description of a state's behavior with prescription of what it ought to do?
3. What single piece of evidence would most change your adjudication between multi-alignment and bloc alignment for a given middle power?

7.3 Error-Log

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Middle powers are simply small great powers.	Middle powers lack unilateral order-shaping capacity; their autonomy is structurally constrained, not merely a matter of will.	Beeson and Higgott (2014)
Non-alignment equals neutrality or passivity.	Non-alignment is an active strategy; multi-alignment engages all sides deliberately rather than abstaining.	Gecelovsky (2009)

Common Misconception	Correction	Evidence
Ontological security always trumps material interests.	The priority is context-dependent; existential survival threats override identity concerns.	Mitzen (2006)
Multi-alignment is costless.	It risks credibility loss, overstretch, and contradictory commitments across partners.	Brands (2016)
African foreign policy is incoherent.	Apparent incoherence often reflects competing legitimate commitments (normative and material) under structural constraint.	Grovogui (1996)
Grand strategy is only for great powers.	Middle powers need grand strategy precisely to manage resource constraints and avoid overreach.	Posen (2014)

SECTION 8 — CHEATSHEET

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-Links
Grand strategy (ends-ways-means)	Alignment of interests, strategies, resources across domains over time	Liddell Hart (1954); Kennedy (1991); Posen (2014); Brands (2016)	Indonesia "bebas-aktif"; South Africa ICJ case + BRICS+	Whether grand strategy is possible for non-great powers	A middle power thriving without any coherent strategy	Lesson 1 (levels of analysis); Lesson 60 (Capstone I)
Middle power problem	Autonomy-security tradeoff under structural constraint	Beeson and Higgott (2014)	South Africa, Nigeria, Indonesia, Turkey	Whether middle powers are a distinct category	A state with middle-power capacity but no autonomy constraints	Lesson 12 (power); Lesson 45 (regional orders)

Core Concepts	Key Mechanisms	Theories and Authors	Cases and Evidence	Debates	Falsifiers	Cross-Links
Ontological security vs. material survival	Identity continuity can override material optimization when selfhood is threatened	Mitzen (2006); Steele (2008)	Post-colonial sovereignty assertions; NAM legacy	Which dominates under what conditions	A state sacrificing identity for marginal economic gain	Lesson 8 (construc-tivism); Lesson 30 (identity)
Multi-alignment	Simultaneous engagement of competing powers to extract benefits and hedge risk	Gecelovsky (2009); Kuik (2008)	Indonesia hedging US/China; India multi-alignment	Whether multi-alignment is sustainable or erodes credibility	A multi-aligned state suffering no credibility costs	Lesson 15 (alliances); Lesson 52 (hedging)
Politics of strategy-making	Coalitions, institutions, and domestic constraints shape strategic choice	Posen (2014); Brands (2016)	South Africa's domestic politics and ANC foreign policy	Whether strategy is elite-driven or socially embedded	Strategy unchanged by domestic political turnover	Lesson 20 (domestic politics); Lesson 55 (institutions)
Five perspectives on middle powers	Each tradition contributes and occludes: African (agency), Chinese (re-lationality), Russian (sovereignty), Western (hedging), UN (multi-lateralism)	Grovogui (1996); Mamdani (1996); Rodney (1972)	UN voting alignment data; trade dependence metrics	Which perspective best explains a given case	A case where one perspective fully suffices	Lesson 2 (perspec-tives); Lesson 61 (this lesson)

SECTION 9 — REVIEW SCHEDULE

Interval	Action	Timing
R1	Re-read all 15 flashcards and recite the five perspectives from memory	Same day, 20 minutes
R2	Reconstruct the Indonesia and South Africa cases without notes, then check against the lesson	24 hours, 30 minutes
R3	Redo the problem-pair memo (South Africa) under timed conditions and compare to the model answer	1 week, 45 minutes
R4	Write a comparative memo: Indonesia vs. South Africa grand strategies, adjudicating multi-alignment vs. bloc alignment	2 weeks, 60 minutes
R5	Full capstone synthesis integrating Lessons 1–61; produce a 1,000-word grand strategy brief for a middle power of your choice	1 month, 90 minutes

SECTION 10 — COMPLETION CHECKLIST

- ☐ I can define grand strategy in ends-ways-means terms and trace it to Liddell Hart (1954).
- ☐ I can explain the middle power problem as a structural constraint, not merely a size category.
- ☐ I can distinguish ontological security from material survival and state when each dominates.
- ☐ I can define multi-alignment and contrast it with non-alignment using Gecelovsky (2009).
- ☐ I can reconstruct Indonesia's "bebas-aktif" strategy and its hedging logic.
- ☐ I can reconstruct South Africa's tension between normative foreign policy and material interests.
- ☐ I can steel-man all five perspectives (African, Chinese, Russian, Western, UN) on the middle-power problem.
- ☐ I can identify what each perspective contributes and what it occludes.
- ☐ I can apply the four levels of analysis (individual, state, systemic, transnational) to a middle-power case.
- ☐ I can distinguish description, explanation, prediction, and prescription in a strategy memo.
- ☐ I can name the strongest counterargument to multi-alignment.
- ☐ I can explain how domestic politics constrains strategy-making.
- ☐ I can use the grand strategy triangle to diagnose misalignment.
- ☐ I can identify falsifiers for the claim that middle powers must multi-align.
- ☐ I can score my confidence honestly on the calibration audit.
- ☐ I can populate the error-log with at least three corrected misconceptions.
- ☐ I can produce a 150–200 word case description for an independent memo.
- ☐ I can answer the hinge question and diagnose each distractor.

FURTHER READING (Optional)

Grand Strategy Theory - Liddell Hart, B. H. (1954). *Strategy: The Indirect Approach*. Faber & Faber. - Kennedy, P. (1991). *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. Vintage. - Posen, B. (2014). *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy*. Cornell University Press. - Brands, H. (2016). *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*. Cornell University Press.

Middle Power Studies - Beeson, M., and Higgott, R. (2014). "The Changing Architecture of Politics in the Asia-Pacific." *International Affairs*. - Gecelovsky, P. (2009). "Middle Powers as Managers." *International Journal*.

Ontological Security - Mitzen, J. (2006). "Ontological Security in World Politics." *European Journal of International Relations*. - Steele, B. (2008). *Ontological Security in International Relations*. Routledge.

African Perspectives - Grovogui, S. (1996). *Sovereigns, Quasi Sovereigns, and Africans*. University of Minnesota Press. - Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject*. Princeton University Press. - Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Bogle-L'Ouverture.

Multi-Alignment and Hedging - Kuik, C.-C. (2008). "The Essence of Hedging." *Contemporary Southeast Asia*. - Ciorciari, J. (2010). *The Limits of Alignment*. Georgetown University Press.

End of Lesson 61. Say **Next** when you are ready.